

ISSN 1404-6091

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Journal of Social and Political Studies



1(37)
2006

CA&CC Press®
SWEDEN

REGIONAL CONFLICTS

**LIMITS OF
INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT
IN THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS:
THE OSCE MEDIATION
IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT
(1992-1996)**

Ohannes GEUKJIAN

*Assistant Professor of Politics,
Human Rights, and Cultural Studies
at the Lebanese American University (LAU),
and Haigazian University in Beirut;
Member of the British Society
for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)
(Beirut, Lebanon)*

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine and analyze the mediation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) conflict from 1992 to 1996, and the internal and external difficulties that hampered its peacemaking efforts. Also, the aim is to analyze the positions of the external (Russia) and internal (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh leadership) actors with respect to the peace plans presented by the OSCE, and highlight the causes that contributed to their failure. In this context, much emphasis is put on the peace strategy implemented by the OSCE for conflict resolution in N-K, and the position of Russia which tried to sideline the OSCE to keep the Southern Caucasus under its direct political and economic influence. This article also stresses

the role of Russia as a major regional actor in the N-K conflict and the prospects for possible cooperation between Russia and the OSCE from 1992 to 1996.

2. The CSCE/OSCE Involvement in the N-K Conflict (1992-1993)

The founding Helsinki Act in August 1975 that formally established the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), OSCE since 1994, has been viewed as an organization without a strong mandate to promote the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts and other disputes between and within member states.¹ A key development in the mediation to resolve the N-K conflict was the United Nation's agreement in late 1992 to let the OSCE become the main leading international body in the management and resolution of the N-K conflict.² The OSCE became officially involved in the N-K conflict on 24 March, 1992, when its Ministerial Council adopted a decision to convene in Minsk (Belarus) under the auspices of the OSCE to provide an ongoing forum for the negotiation of a peaceful settlement of the N-K conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan³ (two former Soviet republics which declared independence after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991). In this way the idea of a "Minsk Conference" was born.

In this context, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and ten other OSCE members (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Sweden, Belarus, France, Italy, the Russian Federation, the U.S. and Turkey) agreed to take part in the "Minsk Conference." Also, representatives of Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis would participate. The "Minsk Conference" did not convene because of the escalation of the fighting in 1992 in N-K between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Hence, the "Minsk Conference" became instead the Minsk Group with the Italian deputy Foreign Minister as its first Chairman.⁴ At this period the aims of the OSCE were first to arrange a ceasefire in N-K and then commence negotiations between the parties to the conflict. The OSCE Stockholm meeting on 14 December, 1992 that was on the verge of implementing a full ceasefire agreement in N-K failed because of Azerbaijan's refusal.⁵

The first Minsk Group "emergency preliminary" meeting was held in Rome in June 1992 in the absence of a Karabakh delegation.⁶ The first two sessions of the talks continued and an agreement was reached on the need to send peacekeeping troops to N-K. Unfortunately, the Minsk Group during the Rome meeting did not clarify from the beginning that the peaceful resolution of the N-K conflict

¹ See: W.M. Brinton, "The Helsinki Final Act and Other International Covenants Supporting Freedom and Human Rights," in: W.M. Brinton, A. Rinzler, *Without Force or Lies, Voices from the Revolution of Central Europe in 1989-1990*, Mercury House Press, U.S.A., 1990, pp. 53-56.

² See: N. Macfarlane, "Keeping Peace or Preserving Conflicts?" *Warreport*, No. 52, June-July 1997, p. 34.

³ See: E. Fuller, "Ethnic Strife Threatens Democratization," in: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report* (hereafter RFE/RLRR), Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1993, p. 22.

⁴ See: J.J. Maresca, "Resolving the Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh: Lost Opportunities for International Conflict Resolution," in: Ch.A. Crooker, F.O. Hampson, P. Aall, *Managing Global Chaos, Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 260.

⁵ *Ibidem*. Despite the failure of the ceasefire attempt, "the Stockholm meeting was significant for the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations in a much broader way, for at this meeting Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, gave a hard line speech that hinted at the direction that Russian policy would follow on issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh in the months to come" (see: *Ibid.*, p. 261).

⁶ See: D.D. Laitin, R.G. Suny, "Thinking a Way Out of Karabakh," *Journal of Middle East Policy* (e-mail version), Vol. 3, No. 1, October 1999, p. 12.

would have to reconcile two fundamental principles: the territorial integrity of recognized states and the right to national self-determination of peoples.⁷ This lack of clarity probably gave the Karabakh Armenian leadership a “false signal that unilateral shifts in borders might be acceptable to the international community.”⁸

In this context, even if the OSCE had not specified clearly in its Rome meeting in 1992 that shifts in international borders were unacceptable, the Karabakh Armenian leadership should have realized that the principle of national self-determination in the form of separate statehood would pose a threat to the existence of Azerbaijan. Apparently, the OSCE had advocated since 1992 a solution to such conflicts which combined respect for territorial integrity of the state while simultaneously respecting the regional minority population’s right to self-determination. Therefore, in order to resolve the N-K conflict the OSCE followed an approach that balanced Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity with an acceptable autonomous status for N-K within Azerbaijan. Moreover, the Karabakh Armenians’ declaration of independence from Azerbaijan on 6 January, 1991, and their attempt to create a separate state on ethnic lines was not endorsed by the OSCE.⁹ In 1992, the Minsk Group expected that Armenians and Azerbaijanis would establish rapport and negotiate on a political settlement. At a later stage, it would become possible to determine the final political status of N-K.

In October 1993, the Minsk Group Chairman, Mr. Mario Raffaelli, presented a peace plan for the settlement of the N-K conflict which pinpointed the following:

- “1. The progressive withdrawal of armed forces of Nagorno-Karabakh within one month from the different occupied territories.
- “2. Azerbaijan was to respond by lifting its blockade in a number of corresponding stages: first, the gas pipeline, then second, the Idjevan-Kazakh railway and finally, all other lines of communication were to be unblocked.
- “3. All these stages were to be monitored by groups of CSCE experts.”¹⁰

The plan was refused by Azerbaijan because it did not address the Armenian blockade of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan (which belongs to Azerbaijan), and did not refer to the Lachin District (a land corridor that connects N-K with Armenia). Armenia agreed to the plan but the Karabakh Armenian leadership did not. On 8 November, 1993, the Minsk Group which met in Vienna, presented a new peace plan which took the Azerbaijani demands into consideration, particularly, the withdrawal of the Karabakh Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories and the return of the Azeri refugees to their homes in N-K. The status of N-K was not stipulated because it would be discussed in the “Minsk Conference” that was never convened.¹¹ The Vienna meeting’s results were criticized by the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, Hasan Hasanov, who accused the Minsk Group of “siding with Armenia and of tacitly condoning an Armenian policy of ethnic cleansing.” On the other hand, the Armenian presidential spokesman, Aram Abrahamian, assessed the Vienna meeting positively advocating combined mediatory among the OSCE, Russia and the UN.¹²

⁷ See: R. Weitz, “The CSCE’s New Look,” in: *RFE/RLRR*, Vol. 1, No. 6, February 1992, p. 27.

⁸ D.D. Laitin, R.G. Suny, op. cit., p. 12.

⁹ See: *Azerbaijan, Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, London and Brussels, 1994, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Report on the Conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh*, Document 7182, presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 17 October, 1994, p. 8, available at [<http://stars.coe.fr/doc/doc94/edoc7182.htm>].

¹¹ See: *OSCE Handbook, Field Activities, the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Dealt with by the Minsk Conference*, 4 April, 2000, p. 14, available at [<http://www.osce.org/publications/handbook/5.htm>].

¹² See: E. Fuller, “Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the Karabakh Mediation Process,” in: *RFE/RLRR*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 25 February, 1994, p. 32.

The failure of the Minsk Group's first phase (January-December 1992) mediation can be attributed to a number of causes.

- First, both parties to the conflict (Armenians and Azerbaijanis) were not tested on the battlefield and had hopes of winning the conflict militarily. Also, both sides could not count on their politically weak governments "to risk being accused by their domestic opposition of a sellout."¹³ In this respect, Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis sought a military solution to the N-K conflict in the absence of international pressure to stop the war. Indeed, violence escalated in 1993 when both sides intensified their military operations to defeat the other. Politically, the nationalist political parties were strong in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Armenia, President Levon Ter-Petrossian was unable to convince the parliament to accept an initial peace settlement that would postpone the discussion of the status of N-K.¹⁴ Similarly, in Azerbaijan, President Abulfaz Elchibey refused any compromise settlement before the withdrawal of the Karabakh Armenian forces from the Azerbaijani occupied territories.¹⁵
- Second, the low-level interest of the Minsk Group in resolving the N-K conflict. It could be argued that this was a major difficulty that confronted the OSCE Stockholm meeting to implement a ceasefire in N-K. In this respect John J. Maresca, the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE, stated that "the Chairman of the Minsk Group did not even attend the Stockholm meeting. His absence signaled that no important developments were expected and ensured that (foreign) ministers would not focus" on the N-K case.¹⁶ The Russians also did not send their Minsk Group negotiator. Perhaps, the Russian absence was deliberate in order to distance Russia from any decision to be taken by the Minsk Group. Furthermore, "there was no official position of the U.S. representative to the Minsk Group despite the fact that the Minsk Group had been created because of high-level U.S. intervention."¹⁷ It seemed that the U.S. representative was not interested in a peace deal for the N-K conflict.
- Third, there was doubt expressed by the Minsk Group Foreign Ministers in Stockholm regarding a future peacekeeping operation or monitoring force, whether the OSCE could actually provide such a force to be dispatched to N-K.¹⁸ In principle, a very large majority in the Organization should take such a decision. Also, the OSCE can only engage peacekeeping missions in conflict zones after an effective ceasefire between the conflicting parties, and only after their consent and cooperation. Even if these conditions were provided in 1992, an OSCE peacekeeping force was not immediately available.¹⁹ Hence, it was difficult to see how an OSCE peacekeeping force could be provided to monitor a ceasefire that would need quick deployment to prevent its collapse.²⁰

To sum up, no doubt that these difficulties lessened the efficiency of the Minsk Group to attract the representatives of the parties to the conflict to serious negotiations. Hence, instead of showing the

¹³ J.J. Maresca, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁴ See: Th.D. Waal, *Black Garden, Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, New York University Press, New York and London, 2003, pp. 226-227. See also: S. Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations, the Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey, 1994, pp. 147-148.

¹⁵ See: E. Fuller, "Armenia Votes Overwhelmingly for Secession," in: *RFE/RLRR, Report on the U.S.S.R.*, Vol. 3, No. 39, 27 September, 1991, pp. 18-20.

¹⁶ See: J.J. Maresca, op. cit.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

¹⁸ See: *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²⁰ See: J. Walker, "European Regional Organizations and Ethnic Conflict," in: R.O. Karp, *Central and Eastern Europe, the Challenge to Transition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1993, pp. 55-56.

conflicting sides a strong commitment to resolve the N-K conflict, the Minsk Group seemed weak because of the lack of coordination among its members. Furthermore, the absence of an official position of the U.S. representative to the Minsk Group, and Russia's determination to distance itself from the Minsk Group could be considered important reasons for its failure to exert more political pressure on the conflicting sides and make them pursue a compromise.

In addition to the above mentioned causes, there were also a number of internal factors at the domestic level that hampered the first phase of the negotiations in Stockholm.

- Firstly, given the committed atrocities in 1992-1993 in N-K, the Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives had little incentive to negotiate in good faith and were unready to make serious concessions to reach a compromise. It seemed that these representatives were not open to discussion, unprepared to listen to each other's needs and evidently unauthorized by their governments to make concessions.
- Secondly, the weak and the transitional nature of the Armenian and Azerbaijani newly independent states. In 1992 the nationalist intellectuals in both states were in power and "liberating" N-K was on top of their political agenda. Hence, they were unready to listen to the early peace initiatives of the Minsk Group.
- Thirdly, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were newly independent states with weak democratic experience and human rights standards. Probably, the Soviet legacy was dominating their relationships with each other as neighboring states. With strong ethno-national radical organizations which emerged as a result of the mobilization of ethnic identity in both republics for the cause of N-K, perhaps the expectations of the Minsk Group in 1992 seemed too much with respect to a compromise resolution.

Therefore, the failure of the Minsk Group to attain a ceasefire in N-K during this period in Stockholm was the result of all these external and internal factors. We turn now to examine the role of Russia and its weak cooperation with the OSCE in the N-K peace process.

3. Possible Cooperation Between the OSCE and Russia (1992-1993)?

The eclipse of the OSCE efforts to hammer out a political solution to the N-K conflict in 1992 encouraged Russia to step in strongly in the Southern Caucasus. Russia found the political situation conducive to enforce a unilateral peace agreement. On 20 February, 1992, with the initiative of the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, the Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers met in Moscow and pledged "an immediate ceasefire, the restoration of communications, dispatch of humanitarian aid and continuing negotiations on a settlement of the conflict."²¹ The parties disagreed over the participation of the N-K leadership in future negotiations, and the possibility of the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping troops in the region.

Russia's major aim was to return the Southern Caucasus to its direct political influence as it was before the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991. Russia wanted to broker a ceasefire and play a leading

²¹ E. Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Internal Conflict Becomes International," in: *RFE/RLRR*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 13 March, 1992, p. 3.

role in the N-K negotiations to keep its leverage in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. In principle, Russia was not against the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping troops in Karabakh provided that they would be replaced at a later stage by Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping forces. Russia was promoting the status of the CIS to be recognized as a regional and international organization along with the U.N. and the OSCE.²² Russia was even encouraged to do so in the absence of international support for a U.N. peacekeeping role in the Caucasus as the U.S. State Department stated that "the U.S.A. would not support a move to deploy U.N. troops in Nagorno-Karabakh at this time."²³

The Minsk Group in its second phase of mediation (January-August 1993) also faced Russia. Russian insistence on peacekeeping on the territories of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) was proclaimed by President Yeltsin in a speech in February 1993: "Stopping all armed conflicts on the territory of the former U.S.S.R. is Russia's vital interest. I believe the time has come for distinguished international organizations, including the U.N., to grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability in the regions of the former U.S.S.R."²⁴

Moscow's "deny access" strategy at this period was applied in its diplomatic relations with the OSCE. Moscow did not hesitate to exploit every opportunity to "make trouble" and prevent consensus on important decisions in the Organization. Moscow was worried about the OSCE's increased involvement in the management of the N-K conflict because that would undermine and marginalize its role in the Caucasus.²⁵

As a cover to its "deny access" strategy, Yeltsin's personal mediator for N-K, Vladimir Kazimirov, declared in the summer of 1993 that Russia decided to conduct its diplomatic activity on four levels to attain a peaceful resolution to the N-K conflict: "as a member of the Minsk Group, within the U.N., acting independently, and on the basis of bilateral consultations."²⁶

Parallel to Kazimirov's declaration, the U.S. interest resumed in favor of finding a peaceful resolution to the N-K conflict by means of introducing an international rather than Russian peacekeeping force. Maresca, who was preparing a peacekeeping proposal, offered Kazimirov a list of seven conditions for a joint supervision of a ceasefire in N-K. Had the Russians responded, it could have paved the way for Russian-international cooperation under the auspices of the OSCE.²⁷

By the end of 1993, a change in the Chairmanship of the Minsk Group from the Italians to the Swedes made it difficult to pursue U.S.-Russian negotiations on cooperative arrangements in the Caucasus. The Swedish Chair, Jan Eliason, decided to terminate private meetings and pursue the peace process through shuttle diplomacy, an approach which according to Maresca "downgraded the U.S. role in the process even though the U.S. was the only voice the Russians took seriously."²⁸ Maresca argued that the reason behind Eliason's decision to conduct shuttle diplomacy was that "the Swedes had not participated actively in the earlier work of the Minsk Group and they had been influenced decisively by the failure in Stockholm."²⁹ They thought that shuttle diplomacy could achieve a breakthrough in the negotiations.

The second phase of the OSCE mediation also did not produce tangible results. A number of external and internal factors contributed to the failure of brokering a lasting ceasefire and resumption of negotiations. First, the Russian policy objective of keeping other countries out of its declared

²² See: S. Crow, "Russia Promotes the CIS as an International Organization," in: *RFE/RLRR*, Vol. 3, No. 11, 18 March, 1994, p. 33.

²³ E. Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Internal Conflict Becomes International."

²⁴ J.J. Maresca, op. cit., p. 263.

²⁵ See: P.K. Baev, "Going It Alone in the Caucasus," *Warreport*, No. 52, June-July 1997, p. 36.

²⁶ E. Fuller, "Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the Karabakh Mediation Process," p. 32.

²⁷ See: D.D. Laitin, R.G. Suny, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁹ J.J. Maresca, op. cit., p. 265.

sphere of influence in the Caucasus. Second, the lack of consistent and explicit Russian stance to engage in serious negotiations to resolve the N-K conflict. Third, the transfer of the Chairmanship of the Minsk Group to Eliason³⁰ who underestimated the positive effect of the group meetings of the Minsk Group that apparently discouraged Russia to conduct unilateral negotiations with the conflicting parties.

Internally, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the N-K Leadership were not interested in serious negotiations. Their political positions in the second phase of the OSCE mediation more or less remained the same. It should be acknowledged that the ongoing war in 1993 in N-K, and Russia's biased relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan affected significantly the peaceful resolution of the N-K conflict. In Armenia, the official position of the government gave more ascendancy to Russia's role in the N-K conflict rather than the OSCE's role. This was expressed clearly when Gerard Libaridian, former Armenian presidential advisor, stated that "the Minsk Group lags behind the unfolding of events... [it] advances no initiatives, it only waits till the conflicting sides make their conditions."³¹ Perhaps, Armenia's stance stemmed from its perception concerning Russia's protection of its borders with Turkey, particularly, in the absence of a lasting ceasefire in N-K and good neighborly relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, the newly elected President Heydar Aliiev in 1993 vowed publicly to introduce peacekeepers in N-K, restore Azerbaijan's sovereignty and secure the return of the refugees to their homes. However, in order to fulfill his agenda he had to "maneuver between Azerbaijani nationalism and support for reconsolidation with Russia."³² In this respect, while Kazimirov was visiting Baku along with Erevan and Stepanakert (N-K's Capital) and was criticizing the Minsk Group by stating that "it lacked mechanisms for enforcing an eventual ceasefire," Aliiev too made similar comments. Indeed, Aliiev said: "the Minsk Group had achieved virtually nothing."³³ Aliiev's position could have stemmed from the weakness of the U.N. in failing to implement Security Council Resolutions 822 and 853³⁴ enforcing an unconditional withdrawal of the Karabakh Armenian forces from the Azerbaijani occupied territories.

The stance of the N-K leadership was not conciliatory too. It insisted on Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination and refused to accept a peace agreement that would not guarantee outright independence from Azerbaijan.

Therefore, for all these external and internal difficulties the peace attempts by the OSCE and Russia in 1992 and 1993 remained abortive. However, on 12 May, 1994 Russia succeeded unilaterally to reach a ceasefire agreement known as the "Bishkek protocol," in the Kirghizstani capital, between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the N-K leadership.³⁵ Russia considered the ceasefire achievement a political victory over the OSCE. After mid-May 1994, Russia and the Minsk Group continued to pull in opposite directions as both tried to introduce different peace plans for the N-K conflict. The main contested issues were the composition and leadership of the peacekeeping force that would be deployed in N-K. What became clear was that any peace plan would need "harmonization" between the OSCE and Russian efforts.³⁶

³⁰ See: *Ibidem*.

³¹ E. Fuller, "Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the Karabakh Mediation Process." See also: E. Fuller, "The Near Abroad: Influence and Oil in Russian Diplomacy," *Transition*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 28 April, 1995, p. 32.

³² I. Bremmer, A. Richter, "The Perils of Sustainable Empire," *Transition*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 15 March, 1995, p. 14.

³³ E. Fuller, "The Near Abroad: Influence and Oil in Russian Diplomacy," p. 32.

³⁴ See: *Annual Report on OSCE Activities, Section 2.9 on Conflict in the Area Dealt with the Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh, 1993*, available at [<http://www.osce.org/e/docs/annualrep/anrep93e.htm>].

³⁵ See: M.P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, Causes and Implications*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1998, pp. 110-111.

³⁶ See: *Annual Report on OSCE Activities, Section 2.2 on the Conflict in the Area Dealt with by the Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994*, available at [<http://www.osce.org/e/docs/annualrep/anrep94e.htm>].

At the same time, the U.S. involvement in the N-K conflict intensified as the Clinton administration tried to give new impetus to the OSCE efforts at mediation. As a result, Maresca in the summer of 1994 presented a new proposal to the warring parties for the settlement of the N-K conflict which included the following terms:

- “1. That Karabakh be recognized as the republic of Nagorno-Karabakh within the sovereign republic of Azerbaijan.
- “2. That Armenia and Azerbaijan sign a treaty on mutual transit rights across each other’s territory.
- “3. That refugees be allowed to return to their homes.
- “4. That all of Armenia and Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, be a free-trade zone.
- “5. That the settlement be guaranteed by the OSCE and the U.N. Security Council.”³⁷

As the preparations started for the OSCE Budapest summit in the fall of 1994, the issue of “sphere-of-influence peacekeeping” or “third-country peacekeeping” in N-K rose on top of the international agenda and was discussed by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin at their meeting in September 1994 in Washington. Although the U.S. did not object to the presence of Russian troops in N-K, Clinton tried to make Russia acquiesce to a “less dominant role” in an OSCE peacekeeping force. Yeltsin argued that Russia was committed to resolve the conflict and preferred to preserve its control in the “near abroad.”³⁸ No agreement was reached between the U.S. and Russia concerning deployment of peacekeeping troops.

4. The OSCE Summit in Budapest in December 1994

The member states of the OSCE met in Budapest from 5 to 6 December, 1994 to discuss strengthening the Organization’s role in resolving conflicts in Europe and the FSU. Among other issues, the participating states debated the possibility of organizing a multinational peacekeeping force to send it to N-K within the framework of the Helsinki document of 1992 which provided a general mandate for OSCE peacekeeping operations.³⁹

The conflict over N-K was addressed and a general agreement was reached on the idea of a joint OSCE-Russian peacekeeping force for N-K. Russia dropped its insistence on keeping its dominant role in peacekeeping in its sphere of influence and expressed willingness to participate in such a force under OSCE auspices. Agreement was reached on a 3,000 OSCE force⁴⁰ to be dispatched to the region following the signing of a peace agreement between the warring parties, and on the establishment of a High-Level Planning Group (HLPG) to plan the formation, composition and rules of engagement of such a force which also needed an adequate resolution from the U.N. Security Council.⁴¹

³⁷ D.D. Laitin, R.G. Suny, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

³⁸ See: J.J. Maresca, op. cit., p. 266.

³⁹ See: *OSCE Handbook, Field Activities, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Dealt with by the Minsk Conference*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ See: C. Migdalovitz, a paper on “the Armenian Azerbaijani Conflict” (e-mail version), p. 8, available at [<http://www.geocities.com/master8885/Forces/fas.htm>].

⁴¹ See: *Annual Report on OSCE Activities, Section 2.2, on the Conflict in the Area Dealt with by the Minsk Conference, 1995*, available at [<http://www.osce/e/docs/annualrep/anrep95e.htm>].

Concerning the N-K conflict, the summit achieved two positive steps: first, it supported the previous U.N. Security Council resolutions on the N-K conflict, which called for the immediate withdrawal of the Karabakh forces from the Azerbaijani occupied territories and "enter into intensified substantive talks" for a political settlement under the auspices of the OSCE. Second, the summit approved to deploy a multinational OSCE peacekeeping force to N-K following the conclusion of a political agreement between the warring parties.⁴²

Despite the general accord on a combined peacekeeping force reached at the OSCE Budapest summit, two major issues continued to block a final agreement: first, who will command the force, and second, the percentage of the force to be provided by Russia.⁴³ Apparently, the OSCE and Russia were pursuing the same goal. Both of them had a stake in an internationally supervised peacekeeping force for the N-K conflict. For Russia it was a major opportunity to prove its "post-Cold War conflict resolution role," and for the OSCE it was an assertion for its "vision of the OSCE as the central international organization for Europe in which it foresaw a major role for itself."⁴⁴ Maresca argued that had the Clinton administration provided more pressure on the Russians, a more tangible agreement on the composition and guidelines for an OSCE peacekeeping force would have been accomplished.⁴⁵

Russian peacekeeping interests in N-K were recognized by the OSCE as it was granted permanent co-Chairmanship of the Minsk Group on 6 January, 1995 together with France and the U.S. This political move facilitated to bring Russian peace initiatives under OSCE supervision⁴⁶ and allowed Moscow to exert leverage in any negotiating format.

Despite the positive steps achieved in Budapest there was no final agreement on a peace plan to present to the conflicting parties. As the peace proposals of the OSCE and Russia had not been united and as there was no final clear structure of the proposed international peacekeeping force the choice of the conflicting parties varied. Apparently, each side proposed its point of view on the peacekeeping force and on the way in which the conflict should be resolved.

Armenia wanted not only a permanent ceasefire but also "the cessation of all hostile actions" like the removal of the Azerbaijani and Turkish blockades and the reopening of the lines of communication. In this context, Armenia welcomed either a CIS or an OSCE international peacekeeping force to monitor the ceasefire and control the lines of land and rail communication with Azerbaijan. Armenia's main objective at this stage was to "find an acceptable end" to the N-K conflict to rebuild its shattered economy.⁴⁷ The government of Armenia also favored the acceptance of the N-K leadership as an independent party in the negotiations with Azerbaijan, and granting the Armenian population of N-K "security guarantees" because that would give new impetus to the dynamics of the negotiations.⁴⁸

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, wanted an "unconditional" withdrawal of the Armenian Karabakh forces from the occupied territories, including Shusha and Lachin, and the return of all the refugees to their homes in N-K. Moreover, at this stage Azerbaijan did not present a "clear proposal concerning the legal status of N-K" because it considered N-K part of its territory. Azerbaijan also refused to conduct bilateral negotiations with the Armenian leadership of N-K because it viewed the

⁴² See: The OSCE Budapest Summit 1994, *Intensification of CSCE Action in Relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, available at [<http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/summits/buda94e.htm>].

⁴³ See: D.D. Laitin, R.G. Suny, op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁴ J.J. Maresca, op. cit.

⁴⁵ See: Ibidem.

⁴⁶ See: E. Herzig, *The New Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London and New York, 1999, p. 69.

⁴⁷ See: *Report on the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, Document 7182, presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 17 October, 1994, p. 10, available at [<http://stars.coe.fr/doc/doc94/edoc7182.htm>].

⁴⁸ See: Ibidem.

republic of Armenia as its main negotiating partner. Direct negotiations with the leadership of N-K would mean accepting N-K's independence.⁴⁹ In regard to peacekeeping forces, Azerbaijan wanted an international peacekeeping force under the aegis of the OSCE.

The N-K leadership insisted on international recognition of its independence. Further, it wanted to be recognized as an official party to the conflict. In addition, it wanted to use the issue of the occupied territories as a bargaining chip in the negotiations. These territories would be returned only after Azerbaijan would recognize N-K's status, and after N-K would be granted international security guarantees.⁵⁰ In regard to peacekeeping forces, the N-K leadership favored a Russian or a CIS separation force.

Returning to international politics, we realize that after the Budapest summit, negotiations dragged on in various European capitals and Moscow. Bilateral and trilateral contacts were suggested by the OSCE to narrow the differences between the conflicting parties. We turn now to examine the OSCE Lisbon summit.

5. The OSCE Summit in Lisbon in December 1996

The OSCE Lisbon summit from 2 to 3 December, 1996 addressed the security challenges facing the member states and wondered about cooperative approaches in facing them. The summit endorsed the Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the 21st Century and "framework for arms control."⁵¹ The summit also addressed the N-K conflict.

The statement made by the Chairman-in-Office (CIO) of the OSCE, which included the Azerbaijani demand for its territorial integrity, was supported by all the participating states except Armenia. The statement emphasized the following three principles as part of the comprehensive settlement of the N-K conflict:

- "1. Territorial integrity of the republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijan republic.
- "2. Legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh defined in an agreement based on self-determination, which confers on Nagorno-Karabakh the highest degree of self-rule within Azerbaijan.
- "3. Guaranteed security for Nagorno-Karabakh and its whole population, including mutual obligations to ensure compliance by all the parties with the provisions of the settlement."⁵²

The Armenian delegation protested against the statement's reference to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity which predetermined the outcome of negotiations between the parties to the conflict to reach a political agreement on the status of N-K.⁵³ From an Armenian perspective it would be difficult to reach a solution on the status of N-K without negotiating directly with the Armenian leadership of N-K. In the words of Libaridian, "Azerbaijan should have negotiated seriously withdrawals and status rather than hijacking the OSCE Lisbon summit."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ See: *Report on the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, Document 7182, presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 17 October, 1994, p. 10, available at [<http://stars.coe.fr/doc/doc94/edoc7182.htm>].

⁵⁰ See: *Azerbaijan, Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, p. 110.

⁵¹ R. Giragosian, a paper on the "Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Compilation of Analysis," Washington, July 2000, p. 5.

⁵² *OSCE Lisbon Summit, 1996, Annexes, Annex 1, Statement of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office*, available at [<http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/summits/lisbo96e.htm>].

⁵³ See: *OSCE Lisbon Summit, 1996, Annexes, Annex 2, Statement of the Delegation of Armenia*, available at [<http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/summits/lisbo96e.htm>].

⁵⁴ G.J. Libaridian, *The Politics of Promises*, a paper presented at a conference on The Transcaucasus Today, Prospects for Regional Integration, Erevan, Armenia, 23 June, 1997.

The N-K leadership supported a compromise solution based on the right to self-determination and "within an equitable negotiation framework that requires balanced concessions by both parties." A different approach was endorsed at the Lisbon summit which prevented progress. The N-K leadership then called the OSCE to act as a "neutral mediator and refrain from prejudicial actions and pre-conditions."⁵⁵

The Azerbaijani delegation accepted the statement issued by the CIO because it supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijan remained committed to a peaceful solution based on the Lisbon principles and was ready to provide security guarantees to the "whole population of N-K, which means that Azerbaijanis could return to their lands safely but that Armenians would also be protected as residents there."⁵⁶

Azerbaijan won a diplomatic battle by presenting itself subject to Armenian aggression with 20 percent of its territory occupied by the Karabakh Armenian forces. The International community had been unwilling to change inter-state borders because that might lead to irredentist claims elsewhere. The OSCE's support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan ended Erevan's hopes concerning the possibility of international recognition of an independent "N-K republic," or unification of N-K with Armenia.⁵⁷

Irrespective of the different views of the conflicting parties, at least the OSCE Lisbon summit was an attempt by the international community for a peaceful settlement in the region. Also, the approach adopted by the OSCE in Lisbon in regard to the status of N-K as part of Azerbaijan remained politically important. Although the parties to the conflict did not achieve full compliance to the statement issued by the CIO, the main elements for a peaceful settlement became clearer to all sides. These are summarized in the table below:

Table

Main Elements for a Peaceful Settlement According to CIO

1.	A status of broad autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh, under the continuing sovereignty of Azerbaijan.
2.	Some form of guarantee for the security of Nagorno-Karabakh.
3.	Armenian withdrawal from Azerbaijan's occupied territories.
4.	Special arrangements for the Lachin corridor and Shusha District, which would permit the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians access to Armenia (possibly coupled with similar arrangements between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan).
5.	Arrangements which will permit at least the major portion of the refugees on both sides to return to their homes.
6.	A major international reconstruction effort.

Source: B. Blair, "Forging a Lasting Peace, the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," quoted from an interview with John J. Maresca (Spring 1996), *Azerbaijan International*, No. (4.1), available at [<http://www.azer.com>].

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ V. Guluzade, "Karabakh, The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict," *Azerbaijan International*, No. 6 (2), Summer 1998, available at [<http://www.azer.com>]. For an Azerbaijani perspective on self-determination, see: Ya.T. Aliev, "U.N. Reaffirms the Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Azerbaijan," *Azerbaijan International*, No. 6 (4), Winter 1998, available at [<http://www.azer.com>].

⁵⁷ See: L.T. Petrossian, "War and Peace? Time for Thoughtfulness," *Armenpress*, 3 November, 1997.

Until December 1996 all the OSCE draft peace proposals avoided to discuss the problem of the status of N-K that was the most contentious issue. Further, the issues related to the N-K mediation process could be divided into two categories: first, "military technical" issues or "the removal of the consequences of the war." These included the occupied territories, the blockades, the refugees, and humanitarian issues. Second, the issue of the status of N-K.⁵⁸ It was preferable to discuss issues that belonged to the first category in order to establish grass root contacts between both sides and implement step-by-step solutions leaving the problem of the status to a later stage of negotiations.

6. Conclusion

This article examined the limits of the OSCE mediation in the N-K conflict. This article also examined and analyzed the various peace plans that were presented to the conflicting parties by the OSCE from 1992 until 1996.

The aim of the Minsk Group was to attain a sustainable ceasefire and attract the conflicting parties to a negotiated settlement. Initially, this aim was hampered due to disagreements with Russia. Indeed, Russia pursued unilateral initiatives and considered its engagement in the various conflicts in the territories of the FSU as natural and important for its geostrategic interests. As a result, the misunderstanding and rivalry between the OSCE and Russia from 1992 to 1994 enabled the conflicting parties to play off the Minsk Group against the major regional peace broker, Russia. In this period, the OSCE failed to keep its commitments in regard to the deployment of peacekeeping troops in N-K mainly because of disagreements with Russia over the nature and composition of the intended international peacekeeping force. In addition, the lack of cooperation among the members of the Minsk Group hampered the peace process.

The failure of the Minsk Group mediation in 1992 and 1993 could also be attributed to the conflicting parties. Armenia, Azerbaijan and the N-K leadership had little incentive to negotiate in good faith and were unready to make concessions to attain peace. The N-K leadership's insistence on independent statehood, and Azerbaijan's insistence on its territorial integrity and withdrawal of the Karabakh Armenian forces from the occupied territories prior to any negotiations over the political status of N-K hampered the mediation of the Minsk Group. Further, the nationalist politicians in both republics were unable to understand each other's needs and unready to listen to each other's demands with respect the N-K conflict. Hence, they prevented progress in the peace process.

Nevertheless, the major political events that renewed the Minsk Group's dynamism as the exclusive mediator in the N-K conflict were the OSCE Budapest and Lisbon summits in 1994 and 1996, respectively. Despite the fact that the OSCE was unable to deploy an international peacekeeping force in N-K, it submitted a proposal in its Lisbon summit as a framework of settlement of the N-K conflict based on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, and at the same time providing a high degree of autonomy for the Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijan.

From the aforementioned, it is reasonable to assume that a sustainable peace in the Southern Caucasus in general and N-K in particular was difficult to achieve without the cooperation and willingness of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the N-K leadership. Hence, the international community and the OSCE should not be held solely responsible for the failure of the peace process in N-K because peace cannot be enforced from above on the conflicting parties.

⁵⁸ See: G.J. Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood, Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence*, Blue Crane Books, U.S.A., 1999, pp. 55-56.

