

THE ROLE OF THE MINSK GROUP IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT: CURRENT CRISIS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THE EXISTING MEDIATION FORMAT

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OSCE Minsk Group has been the main mediating body to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since 1992. For around 30 years the three Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group- Russia, USA and France, have been productively cooperating on the matter. Minsk Group was believed to be an exclusive forum where the Western and Russian conflicting interests did not hinder the Minsk Group’s mission to provide ways to solve the conflict. However, since the February 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war the cooperation between these countries within the Minsk Group has been largely paralyzed.

Unfortunately, this coincided with the aftermath of Nagorno-Karabakh 44-day war in 2020, constant border skirmishes and Azerbaijani aggression and invasion into sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. The more internal struggles the Minsk Group experiences, the more regional security suffers. Different actors come up with individual efforts trying to establish themselves as the main mediators between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Under such circumstances there are no balancing mechanisms to restrain the mediating sides from advancing mutually contradicting initiatives which stem from their interests. Hence, this article advocates the importance of the role of the Minsk Group as a body uniting the main mediating actors at the same time being the only body that has the mandate to mediate on issues relating to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The article analyzes all the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution plans proposed by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, the Minsk Group activities during the 2016 and 2020 wars, the stalemate in the negotiations after the 2018 “Velvet revolution” in Armenia as well as the current crisis within the Minsk Group and the importance of preserving the Minsk Group as the main mediating body in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Keywords: *Nagorno-Karabakh, OSCE Minsk Group, negotiation process, aggression, regional conflicts*

The Resolution Plans Proposed by the Minsk Group

The formation of the OSCE Minsk Group (previously the CSCE), the main mediating body of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for the past 30 years, can be traced back to 1992. The CSCE became involved in the conflict starting in February 1992, after a special mission of the CSCE, headed by former Chairman of the International Helsinki Federation Karel Schwarzenberg, visited Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Based on the results of the visit, a report was created, which was discussed during sessions of the CSCE Committee of Senior Officials in February and March of 1992. The first additional meeting of the CSCE Council on March 24, 1992, is of particular importance. During this meeting, a decision was adopted to

hold a conference with the participation of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Germany, Italy, Russia, USA, Turkey, France, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and "elected and other representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh as interested parties." Belarus proposed its capital Minsk as a venue for the negotiations. Hence, the negotiation process became known as the Minsk group (though the meeting in Minsk never occurred). Instead, states met in Rome between the 1st and 5th of June 1992, at the invitation of Italy. This was followed by four meetings (June 15-20, June 29 - July 6, July 31-August 5, and September 7-10 in 1992). These meetings eventually led to the creation of the Minsk Group, tasked with aiding Armenia and Azerbaijan in resolving the conflict. In December 1994, during the CSCE summit in Budapest, a decision was adopted to establish co-chairmanship, with the first co-chairs being Russia and Sweden. In April 1996, Finland replaced Sweden.¹

In 1997, the permanent co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group was established, being led by Russia and the USA. In 1997, Russia, the USA, and France became the main mediating actors of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict heading the Minsk Group. However, permanent members of the Minsk Group also include Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, and Turkey, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Also, the OSCE Troika is a permanent member on a rotating basis.²

According to the Mandate of the Co-Chairmen of the Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh under the auspices of the OSCE, the tasks of the Minsk Group include but are not limited to

- the development of "a common basis for negotiations with the parties to the conflict";
- conducting the "negotiations with the parties to the conflict for the conclusion of a political agreement on the cessation of the armed conflict";
- promotion of "direct contacts, as appropriate, including substantial talks among the parties to the conflict;
- Joint visits or, when appropriate, separate visits on an agreed basis to "the region of conflict to maintain contacts with parties to the conflict concerning the aforementioned and other related issues," and so forth.³

OSCE Minsk Group has made several proposals for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Those proposals include the "package" deal, "step-by-step" approach, and "common state" solutions. Nonetheless, the parties have rejected these proposals for a variety of underlying reasons. The first proposal, offered to the conflicting parties in July 1997, was called a "package" deal as it sought to combine all the issues at stake and provide a comprehensive package agreement for even the most sensitive problems.⁴

The package deal encompassed two agreements. In Agreement I, the par-

¹ The OSCE Minsk Process, MFA of Artsakh, <http://www.nkr.am/en/osce-minsk-process>, (Accessed .03.2022)

² OSCE Minsk Group, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/108306>, (Accessed 10. 03.2023).

³ Mandate of the Co-Chairmen of the Conference on Nagorno Karabakh under the Auspices of the OSCE ("Minsk Conference") Adopted by the Chairman-in-Office, Vienna, March 23, 1995, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/f/70125.pdf>, (Accessed 10.03.2023).

⁴ **Terrence H. P.**, Minsk Group Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Confronting an "Intractable Conflict," IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2014, Baden-Baden 2015, pp. 167-179. https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/14/Hopmann_2014_en_S.pdf, (Accessed 10.03.2023).

ties were required to "end armed hostilities...to withdraw armed forces." Agreement II dealt with the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The document stipulated that the parties to the conflict should recognize "the territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia." Regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the document foresaw the status of "a state-territorial entity within Azerbaijan" with the administrative boundaries of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Region). Accordingly, Nagorno-Karabakh was to form its legislative, executive, and judicial bodies independently and have its own Constitution. Moreover, the laws of Azerbaijan were to be effective on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh "only if they did not contradict the latter's Constitution and laws."⁵

The "package" deal was doomed to fail from the beginning as it required a solution to all the sensitive issues simultaneously, not considering that the sides have different approaches to the same issue.

In order to overcome the shortcomings of the "package" deal, the Minsk Group co-chairs brought forth the "step-by-step" alternative at the Lisbon Summit in December 1997. This new approach aimed to reach an agreement on more straightforward issues, which would enhance the confidence of the conflicting sides concerning the negotiation process and only after then move to address the more complex issues. However, this new approach required compromises on all the issues at stake, sometimes hindering the negotiation process.⁶

The "step-by-step" approach implied the handing over of territories outside the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) to Azerbaijan, except for the Lachin region; deployment of OSCE peacekeepers on the ground; the return of displaced persons to their places of former permanent residence. However, a step-by-step approach postponed the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh to an indefinite future.⁷

The discussions over the "step-by-step" and "package" approaches became a topic of bitter contention within Armenian political circles. The first RA president Levon Ter-Petrosyan and his administration favored the "step-by-step" approach as he thought that was the only way to overcome the insurmountable contradictions of conflicting parties. However, because of his approach to the conflict, Levon Ter-Petrosyan had to resign as his government opponents declared his policies defeatist.⁸

In his speech during the Extended session of the Security Council held on January 7-8 of 1998, where the resignation of Levon Ter-Petrosyan was decided, Ter-Petrosyan asserted his position on the issue in the following way: "Theoretically, I do not deny that maintaining the status quo perhaps might be the best way out, because unlike the first two options ["package" deal and "step-by-step" approach], which are based on the idea of compromise, it assumes an exclusively victorious solution. However, this is only theoretical." He doubted

⁵ Minsk Group proposal ('package deal') July 1997, <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/4b2ddb/pdf/>, (Accessed 13.03.2023).

⁶ Terrence H. P., *supra* note 4.

⁷ Minsk Group proposal ('stepbystep deal') December 1997, <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/8760bb/pdf/>, (Accessed 13.03.2023).

⁸ Zourabian L., *The Nagorno-Karabakh Settlement Revisited: Is Peace Achievable?*, *Demokratizatsiya*, 2006, 14(2), pp. 252- 265.

that those opposing the “step-by-step” approach had any intention of solving the Karabakh issue in general. He was sure that the debate over “package” and “step-by-step” was just a veil to delay the settlement process, to maintain the current situation, that is, the status quo as long as possible. Ter-Petrosyan considered it “a terrible danger for the existence of both Karabakh and Armenia.” According to him, “In case of disruption or even delay of the conflict settlement process, we will not be able to get out of the current isolation. Moreover, we will even deepen it. It is not just about economic isolation because it is self-evident that economic isolation will also have unwanted political consequences.”⁹

Another solution that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs proposed was the idea of a so-called “common state” proposed in November 1998. The origin of the idea of the “common state” was explained by former Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian. On May 15, 1998, Vartan Oskanian and Armenian Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan headed to Moscow to meet Russia’s Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, and the head of Russian Intelligence. During the meeting, Oskanian mentioned that “a status for Karabakh that makes it de-facto independent, but de jure not in Azerbaijan, would be acceptable, and in that context, it would be worth considering a version of the ‘common state’ approach being proposed in the Transnistria conflict, where horizontal relations would be secured between Karabakh and Azerbaijan.” Afterwards, the Russian Foreign Minister traveled to Baku to negotiate the Karabakh issue, and in November the Minsk Group Co-Chairs presented the “common state” proposal.¹⁰

In essence, the document implied that Nagorno-Karabakh would be a state territorial formation in the form of a Republic and constitute a common state with Azerbaijan in the latter's internationally recognized borders. Borders of Nagorno-Karabakh were to correspond to "borders of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast." Nagorno-Karabakh would have the right to "enter into direct external relations with foreign states in economic, trade, scientific, cultural, sporting and humanitarian fields, and with regional and international organizations associated with these fields" as well as participate in the implementation of Azerbaijan's foreign policy "on issues touching upon its interests." According to the plan, it would also have its own Constitution, flag, national symbols, and national anthem and form its legislative, executive, and judicial bodies independently. However, citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh would have Azerbaijani passports with a stamp indicating Nagorno-Karabakh. Whereas "Citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenian origin may emigrate to Armenia and in case of permanent settlement they may receive Armenian citizenship in accordance with the laws of that country." The question of the Lachin corridor was the subject of a different agreement. Armenian and Azerbaijani refugees were to return to Shushi and the town of

⁹ Տեր-Պետրոսյանի հրաժարականը վճռեց Անվտանգության խորհրդի նիստը. հունվար 7-8, 1998թ., Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյանի ԸՆՏԲԱՆԻ հատորից, January 7, 2023, <https://www.aniarc.am/2023/01/07/ltp-7-8-january-1998/>, (Accessed 14.03.2023).

¹⁰ Birth of the idea of “Common State,” March 5, 2012, <https://mediamax.am/en/column/12217/>, (Accessed .03.2023).

Shaumian.¹¹ Azerbaijan quickly and categorically rejected this proposal of the Minsk Group, though some points were also unacceptable for the Armenian side.¹²

The following active phase of the negotiations was met with significant optimism on the resolution in 2001—starting with French President Jacques Chirac's mediation when he invited the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to Paris for bilateral and trilateral meetings. After the first meeting, four more meetings would occur with direct mediation and the participation of the French President. The main idea of this negotiation process was to provide the final and complete solution to the conflict, accepting the principle of providing Azerbaijan with a stable and uninterrupted corridor through Armenia's territory to Nakhichevan in exchange for handing over NK along with Lachin under the sovereignty of Armenia. Based on the agreements reached in Paris, the United States organized a one-week gathering in Key West to deal with the remaining disagreements and develop a document to become the basis for the resolution. The negotiations started with a meeting between Kocharyan and Aliyev with the participation of the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. There were a few days of intense negotiations with one main principle as a basis in exchange for handing NK with the Lachin corridor to the Republic of Armenia- Azerbaijan should gain free and unimpeded access connecting to Nakhichevan through Armenia.¹³

At the end of the negotiations, the sides seemed very close to reaching an agreement. However, upon returning to Azerbaijan, President Aliyev refused to follow the agreement as “he was not able to secure the approval of even his own circle to a plan,” which implied the release of the adjacent territories in exchange for the de facto ceding Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.¹⁴

Later, the U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh, commented on the failure of this process, stating that the major obstacle was that “neither side had done the necessary work to ready their populations for serious compromise.” According to him, in private, both the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan were prepared to act, but they showed no indication of this in public. Also, in Azerbaijan, “this was doubly difficult” because only a small circle had restricted knowledge of the proposed solution, and even some key advisors were unaware of the process.¹⁵

In November 2007, the Minsk Group Co-Chairs introduced the Madrid principles to the parties. The content of the principles was presented by the presidents of the Minsk Co-Chair countries- U.S. President Barack Obama, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the L'Aquila at the Summit of the Eight. The Madrid principles encompassed three principles of settlement and six elements.

¹¹ Minsk Group proposal (“common state deal”), November 1998, <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/f2c2f3/pdf>, (Accessed 14.03.2023).

¹² *Supra note 10.*

¹³ Վ. Օսկանյան, Քի Վեսթ՝ չիրացված հնարավորություն, August 20, 2013, <https://mediamax.am/am/column/12454/>, (Accessed 14.03.2023).

¹⁴ Musabayov R., The Karabakh conflict and democratization in Azerbaijan, The limits of leadership Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process, Conciliation Resources, London 2005, pp. 60-63.

¹⁵ Exclusive Interview of Former U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group (1999-2001), Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh to Mediamax, April 4 2011, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/keywest/514/>, (Accessed 15.03.2023).

The principles included the Helsinki Final Act principles of Non-Use of Force, Territorial Integrity, and the Equal Rights and Self-Determination of Peoples. The six elements were

1. “Return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control
2. An interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance,
3. A corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh;
4. Future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will;
5. The right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence;
6. International security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.”¹⁶

After offering the Madrid Principles to the parties, there was still no progress toward peace. It was at this time, May 26, 2011, in Deauville during the G8 Summit, the President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, the President of the USA, Barack Obama, and the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy jointly issued a statement on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict calling “upon the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to demonstrate their political will by finalizing the Basic Principles during their upcoming summit in June.”¹⁷

The summit took place in June 2011 in Kazan with the participation of Armenia’s President Serzh Sargsyan, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. As a result, the peace plan became known as the Kazan plan. The document stipulated the following points:

- The return of 5 regions of Aghdam, Fizulu, Jebrayil, Zangelan, and Kubatlu. Later, the Kelbajar district and non-corridor parts of the Lachin district should also be returned.
- Until the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh is determined, Nagorno-Karabakh receives an interim status that gives its residents certain rights and privileges.
- Deployment of peacekeepers
- The final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh is determined by the free expression of the will of the Nagorno-Karabakh people. The parties shall agree upon the dates and details of the vote in future negotiations. The population of Nagorno-Karabakh means all nationals living in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 with the same ethnic proportion as it was before the beginning of the conflict.¹⁸

¹⁶ Joint Statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict by U.S. President Obama, Russian President Medvedev, and French President Sarkozy at the L’Aquila Summit of the Eight, OSCE, July 10, 2009, <https://www.osce.org/mg/51152>, (Accessed 15.03.2023).

¹⁷ Joint Statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict by Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, and Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic at the Deauville Summit of the Eight, The White House, May 26, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/26/joint-statement-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-dmitry-medvedev-president-russ>, (Accessed 15.03.2023).

¹⁸ Կազանի փաստաթուղթ (աշխատանքային տարբերակ), June 23, 2016, https://www.aniarc.am/2016/06/23/kazan-document-23-june/?fbclid=IwAR3TBKvKbCWrytRnEM5Z5SDSNfsPE5sua6ZCL-qW-n_WgKphZBlkNvrrtr08, (Accessed 16.03.2023).

The Kazan document can be noted as one of the working options negotiated on the basis of the Madrid principles, which Azerbaijan rejected. In the final moment, Aliyev proposed ten additional changes to an already agreed-upon document. This meant the failure of the intensive work of the previous three years.¹⁹

The following proposal that was presented to Armenia and Azerbaijan was the so-called “Lavrov Plan.” This was the initiative of the Russian side. In essence, this was another “step-by-step” solution. The solution was presented by the Russian Foreign Ministry in 2016; the last edited version was presented in June 2019. It was based on the Madrid principles and the Kazan document. According to the proposal, the first stage encompassed the return of NK adjacent regions to Azerbaijan after the entry of the Russian peacekeeping mission to ensure the security of the NK population. Then, during the second phase, the remaining two regions were to be transferred to Azerbaijan with a simultaneously held referendum to establish the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Finally, the consent of both parties was required to leave Lachin as a connecting corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁰ This offer from the Russian side was against the wishes of France, the United States, and other European countries that were inclined towards a multilateral solution to the conflict and an international agreement.²¹

Subsequently, the former U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Richard Hoagland, commented on Lavrov's plan, stating that the Russian Foreign Minister's proposed plan was similar to the existing Madrid Principles.²²

At the end of the day, this plan also was rejected, indicating how increasingly difficult a resolution to the conflict was becoming. After years of unpromising negotiations, Azerbaijan resorted to force, which resulted in a four-day war in 2016. The War came to an end through Russian mediating efforts. The Minsk Group went into play and scheduled meetings between the parties. Two critical meetings followed the April War. The first of which took place in Vienna on May 16, 2016. During this meeting, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed “to finalize in the shortest possible time an OSCE investigative mechanism” and” to the expansion of the existing Office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office.”²³

¹⁹ Լեւոնային Ղարաբաղի հարցով Կազանի գագաթնաժողովը. Մերժ Սարգսյանի հոդվածը 10 տարի անց, July 06, 2021, <https://armeniasputnik.am/20210706/lernayingharabaghi-harcov-kazani-gagatnajoxov-ntorumner-10-tari-anc-28190560.html>, (Accessed 16.03.2023).

²⁰ Рашид Нургалиев рассказал о решении застарелого конфликта в Карабахе, Российская газета, January 20, 2021, <https://rg.ru/2021/01/20/rashid-nurgaliev-rasskazal-o-reshenii-zastarelogo-konflikta-v-karabahe.html>, (Accessed 17.03.2022).

²¹ **Waal T.**, A Precarious Peace for Karabakh, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 11, 2020 <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/83202>, (Accessed 17.03.2023).

²² **Hoagland R.**, Does the Minsk Group Still Have a Role? International Conflict Resolution Center, March 26, 2021, <https://icrcenter.org/does-the-minsk-group-still-have-a-role/?fbclid=IwAR23K3jIqj8ftRk7Z0u8PuPA5Nv-RnVvwQkv6IawvsOKtoyxBB2jeiCjYQk>, (Accessed 20.03.2023).

²³ Joint Statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Secretary of State of the United States of America, and State Secretary for Europe Affairs of France, OSCE, May 16, 2016, <https://www.osce.org/mg/240316>, (Accessed 20.03.2023).

The second meeting took place in Russian city of Saint Petersburg in June 2016. During the meeting, the presidents “reiterated agreements reached on May 16 Armenian-Azerbaijani Summit in Vienna” and “agreed, in particular, to increase the number of international observers.”²⁴

The agreed-upon incident investigation mechanisms that were considered a “hard-won diplomatic success” by Sargsyan, considered a 'straightjacket' on Azerbaijan, would later be abandoned by Nikol Pashinyan. Moreover, in 2020, Pashinyan published the so-called 'Munich Principles,' a six-point outline of his "negotiating position" parting from the Madrid Principles,²⁵ then contradicting this move on April 18th, 2023, after referring to them (the Madrid Principles) as a means of recognizing Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan, perverting the elements of the principles.²⁶

On April 21, 2020, Lavrov stated that a new document was disseminated during the April 2019 Moscow meeting of Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian foreign ministers. According to Lavrov, this document has no stark differences from all other options discussed during the last 13 years; it is based on a phased approach. During the first phase, some territories should be returned to Azerbaijan, and communications should be opened between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Armenian Foreign Ministry immediately rejected this statement, reiterating that Armenia did not pursue negotiations based on the phased approach. The current Armenian leadership disregarded all pre-2018 documents based on that logic.²⁷

The Resolution of the NK Conflict following the “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia

The events in Armenia took a severe turn in 2018 when Nikol Pashinyan came to power due to the so-called “Velvet Revolution.” This change of power in Armenia was critical in terms of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs seemed optimistic about the future of the negotiation process. They assumed that the new leadership in Armenia would get involved in the negotiation process more vigorously, be able to achieve tangible results, and make concessions due to broad support from the Armenian population.

At the beginning, Pashinyan showed involvement as he met the Azerbaijani President three times within a short period of time before their first official meeting in March 2019 in Vienna. Another misleading ‘positive’ sign was that the number of casualties on the Line of Contact dropped significantly. However, the initial optimism proved premature when Pashinyan began using controversial populist rhetoric. One early example of such rhetoric was during Pashin-

²⁴ In Saint Petersburg, Presidents of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan made a joint statement, The President of the Republic of Armenia, June 20, 2016, <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2016/06/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-Presidents-o-Russia-Azerbaijan/>, (Accessed 20.03.2023)

²⁵ **Nikoghosyan V., Ter-Matevosyan V.**, From ‘revolution’ to war: deciphering Armenia’s populist foreign policy-making process, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Informa UK Limited, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 1-21.

²⁶ Armenia Recognized Nagorno Karabakh as Part of Azerbaijan with Madrid Principles in 2007, says PM Pashinyan, 18 April 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1108961/>, (Accessed 21.04.2023).

²⁷ **Poghosyan B.**, Opinion: Why is Lavrov pushing for a Karabakh agreement?, April 30, 2020, <https://www.commonspace.eu/opinion/opinion-why-lavrov-pushing-karabakh-agreement>, (21.03.2023).

yan's visit to Nagorno-Karabakh. In his rally of August 2019 in NK, in order to win the support of Karabakh Armenians, Pashinyan declared that "Artsakh is Armenia – and that's it" and called for the union ("miatsum"), meaning reunion of Karabakh with Armenia, a central slogan for the 1988 Karabakh movement. Which was warmly accepted by the crowd, who repeated the "miatsum."²⁸

The then director of Armenia's National Security Service warned Pashinyan to 'refrain from using that language as it could jeopardize the peace process. Nevertheless, Pashinyan ignored the advice of the NSS as he preferred to pour fuel on the fire, trying to garner more support through the above-mentioned "populist" rhetoric.²⁹

As part of his populist rhetoric, Pashinyan continued with detrimental statements. And, it soon became apparent from Pashinyan's initial statements that he intended to change the logic of negotiations established since the outbreak of the conflict by stating that he was starting the negotiations "not from Serzh Sargsyan's point, but from [his] own point."³⁰

His intention of changing the existing negotiation format became more obvious when he announced that he was "ready to negotiate with the President of Azerbaijan within the framework of the co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group, but [he] also [thought] that the negotiation format cannot be considered complete until one of the parties to the conflict, the leadership of Artsakh, participates in it." Pashinyan considered that one of the reasons why the negotiation process had not yielded any result by then was because one cannot imagine successful negotiations "in an incomplete format."³¹

During a (N)SC session soon after Pashinyan took power, he 'allegedly familiarized himself with 'the Karabakh folder' inherited from the previous government, asking his nearest allies: 'Do you agree with the package we inherited?' All those around him responded negatively with concern that being in support would make them look like loyalists of the previous government.³² In essence, he neglected the work of the past three decades to bolster his populist approach.

Simultaneously, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev proceeded with militant rhetoric inflating and aggravating the situation between the conflicting parties. The OSCE Minsk Group did not welcome these kinds of statements and sentiments. In this context, the Co-Chairs urged the sides "to refrain from statements and actions suggesting significant changes to the situation on the ground, prejudging the outcome of or setting conditions for future talks, demanding unilateral changes to the format without the agreement of the other party, or indicating readiness to renew active hostilities."³³

²⁸ **Waal T.**, The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict in its Fourth Decade, CEPS Working Document, No. WD 2021-02 / September 2021, pp. 1-16.

²⁹ **Nikoghosyan V., Ter-Matevosyan V.**, *supra* note 25.

³⁰ «Ես բանակցությունները սկսել եմ ոչ թե Սերժ Սարգսյանի, այլ իմ սեփական կետից». Փաշինյան, April 9, 2019, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29870090.html>, (Accessed 22.03.2023).

³¹ Նիկոլ Փաշինյանը Արցախի խնդրի մասին, May 10. 2018, <https://mediamax.am/am/news/karabakh/28380>, (Accessed 23.03.2023).

³² **Nikoghosyan V., Ter-Matevosyan V.**, *supra* note 25.

³³ Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group on the Upcoming Meeting of President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan, OSCE, March 9, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/413813>, (Accessed 23.03.2023).

As a result of Pashinyan's short-sighted policy, the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations eventually reached a stalemate paving the way for Azerbaijan to launch a full-scale war against Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani President Aliyev justified the resort to force with 'thirty years of negotiations yielding no tangible results.' Moreover, according to him, "Since 2019, the new authorities in Armenia began making absurd statements, which actually led to the end of the negotiations. For example, "Karabakh is Armenia; that's it." After such a statement, it was useless to speak about any negotiations."³⁴

This failure of negotiations led to the 44-day war in 2020 when Azerbaijan with the military support and backing of Turkey launched a full scale aggression against the Nagorno-Karabakh population. Moreover, Pashinyan's government proved total incompetence during the war, which directly stemmed from the dismissals of experienced military officials, leaving the military order in chaos and bound to defeat. Following the war, the General Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces, along with political parties, called for the resignation of Pashinyan, which Pashinyan ignored, suppressing the opposition, completely contradicting his supposed 'will of the people' decision making approach. The government's failures are also increasingly evident when comparing the 2016 4-day war to that of the 2020 war.³⁵

The Activities of the OSCE Minsk Group during the 44-day War

Starting from the first day of the 44-day war to the aftermath, the OSCE Minsk Group, with the co-chairmanship of the USA, Russia, and France, regularly issued statements at the level of Minsk Group Co-Chairs as well as Minsk Group country leaders and foreign ministers. Furthermore, with the participation of the Minsk group, several meetings were held between Azerbaijani and Armenian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, individually and jointly.

On the first day of the war Minsk group appealed to the sides "to cease hostilities immediately and to resume negotiations."³⁶ Two days later, on September 29, Special meeting of OSCE Permanent Council was held on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh with the participation of OSCE's 57 States. During the meeting, the same appeal was reiterated.³⁷

The next statement was made at the level of presidents of the Co-Chair countries. More specifically, on October 1, French President Emmanuel Macron, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and U.S. President Donald Trump put out a joint statement calling on the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan "to commit without delay to resuming substantive negotiations, in good faith and without preconditions."³⁸ On October 5 a similar statement was made by the

³⁴ Aliyev: Talks with Armenia Suspended since 2019, April 22, 2022, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/karabakh/47197>, (Accessed 23.03.2023).

³⁵ Military Brass Calls for Prime Minister's Resignation, Pashinyan Promises to "End the Velvet", EVN Report, Feb 25, 2021, <https://evnreport.com/politics/military-brass-calls-for-prime-minister-s-resignation-pashinyan-promises-to-end-the-velvet/#:~:text=Armenia's%20top%20military%20brass%20has,the%20interests%20of%20the%20country>, (Accessed 24.03.2023)

³⁶ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, OSCE, September 27, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/465018>, (Accessed 24.03.2023).

³⁷ Special meeting of OSCE Permanent Council held on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh context, OSCE, September 29, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/465225>, (Accessed .2023).

³⁸ Trump, Putin, Macron call for Armenia and Azerbaijan to cease hostilities, Politico, Oc-

Foreign Ministers of the respective countries.³⁹

The Minsk Group Co-Chairs also met with the Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers to stop the ongoing hostilities and resume the negotiations. The meeting was organized on October 24 in Washington, D.C. The Co-Chairs met with Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers and participated in a joint meeting with the Foreign Ministers and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun.⁴⁰ The next meeting with Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers was held on October 30.⁴¹

Apart from the joint efforts, the Minsk group Co-Chair countries also made individual attempts in trying to establish a ceasefire. Behind the three ceasefire agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan during the 2020 war were Russia, France, and the USA. The first ceasefire attempt was established on October 10 through Russian mediation, the second on October 18 through French mediation, and the last on October 26 through U.S. mediation (the reason why Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers were invited to Washington). However, all three ceasefires failed minutes after their launch.

The final ceasefire was established through Russian mediation, followed by the November 9 trilateral statement signed by Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian heads of state. On December 3, the OSCE Minsk Group addressed the established ceasefire urging “Armenia and Azerbaijan to take advantage of the current ceasefire to negotiate a lasting and stable peace treaty under the auspices of the Minsk Co-Chairs.”⁴² Subsequently, the Co-Chairs regularly made similar statements calling on “the parties to resume high-level political dialogue under the auspices of the Co-Chairs at the earliest opportunity.”⁴³

In trying to take advantage of the situation, Minsk group Co-Chairs had a couple of meetings with Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers. During the first meeting on February 16, 2021, the Co-Chairs spoke separately by video conference format with Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov.⁴⁴ The first joint meeting between Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister

tober 1, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-putin-macron-call-for-armenia-andazerbaijan-to-cease-hostilities/>, (Accessed 24.03.2023).

³⁹ Joint Statement Calling for a Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, October 5, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/joint-statement-calling-for-a-ceasefire-in-nagorno-karabakh/index.html>, (Accessed .2023).

⁴⁰ Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, October 25, 2020 <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/468204>, (Accessed 27.03.2023)

⁴¹ Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, October 30, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/468984>, (Accessed 27.03.2023).

⁴² Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries, December 3, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/472419>, (Accessed 28.03.2023).

⁴³ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, April 13, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/483416> (Accessed 28.03.2023), Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, May 5, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/485558>, (Accessed 28.03.2023). Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, May 28, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/487879>, (Accessed 28.03..2023). Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, July 29, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/493945>, (Accessed 28.03..2023). Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, February 16, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/478690>, (Accessed 28.03..2023).

⁴⁴ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, February 16, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/478690>, (Accessed 30.03.2023).

Jeyhun Bayramov since November 2020 was also hosted by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. It took place on the sidelines of the General Debate of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2021.⁴⁵ The second meeting took place on November 10 in Paris.⁴⁶

In essence, the meeting held in Paris became the last joint meeting in the Minsk format. This was followed by an attack unleashed by Azerbaijan in Syunik. Thus, on December 4, on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council, the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group only had a separate meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, regretting that "it was not possible to hold a joint meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan under their auspices."⁴⁷

In order to continue the dialogue and get out of the deadlock, the last joint statement by the Co-Chairing countries of the Minsk Group was made on December 7, 2021. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian expressed their support for "the resumption of direct dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs" and continuing the meetings held in New York and Paris.⁴⁸ In essence, this became the last joint statement of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

In February 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war broke out, straining the relationship between the Co-Chair countries. While the West, led by the U.S., wages a full-scale proxy war in Ukraine, with the U.S. alone sending \$75 billion in assistance, including state-of-the-art weaponry as well as their own special forces, as revealed in recently leaked Pentagon documents, it is no surprise that relations are at an all-time low since the Cold War, presumably worse, essentially leaving the Minsk Group non-operable.⁴⁹

The Current Crisis of the OSCE Minsk Group

In the aftermath of the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the effectiveness and future of the OSCE Minsk Group have been strongly questioned. Neither France nor the United States was able or maybe willing to broker a lasting ceasefire during the 2020 war (Russian first attempt also failed, but it succeeded in the case of the November 9 statement).

Following the war, Russia became the central mediator in this conflict after it brokered the November 9 trilateral statement, deploying its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. Now as Azerbaijan has had its way, taking territories by military force, they consider the conflict to be resolved. Hence, the con-

⁴⁵ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, September 24, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/498948>, (Accessed 31.03.2023).

⁴⁶ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, November 11, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/504007>, (Accessed 31.03.2023).

⁴⁷ Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, December 4, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/506813> (Accessed: 03.05.2023).

⁴⁸ Joint Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries, December 7, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/507320>, (Accessed 03.05.2023).

⁴⁹ Adams P., Wright G., Ukraine war: Leak shows Western special forces on the ground, April 11, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65245065>, (Accessed 03.05.2023).

tinuation of the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, per their argument, is pointless. Meanwhile, for Armenia, the OSCE Minsk group remains an essential forum for dealing with several unresolved issues.

The exacerbation of the situation due the Russian-Ukrainian war raised doubts about Co-Chairs' ability to work together within this framework. Moreover, since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, several contradicting statements have been made on the future operation and even the abolition of the group operating for around 30 years.

In April 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that France and the United States have tried to “exclude” Russia from the Minsk Group calling that act “irresponsible.” Lavrov claimed that the U.S. and France said they would not work with Russia in the Minsk Group format: “That is their right. If they are ready to sacrifice the interests of the settlement in Karabakh, in the South Caucasus, this is their choice. Not only this specific issue but all the other issues are being held hostage to their Russophobia policy.”⁵⁰ Moscow went on to appoint Igor Khovaev, the Russian Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's special envoy on "fostering the normalization of relations" between the two South Caucasus states.⁵¹ In response to Lavrov's comments, during a visit to Yerevan, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried claimed that "Russia is a Minsk Group Co-Chair...France, the U.S., and Russia would continue in that format." However, Lavrov has remained firm on his stance and has since repeated the claim that the OSCE Minsk Group has “ceased its activities.”

Azerbaijan quickly added that the OSCE Minsk Group is finished, claiming it to be ineffective in the last 30 years. Moreover, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated, "It's time for them to retire" as Azerbaijan has already “settled the conflict." On the other hand, Armenia sticks to the OSCE Minsk Group as a negotiation mechanism.⁵²

There is a strong tension between the OSCE Minsk Co-Chair countries, which leads to the ineffectiveness and even impossibility of interaction between them in matters of negotiating efforts. This becomes obvious in the continuous mutual accusations of Russia and the U.S.⁵³

The activation of Western involvement in resolving the NK conflict is also highly alarming for Russia. While the U.S. claims their involvement is "not a means for the USA to compete with Russia," their actions in the post-Soviet space say otherwise. The latter conceives this to be a way of pushing Russia out of the South Caucasus region.⁵⁴

As a result of the ongoing tension around the Minsk Group, there are cur-

⁵⁰ Lavrov Says U.S., France Have Due to "Russophobia," <https://hetq.am/en/article/143211>, (Accessed .2023).

⁵¹ Russia Signals Separate Mediation Efforts On Armenia-Azerbaijan Accord, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31804989.html>, (Accessed 05.05.2023).

⁵² Avetisyan A., Western Co-Chairs, Pashinyan, and Lavrov dispute Minsk Group status, <https://oc-media.org/western-co-chairs-pashinyan-and-lavrov-dispute-minsk-group-status/>, (Accessed .2023).

⁵³ Department Press Briefing – October 25, 2022, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-october-25-2022/>, (Accessed 05.05.2023).

⁵⁴ Department Press Briefing – March 6, 2023, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-march-6-2023/>, (Accessed 06.05.2023).

rently parallel peace talks. On one side is the EU, and on the other is Russia (the US is also trying to stay involved by holding meetings and frequent phone calls with Armenian and Azerbaijani officials). The risk is that these efforts may become increasingly competitive, negatively impacting the resolution overall. At the same time, the EU seems to be mediating technical and economic issues at the interstate level. In contrast, security issues and, more importantly, the status of NK continue to lie within Russian and Minsk Group mediation. Prominently neither December nor April EU readout of the meetings in Brussels mention the term “Nagorno-Karabakh.” Thus, the core issue at stake remains under the Minsk group's exclusive mandate.⁵⁵

Thus, the OSCE Minsk Group is undergoing a severe crisis, with the Co-Chairs having antagonistic geopolitical policies. As a result, there have been neither joint statements nor meetings within this format since December 2021; Russia is claiming that other Co-Chairs are unwilling to work with it; while Azerbaijan claims that the conflict is resolved, meaning that there is no need for further existence of the group. Under such circumstances, there are even rumors of the appearance of a successor of this mechanism, considering the vast experience the group has accumulated throughout the years in trying to resolve the conflict.⁵⁶

However, as of now, the appearance of such a body or a mechanism seems unlikely, and one thing is clear for the Armenian side: this format continues to be the most viable option for trying to advance the interests of Armenia and the NK population as well as to balance the contradicting interests of other involved actors. With that being said, the above discussion highlights that the Minsk Group is a powerful tool which prevented the situation from escalating into a full-scale war for nearly thirty years. However, the destabilization of Armenia subsequent to the Velvet Revolution calls attention to the fact that mediating bodies concern soft-power and without a government that is able to uphold the negotiating format, failure is inevitable, leaving the mediating body to be easily scapegoated.

Conclusion

As long as the Minsk format existed, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem continued to be an international conflict, where besides the directly conflicting parties, three main mediators were involved: Russia, the USA and France, the latter also representing the EU. The formal abolition of this format means that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem becomes a subject of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. And if we take into account that the authorities of Armenia have stated many times that there is no such solution where Artsakh is outside of Azerbaijan, then this means presenting the Nagorno-Karabakh problem as an internal affair of Azerbaijan. At the same time, against the background of extreme tension between Russia and the West, the existence of the Minsk Group

⁵⁵ **Broers L.**, Perspectives | Beyond Minsk? The remaking of the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process, April 20, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-beyond-minsk-the-remaking-of-the-armenian-azerbaijani-peace-process/>, (Accessed 07.05.2023).

⁵⁶ **Waal T., at Muradyan A.**, Who can lead Armenia and Azerbaijan to peace if the Minsk group fails? April 28, 2022, <https://jam-news.net/who-can-lead-armenia-and-azerbaijan-to-peace-if-the-minsk-group-fails/>, (Accessed 07.05.2023).

as such is also questioned by the Co-Chairs. In other words, due to the strained relations between Russia and the West, the activities of the Minsk Group have essentially halted. However, this does not entail the formal dismantling of the Minsk Group, as it is still the only format that has an international mandate to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is noteworthy that the USA and France, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand, have repeatedly accused each other of undermining the activities of the Minsk Group, but none of them has yet taken any steps to formally suspend the group's activities in the OSCE.

It turns out that no one wants to dismantle the Minsk Group yet. The explanation can be as follows: if there is a need for Armenia and Azerbaijan to negotiate in future, the Minsk Group can undertake such an obligation. And taking into account Azerbaijan's aggressive policy and aggressive rhetoric, it can be concluded that in the future, even if a peace treaty is signed between the states, it does not imply that Azerbaijan will stop demanding territories from Armenia, or demand the so-called Zangezur Corridor, etc. At the same time, the signing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan does not mean that Armenia will completely abandon Nagorno-Karabakh, especially when there is a change of power in Armenia.

This means that the Minsk Group may still have work to do if there are unresolved issues, territorial disputes, claims, disagreements, the need for negotiations, etc. between the states.

ՍՈՒՐԵՆ ՍԱՐԳՍՅԱՆ, ԱՆԱՀԻՏ ՄՈՒՐԱՂՅԱՆ, ԱԻՂԱ ԳԵՎՈՐԳՅԱՆ, ՎԱՀԱԳՆ ՄԱՆՈՒԿՅԱՆ – Մինսկի խմբի դերը Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հակամարտությունում. ներկայիս ճգնաժամը և առկա միջնորդական ձևաչափի պահպանման կարևորությունը – ԵԱՀԿ Մինսկի խումբը եղել է Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հակամարտությամբ զբաղվող հիմնական միջնորդ մարմինը՝ սկսած 1992 թ.-ից: Մոտ 30 տարի Մինսկի խմբի երեք համանախագահները՝ Ռուսաստանը, ԱՄՆ-ն և Ֆրանսիան, արդյունավետ համագործակցում էին լուծում գտնելու համար: Մինսկի խումբը համարվում էր բացառիկ հարթակ, որտեղ արևմտյան և ռուսական հակամարտող շահերը չէին խոչընդոտում Մինսկի խմբի առաքելությունը՝ գտնելու հակամարտության լուծման ուղիներ: Այնուամենայնիվ, 2022 թվականի ռուս-ուկրաինական պատերազմն սկսվելուց հետո առ այսօր այս երկրների համագործակցությունը Մինսկի խմբի շրջանակներում կաթվածահար վիճակում է:

Որքան շատ են ներքին պառակտումները Մինսկի խմբում, այնքան ավելի է տուժում տարածաշրջանային անվտանգությունը: Տարբեր դերակատարներ հանդես են գալիս անհատական նախաձեռնություններով՝ փորձելով դառնալ Հայաստանի և Ադրբեջանի միջև հիմնական միջնորդ: Նման պայմաններում չկան հավասարակշռող մեխանիզմներ, որոնք կզսպեն միջնորդ կողմերին իրենց շահերից բխող և միմյանց հակասող նախաձեռնություններ առաջ մղելուց: Հետևաբար, սույն հոդվածը միտված է ապացուցելու Մինսկի խմբի դերի կարևորությունը՝ որպես Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հակամարտության միջնորդ, հիմնական դերակատարներին միավորող մարմին և որպես միակ կառույց, որն ունի միջնորդական առաքելություն իրականացնելու մանդատ: Հոդվածում վերլուծվում են Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հակամարտության

կարգավորման բոլոր տարբերակները, որոնք առաջարկվել են Մինսկի խմբի համանախագահների կողմից, Մինսկի խմբի գործունեությունը 2016 և 2020 թթ. պատերազմների ընթացքում, բանակցություններում ստեղծված փակուղին Հայաստանում 2018 թ. «Թավշյա հեղափոխությունից» հետո, ինչպես նաև ընթացիկ ճգնաժամը Մինսկի խմբի ներսում և վերջինիս՝ որպես Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հակամարտությունում հիմնական միջնորդ մարմնի պահպանման կարևորությունը:

Բանալի բառեր – *Լեռնային Ղարաբաղ, ԵՄՀԿ Մինսկի խումբ, բանակցային գործընթաց, ագրեսիա, տարածաշրջանային հակամարտություններ*

СУРЕН САРГСЯН, АНАИТ МУРАДЯН, АИДА ГЕВОРГЯН, ВАХАГН МАНУКЯН – *Роль Минской группы в нагорно-карабахском конфликте: текущий кризис и важность сохранения существующего формата медиации.* – Минская группа ОБСЕ является основным посредническим органом в процессе урегулирования Нагорно Карабахского конфликта с 1992 года. Вот уже около 30 лет три сопредседателя Минской группы – Россия, США и Франция продуктивно сотрудничают по этому вопросу. Минская группа считалась эксклюзивным форумом, где конфликтующие интересы Запада и России не мешали миссии Минской группы в поиске путей урегулирования конфликта. Однако после российско-украинской войны февраля 2022 года сотрудничество между этими странами в рамках Минской группы было в значительной степени парализовано.

К сожалению, это совпало с периодом после 44-дневной войны в Нагорном Карабахе 2020 года, постоянными пограничными стычками и азербайджанской агрессией и вторжением на суверенную территорию Республики Армения. Чем больше противоречий внутри Минской группы, тем уязвимее региональная безопасность. Разные акторы предпринимают индивидуальные усилия, пытаясь утвердиться в качестве основных посредников между Арменией и Азербайджаном. В таких условиях отсутствуют уравнивающие механизмы, сдерживающие посреднические стороны от выдвижения противоречащих друг другу инициатив, вытекающих из собственных интересов. Таким образом, в данной статье отстаивается важность роли Минской группы как органа, объединяющего основные посреднические стороны, и в то же время единственного органа, обладающего мандатом на посредничество в вопросах, касающихся Нагорно Карабахского конфликта. В статье анализируются все планы урегулирования Нагорно Карабахского конфликта, предложенные сопредседателями Минской группы, деятельность Минской группы во время войн 2016 и 2020гг., тупиковая ситуация в переговорах после «бархатной революции» 2018г. в Армении, а также текущий кризис внутри Минской группы и важность сохранения Минской группы в качестве основного посреднического органа в Нагорно Карабахском конфликте.

Ключевые слова: *Нагорный Карабах, Минская группа ОБСЕ, переговорный процесс, агрессия, региональные конфликты*