

Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos. *Caucasus Chronicles: Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia: 1993-1994*. Princeton, NJ and London: The Gomidas Institute, 2002. ISBN 1-884630-05-7. Hardcover. 180 pp.

To review *Caucasus Chronicles*, Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos's book about his diplomatic mission to Armenia, is a rewarding experience, especially for those interested in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the role of the regional and international actors in that struggle.

The author reveals firsthand information about Armenia's internal socio-economic difficulties and the external security threats it faced from neighbouring Turkey during his seven month tenure as the Greek ambassador in Yerevan from 17 July 1993 to 20 February 1994. He also conveys to the readers his objectives as the first ambassador of his country to newly independent Armenia: to "assist Armenia in developing economically, help the Greeks of Armenia to overcome the difficulties of everyday life, and develop bilateral relations [with Armenia] in matters of defense" (pp. 13-14). Moreover, as the representative of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union (EU), Chrysanthopoulos says that he advocated a greater role for the EU in the region in general and in Armenia in particular – so that Russian hegemony in the region could be counterbalanced. He believed that such a policy would help convince the newly independent republics of the South Caucasus that the Soviet legacy could not bring socio-economic betterment for their societies. The ambassador scrutinizes, within this context, the political, economic and military aspects, through which the EU can enhance its presence in the region. He considers that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the best opportunity for the EU to adopt a clear policy vis-à-vis the South Caucasus; it could "increase its presence in the region and safeguard its interests mainly by playing a more active role" and trying to find a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (p. 44). The book narrates and analyses all these themes concurrently.

*Caucasus Chronicles* is not an academic book based on research. It does not have a conceptual approach to explain accordingly the various themes mentioned. However, the author tries to give a detailed explanation of some of the economic, political and military incidents of that seven-month period, which were critical for newly independent Armenia. Despite the dense narrative on some occasions, he offers a good introduction to his adventurous life in Armenia, as well as the diplomatic and humanitarian relief work in which he was deeply involved. Within this context, his account is not restricted to the analysis of his diplomatic and humanitarian tasks, but also touches upon certain interludes during which he tried to better understand Armenia in general and its Greek minority in particular.

The book is not divided into chapters. Instead, the author uses descriptive headings to depict the political, diplomatic, security, economic and humanitarian concerns and developments that he shared with the political leadership in Armenia. He penetrates into the highest levels of the decision-making process in the Armenian

government and provides insight on its dynamics and the ingenuity of the politicians running the country. Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, and his senior foreign policy advisor, Gerard Libaridian, are two of the many personalities on whom he dwells at some length.

Throughout the book, Chrysanthopoulos highlights the war over Nagorno-Karabakh between the region's Armenians and Azerbaijan. He considers this war to be the focal point in the power struggle over the South Caucasus between Russia on the one hand and the EU and the United States (US) on the other. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)<sup>1</sup> had become – by the time of the ambassador's arrival in Yerevan – the main mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and he values its constructive role and tremendous efforts in trying to prevent Russia from getting the upper hand in the resolution of this dispute.

The book starts with a brief historical background on the Greek government's diplomacy vis-à-vis the South Caucasus and the former Soviet Union in the 1920s. The author next explains how diplomatic relations were established and then developed between Greece and Armenia following his arrival in Yerevan on 17 July 1993. He also describes the perilous economic situation in Armenia at the time as a consequence of "the transition from the Soviet model," plus the "economic repercussions of the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, an embargo imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and an energy shortage created by the closure of the nuclear power plant in Metzamor in 1989" (p. 7).

Parallel to outlining the situation in Armenia, Chrysanthopoulos also presents a short historical background to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and briefly covers developments pertaining to that dispute until the joint US-Russian-Turkish peace initiative that was presented to the conflicting parties in 1993, around the time his diplomatic mission started in Yerevan.

The ambassador also deals with geopolitical issues in the region. When referring to Armenian-Turkish bilateral contacts in 1992-93, he first outlines the economic interests of Armenia in furthering this process, as well as the political aims of Turkey, which wished to extend its influence in the South Caucasus and "play a more convincing role as mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (p. 26). Chrysanthopoulos says that, in order to accomplish this end, "Turkey allowed Armenia to participate in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact (BSEC), in spite of the fact that Armenia is a landlocked country" (p. 27). The ambassador next depicts skillfully the limits of Armenian-Turkish relations, ascribing the lack of substantial progress mainly to the absence of diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan, the question of Turkey's recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and Azerbaijan's strong reaction against any Turkish economic assistance to Armenia as long as the territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved. He says that Turkey forfeited its neutrality as a 'mediator' in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to satisfy Baku's political and military demands. Ankara accepted that "the question of Nagorno-Karabakh was an issue of [Turkish] national prestige" (p. 27) and even threatened Armenia with military intervention if the Karabakh Armenian forces continued to carry their military assault forward.

As regards the Armenian government's strategy vis-à-vis the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Chrysanthopoulos reveals that Ter-Petrosian's "objective was to achieve a permanent cease-fire between the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities and Azerbaijan," because it was very difficult "at that time" to find a final solution to the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh (p. 33). He preferred to get involved in negotiations within the CSCE framework to gain additional time so that his country could recover economically, become a stronger state and "perhaps have better possibilities to achieve a final solution of the conflict that would be more consistent with the national interests of Armenia" (p. 33). Moreover, Chrysanthopoulos admits that Ter-Petrosian strived to develop strong relations with Russia, Ukraine, and Iran to counterbalance Turkish influence in the region. The Armenian president also reportedly believed that Greece could in turn play an important role by supporting Yerevan within the EU.

After revealing the internal policy elements of Armenia's government, the author focuses on the dynamics that shaped the EU's role in the South Caucasus. As the representative of the Belgian Presidency of the EU in the region, and as an advocate for a strong EU presence in Armenia, he reportedly played a major role in shaping and specifying the EU's "real" political, economic, and security interests in the region (p. 42). Toward this end, he worked relentlessly with the ambassadors of the other EU member states in Armenia and Azerbaijan to prepare a report about the EU's expected role in the two republics; "these interests explained the important role Europe had played until 1993 in searching for a political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (p. 42). Furthermore, the report suggested that the EU had to continue "this policy in the future" by using the political "instruments" at its disposal: "political dialogue with Baku and Yerevan", as well as Russia, Turkey and Iran, the regional players in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; "humanitarian assistance for Armenia and Azerbaijan"; "negotiations of partnership agreements and restarting of technical assistance"; "the ability to support diplomatic action taken by the Minsk Group<sup>2</sup> and the CSCE to find a political solution that would anticipate the eventual deployment of Russian and CSCE peacekeeping forces" in the zone of conflict (pp. 42-43). Chrysanthopoulos's efforts culminated with success when the EU Council of Ministers adopted his report. This was apparently an indication that the EU leadership did indeed wish to have a clear policy vis-à-vis the South Caucasus.

Chrysanthopoulos's examination of events in the region goes beyond the EU's role. He offers the reader a synopsis of the internationalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, referring, within this context, to the United Nation Security Council resolutions in 1993 that condemned violence and military escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh and urged the parties to continue their negotiations within the CSCE framework.

In his evaluation of the Minsk Group's role and of the CSCE as the sole mediator in the conflict, the ambassador highlights the immense external and internal factors that hampered the peaceful resolution of the dispute.

On the external front, he examines the power struggle between the CSCE and Russia within the framework of the 'rival' peace plans that each side presented separately to the conflicting parties. The main contentious issue in this regard was the proposed peacekeeping operation "on the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan and between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan to guarantee peace after the withdrawal of the Nagorno-Karabakh forces" from the Azerbaijani territories under their control (p. 85). Russia urged that peacekeeping in the territories of the Former Soviet Union should be restricted to either Russian or Commonwealth of Independent States troops. It showed willingness – more than all other regional and international actors – to commit peacekeeping troops and monitor cease-fires in the region. On the other hand, the CSCE and the USA acted to limit Russian military presence in the South Caucasus and, in particular, Russian influence on the foreign policy of the South Caucasian republics. The CSCE found it expedient that "Russian troops would be stationed there either within a CSCE context or as United Nations peacekeepers" (p. 85), while the USA opposed the deployment of Russian soldiers in Azerbaijan. Chrysanthopoulos highlights the weaknesses of the Minsk Group in facing Russia's policy and its failure to understand Russia's economic, political and security interests in the region. At the same time, the ambassador's synopsis makes us understand that the Russian engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict excluded the possibility of any border changes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a policy consistent with the position of the international community.

The author also explains the competition between the Russian foreign and defense ministries in trying to establish Russian dominance in the South Caucasus by imposing their separate perspectives of peace on the conflicting parties. It seems that the Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, tried to harmonize the Russian peace plan with that of the Minsk Group, whereas the Russian defense minister, Pavel Grachev, preferred to sideline the CSCE and impose his terms on Armenia and Azerbaijan through separate negotiations. Indeed, the Greek ambassador argues that the 1993 Russian peace plan indicated a shift from the multinational approach to peace to a unilateral Russian initiative and was hence more in line with the aspirations of those who wished to leave the West out of the negotiation process. This competition between various power centres in Moscow undoubtedly further hampered the overall peace process conducted by the Minsk Group.

However, the failure of the international community to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should not be attributed solely to Russia's determination to keep the Caucasus within its zone of influence. Mario Raffaelli, the Italian Chairman of the CSCE Minsk Group, also bears part of the responsibility. According to the author, Raffaelli failed to "readjust his timetable by adding additional guarantees for the maintenance of peace [in Nagorno-Karabakh] after the withdrawal of the Karabakh armed forces" from Azerbaijani territories under their control. This measure, if undertaken, would be the only way to "neutralise the Russian peace plan" (p. 85). Moreover, British Deputy Foreign Minister Douglas Hogg's expression "that Raffaelli was unqualified for the job" (p. 98) supports the view of many political observers and analysts about the CSCE Minsk Group's low-level interest and lack of

determination to resolve the conflict in 1992-93. Information provided by Chrysanthopoulos is extremely important because it adds further insight to what John J. Maresca, the US ambassador to the CSCE, has written about the causes of the failure of the CSCE mediation effort in his highly impressive and conspicuous article, 'Resolving the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh: Lost Opportunities for International Conflict Resolution', published in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds.), *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict* (The United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), pp. 255-273.

Among the internal factors that held back the peace process, the author mentions the fact that parties to the conflict were not ready for a compromise solution; each of them wanted to impose its terms on the other. Within this context, Chrysanthopoulos describes the considerable degree of autonomy that the Nagorno-Karabakh leadership had from Yerevan. He says that "the influence of Armenia on Stepanakert was weakening, but Yerevan would continue to cooperate with the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities" (p. 63). Ter-Petrosian reportedly tried to explain to the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, during a meeting on 1 August 1993, that Armenia could no more withstand the criticisms of the international community, which held Yerevan responsible for military escalation in the region, and for failing to exert sufficient political pressure on the Karabakh leadership. Ter-Petrosian also "stressed to the Stepanakert authorities the necessity to establish peace, and that the bilateral talks between Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku should be incorporated in the Minsk process and not replace it" (p. 62). Ter-Petrosian and the Stepanakert authorities were unable to agree on a common approach to withdrawal from the Azerbaijani territories under the control of the Karabakh army, although both sides agreed that "Lachin could not be returned since it was indispensable for the security of Nagorno-Karabakh" (p. 66). Robert Kocharian, who was then President of the Committee of National Defense of Nagorno-Karabakh, was against returning Kelbajar and Aghdam to Baku before a final peace settlement. This was a very delicate and sensitive issue because, according to the Minsk Group plan, the economic blockade imposed by Azerbaijan against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh could only be lifted after the return of Kelbajar and Aghdam to the Azerbaijanis.

In sum, Ter-Petrosian failed in his attempts to include the lifting of the economic blockade in the CSCE Minsk Group timetable alongside the withdrawals. He was unable to exert more political leverage on the Stepanakert authorities so that the latter comply with international pressure to stop military escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The reason, according to Chrysanthopoulos, was that "the Karabakh defense force had become strong enough that it could easily take over Yerevan and overthrow the Armenian government if necessary" (p. 63). Chrysanthopoulos's analysis strengthens the conviction that the best way to achieve peace in the region is through the inclusion in the negotiation process of the Stepanakert authorities as a separate party to the conflict.

It is clear that the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were only interested in a permanent cease-fire and not in a final resolution, mainly because of the lack of

trust between them. Baku rejected the Minsk Group peace plan of September 1993 because it did not fulfil its demands and expectations. The Azerbaijanis conveyed on 14 October 1993 eight reasons for not accepting the proposed timetable. However, it was clear to Chrysanthopoulos, even before October, that the new president of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, "was not in a position to take binding decisions on Karabakh, since he was in the process of balancing his relations with the CSCE, Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran" (p. 83).

The most spectacular and, at the same time, dangerous political developments depicted in the book are the events in Moscow in October 1993 and the attendant Turkish military threat to invade Armenia. Chrysanthopoulos says that information about the events that would take place in Moscow were initially conveyed to him by Hrair Maroukian, the chairman of the Bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, during a meeting at the party's headquarters in Athens. Maroukian, who, according to the ambassador, "had close contacts with Moscow and the KGB warned" Chrysanthopoulos that the parliament in Moscow "would be taken over by some of its members, and [the Russian] president [Boris] Yeltsin would have to use tanks to liberate it" (p. 74). Actually, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the chairperson of the Russian parliament, and Alexander Rutskoi, the vice president of the Russian Federation, would attempt such a coup against Yeltsin in early October, but the Russian president successfully crushed the attempt and arrested the perpetrators.

What matters to the Armenians most, within this context, is that, according to French and American intelligence sources, "there had been an agreement between Khasbulatov and Ankara that, if he prevailed, he would allow Turkey to execute incursions of a limited nature into Armenia using the Kurdish issue as a pretext. The Turkish incursion into Armenia, according to French intelligence sources, would take place immediately after Khasbulatov would have withdrawn the Russian troops from Armenia" (p. 77). By leaking information about this collusion to the public, Chrysanthopoulos is doing researchers, academics and all others interested in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict a favour. This piece of information helps us further examine Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and conclude that Turkey – despite its membership of the CSCE – did not maintain neutrality. The report makes an effective case against Turkey's future participation in any OSCE peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. This report also justifies the security concerns of Karabakh Armenians, which used to be one of the major contentious issues during the negotiations. It could be used by the Stepanakert authorities as a pretext to further entrench their unswerving position concerning the withdrawals issue from Lachin and Shushi, and in demanding an agreement on the final political status of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of a 'package deal' before the actual implementation of any withdrawal.

It is really difficult to surmise how the secret deal between Khasbulatov and the Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller would (if successful) have affected Armenia in the long run. However, it is natural to raise a series of questions in this regard. For example, had the collusion been implemented, would Turkey have terminated Armenia's independence in cooperation with the new Russian authorities – in a

repeat of the scenario of 1920-21? Or would it have occupied part of Armenia and forced Yerevan and Stepanakert to sign a humiliating peace with Baku? Chrysanthopoulos says that "only Turkey can tell us its intentions during the Moscow crisis. But if Ankara confirms one day the intelligence reports of France and the United States, it would show the kind of role the Turkish government of the time wanted to play in the Caucasus" (p. 78).

Chrysanthopoulos continues to focus on the Russian role after the October 1993 events in Moscow. He confirms that the failed coup attempt changed nothing with respect to Russia's firm position regarding the CSCE, the Nagorno-Karabakh peace plan and the presence of Russian troops on the Armenian-Turkish border.

Meanwhile, the shaky cease-fire between the warring parties collapsed in the second half of October 1993, and the Karabakh Armenian forces scored successes in their counteroffensive in the Zangelan and Kubatli regions, close to the Iranian border. The ambassador's detailed description of military operations beyond the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Iran's increasing concerns about the Azerbaijani refugees entering its borders, however temporarily, are clear indications of regional security concerns that emerged at the time. Moreover, there were also broader security concerns at the United Nations, stemming from fears that the Nagorno-Karabakh war, if not stopped, could threaten international peace and security. As the warring parties tried to solve the conflict militarily, little political incentive was left to arrive at a settlement based on mutual concessions, despite the efforts of the Russian envoy, Vladimir Kazimirov, who tried to arrange a new cease-fire.

Chrysanthopoulos confirms that, at this juncture, "Armenia desired and needed a substantial link" with the EU that would "contribute to the maintenance of Armenia's independence." Moreover, "Armenia wanted the European Union to counterbalance the influence that the United States and Russia were trying to impose on it" (p. 120). Although this period also witnessed Yerevan and Stepanakert (for the first time) accepting "Rafaeli's timetable" (p. 124), there was no great optimism as regards the future of the Minsk Group peace process. Armenia was "convinced that Baku would reject it [i.e. Rafaeli's timetable] because the return of Lachin and Shushi was not resolved" in it and Nagorno-Karabakh was considered a party to the conflict (p. 120).

Indeed, soon the Azerbaijani prodigious winter offensive started. Chrysanthopoulos does not hide his fears at the time of "a possible direct involvement of Armenia in the conflict, which might lead to an all-out war with Azerbaijan" (p. 133). The EU was also concerned about the large scale fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and its 17 January 1994 communiqué on the situation in Azerbaijan held Armenia responsible for the violation of the cease-fire and requested the warring parties "to resume current negotiations immediately under the aegis of the CSCE Minsk Group" (p. 134). The Armenian response to the EU communiqué, quoted by Chrysanthopoulos, spells out the essence of the conflict, which remains the 'Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination: "The communiqué supports the principle of territorial integrity, without due mention of the right to self-determination, one of the basic principles of the CSCE, and one of the main reasons

for the acceptance of a CSCE negotiating forum by Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh" (p. 135).

Chrysanthopoulos next depicts the Azerbaijani winter offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh and its dangerous regional implications. Within this context, he highlights the Stockholm meeting of the CSCE Minsk Group in January 1994, where the Russians prevailed politically and appeared more determined to impose their own peace plan despite the fact that "there were many countries in the west that wanted to see it fail" (p. 144). The US involvement in this meeting was not strong enough to counterbalance the unilateral Russian peace proposals that had re-surfaced. Hence, it appears that the Minsk Group lost another opportunity to attain a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The Russian cease-fire proposal was ultimately rejected by Yerevan, Stepanakert and Baku. The Russian failure to stop the war led to new developments on the military and political fronts. The Karabakh Armenian forces defeated the Azerbaijani winter offensive. Meanwhile, the government of Armenia had conveyed its deep concern to the ambassadors of the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Armenia that "Baku would provoke an all-out military confrontation with Armenia and oblige Ankara to intervene militarily" (p. 155). In order to prevent further deterioration between Armenia and Turkey, the Armenian government sent Libaridian to Ankara in February 1994 to meet Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin. These contacts were "to feel out Ankara's true intentions and ask Turkey to play a more constructive role in the region, and not to react in a negative way to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the Caucasus" (p. 156).

Chrysanthopoulos stops his narrative here (20 February 1994, the date of his departure from Armenia). Hence, he leaves the reader hanging in the air. There is no epilogue in the book to inform the reader about developments after February 1994.

*Caucasus Chronicles* should be read as a primary source on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is also an eyewitness account of the devastating economic and political situation in Armenia. It depicts accurately the military situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and how Armenia's government dealt with the security, economic and political consequences of the conflict. Chrysanthopoulos presents the Yerevan, Stepanakert and Baku perspectives on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict objectively and this even without his ever being to Baku. The author makes clear that without realising Russia's interests in the Caucasus and without creating trust between the warring parties, any peace plan by the OSCE is doomed to fail. We believe, however, that the ambassador should have referred in more detail to the geopolitical and geostrategic aims of Russia, Turkey and Iran in the South Caucasus so that the reader could better understand their economic and political interests and assess their political leverage on the direct participants in the conflict.

Chrysanthopoulos's firsthand information and analyses are extremely useful in understanding the dynamics of peace making in Nagorno-Karabakh. His fellow diplomats may find some missing elements in this book, but for those who have followed the successive peace initiatives presented to the combatants from newspapers and other secondhand accounts, the book is an indispensable source.

Researchers, academics and general readers who wish to understand the security concerns of Yerevan and Stepanakert vis-à-vis Turkey and Azerbaijan and the dynamics of the peace process in 1993-94, should definitely read this profound, interesting and challenging book.

OHANNES GEUKJIAN

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The CSCE, established in 1975, was renamed the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at its Budapest Summit on 5-6 December 1994.

<sup>2</sup>The Minsk Group, consisting of eleven countries (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Sweden, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, France, Italy, the Russian Federation, USA and Turkey), was formed by the CSCE in 1992 to find a negotiated solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.