

American University of Armenia
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Russia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Spoiling or Mediation?

Student: Lilit Galstyan
Supervisor: Dr. Vahram Ter-Matevosyan

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the role of the Russian leadership in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to understand whether they were mediating the conflict or spoiling its peaceful resolution. The cases of Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev are illustrated in order to compare their efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the NK conflict. The methodology of study comprises secondary data analysis and content analysis of 6 presidential statements. As a result, based on the analyzed data we conclude that Russia neither spoiled nor mediated the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh by being content with the current state of frozen negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh. What is more, from the analysis of findings we conclude that compared to Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev made significant efforts to put the NK conflict on the edge of its resolution.

Introduction

When observing the causes behind the failure of various efforts to find solutions to frozen conflicts, it is necessary to consider the interests and demands of all regional stakeholders, which are involved in the conflicts. More to that, it is essential to take into account that each conflict is unique and that distinct actors always pursue their separate interests by either spoiling the resolution of conflicts or finding a peaceful ground for their settlement. This study focuses on the issue over Nagorno-Karabakh, inasmuch as this topic never loses its importance by remaining a significantly relevant case not only with regards to Armenia and Azerbaijan but also for the entire Caucasian region. The essay will view the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the Russian lens, as Russia is an important external player and stands behind various attempts and efforts to provide a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The cases of Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev will be explored in order to compare their actions towards the NK conflict resolution.

The reason behind the analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue during different Russian presidencies is to compare the stance of Russia towards the conflict and to find out the major changes occurred in Russia's position during the administrations of Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. Furthermore, the paper will examine the theoretical notions of "spoiling" and "mediation" within the context of international relations in order to elucidate whether Russia was mediating the conflict rationally or was trying to spoil its peaceful resolution.

The reviewed literature will address the mediation process of the conflict by presenting the arguments of Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and foreign authors. The methodology and research design will cover the research questions and hypotheses. The first chapter of the paper will focus on Russian mediation missions during Boris Yeltsin's weak state administration between 1991 and 1999. The second chapter of the research will analyze the Russian mediation missions between 2000 and 2016. Finally, the third chapter of the current study will present the analysis and findings by providing answers to the research questions.

Literature Review

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and its resolution have always remained an important topic for many scholars. There is a significant volume of literature covering the mediation missions of various international players by presenting, discussing and evaluating their efforts to end the NK conflict. As such, in their books, the first Russian ambassador in independent Armenia, Vladimir Stupishin, and the head of Russia's mediation mission over the NK conflict from 1992 to 1996, Vladimir Kazimirov, share their memories from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh by focusing on the mediation of Russia in the settlement of the conflict. For instance, Vladimir Stupishin regards Armenia as a Russian ally and displays a pro-Armenian position by underlining the significance of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence for Russian national interests.¹ Similarly, Vladimir Kazimirov presents the mediation process in a detailed manner. According to Kazimirov, the peaceful resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is only possible with a multi-stage negotiation process that will require the conflicting sides to consider Nagorno-Karabakh as both an object and a subject of the argument. What is more, Kazimirov blames the conflicting sides for the unresolved NK conflict as despite various Russian suggestions on ceasefire, the sides continued violent military operations.²

On the other hand, Sergey Markedonov who focuses on the region of Caucasus and post-soviet conflicts asserts that unlike various other conflicts in the Caucasus, in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both Yerevan and Baku value the role of Russia as a mediator. As such, for Armenia, the Russian mediation decreases the full-scale hostilities in the border. In its turn, Azerbaijan benefits from the Russian involvement in the issue over Nagorno-Karabakh, as it distances the West from being engaged in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In addition, he

¹ Stupishin, V. *Moya missiya v Armenii 1992-1994: Vospominaniya pervogo posla Rosii* [My mission in Armenia, 1992-1994: Memories of the first Russian ambassador]. *Academia*, Moscow, 2001: 25-28.

² Kazimirov, V. "Peace to Karabakh". *Ves Mir Publishers*, Moscow, 2014.

indicates that the Russian balance of support towards Armenia and Azerbaijan leaves the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the frozen format of negotiations and continuing violence.³

Following it further, Elena Pokalova from the College of International Security Affairs, displays an interesting approach towards the NK conflict by focusing her study on the timing of conflict resolutions. According to Pokalova, the mediation attempts that take place right after the escalation of hostilities, damage the real picture of future aggressions by temporarily calming the tensions. In contrast, peace efforts that are too late from responding to the expanding violence, might end up with failure due to the creation of a new prominent party. Pokalova insists that mediators should avoid allowing the permanent existence of “frozen” conflicts as well as the emergence of new de facto states.⁴

Moreover, the mediation process of the NK conflict is also widely discussed among Armenian observers. For instance, Tatul Hakobyan, a reporter and an analyst at the Civilitas Foundation, argues that the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has reached a point where it is exploited for deceptive political aims. Further, he goes on to state that both regional and global players are demonstrating a neutral stance towards the NK conflict resolution by being content with frozen negotiations.⁵ Following it further, in their works, Philip Gamaghelyan, from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution of the George Mason University and Sergey Minasyan, a political scientist and the Deputy Director of the Caucasus Institute, examine the possible solutions to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and present the existing stakeholders. As such, Gamaghelyan posits that Russia will gain long-term security and economic benefits from the regional stabilization and the peaceful resolution of the NK conflict. However, according to Gamaghelyan, inasmuch as the stable regional peace will result in decreased Russian political influence within South Caucasus, in short term Russia will mostly benefit from

³ Markedonov, S. Kavkaz-region povishennogo riska [Caucasus-Region of Increased Risk]. Moscow: *Rossiyskiy Sovet po Mejdunarodnim Delam*, (2016): 28-32.

⁴ Pokalova E. “Conflict Resolution in Frozen Conflicts: Timing in Nagorno-Karabakh”. *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 17, issue 1 (2015): 80-83.

⁵ Hakobyan, T. “Karabakh Diary: Green and Black: Neither War nor Peace”. *Antelias*, Lebanon, 2010: 35-37.

the unstable situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶ Similarly, Minasyan argues that Russia does not have a vision concerning the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh by leaving the resolution of the NK conflict to an indefinite future.⁷ In his turn, when referring to Russian position towards the NK issue, Gerard Libaridian, a historian and the former adviser of Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, argues that Russia is mainly interested in preserving a stable situation in the border by being busy with other imminent issues.⁸

Additionally, by presenting the Azerbaijani perspective, Tofik Zulfuqarov, the former minister of foreign affairs of Azerbaijan (1998-1999), posits that both Russia and the West refer to their control over any peacekeeping operation in NK as a key factor leading towards the increase of their influence in the region. According to Zulfuqarov, Russia had an aim to create a monopoly for controlling, mediating and leading the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. What is more, as the author argues, the preservation of a one-sided approach to mediation was more important for Russia than the negotiations concerning the issue over Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, Russia was always famous for its neutral stance towards the NK conflict resolution.⁹

The mediation process of the NK conflict also caught the attention of the West. For instance, Svante Cornell, a scholar and the director of the Stockholm-based Institute for Security and Development Policy, and Thomas de Wall, a senior associate in the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, do not blame Russia for the unresolved NK conflict. As such, Cornell claims that only direct face-to-face discussions between the conflicting sides will serve as a good ground for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh

⁶ Gamaghelyan, P. "Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Myth or a Reality?" *Peace Monitor* (2005):1-5.

⁷ Minasyan, S. "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the context of South Caucasus regional security issues: An Armenian perspective". *Nationalities Papers*, (2016): 6-7.

⁸ Libaridian, G. "The elusive 'right formula' at the 'right time'". In *In The limits of leadership. Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process*. Conciliation Resources, (2005): 37-38.

⁹ Zulfuqarov, T. "The obstacles to resolution: an Azerbaijani perspective". In *The limits of leadership. Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process*. Conciliation Resources, (2005): 38-41.

conflict.¹⁰ In a similar manner, Thomas de Wall argues that the major reason behind the continuing violence is the lack of direct negotiations between the conflicting parties.¹¹

Based on the literature review, it becomes clear that the Russian efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were unsuccessful. What is more, in the literature it was frequently stated that Russia is satisfied with the frozen status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Nonetheless, the authors did not deny the significant Russian contribution in mediating the NK conflict and calming the tensions throughout the years. Furthermore, the reviewed literature illustrated that while trying to find a peaceful solution to the NK conflict, Russia had always remained neutral towards the question over Nagorno-Karabakh by preserving balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The literature also revealed that there is lack of sufficient research concerning the role of individuals and institutions in the Russian mediation process over the NK conflict. Hence, this research aims to understand whether Russia was mediating the conflict or spoiling its peaceful resolution by doing a comparative analysis of the Russian mediation missions during the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. What is more, by using a comparative approach, the study intends to find out whether Russian foreign policy towards NK has changed during three presidencies or the neutral approach towards the conflict resolution characterized the three Russian leaders during their administrations.

¹⁰ Cornell, S. "Small Nations and Great Powers". *Routledge Curzon*, 2005: 48-50.

¹¹ De Waal, T. "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War". *NYU press*, 2013: 202-206.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to understand the role of the Russian leadership in the NK conflict. The paper examines the Russian mediation missions over NK by illustrating the cases of Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev with an aim to compare their efforts to reach towards a peaceful solution to the NK conflict. Thus, the research questions refer to the Russian mediation missions over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Research Question 1: Does Russia act as a spoiler or mediator in the NK conflict?

Research Question 2: How did Russian mediation efforts towards the NK conflict resolution change under different presidencies?

H₁. Russia is content with the current status of the NK conflict.

H₂. The NK conflict had equal chances of resolution during the three Russian presidential administrations.

Data Collection and Research Design

The study will be conducted based on exploratory research design as the thesis intends to explore the role of the Russian presidents within the NK conflict and afterwards, it seeks to find out the changes occurred in Russian foreign policy towards the NK conflict resolution. The analysis of findings within this paper will be based on data collected from relevant articles, books and news websites. In addition, with an aim to answer the research questions and to analyze whether Russia was mediating the conflict or spoiling its peaceful resolution the paper will refer to theoretical notions of “spoiling” and “mediation”. Data collection of the current thesis will also involve local newspapers that contain Russian presidential statements concerning the NK conflict. The paper will analyze the presidential statements from state visits between Armenia and Russia and during the Minsk Group major summits discussed within the study.

Chapter 1: Russian mediation missions between 1991 and 1999

1.1. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Short Background

Armenians were a majority in Nagorno-Karabakh by constituting about 95% (130.000) of the NK population while Azerbaijanis (Tatars) were only about 5% (6500) by 1921.¹² However, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh became an important issue of discussion within the Soviet Union. In July 1921, the Caucasian section of the Russian Communist Party (Kavbiuro) initially granted Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Nonetheless, one day later the Kavbiuro made changes to its decision by incorporating Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan. The justification behind the Soviet decision was the economic dependency of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. Hence, from 1923, Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous oblast in Azerbaijan and had few cultural and political rights.¹³

The new decision of Kavbiuro resulted in protests of Armenians. As such, in 1963, Karabakh Armenians signed a petition for either being incorporated within Soviet Armenia or Russia. Nonetheless, the efforts of Armenians were fruitless and the response from the Soviet leaders was negative. Meanwhile, the continuing demonstrations led to expanding violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As such, it is worth mentioning the pogroms in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku as well as the massive deportations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis.¹⁴ Furthermore, the existing hostility between the two sides increased during the last years of the Soviet rule, when Mikhail Gorbachev (the last leader of the Soviet Union) disseminated the notions of *glasnost*, *democratization* and *perestroika* within the Soviet Union. They became a catalyst for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and changed the track of the Karabakh conflict.¹⁵

¹² Hakobyan, T., 46.

¹³ Zürcher, C. "The Post-Soviet Wars, Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus". *New York University Press*, 2007: 152-154.

¹⁴ De Waal, T., 31-34.

¹⁵ Saroyan, M. "Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union". *Berkeley: Regents the University of California*, 1997: 175-176.

Furthermore, the conflict over NK moved into a new violent stage after the dissolution of the Soviet rule and the establishment of Azerbaijani and Armenian independent republics. The primary reason for increased tensions between the two sides was the referendum held in Nagorno-Karabakh that aimed to stand as a good ground for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, on September 2, 1991, Karabakh announced its independence both from Azerbaijan and from the Soviet Union. Another catalyst to the full-fledged fighting between the sides was the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the conflicting territories. Hence, the limitation and elimination of the existing violence was only possible with the help of international mediation.¹⁶

Starting from 1923 until the present day Nagorno-Karabakh remains a contested area between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As such, the Armenian side claims that they have always remained the major part of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh. In its turn, the Azerbaijani side argues that throughout history Nagorno-Karabakh had always remained under their control.¹⁷ Furthermore, at the beginning, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was considered an internal conflict. However, from 1991, the issue over NK became an internationalized encounter between Armenia and Azerbaijan that touched upon the issues of self-determination and territorial integration. Given this circumstance, the resolution of the NK conflict became more complex due to its dependency from Azerbaijan, Armenia, the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and from the international community directly involved in the mediation of the conflict.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hakobyan, T., 89-93.

¹⁷ Walker, C. "Transcaucasian Boundaries". *UCL Press*, 1996.

¹⁸ Cornell, S., 47-50.

1.2. Boris Yeltsin and the Institutional Dualism

When discussing the mediation missions of Russia in the process of NK conflict, it is worth to state that Moscow took steps for conflict resolution earlier than any other interested player did. What is more, among other intermediaries in the mediation process of the NK conflict, Moscow firstly recognized the trilateral dimension of the NK conflict by regarding Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict.¹⁹

The presidents of Russia (Boris Yeltsin) and Kazakhstan (Nursultan Nazarbayev) made the first attempt of international mediation for the peaceful settlement of the NK conflict in September 1991. Boris Yeltsin perceived the conflict over NK as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his distinct foreign policy approach from Gorbachev by getting international and domestic recognition as a triumphant mediator. In other words, Yeltsin wanted to highlight his role as a successful leader of the post-Gorbachev period. According to Boris Yeltsin, Russia had an aim to transform into the guarantor of stability and peace in its “backyard” (former Soviet Republics).²⁰ Hence, during the Zheleznovodsk negotiations, the delegations of Armenia (Levon Ter-Petrosyan), Azerbaijan (Ayaz Mutalibov) and NK (Leonard Petrosyan and Robert Kocharyan) together with Boris Yeltsin and Nursultan Nazarbaev drafted a memorandum on September 23. The most disputable issues discussed in Zheleznovodsk concerned the necessity of ceasefire, the participation of representatives from NK in the process of negotiations and the status of NK.²¹ Even though, initially the Zheleznovodsk negotiations were believed to bring positive results, the Yeltsin-Nazarbaev mediation failed on November 20 when an Azerbaijani (MI-8) helicopter containing 22 officials was shot down near Nagorno-Karabakh.²²

Further, after the first unsuccessful effort to resolve the NK conflict, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) became interested in the issue over Nagorno-

¹⁹ Nixey, J. “The Long Goodbye: Waning Russian Influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia”. *Chatham House Briefing Paper*, (June 2012): 2-16.

²⁰ Laitin, S. & Suny, R. “Armenia and Azerbaijan: Thinking a Way out of Karabakh”. *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no. 1 (October 1999): 157-159.

²¹ Zheleznovodsk Declaration, 23 September 1991

²² Hakobyan, T., 103-104.

Karabakh. During their meeting in Prague on January 30-31, 1992, it was decided that the Soviet republics could also be included in the CSCE composition and that the CSCE should make efforts to resolve the disputes of its new members peacefully.²³ More to that, on March 24, 1992, during their Helsinki Additional Meeting, the CSCE Council decided to have its significant contribution in the peace process of the NK conflict.²⁴ Hence, a decision was made to convene a conference in Minsk that would contain 11 countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Germany, Italy, Russia, the USA, Turkey, France, Czechoslovakia (later-Finland) and Sweden), as well as the elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh in the framework of interested parties. However, inasmuch as the hostilities escalated between the opposing sides of the conflict and in May 1992, the Armenian side liberated the city of Shushi and established a land corridor between Armenia and NK at Lachin, the conference was postponed.²⁵ Even though the conference in Minsk failed, the “Minsk Group” became the only body that is internationally mandated to promote negotiations and to settle a good ground for the NK conflict resolution.²⁶

Following it further, when referring to Boris Yeltsin’s administration it is worth mentioning that inasmuch as, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had lost its glory and power, Boris Yeltsin was concerned that Russia would no longer be able to influence the economic and political processes of its former Soviet Republics. Hence, the regaining of the Russian “Soviet” power became the first priority for Boris Yeltsin. However, during the first years of his presidency, Boris Yeltsin did not possess enough power to make independent decisions and different internal Russian actors were actively engaged in formulating and exercising the Russian external policy.²⁷ Hence, during the administration of Boris Yeltsin, Russia was actively engaged in the NK mediation process through two ways: the ministry of

²³ Druckman, D. & Mooradian, M. “Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh”. *Journal of peace research*, vol. 36, no.6, (1999): 710-711.

²⁴ Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. *Helsinki Additional Meeting of the CSCE Council: Summary of Conclusions*, 24 March 1992.

²⁵ Sheets, L. “A ‘Frozen Conflict’ That Could Boil Over”. *International Crisis Group*, 2012.

²⁶ Minasyan, S. "Nagorno-Karabakh after Two Decades of Conflict: Is Prolongation of the Status Quo Inevitable?" *Caucasus Institute*, no. 2 (2010): 27-29.

²⁷ Laitin, S. & Suny, R., 161-163.

foreign affairs (Andrey Kozirev (in office from 1990-1996)) and the ministry of defense (Pavel Grachev (in office from 1992-1996)). As such, on April 13, 1992, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia proposed a two-stage procedure for peaceful resolution of the NK issue. Moscow focused on the ceasefire, as well as on the deployment of international peacekeeping forces and the CSCE observers.²⁸ As a result, on August 7-8, 1992, a meeting was held at the headquarters of the Russian Foreign Ministry, between the personal representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents. With Russian assistance, David Shakhnazaryan and Nadyr Mekhtiev formulated a draft agreement that had an objective to create necessary conditions for starting a peace process in NK.²⁹

Nonetheless, even though the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Russia was trying to reach a peaceful settlement to the NK conflict, its efforts were fruitless not only because of the growing violence in the battlefield but also because of the chaotic management of state affairs. As such, a good example for the illustration of weak state management was the agreement made on September 19, in Sochi, between the defense ministers of Armenia (Vazgen Sargsyan) and Azerbaijan (Rahim Gaziev). The two sides agreed upon a temporary ceasefire (two months) with the help of Pavel Grachev (Defense Minister of Russia). However, this time again Russian efforts did not produce positive results and the ceasefire only lasted 20 minutes. The problem was that the Sochi Agreement was a result of an uncoordinated plan and the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Russia was unaware of the agreement by being busy with its own initiatives to resolve the dispute.³⁰

Further, it is worth mentioning that behind the independent actions of Pavel Grachev and Andrey Kozirev firmly stood their personal interests that were signaling distinct Russian foreign policy approaches. As such, Andrey Kozirev was in favor of the CSCE involvement in the mediation process of the NK struggle. Kozirev was prone to financial and material assistance

²⁸ Hakobyan, T., 118-128.

²⁹ Stupishin, V., 43-56.

³⁰ Kazimirov, V., 77-82.

from the West. In his turn, Grachev was prioritizing the Russian role in the NK conflict resolution and had good relations with the Armenian defense minister (Vazgen Sargsyan). More to that, he was supporting Armenians in the battlefield by the supply of necessary armaments.³¹ Nonetheless, inasmuch as Boris Yeltsin favored balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, he wanted to convince the Azerbaijani president that their military cooperation with Armenia would never be used against Azerbaijan. Putting it differently, Yeltsin had an aim to demonstrate that Russia would not be able to sacrifice its relations with Azerbaijan for the Armenian interests.³²

Between 1992 to 1994, during the initial stages of the mediation process, besides setting deadlines for the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and emergency meetings between representatives of the conflicting sides neither the Foreign Affairs and Defense ministries nor the Minsk Group were able to achieve a concrete solution for peaceful conflict resolution. Among the major reasons behind the failed mediation were the continuous hostilities and clashes on the border, Russian weak state control and the independent functioning of Russian Foreign affairs and Defense ministries.³³

³¹ De Waal, T., 202-206.

³² Fuller, L. "Caucasus/Nagorno-Karabakh: Russia seeks to mollify Baku". *Radio Free Europe*, vol. 2, no. 13 (31 March 1999).

³³ International Crisis Group. "Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks". *Europe Briefing n. 71*, (26 September 2013): 3-5.

1.3. Compromised behavior between Russia and the West: 1994-1999

Starting from 1994, Russia highlighted its dominant role in the NK mediation process. As such, it is worth mentioning the Russian efforts to establish a ceasefire and its mediation by solely the Russian representative.³⁴ Pavel Grachev firstly initiated the discussions on the cessation of military operations by arranging a meeting with the Armenian (Serzh Sargsyan) and Azerbaijani (Mamedrafi Mamedov) defense ministers in Moscow on February 18, 1994. Further, on May 5, 1994, several CIS and Russian officials with the heads of the parliaments of Kyrgyzstan, NK and Armenia assembled in Bishkek and signed a Protocol that called for a ceasefire. However, the list of the sides needed for signing the protocol was incomplete as the president of Azerbaijan was in Brussels and what is more, he refused to sign the document with Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, the Russian Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministries put forward the “fax diplomacy” and collected three separate ceasefire agreements by fax-machines. As a result, a ceasefire was established and the shooting was stopped on May 12 at midnight.³⁵

Furthermore, aside from the “fax diplomacy” another important and unusual thing about the ceasefire was its establishment without peacekeeping forces. It is explained with the tense relations between Russia and the West during the initial stages of the NK conflict.³⁶ However, the disagreements between Russia and the West became less apparent soon after the Budapest Summit in December 1994. During the Budapest Summit, the conference members expressed their desire to harmonize their mediation efforts with Russia.³⁷ Hence, Russia obtained permanent co-chairmanship in 1995. In addition, Sweden was first to carry the post of a rotating co-chair country before Finland, that took the post from April 1995.³⁸

³⁴ Markedonov, S. Gotova li Armeniya priznat Nagorniy Karabax [Is Armenia ready to Recognize Nagorno-Karabakh?] Moscow: *Moskovskiy Centr Karnegi*, (2016).

³⁵ Hakobyan, T., 2010: 218-224.

³⁶ De Waal, T., 235-240.

³⁷ Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. *Budapest Document 1994: Towards A Genuine Partnership in a New Era*.

³⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). *Mandate of the Co-Chairmen of the Conference on Nagorno Karabakh under the auspices of the OSCE*, 23 March 1995.

From the beginning of 1996, Yevgeny M. Primakov became the new minister of foreign affairs of Russia. Inasmuch as Boris Yeltsin delegated Yevgeny Primakov to be closely engaged in NK conflict, Primakov was concerned about the situation in Karabakh and had an aim to reach towards the resolution of the NK conflict without confrontations between the opposing sides. During his first months as Russian foreign affairs minister, Primakov was famous for his unreasonable optimism concerning the NK conflict. However, from May 1996, during his visit to the conflict region, he understood the difficulty of NK problem. Hence, in order to highlight a successful outcome from his trip to Baku, Stepanakert and Yerevan on May 8-11, Primakov wanted to reach towards a joint statement for the peaceful resolution of the conflict and towards the exchange of the prisoners of war. Even though, he was only able to fulfill the humanitarian side of his objectives and released 110 hostages, Primakov made significant progress and his visit highlighted the active role of Russia within the region and its interest in resolving the NK conflict peacefully.³⁹

The OSCE Lisbon Summit in December 1996 was another turning point that increased the attention of the international community towards the NK conflict. During the summit, the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group recommended three principles to settle the conflict: highest level of self-rule for NK in Azerbaijan, territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and security for Nagorno-Karabakh. Even though all the Minsk Group members agreed to the proposed principles, Armenia used its veto power and hindered the establishment of an official ground for further discussions. Armenia justified its veto by emphasizing that the NK status should be determined according to the principle of self-determination.⁴⁰

Further, in January 1997, France became the next co-chair country, and during the next month, the United States joined and became the third co-chair of the Minsk Group.⁴¹ The unification to resolve a common problem stood for the harmonized relations between Russia and

³⁹ Kazimirov, V., 278-283.

⁴⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Lisbon Document 1996.

⁴¹ Jacoby, V. "The role of the OSCE: an assessment of international mediation efforts". In *The limits of leadership. Elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process*. Conciliation Resources, (2005): 30-33.

the West. As Boris Yeltsin stated, “It is important that the parties to the conflict literally feel the breath on their backs of the three great powers and understand that there is no other way than rational proposals to peace and harmony. On our part, we are ready to enhance cooperation with the US to ensure stability and security in the Caucasus and the world as a whole.”⁴² What is more, during the Denver Summit, on 20 June 1997, Boris Yeltsin together with the presidents of the US and France stated, “We express our deep concern over the continuing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We are encouraged by the continued observance of the ceasefire. However, the ceasefire by itself is insufficient. Without progress toward a durable settlement, the ceasefire could break down. The international community thus has repeatedly called for a settlement; we believe there should be no delay in establishing a stable and lasting peace in the region.”⁴³

Hence, the three major world powers focused on possible ways for the resolution of the NK conflict by proposing the “package”⁴⁴ (“land-for-status”) and “step-by-step”⁴⁵ (“land-for-peace”) settlement models. As such, in July 1997, the Minsk Group presented its “package” approach for the settlement of the dispute.⁴⁶ The proposal included two agreements: the end of armed hostilities and the status of NK. However, Stepanakert was not hesitant in rejecting the proposal, as it did not express the right to self-determination of NK population. Hence, the Minsk Group came up with another agreement based on the “step-by-step” principle. One of the differences between the “package” and “step-by-step” proposals was the timeframe of NK status definition. This is to say that the “step-by-step” approach did not put a specific deadline for the determination of NK status. Nonetheless, this time again Stepanakert rejected the proposal and brought the argument that it cannot establish good relations with Azerbaijan.⁴⁷

⁴² Yeltsin, B. “Boris Yeltsin’s Karabakh Letter to Bill Clinton”. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 1997.

⁴³ Joint Statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. *G7 Information Centre. Denver*, 20 June 1997.

⁴⁴ OSCE Minsk Group. “Comprehensive Agreement on the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”. (July 1997).

⁴⁵ OSCE Minsk Group. “Agreement on the End of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armed Conflict”. (December 1997).

⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe. “Karabakh: Rethinking “phased” vs. “package”. *Reliefweb*, 2001.

⁴⁷ Zourabian, L. “The Nagorno-Karabakh settlement revisited: is peace achievable?” *Demokratizatsiya*, 14 (2), (2006): 253-254.

After the failure of previous proposals, the OSCE Troika presented its new “common state” proposal in November 1988. According to the new suggestion, Azerbaijan and NK should form two components of a single state. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan was against the proposal by arguing that it did not preserve its territorial integrity.⁴⁸ In his turn, Boris Yeltsin defended the position of Azerbaijan, by indicating that Russia would not support the “common state” proposal as a mechanism to reach towards the NK conflict resolution. Hence, even though Armenia and NK were not against the proposed solution, the proposal failed because of Azerbaijan and Russia.⁴⁹

Following it further, starting from April 1999, the negotiations over NK were held at the presidential level. As such, during the CIS Moscow summit, on April 1, Kocharyan and Aliyev had a long discussion that continued on April 26 in Washington. Within the framework of those meetings, the “land-swap” proposal was being circulated. The idea behind the new approach of resolving the NK conflict was the annexation of NK to Armenia and the control of the Armenian Meghri region by Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the negotiations did not bring positive results, as the proposal was not favored in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hence, the “land-swap” approach towards the resolution of the NK conflict failed in 2001 after the Key West negotiations.⁵⁰

From 1994 to 1999, during the second stage of the mediation process, several serious steps were undertaken towards the resolution of the NK conflict. During Boris Yeltsin’s presidency, Russia successfully utilized the NK struggle as its external policy tool by obtaining short-term benefits. This period was fruitful in the organization of meetings at presidential level, as well as between the representatives of the opposing parties. Further, the period was also characterized by the compromised behavior of mediators in reaching towards a concrete solution to the common problem. Nonetheless, the preservation of the “frozen” status for the NK conflict

⁴⁸ Zourabian, L., 259-260.

⁴⁹ Fuller, L.

⁵⁰ Jacoby, V., 32.

seemed favorable to Boris Yeltsin, as he perceived the peaceful resolution of the NK struggle as a possible threat to Russian expanding influence within the region.

Chapter 2: Russian mediation missions between 2000 and 2016

2.1. The centralized state administration of Vladimir Putin: 2000-2008

The NK mediation process entered into a frozen period from 2001 until 2003, because of major intrastate developments and changes in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the new stage of negotiations, referred to as the “Prague Process,” continued after 2003, following the presidential changes in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. Within the framework of the “Prague Process,” on March 19, 2004, with the attendance of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, a meeting took place in Prague between the Armenian (Vartan Oskanian) and Azerbaijani (Vilayat Guliyev) foreign ministers. Further, Kocharyan and Aliyev had another meeting in Astana on September 15, with the participation of the new Russian President, Vladimir Putin.⁵¹ After the meeting, he stated, “We all recognize the complexity of the NK issue. It is very important that the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents continue the negotiations, as without mutual talks it is impossible to find ways for conflict regulation. No matter what is being said on this subject, Russia is interested in settling this issue, as we want to have full-fledged cooperation with Azerbaijan and Armenia.”⁵² The other Kocharyan-Aliyev meetings took place in Warsaw on May 15, 2005 and in Kazan on August 27, 2005.⁵³

The major points discussed within the “Prague Process” were the referendum, the notion of “interim status” and special arrangements for Kelbajar and Lachin regions. Inasmuch as the conflicting parties had distinct views concerning the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the

⁵¹ Pokalova E., 75-77.

⁵² Putin, V. “Putiny Lernayin Xarabaxi xndiry hamarum e “cayrahex bard” [Putin refers to NK issue as “extremely difficult”]. *Azg*, # 62, (16 September 2004).

⁵³ Romashov, V & Rytövuori-Apunen, H. “Nagorno-Karabakh: Steps of Settlement Market Out by Russia’s Interests”. *Tampere Peace Research Institute*, (2016): 146.

mediators suggested the idea of a referendum vote.⁵⁴ According to the concept of “interim status,” NK would gain a temporary legal framework. Following it further, during the “Prague Process,” the Armenian side agreed to withdraw its forces from five districts other than Kelbajar and Lachin, by taking into consideration their strategic importance for Armenia. Nonetheless, the Kelbajar case was further discussed during the Rambouillet meeting in 2006 when Armenia stated that it would withdraw its forces from Kelbajar only after the holding of the referendum concerning the NK status.⁵⁵

Vladimir Putin had positive expectations from Rambouillet meeting and stated, "Despite the difficulty of the problem, the parties can find a mutually acceptable solution. There is a chance to solve the problem and we will support in every way so that the problem stays in the past."⁵⁶ Even though the new Russian president was also engaged in the NK mediation process, in contrast to Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin did not link the Russian mediation mission in NK to the creation of a powerful Russian state. Differently, he mostly relied on Russian energy resources by using them as tools to conduct Russian foreign policy. Consequently, during the first term of his presidency, Vladimir Putin displayed little interest in the NK conflict and centralized his efforts to make Russia a self-confident and strong state.⁵⁷

Following it further, the Prague Process resulted in the creation of “Madrid Principles” that were presented by the Minsk Group co-chairs in Madrid, in 2007. The document included basic principles for the peaceful resolution of the NK conflict. Among the principles were an interim status for NK that stood for self-rule and security, return of territories adjacent to NK under Azerbaijani control, the determination of the final status of NK through referendum, land corridor between NK and Armenia, return of refugees and IDPs, and universal security guarantees including a peacekeeping operation. Even though, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on

⁵⁴ Mehtiyev, E. “Armenia-Azerbaijan Prague Process: Road Map to Peace or Stalemate for Uncertainty?” *Conflict Studies Research Centre* (2005): 3-5.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group. “Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War”. *Europe Report n. 187*, (14 November 2007): 4-6.

⁵⁶ Putin, V. Lernayin Xarabaxi kargavorman hamar Iracucich xorhrdakcutyunner [Additional consultations over the NK resolution]. *Azg*, #33, (23 February 2006).

⁵⁷ Sakwa, R. “Putin’s leadership: Character and Consequences”. *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.60, no. 6 (August 2008): 881-883.

several principles, the countries did not come up with a common decision concerning the NK status.⁵⁸

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that when comparing the presidency of Boris Yeltsin with Vladimir Putin's first administration, the major difference concerns the functioning of the Russian internal state affairs. As such, due to Vladimir Putin, the foreign policy of Russia towards the region of South Caucasus became coherent and homogeneous without the inner divisions between the Defense and Foreign Affairs Ministries. More to that, as a president, Putin had a clear picture of Russia's internal and external policies and was able to control his new centralized state administration.⁵⁹

2.2. On the edge of resolution: Dmitry Medvedev

The NK peace process entered into a new stage during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev as Russia was most actively engaged in the mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh struggle during the years between 2008 and 2012. Inasmuch as the administration of the new president coincided with the Russian war with Georgia in 2008, it was important for Medvedev to demonstrate to his Western counterparts that Karabakh was a distinct case and would have a peaceful resolution due to Russian mediation efforts. Hence, to decrease the chances of another significant explosion within the region, on November 2, 2008, Medvedev arranged a meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Mayendorf Castle. The initiative resulted in the "Declaration on Regulating the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," the first signed agreement since the May 1994 ceasefire. The presidents agreed to use Madrid Principles as a basis to initiate the final settlement of the NK conflict.⁶⁰

Furthermore, another significant event concerning the NK settlement that took place during the administration of Dmitry Medvedev was the L'Aquila Summit in 2009. The Summit

⁵⁸ Romashov, V & Rytövuori-Apunen, H., 148.

⁵⁹ Sakwa, R, 880-882.

⁶⁰ Sonnleitner, D. "Russia's backyard-unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus". *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2016): 89-91.

was famous in two ways: joint statement of the three Co-Chairs and the presentation of the updated version of the Madrid Principles. As such, Dmitry Medvedev, Barak Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy addressed the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders to settle the NK conflict. What is more, the Basic Principles included an interim status for NK, land corridor between NK and Armenia, return of territories adjacent to NK under Azerbaijani control, the return of IDPs and refugees, universal security guarantees and the determination of the legal NK status through a “legally binding expression of will”. According to the Co-Chairs, the updated Basic Principles stood for a compromise between the right to territorial integrity and the right to self-determination.⁶¹

However, the updated version fell short of a finalized settlement and further meetings were organized for finding a common ground between the opposing presidents. As such, on January 25, 2010, Medvedev hosted a meeting in Sochi with his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts. Another important meeting that was organized during Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency was the Muskoka Summit in June 2010. Nonetheless, the meetings did not produce positive results, as according to Aliyev, Armenians were not ready to take the Basic Principles as a basis for resolving the conflict peacefully. However, it is worth to state that Medvedev did not give up and still believed in resolution of the NK conflict.⁶² As such, in August 20, 2010, during his first state visit to Armenia, he indicated, “In spite of the challenges and contradicting emotional statements of the sides, Russia continues working with Azerbaijan and Armenia as we believe that it is of utmost importance to preserve peace and order within the region.”⁶³ Furthermore, Dmitry Medvedev once again highlighted the importance of regional stability and the mutual talks during Serzh Sargsyan’s first state visit to Russia. As such, in October 23, 2011 the Russian president stated, “Our usual meetings are intended to discuss the ongoing events. These discussions are wonderful opportunities to speak of the resolution of the NK conflict by

⁶¹ Romashov, V & Rytövuori-Apunen, H. “Russia's Karabakh policy: new momentum in regional perspective”. *Caucasus Survey* (2016): 3-5.

⁶² Pokalova E, 76-77.

⁶³ Medvedev, D. “Joint press-conference of the Presidents of Armenia and Russia in the framework of the state visit of the president of RF to RA”. *President of the Republic of Armenia* (20 August 2010).

outlining necessary guidelines for the future.” More to that, during the Armenian state visit, the Russian president also prioritized the preservation of good relations and military cooperation with Armenia.⁶⁴

Even though, the next Astrakhan trilateral meeting on October 29, 2010 between the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia had an intention to strengthen confidence building measures and bolster the regime of ceasefire, it was not an exception and did not produce positive results.⁶⁵ Eventually, the updated Madrid Principles entered into a final stage during the Kazan Summit in June 2011. Both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani presidents had positive expectations from the Summit and thought that it would become a turning point for the frozen Karabakh conflict. In his turn, Dmitry Medvedev believed that the NK conflict is a unique struggle that has big chances to be resolved. “Russia is committed to back the sides and the process will go on,” indicated Medvedev.⁶⁶ What is more, when referring to the conflict settlement perspectives, the Russian president stated, “There is only one way to resolve the NK conflict: by making arrangements. Arrangements do not have alternatives. Only the war is an alternative of an arrangement. Hence, the conflict has to be resolved by making arrangements. As a president I, have spent a lot of time on this issue. Due to my efforts, throughout last couple of years eight trilateral meetings were organized. In my opinion, it is a good result as we were able to bring the viewpoints closer to each other.”⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the Kazan Summit ended up with failure as the opposing sides started to blame each other for extending the talks. Unfortunately, after the failure of the Kazan initiative, the international community was silent and did not propose new approaches for satisfying the conflicting parties. Meanwhile, during 2012 and 2013, the border was not silent by demonstrating the escalated ceasefire violations.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Medvedev, D. Rusastany exel e ev vstahoren mnum e Hayastani arajin gorcynkery [Russia had always remained the first partner of Armenia]. *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, #194 (25 October 2011): 4.

⁶⁵ Sonnleitner, D., 90-91.

⁶⁶ Medvedev, D. “Dmitry Medvedev believes NK conflict can be settled”. *Aysor*, 2011.

⁶⁷ Medvedev, D. Heracox Medvedevy cankanum e arag lucel Lernayin Xarabaxi himnaxndiry [Leaving Medvedev wants a quick solution for the NK issue]. *Chorrord inqishxanutyun*, # 485, (27 December 2011): 3.

⁶⁸ Pokalova E, 77-79.

However, it is important to note that even though, the Kazan Summit, the Mayendorf declaration and the other meetings organized during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency resulted in failure, they represented major steps towards the NK conflict resolution when over the long period of time, the sides believed in success and compromise. Hence, even though Dmitry Medvedev had a short presidential term, due to his increased attention to the conflict settlement process, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was on its edge of resolution.

2.3. Vladimir Putin and the increased level of violence: 2012-2016

The significance of the year of 2013 is explained with the May Decrees signed by Vladimir Putin, as he started his second presidential term. According to the new Foreign Policy Concept, Russia gained an active role in the diplomatic and political conflict settlement process within the framework of the CIS. Hence, Russia also highlighted its important contribution to the NK settlement process with other Minsk Group Co-Chairs. As a result, the Russian diplomats did not lose a chance to indicate that the resolution of the NK conflict is one of the top priorities of Russian foreign policy. As such, in May 2013, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that they have a primary task of unblocking the complex situation in NK as the preservation of peace and stability constitutes a priority within their foreign policy objectives.⁶⁹ In his turn, Vladimir Putin referred to NK conflict, during his state visit to Armenia on December 2, 2013. Putin stressed the unique relationship between Armenia and Russia by indicating that it goes beyond strategic partnership. Further, the Russian president mentioned, "Instead of resolving the regional complications by the use of force, we would all like to find solutions to the regional disturbances by using the diplomatically agreed upon international arrangements. The Russian Federation welcomes the direct contacts between the two presidents. We will do our best to resolve the NK conflict and to find solutions that would be acceptable for both parties."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Romashov, V & Rytövuori-Apunen, H., 6-7.

⁷⁰ Putin, V. RD naxagah Vladimir Putini petakan aycy Hayastan [The state visit of the president of the RF, Vladimir Putin, to Armenia]. *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, #220 (3 December 2013): 1-3.

Nonetheless, in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the notions of “peace” and “stability” only preserved their significance in the official statements of the diplomats involved in the conflict resolution process. As for the situation on the border, the notions of “routine violence” and “ongoing hostilities” best characterized it particularly during the second administration of Vladimir Putin when the violent military attacks started to escalate by melting the frozen conflict. Hence, Vladimir Putin, together with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs was trying to continue the diplomatic process between the opposing sides for preventing the resumption of hostilities on the border. Hence, instead of presenting new proposals towards reaching the NK conflict resolution, Putin was back to basic discussions concerning the halt of military operations.

Along these lines, the Minsk Group organized a meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents on 19 November 2013, in Vienna. The OSCE Minsk Group came up with a statement over Nagorno-Karabakh according to which the conflicting sides agreed to continue working together for finding a peaceful and just solution for the NK conflict. Furthermore, president Putin had bilateral meetings with the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents when in 2014, the escalations of hostilities induced the Russian president to persuade the sides to find mutually acceptable conditions for the conflict resolution.⁷¹ Still, Putin's efforts were fruitless as in April 2016 the violations escalated when the Azerbaijani side presented its carefully organized offensive and surprised Armenians. The primary attacks targeted villages within NK with rockets and artillery. The Armenian side was not hesitant in responding the Azerbaijani offensive and as a result, the Line of Contact went through four days of war. The fatalities on the opposing sides were at least 350, including both military and civilian people.⁷²

It is important to state that, during the April uprisings, Russia was actively engaged in stopping the further developments of the April war. As follows, on April 2, Putin called the sides

⁷¹ Freizer, S. "Twenty years after the Nagorny Karabakh ceasefire: an opportunity to move towards more inclusive conflict resolution." *Caucasus Survey*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2014): 5-6.

⁷² Hovhannisyanyan, A. "Analysis of the 4-day April war". *Armenpress*, April 14, 2016.

for stabilizing the situation and restoring the ceasefire. Even though the ceasefire violations did not stop, on 5 April, due to Putin's efforts, the Armenian and the Azerbaijani chiefs of staff agreed to finish the fighting. Hence, Vladimir Putin highlighted the significance of the Russian mediation mission by initiating the second ceasefire during the April violations.⁷³

What is more, in June 2016, Putin organized a trilateral presidential meeting in Saint Petersburg in order to maintain the dialogue between the conflicting parties and to strengthen the termination of hostilities. The meeting had positive results as the sides agreed to continue the trilateral discussions over the NK conflict resolution.⁷⁴ In addition, on 10 August 2016, in a joint press conference with Serzh Sargsyan, Vladimir Putin summarized the stance of Russia over NK, "Russia is interested in decreasing the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia is looking for a way out of this conflict for the sake of its economic development. Azerbaijan seeks the same goals. However, it is necessary to find the appropriate approach to make sure that neither side feel themselves to be either 'losers' or 'winners.'"⁷⁵ Hence, by this statement Putin supports the Russian "balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan" doctrine by trying to reach towards a solution that will not harm any of the sides. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that when compared to Dmitry Medvedev, during his second presidential term, Vladimir Putin had taken a more neutral position towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. The April War was a signal that throughout time, the Russian mediation mission over Nagorno-Karabakh needed a push factor for taking the matters more seriously.

⁷³ International Crisis Group. "Nagorno- Karabakh: New Opening or More Peril?" *Europe Report* n. 239, (4 July 2016): 2-3

⁷⁴ U1+. "Trilateral presidential meeting ends in Saint Petersburg: Presidents issue joint statement". (20 June 2016).

⁷⁵ Putin, V. "Putin: If the Karabakh problem is not solved, Armenia will not have a chance to develop." *MeydanTv*, (11 August 2016).

Chapter 3: Analysis and Findings

With an aim to understand whether Russia mediated the conflict over NK or spoiled its peaceful resolution, it is important to understand the theoretical notions of “spoiling” and “mediation.” On this subject, “spoilers” have a primary objective to hinder or extend the peaceful resolution of conflicts for the sake of their interests and desires. What is more, spoilers also put the process of peacemaking under big risk as soon as they acknowledge that the peaceful settlement of battles threatens their regional influence. Accordingly, they use violence and concentrate their efforts to impede the settlements of those conflicts by delaying their peaceful resolution.⁷⁶ In its turn, mediation has positive significance by standing for an interactive and dynamic process where the third party helps conflicting sides to resolve the conflict by the usage of negotiation and communication mechanisms. Hence, when being a mediator, the third party is highly interested in the rapid conflict resolution.⁷⁷

The examination of the Russian mediation missions between 1991 and 2016 illustrated that none of the three Russian presidents had an intention to instigate the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. In other words, Russia did not spoil the peaceful settlement of the NK conflict. In contrast, throughout years, Russia used various negotiation and communication mechanisms to help the conflicting sides to resolve the NK conflict. Nonetheless, Russia did not act as a mediator in the NK conflict resolution process as Russia benefited from the chronic insolvency of the conflict. This is to say, that the constant mediation of the NK conflict increased the Russian positive reputation both within the international and regional arena. What is more, the frozen format of the NK conflict stood as a good opportunity for Russia to preserve good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, by selling weapons and by staying neutral towards the victory of either side. Hence, Russia wanted to create an image of a mediator, meanwhile benefiting from the frozen status of negotiations over the NK conflict. Nonetheless, even though when mediating the conflict over NK, Russia had an aim to establish a positive image and

⁷⁶ Stedman, S. “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”. *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1997): 5-7.

⁷⁷ Walker J, “International mediation of Ethnic Conflicts”. *Survival*, vol. 35, issue 1(1993): 105-107.

preserve balanced relations with the opposing sides, it still controlled the situation within the region and did not let NK conflict split into war. What is more, when comparing the three Russian presidential administrations it was evident that there were cases when NK conflict was standing on the edge of its resolution. Hence, the content analysis of presidential statements will give an opportunity to illustrate the differences between the presidential efforts to end the frozen conflict.

3.1. Content Analysis

The analysis of 6 presidential statements was done by the measurement of the intensity of descriptors classified under respective categories derived from related studies over NK conflict mediation.

Table 1 presents the convention used for measuring the intensity of descriptors used in the content analysis.

Table 1 — Scale Used to Measure Intensity	
Intensity Scale	Measurement Category
1	Did not appear or vaguely appeared in text
2	Appeared once or twice in text and was not deemed important at all
3	Appeared more often in text but with little importance attached to it
4	Important, but not dominant
5	Very important, representing the core argument

Table 2 presents the content analysis of 6 presidential statements, separately showing the intensity means for the three Russian presidents. When analyzing the statements of Boris Yeltsin, the second table shows that the category of *regional stability* has the highest mean (3.75) when compared to the other two categories. Hence, Yeltsin was in favor of security and peace within the region and encouraged the observance of ceasefire. Nonetheless, the intensity mean of the category of *direct contacts between the opposing sides* (1.75) indicates that Boris Yeltsin was indifferent towards the resolution of the NK conflict, as he did not give much importance to the

organization of mutual talks between the conflicting parties. In addition, the high intensity mean (3.25) of the *balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan* category supports the previous argument by illustrating that Yeltsin was prone to military cooperation with both of the conflicting countries by not supporting the victory of any side.

Furthermore, the content analysis of Vladimir Putin's presidential statements demonstrates that compared to Boris Yeltsin, he gave importance to the category of *direct contacts between the opposing sides* (4.25) by stressing the significance of the establishment of an environment of trust between the conflicting sides. In addition, Putin was also interested in the category of *regional stability* (4) by encouraging long-term solutions and durable settlement for the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, it can be deduced that compared to Yeltsin, Putin was more engaged in resolving the NK conflict by arranging trilateral talks and making the sides agree upon similar viewpoints. Nonetheless, the category of *balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan* (4.75) cannot be dismissed as it signifies that among the existing categories Putin prioritized the military cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan and did not want to see 'losers' and 'winners' in the NK conflict. Inasmuch as neither of the sides was ready to make concessions throughout years, it can be deduced that Putin was benefiting from the frozen status of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Finally, when referring to the content analysis of Dmitry Medvedev's presidential statements, the point worth mentioning is that when compared to Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, he did not give much importance to the category of *balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan* (2.5) which signifies that he was more interested in reaching towards the conflict resolution. What is more, he prioritized the category of *direct contacts between the opposing sides* (4.75) by stressing the significance of international arrangements and mutual talks between the conflicting parties. In addition, inasmuch as during his short presidency he initiated more than 10 meetings and came up with innovative approaches towards the conflict resolution, he was able to push the NK conflict on the edge of its resolution.

Hence, content analysis revealed that the NK conflict had real chances to escape from its frozen status and ensure stability and peace within the region. Even though, Russian cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan was also important for Medvedev, compared to Yeltsin and Putin, he made significant effort to escape the existing emotional statements of the parties by bringing the sides together and by approaching towards the conflict resolution.

Table 2 — Content Analysis of Presidential Statements				
Category	Descriptors	Boris Yeltsin	Vladimir Putin	Dmitry Medvedev
Regional Stability	Security and Peace in Caucasus	5	5	5
	Observance of cease-fire	5	3	5
	Durable settlement	2	3	5
	Long-term solutions	3	5	3
	<i>Intensity mean</i>	3.75	4	4.5
Direct contacts between the opposing sides	International Arrangements	2	5	5
	Similar viewpoints	1	4	5
	Emotional statements	3	3	5
	Environment of trust	1	5	4
	<i>Intensity mean</i>	1.75	4.25	4.75
Balanced Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan	Military Cooperation	4	5	3
	Mutually acceptable solutions	3	5	3
	Full-fledged cooperation with the sides	4	4	2
	No 'losers' or 'winners'	2	5	2
	<i>Intensity mean</i>	3.25	4.75	2.5

Conclusion

The study revealed that Russia neither spoiled nor mediated the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh by being satisfied with the frozen status of conflict resolution. Throughout years, Russia did not want to deteriorate its good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan by preserving neutrality towards the victory of the opposing sides. Hence, the study accepts its first hypothesis. Following it further, even though Russia benefited from the frozen status of the NK struggle, Russian efforts towards the conflict resolution did not remain the same under different presidencies. The content analysis revealed that there were cases when the NK conflict had real chances of resolution due to Russian efforts. As such, among the three Russian presidents, the NK conflict gained increased chances of resolution and was on the edge of its settlement during Dmitry Medvedev's administration. Thus, the answer of the second research question rejects the second hypothesis by demonstrating that the NK conflict did not have equal chances of resolution during the three Russian presidential administrations.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the Russian role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution was influenced by several factors. Even though, the three Russian presidents made significant efforts to resolve the NK conflict, they never betrayed their 'preservation of good relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan' and 'no losers' and 'no winners' foreign policy approaches towards the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

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