

Principles for the settlement of ethno-political conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

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Abstract

The relevance of the subject of this research is based on the need to find new ways of solving the problems of ongoing ethno-political conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The study is devoted to the problems of resolving the ethnopolitical conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The purpose of the study is to develop the principles for resolving the ethnopolitical conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh remains relevant because of its incompleteness and the possibility of entering a dangerous stage of armed confrontation, which requires a continuous search for ways out of the situation. In this regard, there is a lot of research made on this matter from different positions. As a result of the study, the principles of resolving the ethnopolitical conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh were revealed. The significance of the study is due to the relevance of the problems of research of unrecognized states in conditions when their appearance on the world map is becoming more and more frequent.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, self-determination, separatism, sovereignty, legitimization.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of the subject of this research is based on the need to find new ways of solving the problems of ongoing ethno-political conflicts in the post-Soviet space. There are many new state entities emerged on the territory of the former Soviet Union: Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria. The unrecognized states in the post-Soviet space act as independent representatives in international relations these days. The active engagement of unrecognized post-Soviet states in international relations, as well as the precedents for the emergence of new state formations (Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics) contributes to increasing the attention of researchers to this phenomenon.

Ethno-political conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is one of the longest and most difficult conflicts in the post-Soviet space so far. This is due to the fundamental differences in the positions of the conflicting parties and the unwillingness to find a compromise between the parties.

Separately, it is necessary to highlight the sources of scientific literature that consider the legitimacy of the claims of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the most unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. They can be divided into two large groups with radically different views on this matter. We should note that, as a rule, membership in these groups is formed on the basis of a national attribute. This controversy has deep roots in disputes about the Armenian and Azerbaijani autochthony in the Caucasus.

Researchers of the first group share the view that Nagorno-Karabakh is the occupied lands of Azerbaijan, which should be returned, accompanied by refugees who return to their territories. Its bright representative is academician Mehtiyev (2019), who carries out a detailed analysis of the sequence of events that led to the emergence and accumulation of aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh based on historical facts testifying to the historical affiliation of Karabakh to the lands of Azerbaijan.

The researchers of the second group believe that Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to the territory of Armenia, appealing to the historical realities and the quantitative ratio of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the region (according to censuses and historical evidence). Moreover, the authors take into account the presence of ancient Armenian toponyms and architectural monuments in Karabakh. An example would be the collection of articles "Russia and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in the past and present" (Chernous, 2011)

of the South Russian Review of the Center for Systemic Regional Research and Forecasting of the Institute for Advanced Studies of SFU and the Institute of Socio-Political Research RAS.

2. Methodology

The materials of Budaragina (2016), Kvacheva and Petrova (2017), Meleshkina and Kudryashova (2015), Popov (2009) on the historical retrospective of the events in Nagorno-Karabakh were used when writing this article. The development of the ethno-political conflict was examined from the perspective of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples (Website of the Government of the Republic of Armenia; Website of the Republic of Azerbaijan Cabinet of Ministers; Website of the Government of Nagorno Karabakh Republic), the view of the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which took part in the resolution of conflicts in 1991-1994 and 2016, was also presented. The articles and monographs of Margaryan (2012), Markedonov (2018), Mekhdiev (2017), and Gasanova (2018) were used to examine the issue on Nagorno-Karabakh Republic from the point of view of the regulations and principles of international law.

The specifics of the conflict and the degree of its correlation with previous ethno-political conflicts (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Aland Islands, Kosovo) was assessed by analyzing international materials by Popesku (2007), Stanislawski (2006), comments on the Vienna Convention of Dörr and Schmalenbach (2018), Pegg (1998), Berg and Toomla (2009), and van Meurs (2007).

3. Theoretical Background

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh remains relevant because of its incompleteness, and the possibility of the conflict to enter a dangerous stage of armed confrontation, which requires a continuous search for ways out of the situation. In this regard, there is a lot of research made on this matter from different positions.

Thus, Budaragina (2016) in her article “Status of unrecognized states” explores the issues of legal status of those states that have not received official confirmation from other countries, as well as ways of legitimizing them in terms of international law.

Meleshkina (2015) is carrying out research of general principles and factors that are observed when new states emerge through secession in the territories of the former large state entities [8: 2015].

Popesku (2007), senior analyst at the European Union Institute for Security Studies, in his monograph revealed the legal, national and geographic and political aspects of the existence of unrecognized states in the post-Soviet space.

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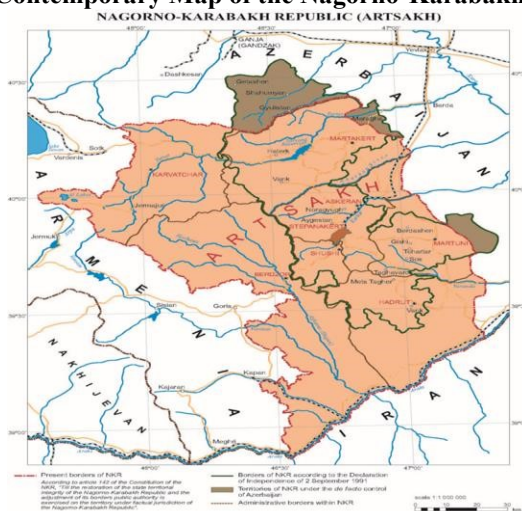
4. Finding

We can distinguish a number of enlarged stages characterizing the phases of its elaboration in the development of the ethno-political conflict in Nagorno-

Karabakh: pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict. The pre-conflict phase began in the 1940s and continued until the mid-1980s (that is, the beginning of the period of Perestroika). The conflict phase began in the mid-1980s with the beginning of Perestroika in the Soviet Union, which lasted until 1994. Accordingly, the post-conflict phase started in 1994 and continues to the present moment.

The Armenian authorities and residents of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) periodically proposed uniting the territories of Armenia and the NKAR in the Soviet era. However, in the conditions of information protection, these proposals of the Armenian leadership and the local population of NKAR haven't been publicly addressed. In particular, Arutyunov, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, sent a proposal to unite the NKAR and Armenia to the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR in November 1945. In response, Bagirov (back then he was the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan) made the following counter-proposal: to include the territory of the Shushi Province of the NKAR (Figure 1) to Azerbaijan, as well as the territory of three other regions of Armenian SSR, where the majority was Azerbaijanis. Both of these proposals were rejected (Budaragina, 2016: 45).

Figure 1: The Contemporary Map of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Artsakh)



Source: Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Map, 2019

Armenians who lived in the territory of the NKAR in the early 1960s sent a written complaint to the Central Committee of the CPSU about regular precedents of ethnic discrimination. This complaint did not give any result. Armenian nationalist dissidents began to form their own associations in the first half of the 1960s, which were in an underground or semi-underground position. Thus, the “Armenian Youth Union” Union appeared in 1963 (Kvacheva and Petrova, 2017: 57).

A mass rally was held in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan on April 24, 1965, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The participants of the Yerevan rally put forward the following slogan: “Fairly solve the Armenian question”, implying that the territory of the NKAR should become part of Armenia. In addition, in 1965, Mikoyan, who served as a chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, received a new appeal on transferring the territory of the NKAR to the jurisdiction of the Armenian SSR. In 1968, in Stepanakert, which was the capital of the NKAR, a rally was also held by residents of the region, who demanded joining the territory of the NKAR to the Armenian SSR. This meeting also did not bring any results. The last mass appeal to the union leadership by the Armenians who demanded the union of NKAR and Armenia “was caused by the adoption of the Union Constitution (1977) and the Basic Laws of the Republics and Autonomies (1978). It did not lead to positive results for Armenians” (Kvacheva and Petrova, 2017: 59).

The conflict phase of the development of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh started in 1985. The leadership of the USSR received many letters and proposals aimed at changing the current status of the NKAR and transferring the region to the jurisdiction of the Armenian SSR with the beginning of Perestroika period. However, this heavy flow of proposals did not bring any result; the central leadership again ignored the demands of the local population. As a result, the local leadership took the political initiative: “During an extraordinary session of the Council of People’s Deputies of the NKAR a decision was made to withdraw this autonomous entity from the Azerbaijan SSR and join it to the Armenian SSR on February 20, 1988” (Vataman, 2015: 46). Following this decision, the territory of the NKAR experienced riots both from the side of the Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

In March 1988, the Soviet leadership sent troops to the territory of the NKAR to prevent a possible Ethnic-Armenian conflict between Armenians

and Azerbaijanis. However, the presence of the Soviet military contingent couldn't stop the conflict on the territory of the NKAR. In 1989, a number of nationalist rallies were held in Stepanakert demanding to join the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh to the jurisdiction of Armenia. As a result, ethnic Azerbaijanis were deported to Azerbaijan from NKAR, the number of deported populations amounted to 170 thousand people. After that, on December 1, 1989, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR decided to annex the territory of the NKAR to Armenia. Azerbaijan responded by deporting ethnic Armenians: 350 thousand people were deported from Azerbaijan to Armenia (Kvacheva and Petrova, 2017: 61). The railway and road services between NKAR and neighboring republics stopped their operation.

The population of Azerbaijan protested against the separation of the NKAR: there were mass rallies in the territory of Azerbaijan against the separation of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in January 1990. As a result, on January 20, Soviet troops and armored vehicles arrived to Baku to suppress the protests. The rallies in Baku stopped for a while; however, there were local clashes initiated on the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia and clashes between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities living in the NKAR.

In 1991, Soviet troops together with the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan, occupied the Armenian villages that were adjacent to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. They had in mind to surround the NKAR from all sides, occupy the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and force the leadership of the autonomous region to surrender weapons. However, the failure of the August coup in Moscow inspired the cessation of operations and the recall of Soviet troops.

On September 2, 1991, a new state, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, was proclaimed on the territory of the Shahumyan Province of Azerbaijan and the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. The city of Stepanakert was declared the capital of the new republic. In turn, the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan announced the abolition of Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy. After that, on November 4, 1991, Azerbaijan launched an energy blockade of Armenia, and then a transport blockade.

On December 10, 1991, a referendum was held in Nagorno-Karabakh, which was attended by international observers. The population of the

republic in the vast majority (99.8%) voted for the complete independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic from Azerbaijan (Kvacheva and Petrova, 2017:62).

The NKAR leadership publicly announced the independence of the republic, after which Azerbaijan again sent its armed forces to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. On January 31, 1992, Azerbaijani troops started full-scale attack against the NKR. When attacking the NKR, Azerbaijani troops used heavy weapons, weapons and ammunition, which remained from the Soviet army. The strategic initiative and good service support of the Azerbaijani army contributed to the successful offensive: about 60% of the NKR territory was occupied by Azerbaijani troops, the republic's connection with Armenia was interrupted, regular shelling of Stepanakert and air raids on the city were carried out. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic as a state entity in 1992 was in danger of total obliteration.

As a result of the successful conduct of hostilities, the NKR army managed to establish control over the entire territory of the republic and seven regions of Azerbaijan adjacent to the territory of the NKR. Thus, the NKR "buffer zone" was established. The Lachin corridor, formed as a result, made it possible to establish regular communication between the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and Armenia.

Russia has acted as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since 1993. At first, Russia achieved a limitation of the hostilities of the conflicting parties, and then a permanent ceasefire on the part of Azerbaijan and the NKR. As a result, on May 5, 1994, a ceasefire was signed between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in Bishkek. At the time of signing this agreement, the contact line between the Azerbaijani and Karabakh forces became the actual border of the territories of Azerbaijan and NKR.

Thus, in May 1994, the conflict phase of the confrontation between Armenia, NKR and Azerbaijan ended upon signing the Bishkek agreement, and then the post-conflict phase started, which has been going for 25 years old so far.

The starting point of the negotiation process between the parties to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh formally dates back to 1991. At that time, negotiations began within the framework of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to resolve the

Karabakh conflict. The co-chairs of the group were the United States, Russia and France. However, the negotiations were unsuccessful until 1994, and armed clashes still took place as we have mentioned above.

During 1997-1998, Russian diplomats made regular trips to Yerevan, Stepanakert, and Baku, using shuttle diplomacy tools. During these visits, the Russian side brought up for discussion a number of proposals for resolving the conflict, which were based on the principles of regulation proposed during the Lisbon Summit.

The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Aliyev and Kocharian, respectively, held a bilateral meeting in Washington on April 25, 1999, and then the next meeting in Paris on March 4-5, 2001. The next round of peace talks took place on April 3-7, 2001 in Key West (Florida, USA) (Mekhdiev, 2017: 49).

The Madrid Principles, i.e. the proposals for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict submitted by the Minsk Group to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia at the Madrid Summit have been the center of attention in recent years. The meeting of Presidents Serge Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev ended on July 6, 2008 with an agreement on the development of the negotiation process based on the Madrid Principles.

A few months later, on November 2, 2008, the presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation signed the Moscow Declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh, which consisted of five points. The declaration confirmed the agreement of the presidents to work on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict using exclusively political methods.

After the G8 summit ended on July 10, 2009, a Joint Statement of the Presidents of Russia, the USA and France was introduced, which was dedicated to the principles for resolving the Karabakh conflict. The text of this statement dealt with updating the previously recommended Madrid Principles. The document says:

1. returning the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh under the control of Azerbaijan and giving intermediate status to Nagorno-Karabakh;
2. ensuring guarantees of self-government and security, opening a transport corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia;
3. future determination of the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh on the basis of legally binding will;

4.ensuring the right of all refugees and displaced people to return to their homes;

5.providing international security guarantees.

This document contains a number of contradictions, such as the return of all occupied territories to Azerbaijan and the establishment of a temporary status for Karabakh, coupled with the transport corridor with Armenia; the new “Madrid principles” acted as a certain framework within which the mediators had a space for influencing the conflict parties to achieve reconciliation between them.

In particular, the options for the implementation of the “Åland Islands model” as well as the “Bosnia-Herzegovina model” for restitution of the population affected by the Caucasian conflicts appear to be unproductive. Generally, the transfer of the full algorithm for resolving the conflict from one society to another seems to have no prospects due to the difference in the mentality of the conflicting societies at different times and in different territories. It should be understood that the participants of the negotiation process are not abstract communities, but representatives of specific societies with their mentality, cultural and historical values and characteristics.

Moreover, the principle of “realistic peacekeeping” implies a rejection of algorithms for a one-act conflict resolution, which may result in a final reconciliation of the parties and coordination of their interests.

It is impossible to resolve all issues within the framework of a single package of agreements without a long coordination (status of a new entity, property restitution, return of refugees). It is necessary to move towards a compromise taking separate steps, and the conflict resolution should strengthen the mutual trust of the parties with each next step.

Thus, in order to solve the problems of unrecognized states of the post-Soviet space, step-by-step algorithms should be used based on the primary solution to current humanitarian and security issues. Accordingly, the signing intermediate legally binding acts by the conflicting parties and even declarations of intent seems to be much more important than the preparation of a comprehensive document, which will be impossible to fulfill and will actually remain inoperative.

Besides the reality, pragmatism seems to be the most important component of the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The

discussion of abstractions that are detached from the interests of specific objects and subjects of negotiations (both ordinary citizens and politicians; both sovereign states and unrecognized entities) should be minimized within the negotiation process. As Budaragina notes “people will begin to believe in democracy if they are convinced of its practical usefulness for themselves personally. Otherwise, democracy loses all its value in the eyes of people, and they will separate from it just as they once occasionally separated from socialism and the USSR” (Budaragina, 2016: 45). All this can rightfully be attributed to the process of conflict resolution. The peace process will start to have progress only when the conflict parties will find it beneficial to their political and social status, business, etc.

Therefore, it is pointless to encourage conflict participants in the Caucasus to make concessions in the settlement, reasoning this by joining democracy and European values. The “European values” for the former field commanders in Nagorno-Karabakh are hard to understand and tangible, just as the North Atlantic integration for Azerbaijan and Georgia is a military-political resource, and not an instrument for introducing democracy. Negotiations with conflict parties should be shifted from the discussion about values to the discussion of pragmatism and interests. Also, when moving towards peace, “desacralization of conflicts” and the refusal to use conflict as a key tool for legitimizing power are extremely important (Meleshkina and Kudryashova, 2015: 57).

Social and humanitarian problems in the territories of unrecognized states of the post-Soviet space should be addressed in the first place. We can discuss the status of disputed territories for years, while ordinary citizens living there need the opportunity to fulfill their rights and protect them (this applies to both civil and human rights). Only the socially and economically rehabilitated territory (which exists *de jure* or *de facto*) can responsibly approach the negotiation process. In this regard, the exclusion of heavy-handed approaches to settle down the conflict process should become a priority.

An important aspect of the problem settlement of unrecognized states of the post-Soviet space is external interference. The dominating paradigm of the preference for an international format as opposed to an exclusive one is not always fair these days. So, the Minsk Group of the OSCE almost immediately took part in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. However,

the resolution of this conflict didn't advance further than the resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian or Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts, where Russia participated as an exclusive peacekeeper for their settlement. Thus, the effectiveness of peacekeeping is determined not by the number of external intermediaries, but by the coordination of their actions.

Moreover, the outcome of the negotiation process should not be planned in advance. The determination of the status of the unrecognized state (based on the principle of self-determination or, vice versa, on the principle of territorial integrity) is not productive. The realities are changing both in the territory of unrecognized states and in the "parent" states along the negotiation process. A simple return to the "parent" states of the disputed territories is impossible by default, since new independent states were formed within their borders during the Soviet era.

Thus, the official resolution of the conflict and the consolidation of a status by the unrecognized state should end the interest alignment of conflicting parties and even political bargaining. The previously voiced option on how to resolve the conflict deprives the opposing parties of the motivation for further negotiations.

5. Discussion

The position of Armenia on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is reflected in the following provisions:

1. independence of Nagorno-Karabakh from the central government of Azerbaijan;
2. absence of enclavement of Nagorno-Karabakh through the functioning of the Lachin corridor as a permanent territorial corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh;
3. security guarantees for Armenians living in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The position of Azerbaijan regarding the Karabakh conflict is registered in the so-called "Karabakh Charter" (or "Charter of Four"). The Azerbaijani position on Nagorno-Karabakh can be reduced to the following requirements:

1. withdraw Armenian troops and the population from the occupied Azerbaijani territories with the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan;

2. return refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh to their own homes and provide them with security guarantees;

3. provide the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, both Armenian and Azerbaijani, with the right to self-government.

Today, the views of politicians discussing ways to resolve the conflict in the NKR are still determined by their national and political affiliation. Moreover, all the statements of the main participants in the NKR dispute are highly straightforward. Moreover, the Republic of Azerbaijan, which perceives Armenians (including NKR) as invaders of Azerbaijani territory, introduces diplomatic restrictions on the entry of Armenian citizens, as well as Russian citizens with a Russian name in Azerbaijan. The official ambassador of Azerbaijan to Russia, Bülbüloğlu, spoke in an interview about ways to resolve the conflict saying: “As a person who has visited Armenia and Karabakh three times in recent years, I can say for sure that a dialogue between the two nations is possible, but Russia must make the most mediation efforts to make the occupation policy come to its end.” Similar opinions are expressed by all officials and researchers who perceive the territory of the NKR as part of Azerbaijan (Gasnov and Bülbüloğlu, 2019).

The adjustment of the Nagorno-Karabakh’ border is not an insurmountable problem in the context of the conflict settlement; this wasn’t a key issue during the negotiation process and it has good prospects for a resolution today.

Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis demand the security of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh in accordance with internationally recognized guarantees. This implies that security will be guaranteed both to the Armenian majority of the population and the Azerbaijani minority.

So, the power separation is a sphere in which the opposing positions of the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides of the Karabakh conflict can be integrated. At the early stage of resolving the conflict, it is advisable to use the format of distribution of power in Nagorno-Karabakh just like the consociationalism-based model of Bosnia in 1995-1997. Due to the low level of confidence of the conflicting parties to each other, an agreement on the distribution of power should be complemented by elements of self-government.

It is also appropriate to provide the territorial-demographic differentiation of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities to ensure the security of both population groups. There should be two ethnic zones formed: Armenian and Azerbaijani. The Armenian ethnic zone should include the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh populated by Armenians, whereas the Azerbaijani ethnic zone should include Shusha and Lachin districts, which are mainly populated by Azerbaijanis.

It's important to provide Azerbaijanis living in Karabakh with the possibility to return to their homes and ensure safe living in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The separation of power between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of Nagorno-Karabakh will allow both parties to ensure equal position in resolving socio-political issues on the basis of a balanced combination of conceptual and integrative elements in the separation of powers.

Markedonov notes in a number of articles on the subject of Nagorno-Karabakh the hopeless implementation of the Madrid principles, evaluating them as a "rhetorical figure", and not a real algorithm aimed at reaching peace. Moreover, the author rightly believes that the peace agreements are ambiguous. Including guarantees of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, they imply an intermediate status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the status of which in the end will be determined by means of the will of the people. At the same time, the author notes the lack of thought in the details of the implementation of these principles: there are no clear decisions on maintaining the Lachin corridor, no description of the positions of the Minsk Group if one of the warring parties refuses to allow the presence of OSCE representatives (Markedonov, 2018).

Therefore, the specifics of the Karabakh conflict and the identified key needs of the conflict parties show that it cannot be resolved exclusively at the local level. It requires a combination of local settlement measures with interstate and supranational measures to settle down the Karabakh conflict.

6. Conclusion

Summarizing the article, which is dedicated to the causes of the ethno-political conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the opinions of representatives of the authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as international experts who took part in the

cessation of hostilities in the disputed territory, it is necessary to evaluate the current actions of the disputed countries and international representatives.

The situation has been in a state of “frozen confrontation” until now. Neither Armenia, Azerbaijan, nor the NKAR agree with the proposed stages of resolving the issue, despite the efforts of the OSCE (Russia, France, USA). The situation is being monitored by the world community, but several interested countries such as Russia, Iran, Turkey pay extra attention to the conflict. Russia, which, according to the “Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia”, ratified by the Federal Law of the Russian Federation of February 9, 1998 No. 25-FZ”, would be forced to provide military assistance to Armenia, has recently made inroads with Azerbaijan. In this regard, the military conflict and its activation in the future are outside the scope of interests of the Russian Federation. Russia, together with Iran, which is also not interested in the conflict at the borders, is making efforts to settle down the political situation on the territories of NKAR.

Therefore, the main actions taken by the OSCE members are aimed at preventing a military conflict and initiating armed confrontation, although, the situation in the NKAR is still intensified and “inflammable”. Things are moving unpredictably, and it’s impossible to judge their further development based on officially submitted information from international organizations, due to the uncertainty and volatility of the situation.

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