



**Report of the Joint Armenian-Azerbaijani Liaison Group on
confidence-building measures in support of lasting peace in the
South Caucasus**

The South Caucasus from war to peace: 30 measures between now and 2030

**Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, need to build the
future based on mutual trust and confidence**

2 April 2022



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The Joint Armenian-Azerbaijani Liaison Group and its task

Does it make sense to speak about confidence-building measures in the South Caucasus at a time when Europe and Eurasia are engulfed in the most serious confrontation since World War II? Overwhelmingly, the answer to this question is yes.

The Joint Armenian-Azerbaijani Liaison Group on Confidence-Building Measures in support of lasting peace in the South Caucasus was constituted after a series of consultation meetings in Yerevan, Baku and Kachreti (Georgia) with the specific objective of looking at the role of confidence-building measures in the current situation in the South Caucasus, and propose a number of concrete measures that can be implemented in the short, medium and long term. This report therefore is not an academic exercise. It is an action-oriented document that combines the views of the Armenian and Azerbaijani members of the Liaison Group and is aimed to help inform policy makers and decision takers as they go forward. This report argues for generous and long-term investment in preventing conflict and sustaining peace in the South Caucasus. It proposes a number of concrete initiatives that, in the process of building trust and confidence, strengthen local resilience and assist the people of the region in developing and sustaining peace processes, whilst also recognising the importance of the regional and international context and the contribution that can be made by the international community in the process.

We are very conscious that what has happened in Ukraine, and what will happen in the future, impacts directly and graphically the situation in the South Caucasus. The members of the Joint Liaison Group are, however, convinced that the need to build trust, reduce misperception, promote dialogue and support peace efforts remains hugely relevant, and may even become more so as the international situation evolves. The South Caucasus has always been an area where the local, regional and international dynamics overlap and influence each other, but also where each has its specific momentum. We therefore believe that a lot of what is in this report is relevant regardless of how the international situation will evolve. Many of the recommendations can easily be adjusted to take into account new developments, since many of the fundamentals will remain the same.

Members of the Joint Liaison Group

The members of the Joint Liaison Group were: Ahmad Alili; Mehman Aliyev; Stepan Grigoryan; Shahla Ismayil; Samir Mammedov; Johny Melikyan; Benyamin Poghosyan; Ramazan Samadov; and Anar Veliyev.

All the members of the group served in a personal capacity and their views as expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of any institutions they may be affiliated with. Ahmad Alili and Benyamin Poghosyan, and together with Dennis Sammut (LINKS Europe), acted as co-rapporteurs.

Modalities

From October 2021 to 31 March 2022 members of the liaison group have met each other in numerous formats, and have also consulted widely with stakeholders in their respective countries and societies and beyond. These conversations helped inform the work of the group, and particularly, the conceptualisation and elaboration of the 30 specific actions being proposed.

Scope of the report

This report focuses on relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, but the scope of the report is many respects regional, i.e. it envisages arrangements that often also include Georgia. In this regard the group held formal and informal meetings with Georgian officials and non-governmental stakeholders to discuss their work.

The work of the Joint Liaison Group took place in the framework of the EU4Peace project and the broader European Union engagement with the process of building peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus. The support of the European Union for the work of the group was instrumental in enabling it to conduct and finish its work. The Group was pleased it could address the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, on the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in December 2021 with tangible proposals on how the ongoing peace efforts can be supported. We are glad we can elaborate further on these ideas in this report.

The members of the Joint Liaison Group thank LINKS Europe for providing the right conditions for the work of the Group to develop, for the facilitation of meetings, and for providing the Secretariat of the Group. We are also grateful for the three co-rapporteurs for their efforts.

We commend this report for the attention of the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, all Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and relevant stakeholders in the international community.

Trust and confidence in support of lasting peace in the South Caucasus

(1) The quest for peace in the South Caucasus

The history of the South Caucasus in the three decades since Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia regained their independence in 1991 has been one marred with war and violent conflict. A region that is characterised by natural beauty, fertile land, artistic talent and skilled and educated populations has spent a lot of its energy in conflicts that have claimed the lives of tens of thousands, have left many emotionally damaged and physically disabled, and have displaced hundreds of thousands. The economic, social and humanitarian costs of these conflicts have dented the efforts for development, have limited the progress towards prosperity, and have hampered the potential of the region's international engagement.

It is not the scope of this report to examine the causes of these conflicts, nor to apportion blame. Regardless, everyone understands that this cycle of violence needs to be broken. For this to be done, it is essential to at least reduce, if not eliminate completely, the current level of mistrust and misperception and replace it with a sustainable peace. Confidence-building measures are an essential tool in the process.

(2) The South Caucasus after the 44-day Karabakh War

The 44-day war, fought between Armenians and Azerbaijanis from September – November 2020, has left many victims. The new reality in the aftermath of the war has created new conditions. The region once again is faced with a choice: should it prepare for another war, or should the cycle of violence be broken and the basis established for just and sustainable peace.

It is now well understood that even if the political leaderships on the two sides of the conflict-divide opt for peace, the journey will be long and difficult. Mistrust, enemy imagery and a security deficit frustrate against even small steps towards peace and reconciliation. The quest for peace needs therefore to be comprehensive and multi layered – recognising the complexity of the regional and international context, and with due regard to the baggage of history that weighs heavily on the shoulders of both leaders and citizens alike. The task of building trust and confidence has therefore never been so important, relevant and necessary as now.

(3) The worsening European and global security situation and international relations

In the six-month period during which this report was being prepared, from October 2021 to March 2022, the state of international relations deteriorated rapidly leading to an outbreak of violence on the European continent not seen since World War II. The humanitarian disaster ensuing the fighting in Ukraine, and the collapse of the European Security order as envisaged in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, has created huge risks.

The South Caucasus is not immune to such risks. Its proximity to Ukraine, its common history with the belligerents, and the geopolitics of the region make the region hugely vulnerable. The fragile and imperfect end to violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis on 10 November 2020 can easily become victim of wider processes, regardless of whether local governments and populations desire this.

On the other hand, the conflict in Ukraine has focused minds, and has convinced all rational thinkers of the need to spare the South Caucasus such a conflagration. It has also increased a sense of urgency in pushing for lasting and sustainable peace.

(4) Confidence-building measures and why they remain important and relevant in the current situation in the South Caucasus

The need for confidence-building measures emerged out of necessity – a necessity that, as we have been well reminded in recent days and weeks, remains all important. The Cold War period saw nuclear armed powers and blocs locked into confrontation which could easily, consciously or through misperception and miscommunication lead to global destruction on an unimaginable scale. Confidence-building measures (CBMs), starting with the establishment of the hotline between the White House and the Kremlin after the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis, and eventually culminating in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1986 Stockholm Document on confidence and security-building measures and disarmament in Europe, contributed to a long period of peace on the continent.

The concept has evolved ever since. CBMs are now understood to encompass both military and civilian measures. They can be designed and deployed at different points and different levels to either prevent conflict; to help resolve a conflict, and also to reinforce the transition from conflict to peace. CBMs can have one or several of the following objectives:

- **Build trust between the sides**
- **Help avoid misperception**
- **Facilitate dialogue and communication**
- **Construct a new reality based on peaceful co-existence and co-operation**

(5) The post-2020 reality

The 44-day Karabakh War resulted in a changed situation on the ground, The 10 November 2020 trilateral declaration, and subsequent follow-up documents, created a framework for moving from conflict to peace.

This process has moved slowly over the last 17 months, and was accompanied by numerous incidents. People continue to die in senseless violence. The peace dividend that many had hoped for remains a distant process. This is disappointing but not unexpected. The animosity of decades cannot be changed to confidence and trust overnight, and those who think so are simply unrealistic. It does not mean, however, that the process can not or should not start immediately. Those who are against this are equally misguided.

Confidence-building measures between Armenia and Azerbaijan and between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, remain therefore as important and necessary as ever and the process must start in earnest and as soon as possible.

(6) Contexts in which confidence-building measures are necessary

CBMs can be designed developed and delivered in a number of different contexts: to help prevent conflict; to help the process of ending hostilities; and after the fighting has stopped, to help the process for a durable and sustainable peace. The conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis has now by and large moved from active violence to an uneasy peace, but with the prospect of long term peace now within reach. CBMs are needed to support this process. CBMs are not an alternative to a peace process or peace and should never be seen as such. But they are an indispensable ingredient on the journey from conflict to peace

The Joint Liaison Group has identified five key areas where confidence-building measures are important and can contribute to lasting peace:

- **Confidence-building in the field of diplomacy, politics, policy, security and geo-politics**
- **Confidence-building in the border areas, and within the communities directly affected by the conflict, and broader people-to-people contacts**
- **Confidence-building In the field of connectivity and economic activity**
- **Confidence-building in education and work with young people**
- **Confidence-building in public spaces, such as media, social media and public platforms, and on heritage, humanitarian and human rights issues**

All the measures that are being proposed therefore fall in one of the above categories.

(7) Timing and sequencing

The Joint Liaison Group has approached its work with a sense of urgency. Despite the 44 day war in Nagorno Karabakh, and despite the fact that incidents continue to occur on the ground, we believe that there is a window of opportunity for serious progress to be made towards lasting peace in the South Caucasus, but we also realise that this window of opportunity will not last forever. Developments in the international environment, or incidents on the ground, can quickly change the dynamic. The Group is therefore proposing a mix of measures, some of which should be implemented in the short term, between now and the end of 2023; medium term measures that can be started and implemented between now and the end of 2025; and long term measures that will require time and whilst the work on which should start as soon as possible, their full implementation is unlikely to be achieved before 2030.

The measures being proposed, whilst in their majority are free-standing and can be implemented separately, are also complimentary and mutually re-enforcing. The approach to confidence-building needs to be holistic and multi-tiered.

(8) The regional approach

This report focuses primarily on the process of building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan and between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. But its ambition is also to contribute to lasting peace in the wider South Caucasus region. Many of the proposed measures therefore require a regional approach, involving the active and equal participation of Georgia and Georgians.

(9) The importance of inclusivity

The Joint Liaison Group wishes to highlight the importance of inclusivity in the process of confidence-building. Women, youth and displaced communities need to be put front and centre of activities. Their marginalisation has often been identified as one of the causes of the intractability of the conflict, and even if this is an oversimplification, there is enough evidence to suggest that it has contributed substantially.

Inclusivity also means that the process needs to engage directly “front line communities” who have often felt the full brunt of the violence of the last three decades.

It is also felt that some of the CBMs being proposed should involve diaspora communities as appropriate. South Caucasus diaspora communities maintain strong links with their respective metropolises. Their role has not been uniformly positive. They could be doing much more to support peace and dialogue, and it is felt that engaging with them is necessary and timely.

(10) 30 measures by 2030

In such a delicate moment, our work assumes even greater importance. Given the fluidity of the international situation, and the uncertainty about the future, the Joint Liaison Group of Armenian and Azerbaijani experts is in this report focusing primarily on practical measures that can be implemented in the short, medium and long term in support of peace between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and in the wider region. The 30 measures being proposed to be implemented by 2030 require different political, logistical and financial inputs to be successful. Some require the commitment of states, others can be done at the level of civil society, most require an element of both. Many require resources if they are to be turned from ideas to tangible actions.

We present these ideas to the societies in the South Caucasus, the political leaderships of the three countries, and the international community. This report is far from being the last word on the subject. It is only another building block in the quest for peace. But we believe that if the ideas we are proposing are implemented, the objective of building a peaceful, secure and prosperous South Caucasus will be much closer to being achieved.

(11) Wider engagement with the formal peace process, and the effective contribution of track 1.5 and track 2 initiatives

The 44-day Karabakh War was a failure for the peace process, and all need to recognise their responsibility – the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and even the civil society peace-building community. Admitting this share of responsibility will ensure that everyone does things better going forward.

One major failure of the OSCE Minsk Process co-Chair format has been its inability to engage with, and galvanise, the work in the track 1.5 and track 2. The little interaction over three decades was never more than symbolic fleeting moments. Going forward there needs to be much more interaction between track 1 and tracks 1.5 and 2. The Armenia-Azerbaijan quest for peace needs to be reminded of this lesson as it evolves, and take it into account. The proposals in this report also should not be seen in isolation, but as a tangible contribution to a dynamic peace process.

(12) The role of the EU in the development, delivery and promotion of confidence-building measures and interaction

The role of the European Union has changed for the better since the 44-day Karabakh War. In 2021/22 we have seen stronger and more consistent engagement, including the trilateral EU-Armenia-Azerbaijan meeting in December 2021 and video-conference in February 2022. This momentum needs to be sustained. The EU is well placed – in some instances, uniquely placed – to take ownership of some of the confidence-building measures being proposed in this report, in partnership with Armenian and Azerbaijani stakeholders. It should do so.

30 confidence-building measures by 2030

A. Confidence-building in the field of diplomacy, politics, policy, security and geopolitics

In the period between the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russia war in 2022, the Caucasus region experienced conflict and turmoil. The piecemeal arrangements put in place by the international community in trying to deal with the conflicts have proven inadequate. A holistic and inclusive approach is required to start unpacking the problems and build a new future, which needs to take into account the present realities whilst aspiring for a better future. The future world order and European security architecture that will emerge after the end of the Ukraine-Russia war will impact what would be possible to do and how, but the war has already taught the world many lessons that need to be factored into future thinking on the Caucasus region.

The work to be done to build confidence between the relevant stakeholders in the field of diplomacy, politics, policy and geopolitics can include the measures outlined below:

1. Initiate diplomatic contacts with a view to launching at an appropriate time a South Caucasus Peace Stability and Security Conference, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, leading to the signing of a regional peace, stability and security pact by the end of 2030.

Time Frame: 2022-2030

Target Group: Governments of the three core countries, regional powers and international stakeholders

Potential Initiators: A government, group of governments or an international organisation

Potential Outcome: Preparatory discussions on a South Caucasus Peace Stability and Security Conference will enable an intensive diplomatic exchange and interaction, opening, restoring or renewing diplomatic channels and lines of communication; Once the Conference is launched – and it is likely to last a number of years – it will create a space for issues to be discussed in detail leading up to the signing of a regional peace, stability and security pact by the end of 2030.

2. Prepare for when the current peacekeeping arrangements established by the 10 November 2020 trilateral declaration expire in 2025.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Signatories of the trilateral declaration; other governments and international organisations as appropriate.

Potential Initiators: Relevant governments and international organisations

Potential Outcome: All sides concerned need to prepare for when the current peacekeeping arrangements established by the November 2020 trilateral declaration expire in 2025. All the relevant sides need to make sure this deadline does not become itself a source of increased tension by ensuring that discussions and agreements on this topic are done in good time. This in itself will help the process of building trust and confidence.

3. Establish an informal ten person Armenian-Azerbaijani Joint Monitoring Group to monitor implementation of the trilateral statements and agreements of 10 November 2020, 11 January 2021 and 26 November 2021, establish contact with relevant parties and offer good offices for maintaining sound dialogue at different levels, contribute to the avoidance of incidents, and to their investigation when they happen, and keep issues in focus of the wider public.

Time Frame: To be launched immediately

Target Group: Armenian and Azerbaijani experts

Potential Initiators: International institutions such as the EU or the OSCE, working with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, or if this is not possible a bottom-up initiative from civil society.

Potential Outcome: The current peacekeeping arrangements will benefit from more transparency and accountability and this is in the interest of all concerned. An involvement of an informal civil society framework to accompany the process and contribute to its implementation will add trust and help the process for peace.

4. Widen the regional political dialogue through a South Caucasus inter-parliamentary framework.

Time Frame: Launch in 2022, ongoing

Target Group: Parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Potential Initiators: Parliament of Georgia, Parliaments of the three countries together, possibly with international support

Potential Outcome: There is a need to widen the political dialogue in the region beyond the formal processes between the heads of state and government, or at foreign ministry level. The South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative (2003-2008) showed that regional parliamentary contacts can contribute to dialogue and can succeed and help build confidence. Conditions now exist for a parliamentary track to develop, and this should as much as possible be left to the three parliaments to design and develop, although some external technical and logistical assistance can be helpful. Women MPs should be involved in the process.

B. Confidence-building in the border areas, and within and between the communities directly affected by the conflict, and broader people-to-people contacts

The period since the signing of the 10 November trilateral declaration has seen a number of incidents on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. A timely and accurate delimitation and delineation of the border will put an end to future such incidents. But the process of building trust between border communities and communities directly affected by the conflict, who for decades have looked at each through the lens of enemies, requires patient and systematic work. Beyond the border regions and conflict affected communities, people-to-people contacts are an important and necessary ingredient on the journey from war to peace.

5. Initiate discussions on setting up a mechanism for strengthening communication and interaction between civilian municipal authorities on issues related to municipal services and community policing, learning from examples of good practice from other post-conflict situations. Areas to support the local emergency services, help and facilitate the process of landmine clearance, and promote good relations between communities should be prioritised.

Time Frame: 2023-2030

Target Group: The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan; municipal authorities

Potential Initiators: The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan working with relevant international organisations

Potential Outcome: In the transition from war to peace, it is necessary to change the way security is perceived and is delivered. It is hardly possible to speak of peace if this peace needs to be secured with armed soldiers and tanks. A shift to civilian policing, working with local authorities, would mark a significant improvement in the situation. Co-operation at the level of municipalities on services is also hugely necessary. Mechanisms for work in this area would initially need to work in parallel with existing or future arrangements for peace keeping, but the process should aim for a transition within a decade. The sides should learn from examples of good practice in other post-conflict situations.

6. Develop a special programme “Know the neighbours” for border communities and areas with historically mixed populations, enabling a better understanding of each other's customs, language, religion and traditions.

Time Frame: Pilot project in 2022; full programme 2023-25

Target Group: Communities on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Potential Initiators: Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society organisations with the support of the EU and other international donors. and buy-in from the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments.

Potential Outcome: Armenian and Azerbaijani border communities have on many occasions in the last three decades suffered human losses and material damage as a result of the conflict. Enemy imagery is in these communities sharper, despite the fact that they live in close proximity to each other. Past memories of living in peace, even if often apart, have now largely faded and what remains are blurred images constructed by propaganda machines. This initiative proposes to start a process of “Knowing the neighbours”, working with grassroots.

7. Use support programmes for civil society to transform the peace-building communities in Armenia and Azerbaijan and help them break out of the “sect mentality” and to become a truly mass movement.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society organisations

Potential Initiators: EU, possibly working with other donors such as US, UK

Potential Outcome: For 30 years civil society groups in the region have struggled to keep dialogue open across a difficult conflict divide, often ostracised by their own societies, and ignored by their governments. Whilst good work has been done, the peace-building community has remained largely a sect, and has failed to become a mass movement. The EU has been one of the more consistent funders for peace-building initiatives. But, together with other donors, needs to think how to use its leverage to turn peace-building into a broader movement.

8. Arrange for two high profile civil society exchange visits Baku-Yerevan, Yerevan-Baku in 2022/23; a larger more ambitious programme can be considered going forward.

Time Frame: 2022-2023

Target Group: Armenian and Azerbaijani Opinion shapers

Potential Initiators: EU supported groups

Potential Outcome: There have been exchange visits in the past, and they by and large passed off without incident. These exchanges have become rarer since the 44-day war, despite the fact they may be more needed now than ever. If properly planned and organised such exchange visits can help break some taboos, and can facilitate better understanding of the respective positions of the sides. They can also help build trust and open the way for further engagement. A cautious start should be made as soon as possible, but there should be the ambition to have a more extensive programme of exchanges as soon as the right conditions exist.

9. Engage with the diaspora communities, initially by introducing the content of this report and engaging in a discussion with them on its content.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora across the world

Potential Initiators: EU and EU supported groups

Potential Outcome: There are large Armenian and Azerbaijani diasporas across the world who keep a strong connection with the home country and who exercise a strong influence both on domestic public opinion in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and internationally. There has hardly been any effort to engage with these communities, and their role in the quest for peace has been at best lukewarm, sometimes disruptive. Engaging with these communities, and in due course helping build dialogue between them, will add momentum to any peace dynamic and increase trust and confidence. A modest start can be made by introducing the content of this report to select diaspora communities in Europe and the Middle East.

C. Confidence-building in the fields of connectivity and economic activity

The 10 November 2020 trilateral declaration created new conditions on the ground and declared an aspiration to open up the region's transport communications. All sides recognise the economic potential and possible benefit from such steps and have committed to work for this objective, even if there are still disagreements on some of the mechanics of the process. Connectivity projects and economic activity can be a hugely important part of the process of renewing trust and rebuilding confidence.

10. Commission a major economic study on how to ensure that the end of the conflict will not only result in a peace-dividend for Armenia and Azerbaijan but can be translated into a "great leap forward" for the entire region.

Time Frame: 2022-2023

Target Group: Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan; think tanks

Potential Initiators: EU working with a leading economic think tank and the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, with potential involvement of the Government of Georgia.

Potential Outcome: Whilst everyone understands that peace can bring considerable economic benefits, visualising and quantifying such a peace dividend not only for Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also for the wider region is difficult. A comprehensive professional study conducted by a leading international think tank, working with the relevant local stakeholders can start answering these questions and help give substance to the debate about the future within and between the countries of the region.

11. Work with the donor community and the international financial institutions to set up a South Caucasus Development Fund.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; EBRD; International Financial Institutions

Potential Initiators: EU or select EU member states working with EBRD

Potential Outcome: Conditions exist for the South Caucasus to take a great leap forward. Peace and stability is an essential pre-requisite, but what is also required is sustained, well-targeted funding. A South Caucasus Development Fund can work with the three governments together and separately to provide financial injections in key areas of the economy and to support infrastructure. Such a fund will sit well with the EU's own Global Gateway initiative and compliment its strategy towards Central Asia, whilst providing critical funding for the governments of the region to pursue their ambitious development agendas.

12. Initiate an annual South Caucasus Economic Forum, with a view to holding the first event in Georgia in 2023, and subsequently rotating annually between the three countries.

Time Frame: Annually starting from 2023

Target Group: Business groups, think tanks, professional groups in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and international partners.

Potential Initiators: An initiative group involving key stakeholders can convene in 2022 to lay the groundwork, after which the initiative should be formalised, possibly on the model of Davos, in time for the first forum to be held in 2023.

Potential Outcome: The South Caucasus lacks one big annual regional event. Up to now this has not been possible because of Armenia-Azerbaijan enmity. The holding of an annual South Caucasus Economic Forum, rotating between the three countries will be a very strong statement of change in the region. The event itself can be very beneficial and can become a feature on the international calendar. One can see this activity growing over the years.

13. Secure the agreement and support of the three countries to develop a joint Special Economic zone in the area close to the Red Bridge. Use it as a showcase for future regional co-operation.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Communities close to the Red Bridge; Investors and industrialists from the three countries

Potential Initiators: Government of Georgia, working with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan and potential international stakeholders

Potential Outcome: The area near the Red Bridge is a point where the borders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia meet. Communities living in this area are sometimes multi ethnic. For nearly three decades the area has been mined – instead of a symbol of unity it has become a symbol of the divisions in the region. The Government of Georgia is well placed to seize the current window of opportunity, seek broad agreement for cleaning the area of landmines and lay the groundwork for a joint special economic zone where the best of the three countries can be showcased; where SMEs and start-ups will have special benefits to develop, and where joint initiatives between business and academia can contribute to artistic development and innovation.

14. Identify tourism as a priority area for regional co-operation; In 2022 set up a working group between the relevant agencies of the three countries with a view to formally establishing a South Caucasus Tourism Bureau by 2023.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Tourist Industry stakeholders in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Potential Initiators: The Tourist authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia working with international organisations and the World Tourism Organisation

Potential Outcome: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have huge potential as tourist destinations and most of it still untapped. Together they can offer an even more attractive destination. A tourist that wants to visit not just one country but all three on one trip finds huge obstacles. Developing a regional tourism brand and tourism product can yield huge economic benefits but also be a very overt confidence-building measure. The establishment of a South Caucasus Tourism Bureau can be an important first step, as long as it has the buy-in of the three countries. Whilst the bureau can kick off with seed funding from international donors, the objective should be to put it quickly in a sustainable mode, by ensuring that stakeholders – be it tourist businesses, local authorities, transport companies etc – contribute to the cost of running the Bureau after the initial establishment phase.

D. Confidence-building in education and work with young people

Healing the pain of the past must go hand in hand with building the foundations of the future. This needs to be done with a focus on two pillars, youth and education. Mutual distrust and animosity have characterised relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis for decades. Transforming this into, at least as a minimum, an atmosphere of good neighbourliness and mutual respect, is going to take time, patience, effort and resources, but all talk of regional peace and co-operation will remain very fragile and superficial unless this transformation is achieved.

15. Hold the first South Caucasus Youth Summer School in Georgia in 2022.

Time Frame: 2022, and annually after that

Target Group: Young Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians

Potential Initiators: EU supported groups

Potential Outcome: A pilot project will see the holding of a regional summer school with the participation of young people from the three countries, where issues of common interest can be identified, and where some discussions of difficult issues can also take place with the facilitation of expert moderators. The summer school should have an equal number of male and female participants. Building on the lessons learnt, the summer school can turn into a prestigious annual event. An alumni network should also be launched to ensure participants stay in touch with each other.

16. Set up a South Caucasus Youth Centre, modelled on the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, as a living expression of a new South Caucasus.

Time Frame: To be established within 2-3 years

Target Group: Young people from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Potential Initiators: EU working with the three governments of the region. The Government of Georgia can take the initiative by donating a suitable building for the purpose and the EU should commit funds for its restoration, and for the running expenses of the centre at least for the first five years.

Potential Outcome: The European Youth Centre in Strasbourg has for decades been a symbol of the new Europe that emerged from the ashes of World War II. Generations of young Europeans attended its language courses, mingled with other Europeans and discovered common interests. The South Caucasus is ripe for such an initiative at a regional level, and such an initiative will have immediate and tangible positive results.

17. Set up a tolerance programme aimed at helping young people in the region avoid the trap of violent radicalisation.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Young Armenians and Azerbaijanis

Potential Initiators: Council of Europe working with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan and other stakeholders

Potential Outcome: Instilling a sense of tolerance among the younger generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis; help set up early warning mechanisms that may lead to violent radicalisation built on similar experiences and programmes in Europe.

18. Work with one Armenian and one Azerbaijani universities to set up a joint education fund which can enable small joint programmes, enable scholars from the two countries to jointly participate in international academic events abroad and develop a scholarship scheme that can see students from the two countries participating jointly in programmes in third countries; Create from these initiatives a strong alumni network.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Students and scholars from Armenia and Azerbaijan

Potential Initiators: EU working with an Armenia and an Azerbaijani university

Potential Outcome: A flexible programme that can allow Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars and academics to develop small collaborative projects, enable them to attend professional and academic conferences in third countries, and benefit from scholarships to programmes of common interests will have a strong long-term impact, and will build the seeds for future co-operation. The scheme will need to be well managed and monitored, and adjusted according to results. Gender balance among the beneficiaries should be a must.

E. Confidence-building in public spaces, such as media, social media and public platforms, and on heritage, humanitarian and human rights issues

Whilst the concept of confidence-building emerged first in the area of military and security domains, it is now well understood that a process of building trust and confidence is necessary across the whole spectrum of society as part of an endeavour in building peace and avoiding conflict. Building trust between communities across a wide range of public spaces and platforms is an essential ingredient for lasting peace in the Caucasus where enemy imagery has now become deeply embedded.

19. Declare graveyards and burial grounds as a common heritage; map out the location of graveyards; create a mechanism that can help maintain graveyards with the proper dignity regardless of their location; facilitate the visit to graveyards by relatives and descendants. Address the issue of mass graveyards in a sensitive and dignified way.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan working with an international organisation, such as ICRC and local municipalities; for the graveyard visits work can be done through NGOs and veteran organisations

Potential Initiators: EU working with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, with potential involvement of ICRC and/or UNESCO

Potential Outcomes: For the people of the Caucasus, graveyards and burial grounds are sacred land. This issue is one of the most delicate and most sensitive in the quest for peace. It cannot and should not be ignored. Graveyards should be identified, mapped out and maintained; in a second phase a process enabling relatives and descendants to visit graveyards and burial grounds needs to be put in place. The valuable work done by the ICRC and other agencies to resolve the question of missing persons from past episodes of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has to be brought to a conclusion and all sides should co-operate fully. These processes need to be supported and encouraged by the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan but an international engagement in making it happen is likely to be necessary at least for the first few years.

20. Create the office of Regional Ombudsman to deal with issues of ethnic or religious hatred and citizens complaints in the area of ethnic linguistic and religious discrimination.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Potential Initiators: This initiative may emerge from the joint parliamentary platform discussed in proposal 4

Potential Outcome: In any post-conflict situation, strengthening human rights is often an absolute prerequisite to any progress in political dialogue and institution building. The post of regional ombudsman will be an innovative step that can ensure transparency in the governance process on sensitive issues and help build trust in communities for such a process.

21. Support the empowering of women as the vanguard for change through the creation of a Women's Regional Task Force with suitable resources to be able to make a difference; prioritise women in border areas, displaced women and young women.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Women groups with particular emphasis on women in border areas, in displaced communities and young women

Potential Initiators: EU working with women groups in Armenia and Azerbaijan, with particular emphasis on women in border areas, among displaced communities and young women

Potential Outcome: Women can play a bigger role in the quest for peace in the South Caucasus, and a lot of their potential to contribute for peace in the region remains untapped. The aim of the task force should be to identify particular gaps and or concerns that emanate low numerical representation of women, such as for example in law enforcement, and intervene to address these in a timely and professional way

22. Develop a platform with think-tanks from across the region with a view to commissioning four reports outlining a future vision for the region – South Caucasus 2030.

Time Frame: 2022-2023

Target Group: Researchers and Experts

Potential Initiator: The platform can be set up with the support of the EU

Potential Outcomes: The South Caucasus lacks a common vision. This leaves a vacuum where competing narratives thrive and often serve to deepen divisions. By helping develop a common vision – SOUTH CAUCASUS 2030 - the platform will narrow the intellectual distance that currently separates the three countries. The vision should emphasise the need for inclusivity, including by highlighting the role of women, and the way displaced communities can be fully re-integrated.

23. Create a South Caucasus Media Platform between established media organisations; enable them to produce a daily 30-minute TV news programme that can run on mainstream TV stations.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Media Organisations

Potential Initiator: EU working with professional EU media partners, and media partners in the region

Potential Outcome: The media in Armenia and Azerbaijan remains largely adversarial to each other. Unfortunately the cease fire emanating from the 10 November 2020 declaration has not extended to media outlets. The use of inflammatory language and enemy imagery remains prevalent. The aim of the platform should be to create the opportunity for journalists from the two countries to work together on a joint daily news bulletin, which would avoid negative language and imagery on the one hand, and produce quality journalism on the other. The journalists will have to secure, and maintain, the trust of the two sides for the action to be successful, especially if the output is to be aired on the national TV channels of the two countries.

24. Host a regional conference for media outlets with the specific task of discussing and agreeing a code of conduct that would guide journalists in dealing with the more sensitive issues of the region; create a body of trusted persons where grievances related to this code of conduct can be referred.

Time Frame: 2023

Target Group: Media organisations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Possible Initiators: EU working with media outlets and partners

Possible Outcomes: There has never been a large conference for media outlets in the South Caucasus. There have been small ad hoc initiatives with little impact. Such a gathering is now timely, and the objective of agreeing a code of conduct for media reporting, and a "peer process" for review of breaches of the code, can be an important step in embracing the media as part of the process of change from conflict to peace. Ensure that women journalists and young journalists are well represented in the conference.

25. Establish a South Caucasus Cultural Heritage Foundation that can start looking at the heritage of the region from a holistic perspective and that can contribute towards the cultural restoration and rehabilitation of patrimony that is of common interest. All cultural heritage needs to be respected and preserved, and an effort needs to be made to restore what has been destroyed or damaged.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Organisations working on cultural heritage issues across the region; Religious groups; cultural groups

Possible Initiators: EU, working with UNESCO, ISESCO, the Holy See, the Council of Europe, Europe Nostra and local partners

Possible Outcomes: The issue of cultural heritage is a very sensitive one, and one that has proven to be very divisive. Layers of cultural heritage laid on top of each other over millennia are often not seen for what they are – important treasures for humanity – and are used to justify this or that territorial claim. We have very often seen that history is abused. A fresh approach to cultural heritage is required; one that also values common patrimony as belonging to more than simply to just one group. A regional cultural foundation can implement targeted interventions to inform and educate, and should also have the capacity to intervene directly in restoring and rehabilitating sites and heritage that are of common interest. The participation of international organisations with experience of this work will ensure the Foundation is able to survive the inevitable controversies that surround such work.

26. Build on the work of the regional campaign Landmine Free South Caucasus; establish a mechanism for liaison between the demining agencies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; mobilise international resources to clear the South Caucasus of landmines and other unexploded ordnance.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Demining agencies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Possible Initiators: EU working with partners

Possible Outcomes: The changes resulting from the 44 day Karabakh war have further exposed the huge problem of landmines and unexploded ordinance in the region. This problem now constitutes a major obstacle for further regional development. The small steps in regional interaction on landmine clearance issues need to be consolidated into a more efficient liaison mechanism involving the demining agencies of the three countries, enabling them as a minimum to have channels of communication, with a view to widening the scope of this interaction. This action can take place in parallel to ongoing national efforts to clear the region from the hazard of landmines – something that needs to continue to be supported and resourced. There is a need for a massive post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation. Thirty years of conflict have resulted in thriving local communities turning into ghost towns and villages. Bringing these communities back to life is a moral obligation for all concerned.

27. Create a cascading effect to the process of confidence building through a small but flexible financial facility to provide interventions that can add momentum to the process of confidence building – understanding that this is a dynamic process, and that windows of opportunity need to be exploited.

Time Frame: 2022-2025

Target Group: Various groups across the board

Possible Initiators: EU working with other donors

Possible Outcomes: The process of confidence-building is a dynamic one. Windows of opportunity open and close often rather suddenly and small steps can sometimes help consolidate small gains. Most funding mechanisms require long and cumbersome procedures that miss the point. These interventions make a difference, but they need to be timely.

28. Connecting through music – mobilising the musical talent of young Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the quest for reconciliation.

Time Frame: 2022-2023

Target Group: General public, especially young people

Potential Implementers: EU-supported groups and local artists

Potential Outcome: Music is an important communication tool, especially when it comes to young audiences. Working on an agreed repertoire, Armenian and Azerbaijani artists deliver a joint concert, including a jointly performed piece, either in in-person concerts or, initially, online.

29. Stimulating a constructive public debate on important issues of interest to people in the region through monthly town hall style meetings with expert panels.

Time Frame: 2022-2023

Target Group: General public in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Potential Initiators: Local think tanks and universities

Potential Outcome: A series of town hall style meetings, held preferably in universities or academic settings, where experts from the region can debate local or international issues, with a modest amount of audience participation

30. Annual prizes for best contribution to peaceful Caucasus in media and social media.

Time Frame: 2022-23

Target Group: Media and social media outlets; wider public

Potential Initiators: EU with local and international partners

Potential Outcome: Media and social media outlets from TV stations to websites have a big contribution to make to a future peaceful Caucasus. The setting up of annual prizes in different categories can help recognise positive contributions. Local media organisations should be fully involved in the preparation of the award scheme, as well as in the annual assessment. An annual event to present prizes can become an important feature on the calendar of the region, around which a lot of positive energy can be galvanised.

Our Appeal

To Armenia and Azerbaijan

To Armenians and Azerbaijanis

To the International Community

All the ingredients for peace exist in the South Caucasus. All the ingredients for war exist too. What is in front of us is a choice. The South Caucasus in the last three decades has been exhausted by war and conflict. Yet, as the war in Ukraine is showing us, war has even worse experiences than the region has gone through so far. It is everyone's duty to contribute to avoid this.

To the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan

The current situation in the South Caucasus and in the wider European-Eurasian region put on you a heavy responsibility. We welcome your commitment stated in many statements and declarations, that you are ready for peace in the region. We urge you to remain resolute in this endeavour.

The process of confidence building can never be a substitute to your work and efforts, and in the final analysis, your political will to push for peace in the region. It is, however, an essential ingredient in making sure that your efforts are well understood, have broad support, and are successful.

We urge you to support the proposals contained in this report, and to take those measures within your competence for their implementation.

To Armenians and Azerbaijanis

No nation desires war. The Armenian and Azerbaijani nations have in the last three decades lost thousands of sons and daughters as a result of conflict. We all owe it to them to ensure that future generations live peacefully, in safety and security, justly and prosperously. This can only happen if there is peace between us. The journey to that destination will be long, but it must start.

Many of the confidence-building measures we propose in this report are not to be implemented by governments, even if their support is necessary. They are measures that need to be implemented by people, because the level of mistrust created by the conflict is not only among officials but runs across whole societies. We urge you to support the ideas contained in this report, to analyse and discuss them critically to make them better, and to engage in turning them from ideas into concrete actions

To the International Community

For three decades representatives of the international community have travelled to the South Caucasus and promised in front of the world that they were ready to support the process of peace in the region. The time to do that is now.

This report is not a wish list. It is a need to do list. All the measures that we propose are doable if there is enough political will by the leaders in the region, and enough resources provided by the international community. In the end the cost of peace is much smaller than the cost of war. The international community needs to do more and better, and in a more co-ordinated way. We are encouraged by the reenergised interest of the European Union in the region. We think the EU is well placed to lead the process of confidence-building and it should not hesitate to do so.

We commend this report to all stakeholders and urge that they take resolute and timely action for its implementation.

**The members of the Joint Armenian-Azerbaijani Liaison Group
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Joint Liaison Group on Confidence Building Measures in Support of lasting peace in the South Caucasus

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About LINKS Europe

LINKS Europe is a foundation registered and based in The Hague, the Netherlands, and is part of the LINKS Network, established in London in July 1997. Our core mission is to support the peaceful resolution of conflicts and contribute towards a secure and prosperous Europe, in friendship and solidarity with its neighbourhood.

Our work is focused on five thematic areas that are in most cases interconnected: 1) Peace through dialogue and confidence-building; 2) The EU in friendship and solidarity with its neighbourhood; 3) A global Europe that provides safety, security and prosperity for its citizens and is a force for good in the world; 4) Connectivity as a tool for peace and prosperity; and 5) an understanding of radicalisation, and developing a response to it. We work with multiple partners in different countries using a variety of tools, including Research and analysis; websites and newsletters; podcasts; meetings and events and publications.

Related websites: www.commonspace.eu, www.karabakhspace.eu and www.links-europe.eu. For more information on LINKS Europe please contact office@links-europe.eu.





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