

Medvedev Seeks Karabakh Deal by December

October 27, 2010



From left, Presidents Ilham Aliyev, Dmitry Medvedev and Serzh Sargsyan meeting in Astrakhan on Wednesday. **Vladimir Rodionov**

ASTRAKHAN — President Dmitry Medvedev said Wednesday that he hoped Azerbaijan and Armenia could reach agreement on the principles of a peace deal for breakaway region Nagorno-Karabakh by early December.

Agreement on the so-called "basic principles" for a future peace deal could pave the way for a resolution of the conflict over the region, indicating movement after years of failed diplomacy by Russia, the United States and France.

A complete breakthrough, however, is considered a long way off as many sensitive issues still surround the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where fighting erupted two decades ago.

Speaking after chairing talks in Astrakhan between Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, Medvedev said those principles could be ready by a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Kazakhstan on Dec. 1

and 2.

"We have come a certain way, which gives grounds to hope that if the sides work well over the next month," Medvedev said.

"Then by the time of the OSCE summit in Kazakhstan on Dec. 1 and 2, we could reach an agreed variant of common regulation principles," he said.

Medvedev also said Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are still technically at war over Nagorno-Karabakh, had agreed to allow prisoner exchanges.

Clashes have worsened since 2008 around the mountain enclave, where ethnic Armenian Christians, backed by Armenia, threw off rule by Muslim Azerbaijan as the Soviet Union collapsed two decades ago.

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