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“Mediation Through the Prism of a Realist Approach:
A Case of Russia's Mediation in the Nagorno-Karabakh
Conflict”

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*“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work
in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized
assistance on it”.*

Snezhanna Klevaka-Myagchilova

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Abstract

In a generally recognized context, mediation of a conflict is one of the liberal means of achieving its resolution, and an impartial mediator, in turn, is a guide for achieving the goal of resolving the conflict. However, a mediator, assuming such a role, can also be guided by its own interests and thus use mediation as a political tool to achieve its goals. This refers to the consideration of mediation from the angle of a realist approach. This was an attempt to view mediation under a critical eye that is undertaken in the Master Thesis. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Russia's mediating actions in relation to it are taken as a case. The Master Thesis presents reasons to believe that Russia, as a mediator of the conflict, also pursued its geo-strategic, economic and other goals. Such goals became the justification of its will and desire to participate in the mediation of the conflict.

Key words: mediation, mediator, conflict, territorial dispute, realism, self-interests, power, South Caucasus, Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia

Absrakt

In einem allgemein anerkannten Kontext ist die Mediation eines Konflikts eines der liberalen Mittel zu seiner Lösung, und ein unparteiischer Mediator wiederum ist eine Anleitung zum Erreichen des Ziels der Konfliktlösung. Ein Mediator, der eine solche Rolle übernimmt, kann sich jedoch auch von seinen eigenen Interessen leiten lassen und Mediation als politisches Instrument zur Erreichung seiner Ziele einsetzen. Dies bezieht sich auf die Betrachtung der Mediation aus dem Blickwinkel eines realistischen Ansatzes. Dies war ein Versuch, die Mediation unter einem kritischen Blick zu betrachten, der in der Masterarbeit durchgeführt wird. Als Fall wird der Berg-Karabach-Konflikt zwischen Armenien und Aserbaidschan und die diesbezüglichen Vermittlungshandlungen Russlands herangezogen. Die Masterarbeit präsentiert Gründe zu der Annahme, dass Russland als Vermittler des Konflikts auch seine geostrategischen, wirtschaftlichen und sonstigen Ziele verfolgt hat. Solche Ziele wurden zur Rechtfertigung seines Willens und Wunsches, an der Vermittlung des Konflikts mitzuwirken.

Schlüsselwörter: Mediation, Mediator, Konflikt, Territorialstreit, Realismus, Eigeninteressen, Macht, Südkaukasus, Berg-Karabach, Armenien, Aserbaidschan, Russland

Introduction

At the end of September 2020, full-scale hostilities resumed in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which became a continuation of the long-term ethno-political conflict and led to casualties among both the military and civilians. The parties made several attempts to conclude a truce, but the only successful was the trilateral agreement reached on the night of November 10, 2020. With the mediation of Moscow, Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to completely cease fire and exchange prisoners and bodies of the dead soldiers. Yerevan also handed over to Baku the territories that were occupied by Armenia over the past several decades. In addition, Russian peacekeepers are stationed in the region. This event was a significant step in resolving the protracted conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, which many experts have widely referred to as “frozen” in recent decades. Moreover, one cannot ignore the role of Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has played and continues to play an active role in resolving the conflict.

Already at the beginning of 1991, since the beginning of the first military actions on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia began to make its first attempts to mediate the conflict. Significant success was achieved in 1994, when a ceasefire was reached by the parties to the conflict through the mediation of Russia. In the same year, Russia began to take the position of one of the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Throughout the 2000s, Russia also continued its mediation activities in the settlement of the conflict. For example, in 2008, through the efforts of Russian diplomats, the so-called Mayendorf Declaration was signed, according to which the parties to the conflict agreed to resolve the conflict only peacefully. Russia also took active mediation actions during the escalation of the conflict in 2016. Moreover, Russia has more than once been the initiator and mediator in the meetings of representatives of the opposing parties to the conflict (Gasanova 2018). Moscow's mediation actions in November 2020 provided grounds for defining its role in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as “key” one (RIA Novosti 2020).

The above-mentioned facts of the chronology of events related to the mediation actions of Russia in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict confirm the normative position and role of Moscow as a mediator. However, it should be noted that the role of Russia in the conflict region is not limited only to mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For example, despite the fact that historically close relations between Moscow and Yerevan are disputed by many researchers, the fact remains undeniable that Russia and one of the parties to the conflict, Armenia, closely interact as strategic partners in the

field of security and economy nowadays. So both countries are members of the Collective Security Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union (Markedonov 2018). More than half of the total volume of net direct investment flows to Armenia falls on Russia (International Information Agency Novosti-Armenia 2019). Moreover, Russia is the main supplier of gas to Armenia as well as the prominent provider weapons and ammunition for both sides of the conflict – Azerbaijan and Armenia (Sargsyan 2013). These facts allow to look more broadly and critically at the case of Russia as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, considering the role of Russia as a mediator not only normatively, but also from the angle of a number of factors, such as political, economic, geostrategic, for example, which can presumably affect Moscow's desire and ability to be part of the mediation process to resolve the conflict. This direction of study of mediation actions of Russia in relation to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh provide the basis for the research problem of the Master Thesis, since it was made an attempt to consider Russia's mediation actions under the prism of the influence of a number of factors, the theoretical framework of which referring to realism.

Moving on to considering the importance and relevance of studying the topic of Russian mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I believe that this topic deserves attention both from an academic point of view and a political position on the following aspects.

Firstly, a new round in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the resolution process of which was "frozen" for quite a long time, in the form of reaching an agreement on a ceasefire between the conflicting parties in November 2020, became not only a politically significant event, but also a new direction for academic research of the event. The signing of a new ceasefire agreement, Russian mediation and the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh at the present time, requires a reassessment of previously existing research in the field of studying the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution. Thus, the Master Thesis supplements a number of studies in the field of studying the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, taking into account its new realities.

Secondly, as mentioned above, a new significant round in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the participation of the Russian element may represent the prospect of considering such an outcome for other similar conflicts in the post-Soviet space, where Russia also plays different roles, such as Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Eastern Ukraine. For example, it is possible to carry out a comparative analysis

of Russia's role in relatively similar conflicts. Thus, the topic under study has the prospect of its further development in the academic aspect.

Third, Russia is currently playing the role of one of the important global actors in world politics. Therefore, studying Russia from the position of a peacemaker of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its role in the Caucasus region as a whole, is of political interest in studying Russia's behavior as a global actor in order to give a political assessment of its actions, as well as to predict its actions in the future.

As the last point, the Master Thesis provides a critical analysis of Russia's mediation activities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the prism of its own national interests, which contributes to the opportunity to take a broader look at Russia's position in the conflict both from an academic point of view in terms of the applied methodology, and from a political one – in the context of the formation of a critical view of current events. Moreover, academically mediation is usually viewed through the prism of liberal standpoints, thus, the consideration of the concept from the angle of realism in the Master Thesis, has brought academic value, given that there is a lack of academic literature on the concept of mediation in the context of the theory of realism.

The *purpose* of this Master Thesis is to take a critical look at the concept of mediation by superimposing a theory of realism, applying to the case study, the normative role of Russia as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process in the Master Thesis is subjected to critical analysis. Based on that the *research question* for the Master Thesis is *"What possible reasons contribute to Russia's willingness and ability to play the role of a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?"*.

In view of the fact that the theoretical framework of this Master Thesis is realism, it should be assumed as a *hypothesis* that Russia, taking a role in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, was guided by its own interests such as political, economic, geostrategic and other self-motives.

In order to find an answer to the research question posed and to check the hypothesis, an analysis of existing academic sources was carried out. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in various directions is widely covered in the academic literature. Most attention is paid to the causes of the conflict and the chronology of its course. But with regard to the consideration of this conflict from the standpoint of Russia's role in it, the topic is not fully covered by academic research. Most of the sources touching upon this issue are of a journalistic nature.

With regard to the issue under consideration about the role of Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, there are the following academic views.

Kavus Abushov Kavus Abushov examines Russia's behavior in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the position of its "strategic interests and material capabilities", opposing this to its "inability and individuality" in this matter. The central issue in the work is why Russia's behavior in the conflict does not allow it to reach a settlement to the conflict, although its resources allow it. The author's arguments for answering the post-question question are the individuality of Russia in the conduct of its foreign policy. The author also proposes the idea of neo-imperialism as the basis of Russia's policy towards conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Crimea (Abushov 2019).

Wojciech Bartuzi et al. expressed the point of view that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for Russia is an instrument of its geopolitical power in the South Caucasus. The authors argue that through the conflict, Russia puts both Armenia and Azerbaijan in positions dependent on it. Changing realities, such as, for example, the prospect of Georgia's membership in NATO, forces Russia to strengthen its strategic presence in the region, to the extent of maintaining the presence of conflicts in it (Wojciech Bartuzi 2008).

Gulnar Bayramova considers the role of Russia in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a supporter of Armenia. The author cites information about military, economic and energy assistance provided by Russia to Armenia throughout the entire conflict. This evidence, as the author assumes, is a deterrent in the settlement of the conflict (Bayramova 2013).

In contrast to the previous author, Sergey Markedonov suggests that Russia is not interested in taking the position of one of the parties, since Armenia and Azerbaijan occupy an important place in Russian diplomacy and joint cooperation. In response to a question about Russia's unwillingness to resolve the conflict, the author argues that Russia's goal is to minimize military operations in the region (Markedonov, Russia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Careful Balancing 2018).

A. Gasanova considered the mediating role of Russia aimed at the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in its normative nature. Particular attention is paid to the events within the confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which flared up with renewed vigor in the beginning of April 2016. The author assumes that it is thanks to the assistance of Russia that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be resolved in the future (Gasanova 2018).

Robert Smigielski defines the significance of the South Caucasus region for Russia as a zone of its influence and geostrategic interests not only from a security standpoint, but also from the standpoint of, for example, energy interests, such as ensuring control

over a corridor for the transportation of oil and gas. Moreover, the author defines Russia's political strategy in relation to mediation as an attempt to balance its interests between the two countries-parties to the conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan, since they are linked by political, economic and energy ties (Smigielski 2009).

Vahagn Aglyan, studying American studies of the role of Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, came to the conclusion that the role of Russia in the conflict is "institutionalized". He notes that throughout the 1990s, the role and status of Russia were seen as a kind of dependent variable, but starting from the 2000s, the factor of Russia is beginning to be seen as a long-term factor in regional development. Moreover, the author argues that it was in Russia's interests to fragment the South Caucasus region, for which the "freezing" of conflicts became an instrument for achieving this goal. The new regional status quo, established in the 1990s, allowed Russia to retain its decisive influence on the existing "asymmetric" military-political balance of power in the Caucasian region (Aglyan 2019).

Balakireva K. claims in her work that Russia made an attempt to become a peacemaker, but the interests of the Kremlin do not allow Moscow to become an independent arbiter in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The author does not indicate the exact explanation of this position, however, it is mentioned that Russia and Armenia are linked by historical ties, as well as active cooperation between the countries, which still exists in various directions. It can be assumed that such a conclusion about the lack of impartiality of Russia in relation to mediation of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh lies in the close ties between Russia and Armenia (Balakireva 2014).

Kirakosyan N. in his work highlights the chronology of the mediation activities of Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He notes that thanks to Russia, a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1994. At the same time, the author cites facts of criticism from Western countries regarding Moscow's mediation in the conflict, referring to its own interests, in particular, to strengthen its influence in the conflict region. Moreover, the author also cites more radical versions of Western experts, such as that Russia not only used the conflict to achieve its own goals, it also initiated conflicts and contributed to their development. However, the author is of the opinion that Russia had no mercenary goals at all in the process of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. On the contrary, according to the Author, Moscow is interested in resolving the conflict, and its leading position as a mediator is dictated by virtue of historical ties with the conflict region, good relations with the opposing countries-parties to the conflict, as well as a desire to prevent hostilities near Russian borders (Kirakosyan 2014).

Suleymanov E. and Evoyan L. also support the idea that Russian mediation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was dictated by a geostrategic desire to consolidate its influence in the region. In particular, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Russia had conflicts in the North Caucasus, which is its integral part, in particular in Chechnya, the loss of influence in the South Caucasus could negatively affect Russia's position in the northern part of the Caucasus. Moreover, at the time of the height of the conflict on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus region, the rivalry of external powers such as Turkey and Iran was growing. In this regard, Russia could not lose its leadership position in the conflict region, thereby losing its zone of influence. Therefore, the Authors determine that maintaining Russian control over the South Caucasus was a strategic task for Russia, and participation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a means of achieving it (Suleymanov E. 2012).

A number of sources slightly touch upon a critical assessment of Russia's mediation actions in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, there is practically no full-fledged critical analysis of Russia's actions as a mediator in the conflict. Thus, this fact determines the academic "novelty" of the Master Thesis. Moreover, the number of works on the role of Russia as a mediator in English is negligible, which also gives academic value to the Master Thesis.

The study case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the only one for my Thesis. The importance of researching the study case reflects both academic interest and personal interest. From the point of view of academic interest, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the main territorial-ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space and affects, first of all, the security of the entire South Caucasus region, as well as neighbouring regions. Moreover, other conflicts on the territory of the post-Soviet space, which also have territorial and ethnic roots, such as the conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, are an indicator of the relevance of studying these conflicts. Moreover, conflicts based on resistance to the principles of territorial integrity and the right of peoples to self-determination are also relevant on a global scale, in view of such examples as Catalonia, Scotland, Quebec, which also declared their claims to the independence of the regions. Personally, since I am interested in the study of territorial-ethnic conflicts, their origins and development, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as one of the longest in the post-Soviet space, whose roots go deep into the 7th century, is of great interest for its study.

With regard to the choice of this topic for the study of mediation actions of Russia in relation to it, the following should be noted. In contrast to the aforementioned conflicts in the post-Soviet space, only in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh did Russia most vividly

use the role of a mediator without an unequivocal opinion on resolving the dispute, not accepting the position of any of the conflicting parties - Armenia or Azerbaijan, as was the case, for example, in the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, or a conflict close in time in the Crimea. Thus, the question arises about the nature of such a strategy on the part of Moscow, the factors influencing such a decision, which will be considered in the Master Thesis through the prism of the theory of realism.

Structurally, the Master Thesis consists of three chapters. The first part examines, first of all, the theoretical framework of the Master Thesis, in particular the concept of the concept of mediation in international conflicts, as well as its application to the theory of realism. In the second part of the Master of Thesis, the case study of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an object of study of the Master Thesis, its historical origins and internationalization is considered. Also, this chapter will consider attempts to mediate the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by various actors. The third main analytical part of the Master Thesis analyzes the role of Russia as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to find an answer to the research question posed and test the hypothesis. This chapter presents the chronology of Russia's participation as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as an analysis of the possible existing factors that influenced Russia's desire to participate in the mediation of the conflict from the point of view of the theory of realism.

With regard to the time frame for considering the indicated problem in this Master Thesis – since the beginning of the military stage of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994 until the events of November 2020.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the Master Thesis is an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical and political science analysis. In particular, methods of qualitative analysis will be applied.

The topic of the Master Thesis and the research question determined the choice of sources that allow for a comprehensive analysis of the stated problem. All sources can be divided into three groups.

The first group includes official documents and materials, such as, for example, agreements, including on the settlement of the conflict, ceasefire, official documents of international organizations, as well as statements, speeches and interviews by officials.

The second group of sources is a number of research papers on the topic of studying the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and defining the role of Russia in it. Particular attention is paid to the study of the academic works of Russian authors and authors representing the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – Azerbaijan and Armenia, due to the subject of their possible bias based on state propaganda or the confrontational position of the parties, but at the same time, strong interest in considering different opinions depending on the positions of the authors and represented by them countries.

The third group of sources includes journalistic materials and information from news portals.

For the research, sources in Russian and English have been used.

1. Theoretical Aspects of Mediation through the Prism of Theory of Realist Approach

1.1. Concept of Mediation in International Conflicts

Conflict as a social phenomenon has existed throughout the entire evolution of mankind, starting with the time of the Old Testament. With the emergence of state structures, the concept of the conflict spilled over to the political nature of its manifestation. In the modern world, the problem of the presence of conflicts remains acutely relevant both at the national and international levels. Thus, the search for ways to resolve conflicts is important for the world community. Such methods of peaceful resolution of conflicts include mediation, negotiations, judicial or arbitration resolution and other peaceful methods (I. Sargsyan 2003).

The concept of mediation is central to the Master Thesis in terms of conceptual framework, theoretical aspects of which will be given a central place in this Chapter.

Despite different approaches to the definition of mediation as a concept, mediation is one of the oldest, and at the same time, effective methods of international conflict resolution used in many parts of the world (James A. Wall 2001).

Mediation as a concept in a theoretical sense is widely developed academically. The definition of mediation by various authors provides a basis for understanding its concept.

“Mediation is assistance to two or more interacting parties by third parties who (usually) have no authority to impose an outcome” (James A. Wall 2019). Other definitions of mediation mentioned in the academic literature are listed below.

Mediation is “any action taken by an actor that is not a direct party to the crisis, that is designed to reduce or remove one or more of the problems of the bargaining relationship, and therefore to facilitate the termination of the crisis itself” (Young 1967). Another definition describes mediation as “a process by which an impartial third party helps two (or more) disputants work out how to resolve a conflict. The disputants, not the mediators, decide the terms of any agreement reached. Mediation focuses on future rather than past behavior” (Liebmann 2000).

J. Bercovitch in his academic work “Mediation in International Conflict: An Overview of Theory, A Review of Practice” defines mediation as “a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties’ own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider (whether an individual, an organization, a group, or a state) to change their perceptions or behavior, and do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law” (Bercovitch

1997). The author gives a broad definition of mediation in an international conflict, which thereby provides an opportunity for mediators to act and use different types of strategies and approaches. At the same time, the author, citing a number of statistical data, notes that mediation is one of the most effective methods of resolving international conflicts at the present time (Bercovitch 1997).

Since Russia's mediation of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can also be viewed from the position of the co-chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group on the settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, it seems important to also give the definition of mediation determined by the OSCE, which describes mediation as a "structured communication process, in which an impartial third party works with conflict parties to find commonly agreeable solutions to their dispute, in a way that satisfied their interests at stake" (OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre 2014).

Summarizing the above definitions, it is possible to conclude that the concept of mediation includes such basic elements as the presence of a conflict, as well as two or more conflicting parties, the participation of a third party that is not directly involved in the conflict and whose purpose is to help the parties reach a solution to resolve the conflict through communication means, while not directly influencing such a decision. Mediation is not necessarily intended to resolve the conflict, but at least to reduce its intensity.

In view of the presence of two countries, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as parties to the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh, we should talk about the international nature of the conflict. Therefore, I consider it is necessary to give a definition of an international conflict as well.

The concept of international conflict has been highlighted on the agenda both at the international political level and in academic writings since the end of the Cold War. The concept of international conflict in the context of other concepts of international relations is a complex phenomenon characterized by its dynamism, multi-dimensionality, multi-level characteristics in terms of scale, nature, and also its causes. The international conflict is also complicated by the fact that it occurs in the context of different strategies and actions on the part of the conflicting parties. However, despite the complexity of the nature of the concept of international conflict, the scientific basis of this concept is being formed in academic circles. Academically, the nature of international conflict is explored in two main dimensions. On the one hand, such a dimension is a definition of the conflict in terms of the causes and driving powers of the conflict. On the other hand, international conflict is viewed from the perspective of its prevention, in particular, for example, how

international actors can strengthen international peace (Mohammad Salim Al-Rawashdeh 2017).

The main criterion for the definition of an international conflict is usually defined as a conflict between states, including organizations or people belonging to different states. Moreover, this criterion can be extended to an intra-state conflict, one of the parties to which is a group fighting for independence from a warring state or in order to acquire or expand powers in relation to political, economic or social power (Adinoyi Adavize Julius 2015). International conflict is a form of social conflict, characterized by such signs as the incompatibility of material interests and values, a dynamic nature in most cases, and a special feature is the involvement of the parties – states (Butler 2009). From the standpoint of the socio-psychological approach, international conflict is viewed as “a process driven by collective needs and fears”, “an intersocietal process”, “a multifaced process of mutual influence”, as well as “an interactive process with an escalatory, self-perpetuating dynamic” (Zartman 2007).

Since conflicts can differ in their nature and the nature of their participants, intensity and political, socio-economic components and other characteristics, then, accordingly, a mediator fulfills a variety of behaviors and functions. There are different classifications of behavior strategies among academics. The behavior strategies of international mediators J. Bercovitch divides into three groups. Mediators with a communication strategy establish contact with the parties, contribute to the establishment of mutual trust between the conflicting parties, work with the provision of the necessary information necessary for organizing the mediation process and resolving the conflict as a whole. In turn, mediation with a formulation strategy presupposes the organization of a mediation protocol, participates in the development of the agenda, actively proposes strategies for getting out of the current situation to the parties, and also exercises direct control over the implementation by the parties of their obligations. In a manipulative strategy, the mediator uses his power in order to influence or change the opinion of the conflicting parties, including using both techniques that stimulate the parties and the threat of sanctions (Bercovitch 1997). S. Touval and I. W. Zartman also classify the strategy of mediator behavior in three aspects as manipulation, formulation, and facilitation in communication (I. William Zartman 1985).

J. Bercovitch and A. Houston, studying what factors influence the behavior of mediators and the choice of the strategy of their behavior, divided such factors into the following groups. The first group of factors – “preexisting factors” – includes factors related to the context of the conflict itself and the parties to the conflict in it. The second

group of factors – “concurrent factors” – will determine the characteristics of the mediator itself and the course of the mediation process. And the third group of factors – “background factors” – refers to the experience of mediation processes that were previously carried out in relation to the conflict. Moreover, based on the study of a number of data, academicians came to the conclusion that the most important factors influencing the process of choosing a strategy for the behavior of a mediator are the characteristics of the opposing parties and the characteristics among which mediation is carried out (Houston 2000).

T. Princen, in turn, proposed to divide mediators according to the principle of their involvement in the process with disputes on the basis of bargaining. He singles out “principal” mediators who may have an indirect interest in the subject of the dispute, thereby using their bargaining power as a resource can help the parties reach the necessary solution. Whereas the other type of mediators “neutral” have no interest at all in the subject of the dispute, thus they do not have the power of bargaining as in the case of principal mediators, but provide a “low-risk environment” to ensure the mediation process for decision-making by the parties (Princen 1992). It is worth noting that in the context of the main hypothesis of the Master of Thesis, in particular, the consideration of Russia’s mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the position of interests reinforced by the theory of realism, according to T. Princen’s classification, it is possible to assume that Russia acted as the principal mediator regarding the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The aspect of realism in mediation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of the Master Thesis.

The importance of the mediator’s behavior and the strategy for performing mediation is expressed in the effectiveness of such mediation. In other words, the mediator is responsible for the influence he exerts on the course of the conflict, although day-facto does not directly participate in decision-making on it. Evaluation of the mediator’s actions is a complex process, since it involves many possible factors influencing the conflict process. There is also no consensus in the academic community on assessing the effectiveness of mediation in relation to the conflict, how successfully or vice versa, mediation has adversely affected the course of the conflict (I. Sargsyan 2003).

J. Bercovitch, for the assessment of mediation actions, we consider two main criteria – subjective and objective. Evaluation of mediation under a subjective criterion implies that the parties to the conflict express satisfaction with the mediation actions carried out, recognize the fairness of the mediation result, the world community, for its part, also approves the mediation process and its mediated result, which in the future is

designed to avoid a return to the dispute. Assessment of mediation according to the parameters of objective criteria is carried out on the basis of an analysis of the situation immediately after the termination of mediation. The success of mediation is determined by the presence of such circumstances as the termination of violent actions, the establishment of communication between the parties, as well as the achievement of agreement between the parties on controversial issues as a result of mediation (Bercovitch 1992).

In his research, B. Savun empirically defined the outcome of mediation and its success as dependent on mediator's characteristics – bias of mediator and information about the conflicting parties. At the same time, he notes that biased mediators are more successful in the implementation of mediation in the end than not biased. And also a mediator having more information about the conflicting parties are also the key to more successful mediation. (Savun 2008). Another determining factor is the direct presence of a mediator of an international conflict which “possess intelligence, tact, skills in drafting formal proposals, and a sense of humor, in addition to specific knowledge of the conflict at hand” (Bercovitch 1997).

Additionally, from the perspective of disputants, the parties' interest in resolving conflict, as well as the readiness of the conflict for outside intervention on the part of the mediator are playing role in conflict resolving as well as mediation's success. “The existence of a hurting stalemate (e.g. a military setback, a change in power relations, or a failure to impose a unilateral outcome) remains the best benchmark in a conflict for deciding when to initiate mediation” (Bercovitch 1997).

Thus, the strategy of the mediator's behavior directly affects the successful outcome of mediation and its reflection on the resolution of the conflict, that is, the mediator plays one of the key roles in the outcome of the conflict. With regard to the case considered in the Master Thesis, Russia, as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, by its actions influenced the conflict process, the nature of such actions and what it is dictated by will be assessed further in the following parts of the Master Thesis.

1.2. Applying Realism to the Concept of Mediation

The concept of mediation, which consists generally in the peaceful resolution of the conflict, based on dialogue and cooperation between the conflicting parties and the mediator, by its nature refers to the liberal aspects of the theory of international relations. However, the purpose of the Thesis Master is to provide a critical view of the concept of mediation from a realistic angle. *Power* is an element of realism (Rasheed 1995). It

argues that the nature of individuals is selfish, in connection with which they strive for *power*. Individuals form states, each of which also strives to ensure its *self-interests* (Mingst 2004). Therefore, the basic elements of the realism approach – power and self-interest are the main conceptual components of the critical analysis carried out in the Master Thesis.

L. Heemsbergen and A. Siniver, in their academic work “New Routes to Power: Towards a Typology of Power Mediation”, defined *power* in the context of mediation as the means or leverage that can push the conflicting parties to reach a compromise or resolve the conflict. These means include a wide range of tactics, including manipulation and even ultimatums. The nature of the mediator’s power is rooted either in the organization he represents or in his own reputation and status. It is also assumed that power can be both positive and negative, as well as material, like financial or military, and intangible, like psychological, for example. In the context of realism, the Authors consider power in its traditional form, that is, in the ability to prevail in a conflict of interests in favor of their own interests. Thus, power is presented in its negative form of expression. However, the other side of power is also considered – the positive side – such as “soft power”. Both types of power can allow the mediator to form the agenda of negotiations between the conflicting parties, as well as power them to make a decision (Luke Heemsbergen 2011). Thus, the power of the mediator lies in his ability to influence the parties to the conflict for the purpose of mediation and the final resolution of the conflict.

J. Rubin proposed a typology of the mediator’s power in the mediation process, which includes six varieties – reward power, which implies material enrichment of the party to the dispute in exchange for changing its line of behavior; coercive power using the threat of sanctions; expert power based on experience with a mediator; legal power as the application of international law to resolve the conflict; referent power, the basis of which is directly the relationship between the mediator and the parties; and the last, information power, in which the mediator acts as a communication conductor and information carrier (Rubin 1992).

In the continuation of the relationship between the power of the mediator and the mediation process itself, the academic literature distinguishes between the “power” approach of intervention or the “pure” form of intervention in resolving a particular conflict. The latter approach is characterized by means of conflict resolution through mainly communications, while the power approach is associated with the use of a wide range of resources and strategies that the mediator possesses (Luke Heemsbergen 2011).

Consideration mediation through the prism of a realistic approach was also an idea of Saadia Touval in his academic work “The Superpowers as Mediators”. He highlighted that “states are rational actors, pursuing their self-interest, and assigning high priority to considerations of security, power, and the promotion of their influence” even with regard to the mediation process in which they act as a mediator. Thus, the Author argues that mediation is a means of superpower foreign policy “employed by states in furtherance of their goals”. His research is based on the study of the mediation actions of the two superpowers of the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. The Author’s definition of superpower is based on nuclear potential. He argues that superpowers are more successful in mediating conflicts, since they have excellent resources for their implementation and have great power to influence the conflicting parties. At the same time, the Author proposes the idea that mediation as a political means can be used both to protect one’s own interests and for expansionist interests. In the first case, the mediator is involved in the mediation process in order to avoid being drawn into the conflict or avoiding problems with the conflicting party, due to the presence of close ties with the other conflicting party. Another goal of the mediator as an expansionist one is that the mediator can use conflict mediation as a means of expanding his influence in the conflict zone, as well as establishing closer ties with the conflicting parties, moreover, using the power of the guarantor of the agreements reached, the mediator thereby expands and controls the political zone conflict and its participants (Touval 1992).

It is also appropriate here to mention again the classification of mediators proposed by T. Princen, given in the previous section of this chapter of the Master Thesis, according to which the principal mediator has an indirect interest in the subject of the dispute, and thus has the power of bargaining, which in my opinion also refers to aspects of realism.

Thus, global powers can view any emerging conflict as a threat to their security and interests, thereby using mediation as a political tool to intervene in the course of the conflict, using their political power and material resources for this (Touval 1992). The prevalence of the protection of the mediator’s own interests during the mediation of the conflict is a manifestation of the mediator’s intentions based on the approach of realism.

Based on the theoretical basis presented in the current chapter, in the subsequent parts of the Master Thesis, a realism view of the concept of mediation will be imposed on the case study of Russia as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

2. Case Study: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

2.1. Historical Background of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Nagorno-Karabakh is geographically located in the South Caucasus region inside the Karabakh mountain range (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

(Helsinki Commission Report 15.06.2017)



The ethno-political conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has deep roots of its origin, dating back to the 7th century, when the disputed territory of modern Nagorno-Karabakh was subject to mass migration of Caucasian peoples (Yoko Hirose 2014, 6). In view of this, it is possible to explain that the historical background has disagreements depending on the sources of its research – pro-Armenian or pro-Azerbaijani.

So according to the pro-Armenian historical version Nagorno-Karabakh or the historical name Artsakh was a territory located in the east of the Armenian Highlands. Historically, this territory was politically organized as a small autonomous kingdom, in different periods also part of the Armenian state, about which evidence has been preserved in the form of historical Christian monuments on its territory dating back to the 4th century AD. Due to historical events, this territory in different historical periods was also under the control of conquerors such as Turks, Mongols, Arabs, Persians. However,

despite the presence of conquerors, Nagorno-Karabakh has always remained under its own autonomous Armenian leadership (I. Sargsyan 2003).

From the standpoint of pro-Azerbaijani historians, Nagorno-Karabakh was historically the western province of the Azerbaijani state under the name of Caucasian Albania, where the Azerbaijani Turks were the original population of this territory. Regarding the presence of Christian historical monuments on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which are guided by pro-Armenian researchers as proof of the presence of the Armenian population, pro-Azerbaijani historians explain this by the fact that in the 8th century the Arab Caliphate seized the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, whose population was Christians and then already in the consequence has Islamized the population (Jannatov 2016).

Such a historical discrepancy, I assume, is due to a conflict with long-standing roots and is relevant to this day as a part of the conflict on a historical level.

In 1813, according to the Gulistan Treaty, Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred by the Persian Empire to the Russian Empire (I. Sargsyan 2003). After the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the end of the First World War, Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent states from the Russian Empire and in 1920 were incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, the territory of modern Nagorno-Karabakh was already a controversial issue at that time (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018). As stated in historical sources, at that time the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was populated to a greater extent by the Armenian population, but both countries had their own claims to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Perchoc 2016). In 1918, Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent political unit proclaimed the autonomy of the region and created a national government. In 1919, the National Government of Nagorno-Karabakh signed a temporary agreement with the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic, however, according to the testimony of Armenian historians, this agreement was repeatedly violated by Baku through armed attacks and ultimately resulted in the massacre of Armenians in March 1920, which is still not recognized by Azerbaijan, as well as Turkey. However, this event influenced the hostile attitude of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh towards Azerbaijanis and expressed a desire for an alliance with Armenia (I. Sargsyan 2003). It is worth noting that Azerbaijan does not recognize the massacres of Armenians in 1920 due to mutual accusations against Armenia. Thus, Azerbaijan accuses Armenia of the massacres of Azerbaijanis and other Muslims in Baku in March 1918, which is also not recognized by Armenia. Although according to the chronicles of Armenian historians in November 1920 Azerbaijan recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Armenia, and Armenia, in turn, in

1921 recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its territory (I. Sargsyan 2003), but the final decision on the controversial territorial issue was made by the leadership of the Soviet Union, which identified the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) as part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018). The Soviet government justified this decision by its regional policy, good relations with Turkey, as well as the support in the person of the Muslim world for the spread of communism. Nagorno-Karabakh was transformed into an autonomy within Azerbaijan, however, the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh repeatedly during the 60s of the last century appealed to the Soviet government with petitions for independence, but to no avail (I. Sargsyan 2003).

The situation began to change in the 1980s with the coming to Soviet power of Mikhail Gorbachev and his liberal policies. Protest movements began to emerge in the South Caucasus region, including in Nagorno-Karabakh (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018). So in February 1988, the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh officially turned to the leadership of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the USSR with a request to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to Soviet Armenia. However, this request was rejected by both Azerbaijan and the leadership of the USSR, based on Soviet legislation on territorial indivisibility (I. Sargsyan 2003). However, despite the refusal on December 1, 1989, the Supreme Council of Armenia and the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh single-handedly adopted a joint resolution on the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia (Cornell 1999). These events became the cause of armed clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, in which thousands of people died.

Talking about the position of the Soviet leadership in relation to the opposing sides was not distinguished by consistency. This position changed depending on the changes in the situation both in the South Caucasus region and in the country as a whole. The USSR tried to use not only political, informational, but also forceful methods of influence in the conflict zone. After the pogroms in Azerbaijan, there was a wave of anti-Armenian pogroms, so the Soviet leadership decided to send Soviet troops to the region. However, the use of the army was intended not so much to protect the victims of the pogroms as to prevent the overthrow of the existing political regime in the republic. Moreover, then the military units of the USSR began to help the Azerbaijani side in its forceful actions against the participants in the movement in Nagorno-Karabakh (R.S. Avetisyan 2011).

Thus, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh passed into the stage of “open *interethnic* confrontation” (Yamskov 1991).

2.2. Internationalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the nature and course of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began to change.

In October 1991, Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence from the USSR and signed a corresponding declaration of withdrawal. Nagorno-Karabakh, in turn, referring to Soviet legislation, in December 1991 held a nationwide referendum on secession from Azerbaijan and gaining independence. During the referendum, the majority of votes were cast for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, this referendum was not recognized as legitimate by either Azerbaijan or the world community (I. Sargsyan 2003). These political events caused full-scale hostilities, which reached their peak in 1992 and lasted until May 1994, the moment of the signing of a ceasefire agreement, in particular the Bishkek Protocol, between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018).

It is worth noting here that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, independent Azerbaijan and the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic became the main participants in the conflict. However, independent Armenia was also involved in the conflict on the side of Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict grew into a phase of open armed confrontation between the Azerbaijani and Armenian armed formations, that is, by its nature, it ceased to be an *interethnic* conflict, but acquired the status of an *international* conflict, since both Armenia and Azerbaijan were recognized by the world community as newly independent states, they have become full members of the UN and other international organizations. Moreover, it is noted that although in military terms there were two sides in the conflict – Armenia and Azerbaijan, in the political perspective, Nagorno-Karabakh, although it was not recognized as an independent political unit, but de facto participated in the conflict process as one of its parties (R.S. Avetisyan 2011). These circumstances endow the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with a special nature of its characteristics and course.

After the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1994, the conflict became “frozen”. Territorially, Azerbaijan suffered colossal losses, as more than 92 percent of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh came under the control of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic under the protection of Armenia.

The conflict has also caused humanitarian consequences for the population of the conflict zone. So the conflict led to ethnic changes, the Azerbaijanis left the Nagorno-Karabakh zone, while the Armenians left the territory of Azerbaijan. According to expert estimates, about 1 million people have become forced refugees, about 750 thousand

Azerbaijanis and about 350 thousand Armenians (Helsinki Commission Report 15.06.2017).

The consequences of the war were reflected in the political structure of the countries. In Azerbaijan, former political leaders were overthrown, and many energy projects were in jeopardy. Due to the large flow of refugees in the country, there is a situation with a shortage of food and an economic crisis. As for Armenia, it became territorially blocked between Azerbaijan and Turkey, which became the reason for blocking the supply of energy resources through their territory and, as a result, caused famine and the threat of freezing of people in Armenia, as well as severe economic consequences (Uhlig 1993/1994).

Until now, there is no consensus on the number of casualties during the Karabakh war. According to some estimates, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh claimed more than 20 thousand lives (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018). However, according to other experts, the number of victims of the conflict reaches 55 thousand people (Heo 2007). Such a humanitarian catastrophe and the number of deaths, according to some experts, even have signs of “ethnic cleansing” (Hopmann 2015).

The ceasefire agreement reached by the parties in 1994 gave the region a decrease in the level of violence and a relatively peaceful next 10 years (Yoko Hirose 2014, 10). However, annually up to 30 people became victims of the conflict during one-time shootings (Freizer 2014), and more than 7 thousand times the cease-fire was interrupted along the 160-mile so-called “line of contact” (Helsinki Commission Report 15.06.2017). The wave of escalation of the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region began again in 2014 with the use of military equipment and human casualties (Yoko Hirose 2014, 10). So, according to some reports, during a week-long armed clash in January 2014, up to 20 soldiers were killed (Freizer 2014). But the situation reached its peak in the aggravation of the conflict in April 2016, when armed clashes between the warring parties escalated into a full-scale “4-days war” (April 1-5), the victims of which, according to various sources, were from 60 to 200 people (Crisis Group Europe 2016). This escalation of the conflict caused anxiety among experts that the “frozen” conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is no longer such and has entered an active phase (The Economist 2016). Such conclusions could be made on the basis that a number of experts believed that the stupor of diplomacy over the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the instability of maintaining the ceasefire status could contribute to a change in the views and intentions of Azerbaijan (Broers 2016). Moreover, over the years of independence, Azerbaijan has built up its military potential, which at the time of the clashes exceeded

the Armenian one, and both conflicting parties – Azerbaijan and Armenia – reduced their confidence in the negotiation process (Conflict Analysis Research Centre 2018). Such events and circumstances became possible prerequisites for a new scenario for the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution.

In 2018, when Nikol Pashinyan came to power in Armenia, many experts believed that his more liberal course in politics could also favorably influence the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, after visiting Nagorno-Karabakh, Pashinyan said that the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to Armenia, thereby confirming the adherence to the previous political course of Armenia in an uncompromising vision of resolving the conflict in favor of Armenia (Kartsev 2020).

The hostilities that unfolded in September-November 2020 became the cornerstone in the development of the conflict and its resolution. So on September 27, 2020, Azerbaijani troops with full-scale military equipment launched the first strikes on the south and north of Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result of hostilities, Azerbaijan took control of a number of cities, such as Hadrut and Jabrayil, which was a great loss for the Armenian front. Then Azerbaijan took up positions in the cities of Zangelan and Gubadli, and in the end the capture of the city of Shusha was decisive (Aksenov 2020). It is worth noting about the military support of Azerbaijan from Turkey in the conduct of military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, on November 10, 2020, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of Russia Vladimir Putin signed an agreement on the complete cessation of all hostilities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, according to which Armenia undertakes to withdraw its troops from the conflict zone, and Russia introduces a peacekeeping contingent along the Lachin corridor – the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh for 5 years with an automatic extension for every 5 years in the absence of objections from Armenia and Azerbaijan (Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation 2020). However, despite the agreement reached on the cessation of hostilities, to date, news continues to flow about the presence of people killed and injured as a result of one-off clashes along the contact line. So, for example, in July 2021, the Minister of Defense of Armenia announced that 3 servicemen were killed and 4 were wounded (Independent 2021).

Thus, at the moment, despite the fact that after the war in September-November, 2020 the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has reached a stage of relative calm, but isolated episodes of military clashes confirm the fact of its incomplete resolution and possible changes in its status in the future.

2.3. Attempts to Mediate the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became the first ethno-territorial conflict in the territory of the collapsed Soviet Union, which acquired such a large-scale scope in terms of its intensity and violence. In this regard, a number of countries have come up with an initiative to mediate the conflict. Kazakhstan, represented by its leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, made its first attempts to resolve the conflict through negotiations with two conflicting countries - Armenia and Azerbaijan at the very beginning of the conflict in 1991, however, due to the fact that the post-Soviet era brought economic and political country, then Kazakhstan soon withdrew from such an initiative. However, in 1992, Kazakhstan again tried to act as a mediator, but this time more taking the side of Azerbaijan and preserving its territorial integrity. This position was dictated by the fact that the integrity of the state territory of Kazakhstan and possible claims to it in the post-Soviet period from Russia were a pressing issue for Kazakhstan at that time. Therefore, Kazakhstan did not want to create a precedent on the separation of part of the territory of one country to another. As a result, such an imbalance in the position of Kazakhstan was not crowned with success in the negotiation process between the conflicting parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In turn, Iran also in 1992 came up with an initiative to resolve the conflict through its mediation. Iran potentially had a chance to be an effective mediator, as it historically has ties with both the Armenian and Azerbaijani people. According to experts, Iran's desire to act as a mediator was dictated by its desire to consolidate its leadership position in the region and prevent Turkey from doing so (Moorad Mooradian 1999). Although Iran's mediation actions were not crowned with tremendous success, a number of Iranian experts note that they contributed to the achievement of a ceasefire agreement between the warring parties in 1992. Actions to resolve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have received attention from the UN Security Council (Ramezanzadeh 1996).

It is also worth mentioning the European Union and its position on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So, unlike its active participation in the resolution of territorial conflicts in Georgia with respect to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the European Union did not express a desire for a direct settlement, but resorted to methods of secondary diplomacy, including the creation and financing of institutional instruments, aimed at resolving the conflict, as well as appeals by the parties to the conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan, for a peaceful settlement (Shiriyev 2013). Since the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the early 1990s, the

European Union has paid little or no attention to the conflict resolution process (Perchoc 2016). Only since the expansion of its borders in 2007 has the stimulation of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict been included in the agenda of the European Union (Galstyan 2010). It is worth noting that both countries Armenia and Azerbaijan are included in the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative. The Eastern Partnership plan also specifies the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (The European Union 25.9.2017). Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is viewed in the context of the Eastern Partnership as an "obstacle to stability and prosperity in the region" (European Union 2020). The European Union also supports the work of the OSCE Minsk Group (OSCE Minsk Group 2020), the mediation of which will be discussed later in this chapter of the Master Thesis. Member of the European Union France participates in the work of this group. As mentioned above, the European Union has also created institutional mechanisms aimed at working with the South Caucasus region, but also related to the settlement of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh as well. For example, in 2003 the European Council created the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, whose task was to establish regional cooperation, as well as support the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (European Council 2003). Another initiative of the European Union was the creation in 2010 of the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. This initiative was funded by the European Union and aimed at creating people-to-people contacts within the Armenian and Azerbaijani society by educating the population in the media, the activities of non-profit organizations, carrying out cultural and educational projects, thereby contributing to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh 2020) (International Alert 2011).

Although the European Union does not position itself as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and does not directly participate in its resolution, nevertheless, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is included in the agenda of the European Union. However, the effectiveness of methods of influencing the resolution of the conflict is noted by experts as rather limited. So, for example, the implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy with the conflicting parties Armenia and Azerbaijan does not bring as such a contribution to the settlement of the conflict, since it is strictly normative in nature without any reinforcing actions from the European Union (Perchoc 2016). There is also criticism of the institutional initiatives of the European Union. So the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia does not have a formal role in the

process of mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, moreover, the mandate of the Representative is too broad and covers three countries of the South Caucasus at once, which also does not focus on solving specific problems, including the problems around Nagorno-Karabakh. The financial limitations of this institution are also noted. Due to these factors, there is a low efficiency of this institution in achieving goals for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh also has problems with its effectiveness. So, due to the fact that this initiative is primarily aimed at civil initiatives and support for public projects, the purpose of which, although the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, is nevertheless not included in the negotiation process at the highest political level, which limits its effect (Zacha 2018).

Other actors-mediators of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, who can be attributed to the main mediators, were Russia and the OSCE. Mediation Russia is the object of study of the Master of Thesis, the next chapter of the Master of Thesis is devoted to it. The progress and results of the mediation of the OSCE will be summarized below in the subsections of this chapter of the Thesis Master.

The OSCE Minsk Group. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining independence in 1992, Armenia and Azerbaijan became full members of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). In view of this, the flared up conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh became the subject of discussion of its resolution at the level of the organization and its members (Yunusov 2007). That is why in 1992 the CSCE decided to organize the conference related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Minsk, Belarus with the aim of creation a forum for negotiations over the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (OSCE. Minsk Group n.d.). But due to the fierce fighting in the conflict zone, in fact, this international conference did not take place, but the work on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continued within the framework of the organization in the form of working groups and meetings. As a result, the process of mediation of the CSCE on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict did not actually achieve any significant results in mediation of the conflict until the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1994 between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It happened, as some experts point out, due to the organization's unpreparedness for resolving international conflicts, as well as the immaturity of the parties to resolving it (Moorad Mooradian 1999).

Only in December 1994, at a meeting in Budapest, the CSCE Minsk Group (OSCE) was given an unlimited mandate, which defines the main aim of the Minsk Group as

“promoting a resolution of the conflict without the use of force and in particular facilitating negotiations for a peaceful and comprehensive settlement” (OSCE 23.03.1995). The main functions of the participants of the OSCE Minsk Group were indicated as to “make joint efforts in order to strengthen the cease-fire; develop a common basis for negotiations with the parties to the conflict; conduct negotiations with the parties to the conflict for the conclusion of a political agreement on the cessation of the armed conflict, drawing upon the progress achieved in previous mediating activities; promote direct contacts, as appropriate, including substantial talks among the parties to the conflict; continue working with the parties to the conflict on confidence-building measures, particularly in the humanitarian field, synchronizing them with the political process” (OSCE 23.03.1995). This group includes three co-chairs – Russia, the United States and France.

During the work of the OSCE Minsk Group, many meetings were held with representatives of both conflicting parties – Armenia and Azerbaijan. Also, the OSCE Minsk Group proposed ways to resolve the conflict. For example, at the beginning of 1998, the OSCE Minsk Group proposed to give the status of Nagorno-Karabakh as a semi-state entity in the form of a republic while maintaining its incorporation into Azerbaijan, but this proposal was rejected by the latter (Perchoc 2016). One of the important plans for the settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group, is the so-called Minsk principles of 2007. They envisaged a phased withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, a popular referendum on determining the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the introduction of a peacekeeping contingent, the provision of international assistance in demining the territories of the conflict, as well as the return of internally displaced persons (Basic principles for a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, transmitted at the OSCE Ministerial Council (Madrid, 29 November 2007) as an official proposal of France, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, as Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, for consideration by the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan 2007).

Despite the fact that the mediation actions of the OSCE Minsk Group were not ultimately crowned with success in reaching real agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Zacha 2018), however, this Group is the main mediator on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the normative position to conduct the negotiation process between conflicting parties Armenia and Azerbaijan declaring that the status quo was not applicable and had to be overcome through productive talks between two opponents in a peaceful manner (OSCE Minsk Group 05.12.2019).

3. Analysis of Russia's Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

3.1. Course of Events of the Russia's Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

From the very beginning of the active phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the early 1990s, Russia made its first attempts to resolve it. As mentioned above in the previous part of the Master of Thesis, Kazakhstan, represented by its President at that time, Nursultan Nazarbayev, attempted to mediate the conflict. Together with him, President of Russia Boris Yeltsin came forward in this initiative to regulate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Moorad Mooradian 1999). In the course of mediation activities, the leaders of Russia and Kazakhstan organized a number of meetings with representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and following the results of these meetings, on September 23, 1991, the Presidents of Armenia, Kazakhstan and Russia in Zheleznovodsk signed a communiqué reflecting a number of problems that need to be resolved on the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Gurushkin 2009). This communiqué stipulated the conditions for the withdrawal of troops from the conflict zone, a ceasefire by the opposing sides of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh was not determined (Gasanova 2018). Also, as indicated above in the previous part of the Master Thesis, the beginning of the 1990s was a difficult economically and politically time for Russia and Kazakhstan, so the countries were primarily concerned with solving their internal problems.

However, it was thanks to Russian diplomatic communications that the belligerents Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1994 signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities and fire (Kirakosyan 2014). The fact of the success of the Russian mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in reaching an agreement on a ceasefire was recognized by international actors, but at the same time, on the part of Western countries, this fact was perceived with some intention of Russia to strengthen its influence in the region (Friedrichson 2012). Against the background of this state of affairs, a number of experts even note the growing tension in relations between Russia and the OSCE as two mediators of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in an attempt to gain leadership positions in the settlement of the conflict (Pryakhin 2002). The solution to this tension in the clash of interests of the two mediators was the inclusion of Russia in the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Gasanova 2018).

As mentioned above in the Master Thesis, the work of the OSCE Minsk Group was not crowned with great success, however, Russia, both as a member of the Minsk Group and on its own behalf, continued the negotiation process with Armenia and Azerbaijan to

reach solutions on the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. A significant breakthrough in mediation of the conflict, thanks to the efforts of Russian diplomats, was the signing by Armenia and Azerbaijan in November 2008 of the Mayendorf Declaration on Consent to a Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict on the Basis of International Law, as well as the search for such a solution at the highest level of both countries (Gasanova 2018). Also in 2010-2012, Russia in its territory organized a number of high-level meetings with representatives of the conflicting parties, during which some agreements were reached on the exchange of prisoners of war, the return of the bodies of dead soldiers, the investigation of some incidents on the line of contact, as well as the establishment of cultural and scientific dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Kirakosyan 2014). In April 2016, during the so-called “4-day war” (April 1-5) in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia actively called for an end to hostilities. Thus, Russian President Vladimir Putin held telephone talks with the leaderships of Armenia and Azerbaijan on April 5, 2016 (Reuters 2016), after which the conflicting parties decided to ceasefire.

The most recent major achievement of Russian mediation was the conclusion by the conflicting parties of Armenia and Azerbaijan of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities that took place in September-November 2020. According to the agreement, the parties pledged to exchange prisoners of war and bodies of those killed during hostilities, to return internally displaced persons and refugees to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under control UNHCR and to provide access to transport routes for both parties. The Armenian troops pledged to leave the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh occupied by them, and the Russian peacekeepers on the line of contact will become the guarantor of security in the region. Russian President Vladimir Putin, commenting on Russia’s mediation actions in Nagorno-Karabakh in November 2020, said: “We presume that the agreements reached will set up necessary conditions for the lasting and full-format settling of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis on the base of justice and to the benefit of Armenian and Azerbaijan peoples” (SBS News 2020).

3.2. Russian Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict from the Standpoint of the Theory of Realism

Based on the historical perspective of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict presented in the Master Thesis, Russia, represented by its historical political predecessors – the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, had close ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and with the South Caucasus region as a whole throughout long period.

Plunging into a historical overview of relations between Russia and the Caucasus region as a whole, a long history can be traced. In the 16th century, the Russian Tsar Ivan IV initiated the process of expanding the borders of the Russian Empire, starting with the construction of fortifications on the Caspian Sea in 1559. Three centuries later, in 1829, the Russian Empire concluded the Turkmanchay Peace Treaty with Persia, which marked the end of the war between states and the recognition of Russia's territorial acquisitions in accordance with the Gulistan Peace Treaty of 1813 of the lands of Eastern Armenia, the Nakhchivan and Erivan Khanates (V.V. Rogushchiva 2006), which were located on the territory of the modern states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thus, in a historical perspective, in its policy, Russia initially pursued the goal of expanding its influence and domination, as well as strengthening its position on the territory of the South Caucasus region.

It should be noted that Russia's policy of domination in the Caucasus has historically not been supported by support from the Caucasian state formations and peoples. So for 46 years, in aggregate from 1817 to 1863, she waged wars with various state and territorial entities in the Caucasus, which received the general name as the Caucasian War, the main goal of which was the conquest of the Caucasian region by Russia. Moreover, this war, as noted by historians, is marked by particular cruelty (King 2008). Later, during the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Caucasian states also attempted to secede from the control of the Russian Empire, but resulted in confrontations with Soviet Russia (Marshall 2010). As a result, the resistance of the Caucasian region to Russia's domination in it historically, according to a number of experts, has become one of the reasons for the formation of ethnic nationalism of the peoples of the Caucasus (Neumann 1993).

Russia, historically considering itself as the controller of the Caucasus region, also defended its territorial interests by military means against external sources, powers that claimed to control the Caucasus as well. So, for example, during the Crimean War in 1853-1856, as well as during the First World War, Russian troops defended the territory of the Caucasian region. During the Second World War, the German fascist army was also defeated by the Soviet army in terms of seizing the territories of the Caucasus (Grechko 1971).

Regarding the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, it is also worth recalling that it was the Soviet Union, as the predecessor of modern Russia, decided to transfer the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, disputed between the two Soviet republics, Armenia and

Azerbaijan, in 1921 to Azerbaijan, which in fact became the subject of the ongoing conflict at the present time.

The period of the collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by the possibility of gaining independence throughout the Caucasus region. Thus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia declared their independence and acquired the status of sovereign states. However, in another part of the Caucasus region, for example, the North Caucasus, in particular Chechnya, the struggle for independence resulted in two bloody wars with the Russian center, the result of which was the abandonment of the North Caucasian states as part of the Russian Federation. However, even the states of the South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, having acquired the status of independent states in the post-Soviet period, faced ethno-territorial conflicts, in which Russia was also involved to one degree or another. For example, Georgia in 2008 lost its territorial political control over the autonomies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, due to the latter's announcement of separatist intentions to separate them from Georgia. At the same time, Russia supported the separatist movements of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, moreover, recognized their independence. The ethno-territorial conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains frozen to this day. However, an analysis of Russia's actions showed how influential and powerful it is in maintaining its presence in the region and the ability to regulate processes in it. Nagorno-Karabakh, although it also declared its independence on January 6, 1992. However, in my opinion, in view of the fact that the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was the subject of a dispute between two other Caucasian states, as a result, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict acquired international status, thereby Russia has chosen a different strategy of influencing the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, namely the role of a mediator of the conflict. What are the motives for such a decision - to act as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, pursued by Russia, is the key question of the Master of Thesis and in particular of this chapter.

Summing up the historical aspect reflected above, it is possible to conclude that historically Russia in its foreign policy pursued the goal of strengthening its presence and influence in the Caucasus region. For centuries, it retained a dominant position in relations with the Caucasian state formations, moreover, it made decisions that were reflected in the historical level and the current state of affairs in the Caucasian region. And in modern history it continues to play a significant role in the Caucasus as a significant political actor.

Thus, from my perspective, one of the motives for Russia's participation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a mediator is, among other things, the *historical reason* –

historically predetermined behavior and position of the Russian state due to the historically established trend of Russian participation in the political life of the Caucasus region and the possibility of maintaining control in decision-making concerning the Caucasus region. Moreover, the historical factor confirms that Russia had its own interests in the Caucasus region as a whole, pursuing the goal of expanding its power in it, which belongs to the principles of the theory of realism, and, accordingly, contributes to the answer to the research question about factors posed in the Master Thesis influencing the desire and ability of Russia to participate in the role of a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So the historical factor of Russian interests in the Caucasus region predetermined the basis for further consideration, in the context of realism, of Russia's involvement in the process of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the role of a mediator as part of its policy in the Caucasus as a whole.

First of all, the *geostrategic reason* takes place in the need for Russia to be involved in the process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Russian Federation includes seven North Caucasian republics, Ingushetia, Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, the Chechen Republic, Dagestan, as well as two federal territories – Krasnodar and Stavropol. As indicated above in the Master Thesis, during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet period, Russia also had intra-federal conflicts based on separatist motives, state formations in the North Caucasus. However, as noted by experts, the Caucasus is a single organism, therefore, the conflicts occurring both within the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus region and outside its borders in the South Caucasus are interdependent. The positive or negative dynamics of the processes in both the North Caucasus and the South Caucasus directly affects or may affect the processes taking place in the other part of the Caucasus. For example, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict in the early 1990s had a serious impact on the dynamics of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict within the Russian Federation, and the Georgian-Abkhaz one – on the ethnopolitical processes in the Republic of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia (Markedonov 2018). A more striking example, directly related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and internal conflicts in the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, is the participation of armed groups formed by the head of the separatist movement in the North Caucasus, the leader of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Shamil Basayev, at the height of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at the beginning 1990s on the front line of Karabakh (Taarnby 2008). Thus, the direct participation of Russia as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be considered as one of the instruments

of the Russian policy of resolving its internal conflicts, therefore, the possibility of being involved in the decision-making process and containing the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is directly related to ensuring the security of Russia itself, in particular, its North Caucasian region, which is notable for its instability, especially during the years of the beginning of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Another geostrategic factor in Russia's participation as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be seen as Russia's desire to remain able to have access to the South Caucasus region in political terms, to retain power in the region against the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, after gaining independence by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia as the successor to the Soviet Union, Russia actually lost its direct levers of power in the South Caucasus region. Integration processes between post-Soviet states such as the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, for example, did take place, but in fact such processes were a big question of their effectiveness, since the newly independent states began to pursue their national policies and build their sovereign states (Grigoryan 2013). Therefore, it was important for Russia to maintain its presence in the region. Russian mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between two South Caucasian states, Armenia and Azerbaijan, could become a guarantee of ensuring the Russian presence in the region for many years, which in fact happened. Moreover, as described in the Master Thesis part of the theory, Russia became a principal mediator, having indirect interests in the conflict and leverage of power to bargain between the parties. It should be noted here that Russia actually has the strength and ties with the conflicting parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, sufficient to influence the decisions of the parties. This is confirmed by her successful ceasefire mediation in 1994, 2006 and 2020 as well.

Returning to the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it should also be noted that a certain vacuum has formed in the post-Soviet space in terms of political patronage from powerful political actors. Russia tried to maintain its geo-power in the post-Soviet territory by building new integration processes and bilateral relations between the former countries of the Soviet Union, however, the political and economic instability of post-Soviet Russia, as well as the political change in the course of new independent countries, became the reason for the arrival of others powerful powers. The South Caucasus region is primarily of interest to such regional powers as Iran and Turkey, which have also demonstrated their interest in influencing the region, including building a new level of relations with the independent states of the South Caucasus, as well as in mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Therefore, if Russia did not act as a mediator of the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it could lose in this case the opportunity to “control” the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and, as a result, the resolution of the situation to resolve not in favor of Russian interests could negatively affect on its internal and external aspects of politics and its security in general. At the same time, as a mediator, Russia could not openly impose a solution to the conflict on the conflicting parties, since it would affect not only Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also the interests of regional powers such as Iran and Turkey, as well as other international actors such as the United States and the European Union (Markedonov 2018). Just as it could not allow the escalation of the conflict through its own direct participation in it, as was the case with South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, for example, since, firstly, Russia politically could not accept the position of one of the parties, and secondly, such participation could result in an escalation of the conflict with the participation of international actors. Thus, the role of the mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become “ideal” for Russia’s goals in the region under consideration.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was also important for Russia to form its Eurasian policy towards the newly independent post-Soviet states, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, to build bilateral relations and establish political and economic ties (Markedonov 2018).

Armenia, together with Russia and other post-Soviet countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which aims to “strengthen peace, international and security and stability, collectively protect independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. of the Member States, the priority for which Member States give priority to political means” (Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization October 7, 2002). Moreover, there is a Russian military base on the territory of Armenia in the city of Gyumri with a number of soldiers around 5,000 (Aynur Asgarli 2020). Russia and Armenia also have close economic ties. So, since 2015, Armenia has been a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, whose members, in addition to Russia, are also Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of this organization is to ensure “freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labor, the implementation of a coordinated, coordinated or unified policy in the sectors of the economy” (Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union May 29, 2014). Also, Russia is one of the main trade partners of Armenia, providing almost a third of all Armenian foreign trade. In 2020, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to about USD 2.3 billion (Russian Trade.com 2021). Moreover, Russia is the main investor in the Armenian economy. Thus, as of 2020, the accumulated Russian

investments amounted to USD 2.1 billion, including direct investments in the amount of USD 1.7 billion (Arka News Agency 2021). In addition, some strategic facilities in Armenia also belong to Russian companies. For example, “South Caucasian Railway” is a subsidiary of “Russian Railways”, the Russian gas company “Gazprom” owns “Gazprom Armenia”, and “Electric Networks of Armenia” is owned by the Russian energy company “Inter RAO” (Markedonov 2018). Russia is also Armenia's main energy supplier. Armenia receives gas from Russia through Georgia and Iran (International Energy Agency For EU4Energy 2021).

Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan prefers not to pursue an integration policy with the post-Soviet space, but prefers the development of bilateral relations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Azerbaijan are developing in a rather positive direction. For example, in 2010, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was the first of all post-Soviet countries to sign an agreement with Russia on the delimitation and demarcation of borders. In 2018, both countries, together with other Caspian states, also reached an agreement on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea.

Azerbaijan and Russia also have close economic ties. Thus, the trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Russia in the first half of 2021 amounted to \$ 1.3 billion. Moreover, Russia ranks third among Azerbaijan's trading partners after Italy and Turkey. During this period, trade operations with the Russian Federation accounted for 9.45 percent of Azerbaijan's total foreign trade turnover. At the same time, Russia is a leader among the countries from which Azerbaijan imports about 17 percent of all goods imported by the country (Tass 2021).

Summing up some of the above about the relationship between Russia and the two countries that are conflicting parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia built relations with both countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the basis of recognizing the independence of the two countries and pursuing by them, respectively, independent domestic and foreign policies. However, in the case of Armenia, it is clearly seen that it is more involved in the integration processes with Russia, and also economically more dependent on it than Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is an oil-rich country that is economically quite self-sufficient, which gives it the opportunity to conduct its policy on the basis of bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation rather than integration. This applies not only to integration with the post-Soviet space, but also to the Western European direction (Ibragimov 2020). However, it should be noted that in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the

apparent imbalance on the part of Russia in favor of Armenia is not traced. Russia values its relations with both states strategically, economically and politically. Azerbaijan is a strategic partner for Russia in many respects. Therefore, Russia's position as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is acceptable both for the conflicting parties and for Russia, which wants to maintain beneficial relations in the economic sense, including with both countries, since they cover a significant part of the Russian economy. Thus, the *economic* factor is also likely to play an important role in resolving Russia as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Moreover, Russia's position as a mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also "smooths out" the participation of Armenia and Russia in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which is designed to protect the security interests of its member states, including the territorial integrity of states. Logically, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict affects the territorial interests of Armenia and Armenia is directly involved in the conflict. However, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, where Russia plays a significant role, in fact in no way took part in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, although according to its charter goals it could do it. However, if a decision was made by the Collective Security Treaty Organization in some way in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, obviously protecting the interests of Armenia, then Russia would find itself in a position opposing Azerbaijan, which is neither geo-strategically, nor economically, nor politically beneficial. Russia. In an interview, Russian President Vladimir Putin, when asked about the non-participation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, replied that the Organization would react only in the event of a direct military attack on the territory of Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh is a disputed territory, moreover, unrecognized in part of the declared its last independence (RIA Novosti 2020). However, at the same time, the Collective Security Treaty Organization allows Armenia to use its preferences in terms of the purchase of weapons, moreover, the main supplier of which is Russia. Thus, according to experts, over the past ten years, 94 percent of the weapons supplied to Armenia were of Russian origin. At the same time, the supply of weapons by Russia to Armenia is carried out on a gratuitous basis or on terms of preferential crediting. Armenia received from Russia such weapons as S-300 air defense systems, Tor air defense systems, Iskander OTRK and Su-30 fighters. The total cost of acquired weapons over the past ten years has exceeded US \$ 5 billion. At the same time, Russia also, as mentioned above, provides loans to Armenia to pay off the cost of weapons purchases. For example, in 2015, Russia provided Armenia with a \$ 200 million loan to purchase Russian weapons, which were delivered in 2018. The fact that

Russia supplies Armenia with weapons was ambiguously assessed by the international community and experts in view of Russia's positioning as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev commented on this fact: "Those who demand observance of the ceasefire regime are arming Armenia. I have a list specific list. Why are those who verbally advocate a truce supply arms?" (Aynur Asgarli 2020). However, at the same time, Russia is also one of the main suppliers of weapons to Azerbaijan. So, according to 2018 data, Azerbaijan purchased Russian weapons worth \$ 5 billion. However, unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan does not enjoy the privileges of purchasing weapons. Nevertheless, more than 22 percent of Azerbaijan's weapons fall on the purchase of Russian weapons. Thus, proceeding from this state of affairs, it can be said that for Russia the continuation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was accompanied by "profitable" commercial deals on the sale of its weapons to both sides of the conflict, where it is possible to trace the motives based on the theory of realism. However, after the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement in 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as a change in the status quo of the conflict in connection with territorial changes in the conflict zone, experts assume that the previous volumes of arms supplies by Russia to Armenia and Azerbaijan will be reduced (Valchenko 2020).

Thus, in this chapter of the Master of Thesis, an attempt was made to analyze the main probable reasons why Russia chose the role of a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the perspective of a realist approach, namely, using its strength and following its own interests. Historical, geostrategic, economic and political reasons have become the main reasons behind Russia's mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Conclusion

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a flurry of political and economic upheavals for the countries of the post-Soviet space. Territorial and ethnic conflicts have become one of the big problems for the countries of the former Soviet Union, when the growth of ethno-territorial problems, the embryos of which persisted for many decades and even centuries, with the acquisition of state independence, simply burst out with such force that they turned into violent clashes and full-scale wars.

The ethno-territorial conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan became an example of such a test in the post-Soviet space. The causes of the conflict originated many centuries ago, for many centuries this conflict was contained to varying degrees, including during the Soviet period, but the collapse of Soviet power in the region became a trigger for the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from local to international, from single clashes to full-scale war. The strategic importance of the South Caucasus region, the building of relations with independent Armenia and Azerbaijan, the possibility of escalating the conflict beyond its flare-up zone, numerous human casualties and the inability of the conflicting parties to reach a consensus on the settlement of the conflict demanded attention and assistance from external actors. Since the beginning of the conflict in the early 1990s, there have been several attempts at mediation by Kazakhstan and Iran, for example, but they have not achieved the desired result. Only in the 2000s did the European Union come up with initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict, but also without much efficiency. Great hopes were pinned on the OSCE Minsk Group as the main mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, however, it also faced difficulties in achieving significant results in resolving the conflict.

From the very beginning of the conflict in the early 1990s, Russia took a rather active position as a mediator. It was her mediation actions that contributed to the achievement of a ceasefire agreement between the warring parties in 1994, 2006, 2020. Russia has repeatedly sought to achieve agreements between the parties on the exchange of prisoners of war, humanitarian goals. Thus, Russia can rightfully be considered as a fairly effective mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, considering mediation in Russia from a critical angle, one can see some reasons for its decision to be an active mediator of this conflict, which refers to the consideration of mediation through the prism of realism of the theory that mediation can be used as a means of achieving one's own interests and goals.

Thus, in the course of the analysis, such findings were achieved as historical reasons contributed to the involvement of Russia as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. Since Russia for centuries, represented by its predecessors, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, had direct access to control of the South Caucasus region as a whole, moreover, it in particular acted as a hegemon, the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus the loss of its former control forced Russia look for other sources of control in the region.

Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a means of ensuring its presence in the region could become a beneficial role for Russia. Moreover, the South Caucasus region, like other parts of the post-Soviet space, after the end of the Soviet Union, experienced a political vacuum in the sphere of external influence of the large players in the region. Thus, Russia, due to the role of mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, filled part of the resulting vacuum, preventing other external actors from doing this.

Another reason for Russia's participation as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could be the provision of the internal security of its federation. Russia, which has in its federation the states of the North Caucasus, where, especially in the early 1990s, clashes were observed, ensuring control over the situation in the South Caucasus, in particular in Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby favourably influencing the situation in the North Caucasus. Allowing an escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could lead to big problems in the North Caucasus as well.

Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became important for Russia to build relations with the already independent Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is obvious that Russia was striving to create intergenerational processes between the countries of the former Soviet Union. Armenia is more susceptible to them, and also more dependent on Russia economically and energetically than Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan is also important for Russia economically. Thus, it was extremely important for Russia to maintain good and economically beneficial relations with both sides of the conflict. Therefore, the role of a mediator also contributed to not accepting the position in the conflict of either side, thereby maintaining beneficial relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, the sale of weapons to both sides also benefits Russia. Thus, the existence of such a conflict is to some extent also beneficial for Russia.

The status quo of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been maintained for over twenty years since the parties to the conflict signed a ceasefire agreement. The status quo allowed Russia to maintain its position in the region and pursue its interests, while acting as a mediator.

However, the events of November 2020 canceled the status quo, which had existed for such a long time that it cannot but affect Russia's position in the region and

the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a whole. For example, until November 2020, Armenia actually controlled most of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was to some extent more comfortable for Russia, since Armenia is more subject to Russia. However, the balance of power has now shifted in favor of Azerbaijan. Moreover, Turkey actively participated in the last major military operations, supporting the Azerbaijani troops. This creates a potential threat for Russia to disrupt its previous presence in the region in the future. Moreover, given that in political terms and with Armenia, Russia has some problems, since the current Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan is also quite Western-oriented in his policy. Such facts will also force Russia, I believe, to reconsider its strategy of presence in the region. And Russia has already doing it. For example, experts believe that Armenia's "defeat" in the 2020 war can be used by Russia as a fact that Armenia absolutely needs Russian protection. In part of Azerbaijan, Russia, for example, did not use its radar installations to track Azerbaijani drones during hostilities, which also showed Azerbaijan's military necessity in Russia (Minzarari 2020). That is, Russia is experimenting with other approaches in connection with the changed status quo of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. But, most importantly, from my point of view, Russia will maintain its role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to preserve its own interests in the South Caucasus, including, moreover, the conduct of a peacekeeping contingent of Russian troops into the conflict zone has become an event that will strengthen Russia's position in the region and thus will give the latter access to continue to ensure its presence in the region and pursue its own goals and interests.

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