

AUGUST 2008 LESSONS FOR THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

AĞUSTOS 2008'DEN ÇIKARILACAK KARABAĞ DERSLERİ

Araz ASLANLI

Chairman

QAFSAM – Caucasian Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies

Hazar University Humanitarian and Social Sciences Faculty

aslanly@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The settlement of the Karabakh conflict carries great importance for the future of our region. The conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are the other important ethnic problems in the Caucasus, has for the time being entered a new phase following the August 2008 events. As known, during the war that started on 8 August 2008, Georgia was subjected to the occupation of Russia and following the developments that took place, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with their independences being recognized by Russia and some other countries on the path of entirely detaching from Georgia, and on the condition of entering Russia's full military defense had received many serious de facto results. Moreover, by mentioning the possibilities of the US and Russia coming militarily face to face, scenarios for a "3rd World War" were also brought to the agenda. What took place in August 2008 has shown how serious risks the continuity of non-settlement of ethnic problems in the South Caucasus entails. The existing conditions right before August 2008 in terms of the conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia can also currently be applied for the Karabakh conflict. The region recognized as Azeri territories by the UN and all other international organizations has been occupied by Armenia, peace has not been able to be obtained despite a ceasefire agreement being signed, and the ceasefire is frequently violated. Since the beginning of 2013, Azerbaijan is becoming stronger from the military aspect and expresses that it will not accept the existing situation in any way and that if peaceful methods fail to create solutions, then it could appeal to military means (will use its right to self-defense) in order to defend their legal rights. If a close combat starts in the region, its consequences can flow beyond what is foreseen. What is in question is not only regional destruction, human tragedies being experienced or regional and global projects being performed through the South Caucasus on economics, transportation and other aspects being harmed. In case of a war being rekindled between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the possibility of allies of both countries being drawn into the war is also quite high. In this paper, a comparative evaluation of the current situation of the Karabakh conflict, its settlement and the potential for a war will be made in light of what is mentioned above and suggestions will be provided.*

Keywords: *Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, August 2008*

Öz: *Karabağ sorununun çözümü bölgemizin geleceği için büyük bir önem taşımaktadır. Kafkasya'daki diğer önemli etnik problemlerden olan Abhazy ve Güney Osetya anlaşmazlıkları, Ağustos 2008 olaylarından sonra yeni bir döneme girmişlerdir. Bilindiği gibi 8 Ağustos 2008'de başlayan savaş sırasında Gürcistan Rusya'nın işgaline maruz kalmış, ve gelişen olaylardan sonra bağımsızlıkları Rusya ve diğer bazı devletler tarafından tanınan ve Gürcistan'dan tamamen ayrılma yolunda olan Güney Osetya ve Abhazy yasal ve Rusya'nın askeri savunma sistemine katılması şartı ile de birçok ciddi fiili sonuçla karşılaşmışlardır. Ayrıca, ABD ve Rusya'nın askeri anlamda yüz yüze gelme ihtimali belirtilerek, Üçüncü Dünya Savaşı senaryoları gündeme getirilmiştir. Ağustos 2008'de gerçekleşen olay, Güney Kafkasya'daki etnik anlaşmazlıkların çözülmeden devam edilmesinin ortaya çıkarabileceği ciddi riskleri göstermiştir. Güney Osetya ve Abhazy anlaşmazlıklarının Ağustos 2008'den hemen önceki durumu, şu anda Karabağ anlaşmazlığına da uygulanabilir. Birleşmiş Milletler ve diğer tüm uluslararası örgütler tarafından Azerbaycan toprağı olarak tanınan bölge, Ermenistan tarafından işgal edilmiş, bir ateşkes anlaşması imzalanmasına rağmen barış sağlanamamış ve ateşkes anlaşması sık sık ihlal edilmiştir. 2013 yılının başından beri Azerbaycan askeri anlamda daha güçlü hale gelmekte, mevcut durumu hiçbir şekilde kabul etmeyeceğini ve barışçıl yöntemlerin sonuç vermemesi halinde hukuki haklarını koruyabilmek için askeri yollara başvurabileceğini (kendini savunma hakkını kullanabileceğini) belirtmektedir. Eğer bölgede bir sıcak çatışma yaşanırsa bunun sonuçları tahmin edilenden daha ileri boyutlara ulaşabilir. Söz konusu olan sadece bölgesel bir yıkım değildir. İnsani trajediler yaşanabilir veya ekonomi, ulaşım ve diğer alanlarda Güney Kafkasya genelinde gerçekleştirilen bölgesel ve küresel projelerde aksamalar oluşabilir. Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan arasında bir savaş alevlenirse, iki ülkenin müttefiklerinin de bu savaşa sürüklenme olasılığı yüksektir. Bu makalede Karabağ sorununun mevcut durumuna, sorunun çözülmesine ve bir savaşın ortaya çıkması olasılığına dair yukarıda verilen bilgiler ışığında karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirmeye ve bazı tavsiyelere yer verilecektir.*

Anahtar kelimeler: *Karabağ sorunu, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan, Abhazy, Güney Osetya, Ağustos 2008*

Introduction

For the answer to the question of “will conflict or cooperation make its stamp to the future of the Black Sea region”, the settlement of the issue of Azeri territories being occupied by Armenia (commonly known as the Karabakh conflict in short) carries great importance. Similarly, the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as the other ethnic conflicts of the region, have entered a new phase for the time being following the August 2008 events. As can be remembered, small-scale mutual attacks that first started have turned into a war between Georgia and Russia on 8 August 2008; while Georgia has wanted to bring under its control South Ossetia, which declared that it detached from Georgia and claimed independence, had all of a sudden been subjected to the occupation of Russia. During this process, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with their independences being recognized by Russia and some other countries on the path of entirely detaching from Georgia, had received legal and on the condition of entering Russia’s full military defense had received de facto many serious results.

As long as a very serious transformation is not experienced under regional and global conditions, the possibility of these problems to ignite is very low and even if an unexpected development takes place and ignites, it most likely will not bring any serious benefit to the side (and especially if this side is Georgia) that opens the first fire. On the opposite, the first side to open fire can even fall into the situation of paying the costs of its damages to a certain degree. Therefore, the main issue that should be dwelled upon in terms of the region is the Karabakh conflict. Bringing an explanation to how risky a process similar to August 2008 is for the Karabakh conflict carries great significance.

Actually, if we observe the issue more widely, the ending of the Cold War and the events of August 2008 constitute two important stages in terms of evaluating the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus. These two periods have been at a key position in terms of ethnic conflicts arising and the process of their resolution.

Parallel to the Cold War coming to an end and the bipolar world order being abolished, an increase in ethnic conflicts is observed worldwide. Ethnic

The first half of the 1990's has entailed the years in which ethnic problems have been experienced in both geographies as small-scale conflicts and most of the time as war. Ethnic problems emerging in these geographies have carried the feature of both ethnic and religious minority problems as well as policies of expansionism and aggression.

problems emerging especially in the geographies of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia have occupied world agenda since the second half of the 1980's. The first half of the 1990's has entailed the years in which ethnic problems have been experienced in both geographies as small-scale conflicts and most of the time as war. Ethnic problems emerging in these geographies have carried the feature of both ethnic and religious minority problems as well as policies of expansionism and aggression. Just as these problems have caused basic human rights to become insignificant and economic problems to increase in the regions the problems emerged, they have also threatened regional and international security and stability.

One of the issues occupying world agenda the most in this period has been the "issue of Azeri territories being occupied by Armenia" which is commonly known in short as the "Karabakh Conflict". The strategic importance of the Caucasus for countries waging a struggle for global power, energy resources existing in the Caspian basin, the region being situated on international transportation lines and other reasons have made this issue a center of attraction.

On the other hand, it is possible to classify the August 2008 events in some way as the September 11 of the ethnic problems in the Caucasus. According to some interpreters, the events of 2008, that have brought the world to the brink of a 3rd World War, have radically changed some theses that were valid until then. The 2008 events have been the peak of Russia's payback in the former Soviet geography and at the same time have been a significant indication of non-recognition of borders. The US, for not being able to meet the expectations from it, has caused disappointment among Western advocates and has increased the timidity among leaders of the former Soviet republics in regards to hostility against Russia and favoring the West. Following the 2008 events, Russia-Georgia relations came to a breaking point. Similar to the saying of "Iraq must be rescued from Saddam Hussein" used by the US towards Iraq, Russia has declared that "Georgia must be rescued from Saakashvili". Russia has increased its suggestions towards the countries of South Caucasus that "those wanting to do something in the future must learn lessons from these events".

At least as much as other issues, the August 2008 events have also closely influenced the Karabakh conflict that is for now the only issue bringing the two South Caucasus countries directly face to face. Every development that can take place concerning the alternatives of the conflict's resolution to the resolution processes, to every little detail of the processes have been influenced from these events. In terms of resolution, it has caused hopes to rise in some circles, while in some circles it has caused hopelessness to rise.

Especially the bilateral talks held between Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders, initiatives and explanations of the senior officials of international organizations and great powers, developments regarding the issue within the framework of Western countries-Turkey-Armenia, Russia-Azerbaijan-Armenia and Russia-Western countries, allegations that the steps taken especially by Turkey towards the Caucasus in general and towards relations with Armenia in particular will make significant contributions to the resolution process of the Karabakh conflict and the joint declarations signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia through Russia's mediation have caused the view of "the resolution of the Karabakh conflict is very near" to be frequently mentioned. However, Russia's increasing role which is described by many researchers as the "source of the conflict", inconclusiveness being more at the forefront despite the intensity in talks and conflicts, although small-scale, arising on the Azerbaijan-Armenia front line have drawn attention as negative indications.

In general, it is believed that there are serious lessons to be learned from the August 2008 events for the Karabakh conflict. In order to better understand what these lessons to be learned are, the Karabakh conflict will be examined in detail, later on the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be addressed in general terms. Then, the August 2008 events will be summarized very shortly, while in the end views and proposals on the lessons to be learned will be expressed.

THE GENERAL HISTORY OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

Looking at the conflict's history, we see that the first foundations were based on the policies of great powers concerning the region and in this context, the ethnic migrations in the region. Azerbaijani and Armenian¹ population was observed within state structuring found in the region during the former periods, and wars of ethnic origin did not exist. In particular, Russia constantly becoming stronger since the 18th century, attempting to extend its regional domination and to expand to the south, and in this context, requiring state structuring which it could use in the Caucasus as a base have caused this country to implement ethnic activities in regards to the region.

The agreements signed by Russia as a result of the wars with the Ottomans and Iran during the first half of the XIXth century have formed important stages of changing the region's ethnic structure. The Treaty of Turkmenchay signed in 1828 between Russia and Iran has envisaged for hundreds of thousands of Armenians living on Iranian territories to be migrated to the

1 Azerbaijani Turks or Muslim identity have also been expressed.

area of Karabakh which will remain under Russian control and to today's Armenian territories. Moreover, with the Edirne Treaty signed in 1829 between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, approximately 84.000 Armenians have been brought to the area of Karabakh². According to Russian historians, at the end of these processes until the middle of the 1800's, a total of around one million Armenians have been settled in today's Armenian territories and in the Karabakh region³.

After areas where the most Armenians live are formed in the Caucasus, as the second stage an Armenian state has been established in the beginning of the 1900's. The beginning of the 1900's has drawn attention for our issue through two of its features. First of all, during this period, Armenian movements in the north of Turkey and in the Caucasus in general have been supported by foreign powers. Furthermore, another feature that draws attention has been Russia's initiative to weaken the nationalist movements gaining power against the central administration in the Caucasus by bringing them into conflict with each other. The conflicts experienced between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the beginning of the XX'th century have to a great extent developed within this framework and the intellectuals of both communities have shown conscience in assessing the issue from this aspect. Thus, while the conflict was frozen with the region existing within the Soviet Union in the following years, it has constantly been emphasized in evaluations made towards the past, that the Tsarist administration had ignited ethnic conflicts in order to protect itself. However, how bizarre is it that the administrators of the same Soviet Union have not refrained from resorting to the tactics of Tsarist Russia during the dissolution process of the Soviet Union⁴.

Meanwhile, another point that must be dwelled upon is the allegations that "Nagorno-Karabakh supposedly belongs to Armenia and has been given by Stalin to Azerbaijan". The general view of communist administrators or other leaders while the Soviet Union was being formed was that "Karabakh belonged to Azerbaijan and the Armenian population there did not experience great difficulties, but the region was subjected to provocations from the outside". Despite this general conviction, the problem was constantly escalated and scenarios of Karabakh being separated from Azerbaijan were tried to be applied. The RK (b) P Caucasus Bureau (was formed of the communist parties in the Caucasus republics and only one of its seven members was Azerbaijani) convening on 4 July 1921 had first expressed the

2 *Colonial Policy of the Russian Tzarism in Azerbaijan in 20-60s XIX Century, Part I*, Moskow-Leningrad, 1936, pp. 201, 204; Reşid Göyüşov, *Qarabağın Keçmişine Seyahet*, Baku, Azərbaycan Devlet Neşriyyatı, 1993, p. 75.

3 N. N. Şavrov, *Novaya Ugroza Russkomu Delu v Zakavkazie*, Sankt Petersburg, 1911, pp. 59-61.

4 Araz Aslanlı, *Karabakh Problem – History, Essence, Solution Process*, Baku Nurlar Press, 2009, p.14-16.

view that the mountainous area of Karabakh should be given to Armenia, but with the RKP Caucasus Bureau convening again on 5 July 1921 with the participation of representatives from the RK (b) Central Committee, it had conveyed the view that the mountainous area of Karabakh should remain in Azerbaijan. After all assessments were made, upon the suggestion of Orconikidze and Nazaretyan, it was decided for “Nagorno-Karabakh to remain within the borders of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and for the city of Shusha as an administrative center to be given extensive sovereignty based on matters such as the need of national peace between the Muslims and Armenians, the necessity of economic concern of the regions of Highland and Lowland Karabakh, and the permanent connection of the region with Azerbaijan”⁵.

It can clearly be seen from the originals of the decisions of July 4th and 5th that the allegations frequently mentioned in Armenian sources that “Stalin gave Karabakh to Azerbaijan” are initially incorrect, because when looking at the originals, it can be seen that in the statements existing in the drafts submitted to voting it is mentioned that Karabakh or its mountainous area “should be left within Azerbaijan” (“*Karabax ostavit v predalax Azerbaydjana*” in its Russian original) or “to be given to Armenia” (“*Naqornuyu çast Karabaxa vklyuçit v sostav Armenii*” in its Russian original)⁶. But, if the region had been taken from Armenia and given to Azerbaijan, then on the complete opposite it should have been mentioned that it should be “given to Azerbaijan” or to “remain in Armenia”.

Apart from these, in the period since the formation of the Soviet Union until its collapse, a formation named the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region being established within Azerbaijan, the ethnic density of Armenians being obtained within this formation, and comprehensive preparations for the NKAR to join Armenia continuing inside and outside of the Soviet Union have caused conflicts to exacerbate in the region during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In stages, first of all mutual ethnic hostilities have increased and small-scale conflicts have emerged within the Azerbaijan-Armenia border and within the former NKAR geography in Azerbaijan, whereas these conflicts have turned into war since June 1992. Until this period, due to existing administrations in Azerbaijan not having a positive outlook on the establishment of a national army opposite to Armenia possessing such army, Armenian forces have occupied approximately 5% of Azeri territories. The massacre committed in Azerbaijan’s rayon of Khojaly by Armenian forces on 25-26 February 1992 with the support of the Russian

5 Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Geçmişten Günümüze Karabağ Meselesi*, Ankara, Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1995, pp. 136-137.

6 “İz protokola Veçernego Zasedaniya Plenuma KavByuro ÇK RKP (b)”, *Sovyetleri Birliyi Komünist Partii Merkez Komitesi yanında Marksizm-Leninizm Enstitüsü Merkezi Parti Arşivi*, Fond 64, Op. 2, File 1, p. 118.

366th regiment in the region has caused harsh reactions from numerous foreign states and international organizations⁷, but no proceeding has taken place for those committing this massacre.

Azerbaijan has officially declared that the 366th Russian Regiment in Hankendi has participated in the attack⁸, because the most developed conventional weapons have been used in the attack. These have not existed among local groups in the region, but also among Azerbaijani and Armenian armies just starting to be formed. The Russian side has declared as always that it has nothing to do with the attacks, but 3 Russian soldiers who escaped from the regiment mentioned above, in a press conference organized on 3 March 1992 have confessed that “they were brainwashed and it was wanted from them to fight on the side of the Christian Armenians against the Muslim Azerbaijanis”⁹. Years later, in an interview, Armenian President Serj Sarkisian’s statement that the slaughtering of the Azerbaijani civilians was committed consciously was also met with reaction by the writers of Armenian origin¹⁰.

While mutual attacks continued throughout May, the CSCE Council of Foreign Ministers, convening in Helsinki on 24 March 1992, had evaluated the situation in Karabakh and in articles 3-11 of its final declaration, had called for a conference in Minsk of Belarus for the resolution of the conflict. In article 9 of the declaration, as participants of the conference, names of 11 countries consisting of Azerbaijan, Germany, the US, Armenia, Belarus, Sweden, Italy, France, Turkey, and Czech and Slovak Federal Republic have been expressed¹¹. The task of coordinator of the Minsk Conference has been granted to Italy and Italian representative Mario Rafaelli has been appointed as Chairman of the conference. It has been foreseen for the conference to be held in Minsk in July 1992. This initiative of the OSCE has also received support from the UN. In the UN Security Council’s meeting held on 26 March 1992, the decision not to directly intervene in the conflict and to

7 Letter dated 23 April 2002 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights
<http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.Nsf/0/7c3561e40d2d3d07c1256bae00447b7f?Opendocument>; “Nowhere To Hide For Azeri Refugees”, *The Guardian*, 2 September 1993; “The Face Of A Massacre”, *Newsweek*, 16 March 1992; “Massacre By Armenians”, *The New York Times*, 3 March 1992; Thomas Goltz, “Armenian Soldiers Massacre Hundreds Of Fleeing Families”, *The Sunday Times*, 1 March 1992; “Corpses Litter Hills In Karabakh”, *The Times*, 2 March 1992; Jill Smolowe, “Massacre In Khojaly”, *Time*, 16 March, 1992, “Nagorno-Karabagh Victims Buried In Azerbaijani Town”, *The Washington Post*, 28 February 1992;

8 Araz Aslanlı, “Tarihün Günüümüze Karabağ Sorunu”, *Avrasya Dosyası, Azerbaycan Özel*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 2001, p. 404.

9 *Hürriyet*, 4 March 1992.

10 “Rober Koptaş yazdı: Hocalı sorumluluğu”, *Agos*, 28 February 2013,
<http://www.agos.com.tr/haber.php?seo=rober-koptas-yazdi-hocali-sorumlulugu&haberid=4529> (28 February 2013)

11 CSCE Helsinki Additional Meeting of the CSCE Council 24 March 1992 Summary of Conclusions
<http://www.osce.org/mc/29121> (4 March 2012).

support the OSCE's initiatives was taken¹². The conference has been held under Rafelli's chairmanship with the attendance of representatives of countries to take part in the Minsk Conference in Rome on April 1st 1992. During the same period, the CSCE observation delegation has also visited Baku¹³.

In the conflicts taking place from June 1992-November 1992, Azerbaijani troops have been able to rescue most of the Armenian occupied territories (approximately 3.5 percent) from occupation. However, since the end of 1992, Armenia has turned the war to its own advantage and has increased its occupation of Azeri territories. As a result of the attacks of the Armenian army from 27 March-3 April 1993, Azerbaijan's rayon of Kelbajar has been occupied by Armenia.

The first resolution of the UN Security Council in regards to the conflict has been adopted following this occupation. Resolution 822 has emphasized immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Kelbajar rayon¹⁴. But, with the influence of Armenia's policies of distraction being tolerated by international organizations, this resolution has not been able to be implemented. As a result of this, Armenia has continued to occupy Azeri territories until the end of 1993 and the UN Security Council has continued adopting resolutions that seeks the cessation of these occupations¹⁵.

What remained from 1993 have been the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the UN Security Council's resolutions not implemented, and the OSCE Minsk Group's attempts remaining inconclusive. If we shortly evaluate the UN Security Council's resolutions, one aspect of these resolutions has been their constant emphasis on the inviolability of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Armenia being a party to the conflict and the requirement of immediate and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied territories. The other aspect of the resolutions has been that no issue has been indicated in regards to Armenia not openly being declared as the attacking country (whereas how logical the allegations that Armenians of the region having no army and military supplies had carried out the attacks with planes, tanks and heavy weapons on their own was obvious. Moreover, Azerbaijan being attacked from both sides, from the

12 Manvel Sarkisyan, *Politiçeskie Problemi Kavkaza i Armeniya. Politika Armenii v Regione* (Kafkasların ve Ermenistan'ın Politik Sorunları. Ermenistan'ın Bölge Politikası), Erivan, Armyanskiy Tsentri Strategičeskiy i Natsionalnıx İssledovaniy, 1998, p. 59.

13 Araz Aslanlı, "Türk Dünyasının Kanayan Yarası: Karabağ", *Yeni Türkiye, Türkler Özel Sayısı* 19. vol., p. 200.

14 UN official website, <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1993/822e.pdf> (4 March 2012).

15 [Resolution 853 \(1993\) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3259th meeting, on 29 July 1993](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3b00f15a60)
[Resolution 874 \(1993\) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3292nd meeting, on 14 October 1993](http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f1684.html)
[Resolution 884 \(1993\) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3313th meeting, on 12 November 1993](http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f16520)
<http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3b00f16520> (4 March 2012).

former NKAR and the Armenian border during the occupation of Kelbajar has also been determined through videos) and in regards to the sanctions to be enforced if Armenia does not withdraw from the occupied territories (as in the example of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait). But the result has been Azerbaijan, which suffered from domestic disturbances and failing to obtain sufficient external military assistance, losing approximately 20 percent of its territories and its territorial integrity seriously being threatened. The period of January-March 1994 has passed by with small-scale attacks and the OSCE and Russia's mediating initiatives.

Although Russia is a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, it gave more supremacy to its own plan and believed that this way it would obtain its earlier influence. The most important among Russia's initiatives were the talks held in Moscow on 18 January 1994 between Russian Foreign Minister Kozirev and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Hasanov and held on 20 January 1994 between Kozirev and Hovanisyan, the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Armenia, the talk held on 4 February 1994 in Hungary between the "Nine of Minsk" and the Swedish new chairman of the OSCE Minsk Conference Yana Eliasson, the signing of a protocol following a meeting held in Moscow on 18 February 1994 between the Defense Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, and the visits of the Russian Deputy Defense Secretary and the authorized representative of the president to Baku and Yerevan on 28 February-1 March 1994¹⁶.

On 31 March-3 April 1994, the Kyrgyzstan Supreme Council President as the representative of the CIS Inter-parliamentary Council and the special delegate of the President of Russia have visited Baku, Yerevan and Azerbaijan's city of Hankendi. On April 9, Armenian forces have started a heavy attack on the rayon of Terter that lasted almost a month. During the CIS Presidents summit held on April 15 in Moscow, Presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have met to discuss the issue. Also during the CIS Presidents Summit, a joint statement has been declared regarding "Nagorno-Karabakh and the events surrounding it".

From 26 April-2 May 1994, the OSCE delegation has visited the region. On 4-5 May 1994 the Kyrgyzstan Parliament and Russian Foreign Ministry has brought the heads of parliaments of Armenia and Azerbaijan together in Bishkek within the framework of the CIS Inter-parliamentary Council and the former NKAR has brought the representatives of the Turkish and Armenian populations together. During this meeting, as a step towards peace, the "Bishkek Protocol" has been signed on 5 May 1994¹⁷.

16 Aslanlı, "Tarihten Günümüze Karabağ Sorunu", p. 414.

17 *Xalq Qezeti*, 6 May 1994.

In short, by emphasizing in the protocol that the conflicts in the former NKAR and surrounding areas harms the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities and the other communities of the region, that in the CIS Presidents summit held on 14 April 1994 the halting of armed conflicts and a negotiation being reached is supported, the initiatives of the Inter-parliamentary Council and the CIS in this direction, and that the resolutions adopted by the UN and OSCE for the settlement of the conflict must be implemented (before all, resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of the Security Council), by referring to the protocol signed on 18 February 1994 in Moscow between the Defense Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, it was indicated that since the night passing from May 8 to May 9, a negotiation was reached on the fire being ceased and for some time, refugees being allowed to return to their homes. An agreement concerning the ceasefire was signed on 9 May 1994 between the Defense Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia and the representatives of the separatist Armenian leadership in the NKAR. As of 12 May 1994, the ceasefire regime has started being implemented¹⁸.

In almost all problems and conflicts in the world at important points, the Western world (particularly the US), Russia, and Iran have always supported different sides. In regards to this matter, most likely the issue of Azeri territories being occupied by Armenia (the Karabakh conflict) forms the only exception.

THE “RESOLUTION PROCESS” FOLLOWING THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

With the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement, Armenia’s occupying attacks on Azerbaijan territories and the war between the two countries have officially been suspended. Despite the violation of the ceasefire occurring frequently and sometimes expectations that these violations will turn into war forming in the period since the 1994 ceasefire until the present, the ceasefire situation has continued until today.

Meanwhile, we believe that it would be correct to shortly examine the internal and external factors that allowed Armenia to win the war. In almost all problems and conflicts in the world at important points, the Western world (particularly the US), Russia, and Iran have always supported different sides. In regards to this matter, most likely the issue of Azeri territories being occupied by Armenia (the Karabakh conflict) forms the only exception.

18 RESOLUTION 1047 (1994)1 on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta94/ERES1047.htm> (7 March 2012).

Concerning this issue, perhaps the issue of Azeri territories being occupied by Armenia constitutes the only exception. It is bizarre that during the war, Russia's forces and Armenia to which the West never gave up its financial and moral assistance, also received the support of Iran which they referred to as an "Islamic State". On the opposite, the Turkish Republics and states whose populations are Muslim had not provided the necessary support to Azerbaijan and it was even seen many times that they actually supported Armenia. In terms of internal factors, Armenia was also in a better condition. Opposite to Armenia holding the sole power throughout the war, Azerbaijan had always been the setting for power struggles and the existing powers were unable to fully provide the necessary war setting in the country. One point that specifically needs to be emphasized is that to a great extent Russia determines the fate of the wars in the region. No matter how small and weak one side that is supported militarily and politically by Russia is to the other, its success is inevitable. The chance for Azerbaijan, which during the war took a stance towards Russia and attempted to pursue an independent policy and to some extent possesses the image of a pro-Western country image (when presently compared with Armenia, this maintains its validity to a great extent), to gain victory was naturally very low.

The signing of the ceasefire agreement did not mean that the problem had been resolved. The agreement had a very sensitive composition. Additional steps had to be taken for it to be preserved and also for the resolution of the conflict. The period from 1994 until the present became rich with the steps taken in this direction, but most of these steps generally remained inconclusive. There were several reasons for this and these reasons still prevent any kind of peace treaty from being signed.

First of all, public opinions of both countries have always approached the issue of making concessions coldly. The Azeri population argues that the region legally and historically belongs to them. On the other hand, the Armenian population is using the advantage of holding the territories -although through occupation- in its own hands and does not want to let go of the Karabakh region which it sees as a part of "Great Armenia". Armenia had the open support of countries in the region, including Russia's soldiers, and was also supported by Iran. However, Azerbaijan, although not as strong as Russia, was receiving Turkey's support in all other areas besides its full open military support. Another important factor was that Azerbaijan owned natural wealth, whereas Armenia possessed a strong lobby in Western states. Law was on Azerbaijan's side, while Western public opinion was on Armenia's.

In order for the conflict to reach a settlement, the separate efforts of states and those of international organizations have continued in an intensive manner after the ceasefire.

In many international conferences, whether at the summits of CIS and OSCE or including meetings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference held after the ceasefire, or during the visits of Co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group to the region or in almost all talks held by the authorities of both countries with the authorities of foreign countries, the Karabakh conflict has taken its place on the agenda and efforts towards its resolution have been conveyed. Various countries have expressed their proposals for mediation, while these proposals have been received differently by the parties. But the most important part of the initiatives towards the conflict's resolution has been constituted within the group framework of the three countries (US, Russia, France) holding OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship and by their individual efforts. The Co-chairmen have visited the region many times, have held talks with the country's officials regarding suggestions for a solution, have made inspections at the borders and have prepared special declarations for OSCE summits concerning the situation of the conflict. At the first stage, 3 proposals for a solution have been presented by the co-chairmen (peace treaty draft), but since one of them was not accepted by Azerbaijan and the other two were not accepted by Armenia, no negotiation was able to be reached.

These three proposals that had been kept hidden for a long time were named "Package Deal", "Step-by-Step Deal" and "Common State Deal" respectively. Although generally entailing the same provisions, the proposals have also carried significant contrasts. By bringing economic factors to the fore in all three proposals, it has been expressed that peace is necessary for the development of the region, increase of living standards and for foreign investment to arrive to the region. The proposals foresee a Permanent Mixed Commission for the settlement of problems that can arise between Azerbaijan and its region of Nagorno-Karabakh and an Azerbaijan-Armenia Bilateral (or Intergovernmental) Commission to be established. Furthermore, all three proposals emphasize that Armenian armed forces must withdraw to within the borders of Armenia and at the same time indicate that the security forces and police of Azerbaijan cannot enter within the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh without the permission of its authorities.

The first proposal named "Package Deal" brought forth on 17 July 1997 envisaged all the important points concerning the resolution of the conflict¹⁹. According to this, the two agreements must be signed, where one of them would establish the conditions of peace and the other would determine the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Here, Nagorno-Karabakh is defined as a

19 "Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişesinin aradan qaldırılmasına dair herterefli saziş", *Azərbaycan*, 21 Şubat 2001; "Minsk Group proposal ('package deal')": http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord17_22Keytextsandagreements_2005_ENG.pdf (3 Mart 2013)

governmental institution within Azerbaijan and is indicated that it can possess an army together with police forces.

The “Step-by-Step Deal” presented on 2 December 1997 sought an agreement for first of all peace to be completely settled and conditions for refugees to return to be prepared and then the issues of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and talks on the situation of the Lachin, Shusha and Shaumian cities to be held later on²⁰.

The final proposal submitted on 7 November 1998 and named “Common State Deal” foresaw the formation of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and for this republic to form a common state with Azerbaijan within its borders. In addition, this proposal, compared to the others, conveyed Armenian as the official language of Nagorno-Karabakh and that Nagorno-Karabakh can print its own money if it wishes. Later on in the proposal, articles on the situation of the Lachin corridor and the towns of Shusha and Shaumian and the content and guarantee of the peace treaty were given²¹.

Due to Azerbaijan not accepting the last and Armenia not accepting the first two proposals, as Aliyev expressed in his speech delivered on 23 February 2001 at the Azerbaijani National Assembly, these had become a thing of the past.

Countries Russia, Turkey, Iran and Georgia in the region had, through various occasions, proposed mediation for the settlement of the conflict. From these, the mediations of Russia and Iran had been accepted, Turkey’s proposals had always been turned down by Armenia, while Georgia’s proposals had presumably not been taken seriously. Iran’s proposals following the ceasefire have been rejected this time by Azerbaijan with harsh reactions. Russia has continued its initiatives both through the mutual visits conducted with Armenia and Azerbaijan and also within the framework of the OSCE. In fact, as if to display the importance it attaches to the issue, it has attended all the talks held within the scope of the OSCE Minsk Group not only with its Co-chairman representing the country, but also its Deputy Foreign Minister²².

France has been the country continuing its initiatives for peace the most intensely following the ceasefire. In fact, French President Chirac’s initiatives in 1997 had almost brought the peace treaty. But, L. Ter. Petrosyan being

20 “Dağlıq Qarabağ silahlı münaqişəsinin dayandırılması haqqında saziş”, *Azərbaycan*, 21 Şubat 2001; “Minsk Group proposal (‘step-bystep deal’)”, http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord17_22Keytextsandagreements_2005_ENG.pdf (3 Mart 2013)

21 “Dağlıq Qarabağ silahlı münaqişəsinin hərtərəfli həllinin prinsipləri haqqında”, *Azərbaycan*, 21 Şubat 2001; “Minsk Group proposal (‘common state deal’)”, http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord17_22Keytextsandagreements_2005_ENG.pdf (3 Mart 2013)

22 Araz Aslanlı, “Tarihtən Günümüze Karabağ Sorunu”, *Avrasya Dosyası Azərbaycan Özel Sayısı*, 2001, pp. 418-419.

overthrown in Armenia and R. Kocharyan replacing him has prevented this process. Let us bear in mind that right before this process, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia had even issued a joint statement in Strasbourg on 10 October 1997, expressing that they are close to a settlement and they have generally accepted the proposals of the co-chairmen²³.

It should also be noted that another important role during the peace process entering a deadlock following Kocharyan's election as the President of Armenia was played by the US which encouraged the presidents of the two states to hold meetings between themselves. This proposal brought forth during NATO's 50th anniversary ceremonies by the US has been met positively by both Russia and France. The two leaders coming together most recently at the UN Summit in 1998 has later on held a talk on 16 July 1999 at the Le Grand Saugy castle near the Lemman Lake in France that lasted for approximately 2.5 hours²⁶.

As a result of the intensive talks held between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia before the OSCE's Istanbul Summit in 1999 and the intensive efforts of international organizations, the expectation for a peace treaty to be signed between the two countries has once again resurfaced. But the terrorist attack taking place right before the summit on 27 October 1999 on the Armenian parliament that resulted in the murdering of the Prime Minister, President of Parliament and 6 deputies has caused this opportunity to also disappear²⁵. Therefore, no serious result has also been obtained from the talk held during the OSCE's Istanbul summit on 18 November 1999 between Aliyev and Kocharyan through the mediation of US President Clinton²⁶.

With the meeting held in Strasbourg in January 2001 due to membership to the Council of Europe and then the meeting held on 4-5 March 2001 in Paris through President Chirac's mediation, the bilateral meetings held between the presidents of the two countries have reached 15²⁷. However, despite the many allegations put forward in the press, a definite solution has not been reached in these talks. Yet still, President Chirac has expressed that the talks have been held in a pleasant atmosphere, that positive developments have

23 "Armenian, Azerbaijani presidents meet", <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/1997/97-10-13.rferl.html> (8 July 2012).

24 "Aliyev-Koçaryan Zirvesi Sonuçsuz", *Türkiye*, 17 July 1999.

25 "Shooting in the Armenian Parliament", <http://www.internews.am/projects/archive/events/index.htm> (8 July 2012); "Attack in Armenia", http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/july-dec99/armenia_update_10-27.html (8 July 2012).

26 "Clinton, Koçaryan ile Aliyev'i Buluşturdu", *Türkiye*, 19 November 1999.

27 Araz Aslanlı, "Küresel ve Bölgesel Aktörlerin Son Girişimleri Işığında Karabağ Sorunu: Çözümüne Doğru mu?", *Stratejik Analiz*, April 2001, p. 56.

taken place and that he hopes the peace treaty will be signed in the year they are in²⁸.

Concerning this issue, the most important step of the US, which continued its mediation on various occasions, was the Key-West talks held in April 2001. This meeting organized on 3-7 April 2001, due to some of its features, has been a first in terms of efforts to reach a solution for the occupation of Azeri territories by Armenia. In the official report of “Regarding the Karabakh Conflict’s Past” issued by the US before the talks, for the first time statements have been made that the Armenian army is keeping Azeri territories under occupation. Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, all three Co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group and numerous specialists have attended the talks organized through the mediation of the US Foreign Secretary Powell. After the talk although generally positive statements have been made, it has been indicated that a definite solution has not been reached²⁹. Although it has been declared after the talks by the Co-chairmen that the Geneva talks will be held on 15 June 2001, the Geneva talks have not been able to take place. As the reason for this the parties have said that no progress has been able to be achieved, therefore holding such talks will be meaningless.

In the following years, the talks have increasingly intensified and although no resolution has emerged, the “Paris Principles”, Prague Process”, “Madrid Principles”, “Moscow Declaration” and the “Renewed Madrid Principles” have drawn attention as important steps in regards to the conflict³⁰. All of the points mentioned above have been evaluated differently by the parties to the conflict and mediators in terms of content, the process of emergence and their meaning. Former President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev and the current President Ilham Aliyev have indicated that in case of the talks continuing several times inconclusively, Azerbaijan can also resort to military means in order to rescue its territories from Armenia’s occupation. An agreement has been reached on suspending the talks concerning the conflict especially during the periods when elections will be held in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Among the intensified talks held in the following period, the talk held only between the presidents of the two countries on 2 November 2008 in Russia has resulted in the Moscow Declaration being adopted in regards to “military

28 “FRENCH PRESIDENT THINKS THERE IS A POSITIVE ADVANCE IN KARABAKH PEACE PROCESS”, March 6, 2001, <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/politics/news/6700/> (18 March 2013); “Facts and Comments”, <http://www.eraren.org/index.php?Lisan=en&Page=DergiIcerik&IcerikNo=158> (18 March 2013)

29 “Armenia and Azerbaijan: Key West Peace Talks”, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2001/2098.htm> (19 March 2013); “Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia complete Nagorno-Karabakh talks in key west”, <http://english.pravda.ru/news/hotspots/07-04-2001/40137-0/> (19 March 2013).

30 Araz Aslanlı, “Kafkasya’da Güvenlik ve İstikrara En Büyük Tehdit: Karabağ Sorunu”, Der: Cavid Veliev, Araz Aslanlı, *Güney Kafkasya*, Berikan Yayınevi, Ankara, 2011, p. 190.

means not being resorted to for a resolution”³¹. On the other hand, many talks, including the talk held in October 2009 in Kishinev, have either resulted without reaching any solutions or by agreeing on some minor issues.

For now, the trilateral summits at Astrakhan and Kazan and the OSCE Summit held in Astana in December 2010 have formed the last steps of the attempts for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. On 27 October 2010, a meeting has been held at the Astrakhan city of Russia between President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of Armenia Serge Sarkisian through the mediation of the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. After the summit, Medvedev had asserted that “until the OSCE Summit to be held on 1-2 December in Kazakhstan, also through the works of the foreign ministers, an agreement will be reached on the main principles of the treaty” and eyes have turned towards the Astana Summit³². However, this has not been accomplished. Another great expectation has been in regards to the Kazan meeting held on 24 June 2011. Before the Kazan Summit, the atmosphere had heated further with the explanation regarding the issue made during the G-8 summit meeting held in France’s city of Deauville. Leaders of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair countries (Russia, US and France) Dmitri Medvedev, Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy have emphasized in Deauville that the time has arrived for all the sides to the Karabakh conflict to take a decisive step towards a peaceful settlement.³³ However, the statement made after the Kazan meeting held closed to the press, had shown that contrary to the expectations a peace treaty based on essential principles had not been signed³⁴. Following the meeting, the first reactions of the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian media along with the media of other concerning countries concentrated upon failure being experienced in Kazan and inconclusiveness continuing.

The most recent meeting (for now) held between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia is the talk held in Sochi on 23 January 2012 again through the mediation of Russia. The three presidents have also issued a joint declaration following this meeting, emphasizing their commitment to the Moscow Declaration of November 2nd 2008 and the Sochi Declaration of March 5th 2011³⁵.

31 “Russia’s Medvedev hosts Nagorno-Karabakh talks”, Nov 2, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL2389234> (13 November 2012).

32 “Summit suspense: OSCE opens meeting in Astana; Karabakh on the agenda”, http://www.armenianow.com/commentary/analysis/26210/astana_summit_osce_karabakh (13 November 2012).

33 “Joint statement on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, by the Presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries at the G-8 Summit, Deauville, France, 26 May 2011”, <http://www.osce.org/mg/78195> (13 November 2012)..

34 “Meeting with Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan”, June 24 2011, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/2462> (14 November 2012).; “Kazan’dan temel ilkeler üzerine anlaşma çıkmadı”, <http://www.1news.com.tr/azerbaycan/siyaset/20110625093754667.html> (14 November 2012)..

35 Meeting with the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia”, January 23, 2012, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/3351> (14 November 2012).

Although the Eurovision song contest held in Azerbaijan in May 2012, 2013 being the year for the presidential elections to be held in Armenia and Azerbaijan and other reasons have slowed down the process of the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, officials of Azerbaijan and Armenia have continued making harsh statements that threaten the opposite side. During this process, a new dimension called the “Khojaly Airport” has also been added to the issue. Armenia Opening the Khojaly Airport to service on the Azeri territories under occupation and wanting flights to departure from there without the consent of Azerbaijan has increased the tension.

When taking into consideration that the current viewpoints of the public opinions of Azerbaijan and Armenia towards the issue is on completely opposite points, the difficulty in finding a resolution to the conflict can be understood more easily. One of the most important examples of this has been the developments experienced right after the Astrakhan Declaration and the harsh statements made mutually.

Concerning the initiatives towards the issue, it can be seen that due to the viewpoint generally not being correct, the conditions and properties of the region not being evaluated carefully, the history and actual feature of the issue being ignored and similar reasons, proposals for the resolution of the issue actually carry a serious potential for conflict. Although it is clear that the actual feature of the problem is Armenia occupying Azerbaijan’s territories and attempting to extend its borders, this point had not taken place in the resolutions of international organizations for a long time. However, particularly the Council of Europe adopting resolutions in 2005³⁶ and the UN adopting resolutions in 2008 that openly state that Armenia is in the position of being the occupier³⁷, have been considered as encouraging for Azerbaijan, while for Armenia as a result of being entrapped.

THE GENERAL FEATURES OF THE CONFLICTS OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

The other two important ethnic problems in the South Caucasus are the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In general, in terms of all ethnic conflicts, common and unique characteristics are at issue. However, rather than their unique features, these two conflicts have more common characteristics. At the basis of the South Ossetia issue lies Ossetia, found in

36 The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta05/EREC1690.htm> (10 December 2012).

37 “General Assembly Adopts Resolution Reaffirming Territorial Integrity of Azerbaijan, Demanding Withdrawal of All Armenian Forces”, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/ga10693.doc.htm> (13 November 2012).

the North Caucasus, splitting into two during the formation of the Soviet Union and South Ossetia being left as an autonomous formation in Georgia and North Ossetia being left in the Russian Federation. The emergence of the problem in its present form has taken place parallel to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The separatist policies of the administration in South Ossetia has further been triggered with the extremely nationalist policies of Georgia's first President Zviad Gamsahurdia and the movement starting in South Ossetia in September-November 1990 has first declared the region's independence, then has started conveying their demands to join with North Ossetia. The Parliament of Georgia, which reached the decision for independence on 20 November 1990, had abolished South Ossetia's autonomy in December 1990 and had decided to put the region directly under the administration of Tbilisi³⁸. This decision of the Georgian Parliament has been rejected by the central government of the USSR.

Despite the appeals of officials of South Ossetia to unite with North Ossetia (and therefore with Russia) starting from 1991 has not been accepted by Russian officials, it is known that Russia had accumulated its troops on the border of North Ossetia and that these troops had entered war with war helicopters and tanks in 18 June 1992 against the Georgian National Guard Units near Tshinvali (later on Russia has given Russian passports to most of the population of South Ossetia). In fact, President of that period Eduard Shevardnadze has described this as an imperialist initiative of Moscow to annex South Ossetia by force. Although the small-scale conflicts starting in the beginning of the 1990's had been brought to an end with an agreement concluded in March 1992, since the beginning of 1992 more serious conflicts was taking place. The administration of South Ossetia, which had received the support of Russia and some part of the local community of the North Caucasus, has been successful in brining almost the entire region outside of the control of the Georgian central administration and this situation has continued until presently. With the agreement signed in 1994, armed conflicts have been brought to an end and later on a peacekeeping force has been deployed to the region³⁹. Despite the conflicts sometimes even reaching the level of war, the ceasefire situation has continued until August 2008.

Concerning the Abkhazian conflict, when looking at its historical origins, although being able to go all the way back to the ancient history of both the region of Abkhazia and more generally of Georgia, it is put forth that the conflict has stemmed from the ethnic structure of Abkhazia being changed

38 "Georgia Conflict History", <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/key-issues/research-resources/conflict-histories/georgia.aspx> (13 November 2012).

39 Ibid; "UNOMIG Mandate, adopted by the Security Council Resolution 937 21 July 1994", <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/georgia-abkhazia/keytext5.php>. (13 November 2012).

by force in the 19th and 20th centuries and different statuses being granted to the region in different periods during the formation of the Soviet Union⁴⁰.

During the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as in the many regions of this empire, nationalist movements in Georgia and in Abkhazia, which is an area of Georgia, have also gradually increased. Political processes have carried radical elements in both Georgia and Abkhazia to power and parallel to initiatives of abolishing Abkhazia's autonomy in Georgia, demands to separate from Georgia have intensified in Abkhazia. Mutual "civilian" steps taken particularly in the beginning of the 1990's (Abkhazia declaring its full independence in 1990 and Georgia entirely abolishing Abkhazia's autonomy in 1992) have rendered a military conflict inevitable under the conditions of that period. By starting the military operation named "Sword" in on 14 August 1992, Georgian military forces have tried to attach Abkhazia to the center. The Georgian army, which had gained serious victories at the beginning, has later on lost the war with volunteer troops of the Confederation of Caucasus Nations and Russian forces stepping in.

Throughout September 1993 the Georgian army was defeated over and over again and since 30 September 1993 the war resulted with Georgia's defeat⁴¹. Abkhazia, from that date until today, has continued to remain outside the control of Georgia's central administration, but its declaration of independence has not been recognized by any state until the events of August 2008.

Saakashvili's rise to power has constituted an important step for both conflicts, because Shevardnadze was not able to prevent separatist movements since the time he was in power and was contented with only freezing the course of events. With the events occurring in November 2003, Shevardnadze has resigned and Saakashvili's period has started in Georgia.

The features of the tactics carried out until August 2008 by Saakashvili's administration towards the conflicts can be listed as follows⁴²:

- a) to eliminate Georgia's problems as soon as possible and to make Georgia an appealing country for those living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by increasing living standards;
- b) to give the message to the people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that Georgia has no problems at all with them, trying to win those

40 Araz Aslanlı, "Bölgesel ve Küresel Dengeler Açısından Abhazya Sorunu", *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, No. 5, Spring 2005, p. 117.

41 "Dünden Bugüne Abhazya Gerçeği", http://www.abhazya.org/abhazya/abhazya_tarihi.htm (13 December 2004).

42 Sinan Oğan, "Kafkasya'da Etnik Çatışmalar Ekseninde Abhazya Sorunu", Der: Cavid Veliev, Araz Aslanlı, *Güney Kafkasya*, Berikan Yayınevi, Ankara, 2011, p. 208.

living in the regions – especially the youth and children- through various activities by inviting them to Tbilisi;

- c) to convince Georgian public opinion and particularly those living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that he is determined in maintaining Georgia's territorial integrity, that he will not abandon this for any reason and that when necessary, although he will certainly not do this, that he will resort to military power;
- d) not to remain alone in the face of Russia's "disturbing" approaches by fully obtaining the support of international organizations and Western states.

For Georgia, this line has continued towards August 2008, but August 2008 has been a very important turning point for the conflicts of Georgia and Abkhazia together with many other issues. In the first days of August, South Ossetia and Russia has accused Georgia, while Georgia has accused the opposite sides of attacking and murdering civilians. The possibility of a war starting in the region has been mentioned. Just then, with Russia's intervention on 8 August 2008, the separatist movement, carried out by Georgia towards South Ossetia in order to maintain Georgia's territorial integrity and constitutional order, has gained a new dimension and the danger of the war spreading all over the Caucasus has emerged⁴³. While all these developments were taking place, in order to regain some of the territories in the Kodori Valley occupied by Georgian armed forces in 2006, Abkhazia has organized attacks on Georgia's military units in the region. With separatist South Ossetia, which Georgia had occupied with a military operation, officially calling on Russia for assistance, the war "to maintain constitutional order" in the region had officially turned into war between Georgia and the South Ossetia-Abkhazia-Russia trio. By signing a document that indicated that there was a "State of War" in the country, President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili had sent it to the Parliament for ratification and the proposal has been adopted by the Parliament. On the other hand, the General Staff of the Russian Federation has persistently alleged that there is no state of war and that they are only trying to rescue their citizens in the engagement zone. The Russian army has not only discharged the Georgian army from the South Ossetia region, but has also advanced towards Tbilisi by occupying the other areas of Georgia and has even gone as far as bombing the area in which Georgian President Saakashvili was present⁴⁴. Russia has also not neglected

43 Sinan Oğan, "Gürcistan-Güney Osetya savaşında cephe genişlerken, Gürcistan kaybediyor...", *Zaman*, 11 August 2008, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=724555> (10 August 2012).

44 "Russian Forces Capture Military Base in Georgia", <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/world/europe/12georgia.html> (10 Augusts 2012).

to attack Georgia through the Black Sea. The possibility of the US and NATO in general to militarily intervene in the process and scenarios of a 3rd World War have been brought to the agenda.

While declaring a “State of War” on the one side, Georgia has also been obliged to request a ceasefire on the other. Despite various initiatives, particularly through the mediation of French President Nicolas Sarkozy the ceasefire treaty has been signed⁴⁵. Meanwhile, US naval ships have anchored at the Georgian harbors by joining the Black Sea through the Turkish straits.

This development has caused Georgia to receive a blow on its efforts towards the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the policy it pursues to remain half finished or even inconclusive. Especially with the effect of the Kosovo process, following this development Russia has also taken practical steps towards detaching Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia on a legal basis. On 25 August 2008, first the Russian Federation Council and then the State Duma have recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia⁴⁶. After Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and the Pacific island nation of Nauru have also recognized these two regions as independent states⁴⁷. Russia’s initiatives to expand this circle have remained limited especially due to the attempts of the US and the EU.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the historical foundations and development processes, the internal and external dynamics, features and the level they exist in, the conflicts of Karabkh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have similarities as well as serious differences between them. Their similarities were greater in the beginning. At the basis of all the conflicts somehow lay Russia. Through Russia’s direct and indirect interventions, these three regions were taken outside the control of the independent states. An important difference was that Azeri territories were occupied by the Armenian army (in other words, by the army of another state possessed by the same ethnic group not being a part of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts), which received the support of Russia.

45 “Georgia and Russia declare ceasefire”, *Guardian*, 16 August 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/16/georgia.russia2> (10 August 2012); “Nicolas Sarkozy defends Georgia peace deal”, *The Telegraph*, 27 August 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/2633048/Nicolas-Sarkozy-defends-Georgia-peace-deal.html> (10 August 2012).

46 “Russia recognises Georgian rebels”, *BBC*, 26 August 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7582181.stm> (10 August 2012).

47 “Chávez Backs Moscow on Rebel Regions”, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/11/world/americas/11moscow.html?_r=1 (10 August 2012), “Abkhazia and Latin America”, <http://www.mfaabkhazia.net/en/latam> (10 August 2012), “Abkhazia Is Recognized — by Nauru”, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/16/world/europe/16georgia.html> (10 August 2012).

The conflicts were tried to be established upon the contradiction of territorial integrity-determining your own fate. Meanwhile, there were also interesting differences that originated from Abkhazia's historical dynamics and political status, from the 1.5% of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan, right alongside the Armenian state when it existed, attempting to create a state in the area, which the Armenians also accepted to have settled in 150 years ago, and from Russia not allowing statements to be made regarding the independence rights of North Ossetia found within Russia itself with a more crowded population, but supporting the claim for independence of South Ossetia, which is smaller and found in neighboring Georgia. However, in particular the course of Russia-Azerbaijan, Russia-Armenia, Russia-Georgia, Russia-Turkey and Russia-US relations from the Cold War until the present have, as external dynamics, increased the difference between the conflicts.

The August 2008 events entailed the important detail in terms of the differentiation between the conflicts. Russia fully detached the two separatist regions from Georgia and turned them de facto into total states and legally into independent states to a significant degree. The detail that this independence was a "dependent independence" under Russia's control should not be forgotten. Actually it is also a known fact that this point also applies to the so-called formation named "Nagorno-Karabakh" formed artificially upon Azeri territories under Armenian occupation. The point that this area is mostly under the control of Russia and to a significant degree under Armenian control is generally accepted. It is also a painful fact that in terms of military, political, economic etc. factors, the key to the three conflicts is in Russia's hand.

The August 2008 events have generally directed attention to the ethnic problems worldwide and in particular to those in the former Soviet geography. How risky the current situation of frozen conflicts and especially the Karabakh conflict is and the detail that the conflict is not only directly between the parties, but carries the risk of triggering a regional and even global war has emerged in a clearer manner. The multidimensional efforts, including the OSCE Minsk Group and Russia's initiatives in particular regarding the Karabakh conflict have drawn attention.

However, it has also not gone unnoticed that despite the August 2008 events, the intensity in the initiatives towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict was more an attempt to increase the control of the parties to the conflict. Yet, the most important lesson to be learned from the August 2008 events was that initiatives on their own to keep frozen conflicts under control were insufficient and even deceiving and the truth that no matter how difficult it

is and without doubt has a cost to it, achieving a just and lasting peace as soon as possible was a more accurate option and even a necessity.

It is also observed that regarding the “lessons to be learned”, differences exist between the parties to the conflict and the approaches of the concerning states. With the US at the forefront, they want Western Azerbaijan and Armenia to learn lessons from the August 2008 events. Yet, there is a call to learn lessons that is significantly uncertain and whose messages are unclear. On the other hand, Russia wants everyone besides itself and in particular Azerbaijan and Armenia to learn lessons from the August 2008 events and what is meant by lessons is the following: “if someone tries to rescue their territories despite me or if someone tries to defend themselves without taking me into attention, the end will be disappointment”. It is possible to observe this emphasis in almost all the statements made by Russian officials in the following period. For Armenia, the most important lesson to be learned is that the cost of trying to resolve the conflict through military means (especially despite Russia) will be heavy. On the other hand Azerbaijan has drawn attention to the risks created by the inability to resolve the conflict and that the conflicts presumed to be “frozen” actually constantly carry the risk of war.

Iran believes that the actual lesson to be learned is the disappointment in trusting the West for the conflict to be resolved. On the other hand, by drawing attention to the risks created by the lack of reaching a resolution for the conflict and the door to dialogue remaining closed, Turkey has tried to present a project of peace and stability that comprises the entire region.

Despite these theses having some truth to them, it must be emphasized that the most important lesson to be learned is that there is no issue that nothing can be done despite Russia, because no power, including Russia, possesses unlimited might. (1); although it possesses unlimited might, it is almost impossible to maintain this condition (2); although it might remain in such condition, there is the possibility that it can change its stance towards the conflict (3); although it will never change its stance on the conflict, the possibilities that the other parties and especially the indirect parties to the conflict of Azerbaijan and Armenia might not accept this some day (4); as emphasized above, actually all sides, including Russia, must have learned their lessons. This lesson entails the risk created by the lack of reaching a resolution. Without doubt, the lack of a resolution causes problems to arise in regional security, cooperation, stability and welfare, human rights, democratization and other issues and also regional and global projects, including energy projects, being implemented under more economic conditions. However, it directly threatens peace which is one of the most important values of the existing international system. It not only threatens, but also carries the risk of creating

very serious regional conflicts that can directly or indirectly draw in numerous powers from outside the region. Therefore, in order for a resolution to be reached as soon as possible, completely appropriate to international law and by also taking into consideration regional conditions to a certain extent, initiatives must be intensified.

Despite the Karabakh conflict's struggle for global power, Russia's initiative to specially keep the region under its control, ethnic conflict, religious conflict and having many other dimensions, we presume that actually the most important feature of the conflict is it being a conflict of expansionism and occupation. In order for the conflict to reach a resolution in real terms, the Armenian occupation of Azeri territories must be brought to an end, because the continuation of the occupation causes the conflict to become inextricable. At the same time, the Armenian army has also hypothecated the real owners of the Azeri territories (regardless of their ethnic origins, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians etc.) which they are keeping under occupation. In order for the occupation to be ended, either a peace plan must be prepared by international powers and must be implemented as soon as possible or Azerbaijan must drive the Armenian army out of their own borders by using its right to self-defense.

However, just as the settlement of the conflict cannot be based on giving consent to expansionism, counter expansionist movements or responding to expansionism with movements of ethnic cleansing are also not found to be acceptable. In order for the conflict to reach a lasting resolution, Armenia's efforts of expansionism must be prevented, Azerbaijan's territorial integrity must be provided without bringing forth any preconditions, the necessary local administration structuring in Azerbaijan must be realized, and at the same time the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Armenian minority must be guaranteed in accordance with rules of international law.

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