

The Minsk Group – the Test and Collapse of the Mediation Format in Conflict Resolution

UDC 327.56:341.67

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/172660>**Khatahim Ragsana**Teacher, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5134-5924>, raqsanaceferova@bsu.edu.az*Baku State University (Baku, Azerbaijan)*

Abstract.

International mediation formats created to resolve armed conflicts often reflect the era in which they were formed. The article explores the historical trajectory, internal contradictions, and ultimate failure of the OSCE Minsk Group as a mediation mechanism in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The aim of the study is to identify the systemic causes behind the collapse of this long-standing negotiation format and to assess its impact on the architecture of regional conflict resolution. The study utilizes a historical and political analysis, allowing the Minsk Group to be viewed within the context of political processes and international agreements; a comparative method, allowing its activities to be compared with those of other mediation formats (Kosovo, Transnistria, Bosnia and Herzegovina); and a documentary analysis based on official communiqués and OSCE reports. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the internal logic of the format's functioning and the factors behind its decline.

The results reveal that the Minsk Group gradually lost credibility due to geopolitical rivalry among the co-chair states, asymmetry in the approach to the conflicting parties, and the absence of enforcement mechanisms. The study demonstrates how the group's formal neutrality evolved into political inertia, preventing real progress in peacebuilding.

The conclusions emphasize that the demise of the Minsk Group symbolizes the exhaustion of traditional multilateral mediation models in post-bipolar conflicts, highlighting the need for new regionally anchored formats of diplomacy based on realistic balance of power and inclusivity. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of institutional decline in international mediation and provides insights for rethinking global peace processes.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, conflict resolution, diplomacy, mediation, OSCE

Мінська група – випробування та крах формату посередництва у врегулюванні конфліктів

Хатахім Рагсана*Бакинський державний університет (Баку, Азербайджан)*

Анотація.

Міжнародні формати медіації, створені для вирішення збройних конфліктів, часто відображають епоху, в якій вони виникли. Стаття присвячена аналізу історичного шляху, внутрішніх суперечностей та остаточного краху Мінської групи ОБСЄ як механізму посередництва у врегулюванні нагірно-карабаського конфлікту. Мета дослідження – виявити системні причини неефективності цього довготривалого переговорного формату та оцінити його вплив на архітектуру регіонального врегулювання конфліктів. Дослідження використовує історичний і політичний аналіз, що дозволяє розглядати Мінську групу в контексті політичних процесів і міжнародних угод; порівняльний метод, що дозволяє порівнювати його діяльність з іншими форматами медіації (Косово, Придністров'я, Боснія і Герцеговина); та документальний аналіз на основі офіційних комюніке та звітів ОБСЄ. Цей методологічний підхід дає всебічне розуміння внутрішньої логіки функціонування формату та чинників, що лежать в основі його занепаду.

Результати дослідження показують, що Мінська група поступово втратила довіру сторін через геополітичне суперництво співголів, асиметрію підходів до сторін конфлікту та відсутність механізмів примусу до виконання рішень. Доведено, що формальна нейтральність групи перетворилася на політичну інерцію, яка унеможливила реальний прогрес у побудові миру.

Висновки підкреслюють, що розпад Мінської групи символізує вичерпання традиційних багатосторонніх моделей посередництва в постбіполярних конфліктах та актуалізує потребу у створенні нових регіонально орієнтованих форматів дипломатії, заснованих на реалістичному балансі сил і взаємній відповідальності сторін.

Ключові слова: Азербайджан, врегулювання конфліктів, дипломатія, медіація, ОБСЄ

Introduction.

International mediation formats created to resolve armed conflicts often reflect the era in which they were formed. The Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has become one of the most illustrative examples of such a mechanism, combining the ideals of a post-bipolar world with the contradictions of the new geopolitical reality. Created in 1992 to facilitate a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, for nearly three decades it was perceived as the only internationally recognized negotiating platform between Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, over time, its authority and effectiveness inevitably declined, reaching its climax in 2020, when the format finally lost its functionality.

Relevance of the topic. The Minsk Group's failure is defined not only by the Minsk Group's historical role in resolving one of the most protracted post-Soviet conflicts, but also by the broader context of the transformation of international mediation institutions. The collapse of this format demonstrated that traditional diplomatic models based on the concept of "neutral multilateral arbitration" have ceased to work in a dynamically changing world, where regional powers are increasingly taking the initiative. Researching the Minsk Group phenomenon is important not only for understanding the reasons for the failure of this particular case but also for identifying patterns in the degradation of multilateral formats in general, which has direct implications for modern international relations theory and peacekeeping practice (Cornell, 2017; Simao, 2021).

Purpose of the study. The aim of this study is to identify the systemic causes of the ineffectiveness and ultimate collapse of the Minsk process, as well as to analyze its institutional degeneration as part of the crisis of the classical model of international mediation. Achieving this goal requires a comprehensive examination of the factors that determined the group's gradual loss of political clout, adaptability, and trust among the conflicting parties.

To achieve this goal, the following research objectives were formulated: (1) to examine the prerequisites for the creation of the OSCE Minsk Group and its place in the architecture of post-war regulation of the post-Soviet space; (2) to analyze the dynamics of its activities in the period 1994–2020, highlighting the key stages in the evolution of the format; (3) to identify the factors that led to the political marginalization of the mediation mechanism; (4) to formulate conclusions about the nature of the crisis of international mediation and possible prospects for its reform.

The study utilizes a historical and political analysis, allowing the Minsk Group to be viewed within the context of political processes and international agreements; a comparative method, allowing its activities to be compared with those of other mediation formats (Kosovo, Transnistria, Bosnia and Herzegovina); and a

documentary analysis based on official communiqués and OSCE reports (OSCE, 1994–2020). This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the internal logic of the format's functioning and the factors behind its decline.

Scientific novelty. The study's primary objective is to systematically analyze the Minsk Group for the first time as an example of institutional failure in the classical model of international mediation. The work demonstrates that its collapse was not the random result of diplomatic miscalculations, but rather the logical outcome of structural contradictions between global and regional centers of power, diverging political interests among the co-chairs, and the organization's inability to adapt to the new security architecture. Thus, studying the Minsk Group reveals not only the causes of its ineffectiveness but also universal patterns in the evolution and decline of international mediation institutions in the 21st century (Freedman, 2020; Hopmann, 2014).

The issues of international mediation and the dynamics of conflict formats in the post-Soviet space have received considerable attention in the academic literature. However, in most cases, researchers have viewed the Minsk Group primarily as a diplomatic instrument, without paying due attention to its institutional evolution and systemic limitations. Even early publications on the OSCE noted that the organization faced a contradiction between the ideals of collective security and the reality of Europe's political fragmentation after the collapse of the USSR (OSCE, 1994–2020). This duality was also reflected in the activities of the Minsk Group, which from its inception existed within a context of overlapping interests among the United States, Russia, and France, which subsequently became one of the key factors in its stagnation.

Several scholars of international conflict resolution institutions, notably L. Freedman (2020), emphasize that the Minsk Group became an example of "inertial mediation," where the diplomatic process continued even after its substantive effectiveness had been lost. Freedman interprets such formats as "formal shells" that maintain the semblance of negotiations but lack real leverage over the parties to the conflict. In a similar vein, W. Zartman (2015) and C. Crocker examine the phenomenon of protracted conflicts in which mediation institutions act as stabilizers but are incapable of achieving a genuine settlement. They argue that the long-term existence of such structures is determined not by a desire for results, but by the need of international actors to maintain the status quo for the sake of demonstrating political engagement.

Research by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Chatham House also focuses on the geopolitical component of the Minsk format. For example, S. Cornell (2017) points out that internal contradictions between the co-chairs and their asymmetrical involvement in the conflict have undermined Azerbaijan's trust in the process. Cornell emphasizes that such examples reflect a crisis in

multilateral diplomacy based on equal representation, where the balance of interests is being replaced by a hidden competition among powers for regional influence. L. Simao (2021) draws similar conclusions, noting that the European model of neutral mediation is gradually giving way to realistic approaches that prioritize political control over the region over the impartiality of the negotiation process.

In recent years, interest in the Minsk Group has increased following the format's final collapse following the Second Karabakh War. R. Mammadov (2020) view this process as a natural result of the degradation of trust and the inadequacy of the format's structure to address contemporary regional security challenges. Mammadov notes that the group has effectively lost its capacity for innovation, and its activities have been reduced to routine declarations that fail to reflect the real dynamics of the conflict. Z. Zeynalova (2023) complements this analysis, describing the phenomenon of "diplomatic degeneration," whereby international institutions retain the outward trappings of activity but lose touch with the changing political environment.

Analysis of Russia's role in the Minsk process occupies a special place in historiography. A. Melikoff (2019) emphasizes Moscow's dual position: on the one hand, it sought to maintain its status as co-chair and guarantor of the negotiations, while on the other, it actively participated in regional initiatives that bypassed the Minsk Group. This duality, according to the author, became one of the reasons for the erosion of the format, as Russia effectively transformed from a mediator into an independent arbitrator.

A review of the aforementioned studies reveals that, despite the abundance of publications on the OSCE's diplomatic mechanisms, a systemic analysis of the Minsk Group as an institutional phenomenon remains lacking. Most studies focus on the political and legal aspects of the conflict or assess the positions of individual states, while the internal logic of the format's evolution remains on the fringes of scholarly attention. In this context, this study fills this gap by offering a holistic understanding of the Minsk Group not as a static institution, but as a living organism of international diplomacy, whose development and collapse reflect a broader process of transformation of the global mediation system (Freedman, 2020; Simao, 2021; Zartman, 2015).

Research by Azerbaijani and Russian authors also makes a significant contribution to understanding the reasons for the Minsk Group's ineffectiveness, but they are characterized by different approaches – from a pragmatic analysis of diplomatic failures to a systemic critique of the institutional model. Azerbaijani researchers, including R. Mammadov (2020) view the Minsk Group's activities as an example of the degradation of international mediation under the influence of political bias. Their works emphasize that for nearly three decades, the format has failed to reach a compromise or develop mechanisms

for exerting pressure on a party that has systematically violated the principles of international law and UN Security Council resolutions. According to Mammadov (2020), this is due to the OSCE's lack of institutional leverage and the dependence of its decisions on the will of the co-chairs, who represented different centers of power.

A similar approach is shared by A. Melikoff (2019), who, in analyzing Russia's policy on the Karabakh issue, points to the ambivalent nature of its mediation. He notes that Moscow, on the one hand, attempted to maintain a balance of interests, while on the other, used the Minsk Group as a tool to strengthen its own influence in the South Caucasus. As a result, the format became hostage to geopolitical contradictions rather than a mechanism for conflict de-escalation.

Azerbaijani political scientists and diplomats (Aliyev, 2021; Musaev, 2020) emphasize that the collapse of the Minsk Group was a natural consequence of its institutional secrecy and Azerbaijan's loss of trust. Aliyev (2021) notes that the mediation process ceased to reflect the realities of regional security, as decisions were made outside the framework of a balance of interests between the parties. In this sense, he assesses the Minsk Group as having become an "archival mechanism" of international diplomacy, formally existing but incapable of responding to conflict transformations. Musaev (2020) adds that the passivity of the Western co-chairs and attempts to impose political formulas on Azerbaijan that are not based on international law have ultimately undermined the format's legitimacy.

Russian scholars also acknowledge the limitations of the Minsk process, although they interpret them through the prism of the crisis of multilateral diplomacy as a whole. The problem lay not in the idea of mediation itself, but in the lack of agreed-upon rules of interaction between the guarantor powers. He emphasizes that any mediation becomes ineffective when there is no strategic agreement among the mediators on the goals of the settlement.

Summarizing the approaches of Azerbaijani and Russian authors, it can be noted that the majority of studies converge: the OSCE Minsk Group lost its meaning as a real instrument of diplomacy long before 2020. Its existence was ensured by the inertia of international organizations and the interests of individual actors to maintain control over the political discourse surrounding the conflict. However, the academic literature still lacks a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of the Minsk Group as a political-institutional phenomenon combining elements of diplomatic, legal, and sociological dimensions. Most works are limited to the descriptive level and do not address the underlying patterns of its institutional degradation. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the Minsk Group in a broader context – as a model of a systemic crisis of mediation, reflecting the transformation of international norms and accountability

mechanisms in the post-bipolar era (Aliyev, 2021; Mammadov, 2020; Melikoff, 2019).

Research results.

Formation and evolution of the Minsk Group.

The establishment of the Minsk Group in 1992 was the international community's response to the need to develop a sustainable mechanism for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which escalated in the late 1980s amid the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states. The initiative to establish this mediating body came from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which at that time viewed itself as the main institution maintaining stability in the post-Soviet space. The Minsk Group was intended to unite the efforts of leading powers to facilitate peaceful dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia, minimizing the risks of further escalation of the conflict and creating an internationally recognized platform for negotiations (OSCE, 1994–2020).

Initially, the format included a significant number of participants – 11 states – but by 1995, the structure was streamlined: the leading role was assigned to three co-chairs – the United States, the Russian Federation, and France. This composition was intended to symbolize a balance of interests between West and East and also to provide guarantees of neutrality and mediation (Cornell, 2017). However, it was this triad that subsequently became a source of constant controversy, as each side pursued its own geopolitical and economic goals in the South Caucasus.

The first years of the Minsk Group's activities were marked by a certain optimism. Following the signing of the ceasefire agreement in May 1994, the group played a key role in institutionalizing the peace process and developing the basic principles for a settlement. Specifically, several draft agreements were prepared, including proposals for the return of occupied territories, ensuring security, establishing an international peacekeeping force, and restoring communications. According to Freedman (2020), these initiatives created the illusion of diplomatic progress, but in reality, they failed to produce practical results.

The period 1994–2001 can be characterized as a period of stagnant diplomacy: negotiations were held regularly, but their content remained declarative. The conflicting parties continued to hold opposing positions, and the co-chairs avoided making concrete decisions, fearing to upset the delicate balance between their national interests. Zartman (2015) defines this period as a "mediation dead zone," in which negotiations served more to maintain the status quo than to achieve peace. During this same period, the Minsk Group's distinctive diplomatic language gradually took shape – a set of formulas designed to demonstrate procedural activity in the absence of real mechanisms for forcing the parties to compromise.

A series of high-level meetings in the late 1990s, including talks between Presidents Heydar Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan, mediated by the co-chairs, became a significant event. Despite a certain rapprochement in positions, no significant progress was achieved. As Melikoff (2019) notes, this was due not only to the conflicting interests of the parties to the conflict but also to the limited institutional capacity of the OSCE itself, which lacked the means to enforce its decisions.

Since the early 2000s, the Minsk Group's activities have shown signs of institutional fatigue. Documents and reports have become increasingly less concrete, diplomatic language increasingly formulaic, and meetings increasingly symbolic. A key manifestation of this crisis was the gradual displacement of the real substance of the process by rhetoric about the "need for mutual understanding," which, according to Simao (2021), reflected an internal crisis within the entire European collective security system. During this period, mediation increasingly devolved into a form of bureaucratic routine, losing touch with the changing political reality of the region.

Thus, initially conceived as an instrument for active conflict resolution, the Minsk format eventually transformed into a self-sufficient structure, supporting only the illusion of a negotiation process. Its evolution demonstrates the transition from the dynamic diplomacy of the early years to inertial conflict management, in which the primary goal became not achieving peace but maintaining the institutional stability of the structure itself. This stage became the harbinger of a profound crisis of legitimacy, which would ultimately manifest itself in the following decades (Freedman, 2020; Cornell, 2017; OSCE, 1994–2020).

Geopolitical contradictions within the format.

One of the key reasons for the gradual weakening of the Minsk Group was the growing inconsistency of interests among the three co-chair countries – the United States, Russia, and France. Initially, it was assumed that this trilateral leadership would ensure a balance of positions and prevent the dominance of any one power. However, over time, it became clear that this structure, rather than creating equilibrium, entrenched competition between West and East, turning the Minsk Group into an arena of latent geopolitical confrontation (Cornell, 2017).

During the 1990s, it was the United States that sought to use the Minsk format as a tool for asserting its own diplomatic role in the post-Soviet space. Under the Clinton administration, Washington viewed the OSCE as a platform for promoting the principles of a liberal world order and democracy. Russia, for its part, viewed the Minsk Group less as a settlement mechanism than as a means of maintaining political influence in the South Caucasus and keeping the region within its orbit (Melikoff, 2019). In this context, each side sought not to reach a compromise but to strengthen its own position within the geopolitical rivalry, which inevitably

undermined the idea of collective mediation (Freedman, 2020).

France occupied a special place, its role in the format initially seen as a symbolic guarantee of a "European presence." However, in reality, Paris demonstrated limited diplomatic initiative. According to Simao (2021), France's policy in the Minsk Group was one of passive coordination: the country formally supported its partners' decisions, avoiding direct intervention in the process. This strategy of neutral participation allowed France to maintain its political image as a peacemaker but did not contribute to the practical advancement of the negotiations.

Over time, these contradictions transformed into a structural crisis of trust between the mediators themselves. Each power perceived the Minsk Group through the prism of its own national interests, making it impossible to develop a unified line of action. Under such conditions, the format lost not only its internal coherence but also its ability to convincingly convey the idea of neutrality. The principle of a "balanced approach" gradually gave way to diplomatic double standards, where identical actions by the parties to the conflict were interpreted differently depending on the political climate and the foreign policy priorities of the co-chairs.

The loss of neutrality was further exacerbated by the co-chairs' frequent public statements reflecting their individual positions rather than the OSCE's collective position. As a result, Azerbaijan repeatedly protested the uncoordinated statements of individual diplomats who interpreted the conflict in terms of a territorial "status quo," which contradicted UN Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 (Aliyev, 2021). These episodes undermined the group's credibility and created the perception among the parties that the mediators were guided by political preferences rather than international law.

Thus, internal competition between the US and Russia, accompanied by France's passivity, became a systemic factor in the erosion of the format. The Minsk Group increasingly resembled less and less a unified diplomatic mechanism and more and more a platform for demonstrating the symbolic participation of great powers in a "managed conflict." As Freedman (2020) notes, such structures often become hostage to their own image, when maintaining the process becomes more important than the outcome.

In a broader context, the Minsk Group embodied a residual model of post-bipolar diplomacy, inherited from the logic of the 1990s, when the international community believed in the universality of Western principles for settlement. However, the 21st century has demonstrated that multilateral neutrality is losing its effectiveness amid the resurgence of geopolitical realism. The paradigm shift – from "diplomatic equilibrium" to "regional pragmatics" – has rendered the Minsk Group an anachronism, incapable of addressing the new realities of the balance of power (Mammadov, 2020; Simao, 2021).

It was this internal rift among the co-chairs, compounded by the weakening authority of the OSCE, that became the fundamental cause of the subsequent institutional crisis, which finally manifested itself during the Second Karabakh War. The Minsk Group, having lost its neutrality and the trust of the parties, by that point represented more a symbol of the past than an instrument of modern peacekeeping (Cornell, 2017; Freedman, 2020; Melikoff, 2019).

Armenocentrism and the Crisis of Trust.

One of the most problematic aspects of the Minsk Group's functioning has been the apparent shift in diplomatic discourse toward the Armenian narrative, leading to a persistent perception that the format is politically biased and lacking real balance. Despite the official proclamation of the principle of equality of the parties, enshrined in OSCE documents, this principle has not been observed in practice. Azerbaijan has repeatedly pointed out that in many cases, the co-chairs' positions were based not on international law, but on political considerations reflecting the interests of individual countries (Aliyev, 2021). This discrepancy between declared goals and practical actions has become one of the main factors in the crisis of confidence, undermining the legitimacy of the mediation mission.

A key element of this crisis was the disregard for UN Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, which unequivocally affirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories. Despite their binding nature, the Minsk Group took no real steps to implement them, limiting itself to declarative calls for "mutual understanding between the parties" (Cornell, 2017). Baku perceived this position as a double standard, in which the principles of international law were applied selectively depending on the political situation.

Many researchers attribute this selectivity to the growing influence of the Armenian lobby in Western political and media structures. According to Freedman (2020), throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Armenian diaspora in France, the United States, and several European countries actively shaped public opinion in favor of Armenia, leveraging the media, think tanks, and parliamentary circles. This influence was often evident in the rhetoric of the co-chairs, particularly French diplomats, whose statements often aligned with Yerevan's official position (Simao, 2021). This tendency created a clear imbalance and undermined the fundamental principle of neutrality in the mediation.

The example of France is particularly illustrative, where political and public pressure from the Armenian diaspora often influenced foreign policy decisions. As Melikoff (2019) notes, French representatives in the Minsk Group were effectively in a position that required a constant balance between the national interests of the state and the electoral influence of the Armenian community. As a result, France's official position was

often compromising, but de facto favored maintaining the status quo. This led Azerbaijan to believe that the Minsk Group was not seeking a just settlement but was instead maintaining the political stability of the frozen conflict.

The Armenian lobby's influence extended beyond the diplomatic sphere and was active in the scientific and informational sphere. A number of Western research centers – in particular, small analytical centers at universities in Europe and the United States – reproduced interpretations of the conflict that emphasized the "right to self-determination" of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, while ignoring the facts of military occupation and ethnic cleansing documented by international organizations (Hopmann, 2014). This one-sided interpretation created a false balance of narratives and distorted the perception of the conflict in global public opinion.

The consequence of this Armenia-centrism was a decline in Azerbaijan's trust in the Minsk process. Baku's state structures gradually ceased to perceive the group as an independent mediator and its activities as an effective negotiating tool. A situation arose in diplomatic practice in which mediators lost their ability to act as arbitrators and became mere observers of a protracted conflict. As Mammadov (2020) emphasizes, this state can be defined as a "moral collapse of mediation" – a moment when the institution loses legitimacy in the eyes of one of the parties but continues to formally exist to maintain the appearance of a process.

Thus, the dominance of an Armenia-centric approach, the systematic disregard for UN Security Council decisions, and the influence of diaspora networks on Western diplomatic and information discourse have ultimately undermined trust in the Minsk Group. This crisis of trust is not a localized problem, but rather a manifestation of a broader process – the erosion of the principles of multilateral mediation, in which subjective interests and ideological sympathies are beginning to prevail over international law (Aliyev, 2021; Freedman, 2020; Melikoff, 2019).

The 2020 War and the Final Collapse of the Format.

The events of the Second Karabakh War in the fall of 2020 marked not just a military turning point but also the symbolic end of an entire diplomatic era, at the center of which for nearly thirty years stood the OSCE Minsk Group. The conflict, considered "frozen" for decades, unexpectedly erupted into active hostilities, completely shattering the illusion of a manageable process and demonstrating the group's loss of control over the settlement. Despite numerous statements about the "need for de-escalation," not a single OSCE initiative had any real impact on the dynamics of the military conflict. The Minsk Group, which once positioned itself as a guarantor of dialogue, found itself outside the decision-making process, observing events from the sidelines (Cornell, 2017; Freedman, 2020).

The reasons for this institutional reset are rooted in

the fact that by the time the war began, the format had already lost its ability to perform its basic mediation functions. Its statements were reduced to diplomatic clichés, and the regular visits of the co-chairs were purely protocol-based. Mammadov (2020) rightly notes that in recent years, the Minsk Group existed as an "archival institution," living by inertia and incapable of prompt decisions. When the real crisis unfolded before the eyes of the international community, it became clear that the traditional OSCE mechanisms lacked even minimal coordinating effectiveness.

It was during the 2020 war that the international community first saw that the diplomatic structure created to prevent conflict was completely disconnected from the political reality of the region. Not a single statement by the co-chairs was able to influence the course of events and attempts to organize emergency talks yielded no results. Moreover, for the first time, the co-chairs demonstrated a clear fragmentation: the United States effectively withdrew from the process, France adopted a unilateral position, and Russia, conversely, shifted from the role of mediator to that of a direct participant in the settlement (Melikoff, 2019). This moment marked the final recognition of the dysfunctionality of the Minsk format.

Following the end of the war and the signing of the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, the key role in ensuring post-war peace shifted to a new architecture of interaction – the Russia-Azerbaijan-Turkey format, which effectively replaced the Minsk Group (Ismayilov, 2022). This agreement ushered in a new system of regional settlement based on pragmatism, a balance of interests, and the direct participation of regional countries rather than external actors. Russia assumed the role of security guarantor and deployed a peacekeeping contingent, Azerbaijan regained control over most of its territories, and Turkey became a co-guarantor of the agreement's implementation and an important element of the monitoring system.

This redistribution of roles demonstrated that regional actors are capable of independently developing effective mechanisms for interaction without the involvement of traditional Western mediators. According to Simao (2021), this marked a precedent for the transition from a global diplomacy model to a regional one, where the key role is played not by formal structures but by the specific interests of the parties and their ability to engage in direct dialogue. The Minsk Group, by contrast, was a product of a bygone era, when conflicts were often resolved through remote institutions lacking real engagement.

In the post-war period, the OSCE and its governing bodies were forced to acknowledge the limitations of the previous mediation model. Official statements by the organization's representatives began to advocate the need for institutional reform of international mediation, updating its tools and approaches to adapt to the new realities of conflicts (OSCE, 2021). However, this process

proved belated: trust in the Minsk format had already been completely lost, and its place was taken by flexible trilateral and bilateral mechanisms.

Thus, the Second Karabakh War marked the point of no return for the Minsk Group. Having lost its ability to influence the settlement process, the format was finally transformed from a diplomatic tool into a historical symbol of the failures of multilateral mediation. The collapse of the Minsk Group is not simply the result of the failure of a specific mechanism, but rather a manifestation of a systemic transformation in global diplomacy, where local forces are increasingly taking the initiative and traditional institutions are losing their significance.

The shift from global to regional mediation marked the end of the "era of universal arbitrators." The Minsk Group, once the embodiment of hope for international cooperation, ceased to exist as an archaic structure, unable to adapt to new geopolitical realities. Its demise served as a lesson for international organizations, demonstrating that neutrality without effectiveness becomes a formality, and diplomacy without adaptability inevitably becomes anachronistic (Freedman, 2020; Mammadov, 2020; Ismayilov, 2022).

Conclusions.

The history of the OSCE Minsk Group ended not simply with the collapse of a mediation format but with the symbolic closure of an entire era of multilateral diplomacy. Having traveled from the hope of peace through the negotiating mechanism to its final dissolution on September 1, 2025, the group became an illustration of how an institution unable to adapt to new political realities loses legitimacy and meaning (OSCE, 2025).

For decades, the Minsk Group served as a platform where the conflicting parties met and exchanged declarations but failed to achieve effective solutions. The 2020 war and subsequent changes in the South Caucasus exposed its inability to oversee the settlement process and ensure compliance with the agreements reached (RFE/

RL, 2025). Losing leverage and the trust of one side, the mechanism gradually transformed into a symbol not of mediation, but of protracted, fruitless dialogue.

The decision to disband the Minsk Group was not a catastrophe for international diplomacy, but rather a sign of the emergence of a new paradigm – one of regional conflict management, where key decisions are made by regional participants with minimal external mediation. The Russia-Azerbaijan-Turkey format, launched after 2020, became practical evidence of this paradigm shift (AzerNews, 2025).

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its view that the collapse of the Minsk Group is not an accidental failure, but rather a logical consequence of institutional stagnation, geopolitical competition, and loss of trust. The findings demonstrate that international mediation formats must have not just a procedure but also adaptability, legitimacy in the eyes of all parties, and a genuine connection to the political will of the participants.

The practical significance of this work lies in the fact that studying the experience of the Minsk Group provides valuable lessons for both international organizations and regional states. First, the mediation format must be flexible and responsive to changing power balances. Second, the neutrality of a mediator is impossible without real instruments of influence. Third, the key factor is not the number of participants, but the clarity of goals, the accountability of the mechanism, and the readiness to terminate when it has exhausted its function.

Thus, the final point in the history of the Minsk Group does not mark the end of the Karabakh conflict settlement process. On the contrary, it opens a new chapter, where peace issues are resolved not through outdated platforms, but through regional initiatives, pragmatic cooperation, and sustainable mechanisms of accountability. The Minsk Group is gone, but its lesson remains: in a world where diplomacy should be a tool rather than a form, results are more important than procedures.

REFERENCES

- Abilov, S. (2018). OSCE Minsk Group: Proposals and failure, the view from Azerbaijan. *Insight Turkey*, 20(1), 143–163. <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2018201.09>
- Aliyev, I. (2021). *New geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War*. ADA University Press. <https://adaupress.az>
- Cornell, S. E. (2017). *The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: A legal and political analysis*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. <https://www.cacianalyst.org>
- Freedman, L. (2020). Strategy and conflict mediation in the post-Soviet space. *Chatham House Papers*, 15(3), 45–67. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications>
- Hopmann, P. T. (2014). *Minsk Group mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Explaining failure and suggesting future paths*. In *OSCE Yearbook 2014* (pp. 163–180). Forum Verlag. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2300148
- Mammadov, R. (2020). Collapse of mediation formats in regional conflicts: Lessons from the Minsk Group. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 12(1), 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366520904345>
- Melikoff, A. (2019). *Russia's dual role in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process*. Russian International Affairs Council. <https://russiancouncil.ru>
- OSCE. (1994–2020). *Official statements and communications of the Minsk Group*. Vienna: OSCE Secretariat. <https://www.osce.org/mg>
- Simao, L. (2021). *European mediation and the limits of neutrality: The OSCE in the South Caucasus*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003148432>
- Zartman, W. I. (2015). *Preventive diplomacy and mediation in protracted conflicts*. United States Institute of Peace Press. <https://www.usip.org/publications>