



CSCE's Peace Efforts in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict during the Czechoslovak Chairmanship in 1992

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Abstract:

The year 2022 marked thirty years since the Chairmanship of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic in the CSCE. The article focuses on one of the main agendas of that period: the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. It aims to assess the success of the CSCE peace-making activities and initiatives during 1992 and to answer the question of whether individual actors' efforts led to a peaceful solution, defusing the situation, and improving relations between the parties to the conflict in the South Caucasus region. Finally, the article concludes that, although the CSCE gradually moved from soft actions to peace-building activities, it lacked peace-making experience and sufficiently developed and flexible mechanisms compared to other international organizations.

Keywords:

Minsk Group – Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – Jiří Dienstbier – Nagorno-Karabakh – Armenia – Azerbaijan

Professional biography:

Michael Augustín is a Researcher at the Institute of Political Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences. Simultaneously, he is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of International Relations, University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. He is devoted to the Helsinki process in his research and publishing activities, especially its development in the first half of the 1990s. He focuses primarily on events connected with the Czechoslovak chairmanship in the CSCE in 1992. In addition, he also deals with the older and more recent developments in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, primarily in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the turn of the years 2021 and 2022, he was accepted and spent several weeks as a Research Fellow within the Researcher-in-Residence program at the OSCE Documentation Center in Prague. He also conducted several research interviews with local diplomatic actors whose professional career was related to the CSCE/OSCE, e.g., with Ján Kubiš, former director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center and OSCE Secretary General.

Introduction

The institutionalization of the Helsinki process in the early 1990s progressed together with its expansion to include new countries, which meant a complete change in the understanding of the mission of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the transformation of its functions and, finally, the performance of new tasks. The Paris Summit, held on November 19–21, 1990, marked a turning point in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) history. The discussions led to the establishment of permanent institutions and operational capacities.

Shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union, independent republics of the post-Soviet space, including the Caucasian republics – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The CSCE began to address the regulation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh the moment Armenia and Azerbaijan were included as participating states. Together with the war in the former Yugoslavia, the conflict in the South Caucasus was one of the two most pressing, but also most complex, agendas of the Czechoslovak Chairmanship of the CSCE in 1992. Czechoslovakia took over the chairmanship from Germany at the meeting of the 2nd Council of Ministers in Prague on January 30–31, 1992 with Jiří Dienstbier, then Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia, taking on the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers (CM). 2022 saw the 30th anniversary of this event, which, while earning Czechoslovak diplomacy great prestige, also posed a challenge of responding adequately to the rapid development of events. Zdeněk Matějka, Dienstbier's deputy in charge of overseeing the activities of Czechoslovak diplomacy in the CSCE, confirmed that the new state leadership, in addition to attaching special importance to the Helsinki process, required the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR) to show initiative within the CSCE structures.¹ This stage of modern political history was undoubtedly one of the milestones that shaped the character of post-November Czechoslovak diplomacy and determined the direction of the then still-common state of Czechs and Slovaks.

When the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (February 1988–May 1994), broke out, the newly formed institutional apparatus of the CSCE was faced with an unprecedented situation. The Helsinki process was launched in the conditions of the Cold War, and, until then, no military conflict had taken place between its participating states. Yet, within several months, a few such clashes erupted on the map of Europe, while Nagorno-Karabakh eventually turned into the most protracted conflict on the European borders. The CSCE participating states recognized the need to establish effective mechanisms and procedures to address ethnic-territorial disputes, such as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

This article was completed at a period when the international community was confronted with unprecedented events concerning the Helsinki process. After the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, a ceasefire agreement was concluded, which changed the long-standing status quo in the South Caucasus. Armenia ceded to Azerbaijan large areas previously controlled by the Republic of Artsakh, recognized the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and renounced any territorial claims in Nagorno-Karabakh. The ceasefire was supposed to lead to peace treaty negotiations and the delimitation of a new state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Constant violations of the ceasefire on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and the ten-month blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijan resulted in a military offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh launched by Azerbaijan. In the aftermath of the offensive, a massive exodus of Armenians from the region began. On September 28, 2023, by presidential decree from the president of Armenia's self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh

¹ Z. Matějka, *Povolání diplomat aneb Jak jsem pomáhal rozpouštět Varšavskou smlouvu* [Profession: diplomat or How I helped dissolve the Warsaw Pact], Pilsen, 2007, p. 134.

Republic all state institutions are to be dissolved by January 1, 2024, and the Republic of Artsakh cease to exist. As a result of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, several OSCE bodies, including the Minsk Group, remain paralyzed and the future of the OSCE remains at stake. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has seen periods of both active hostilities and negotiations aimed at peace. Analyzing the peace initiatives of the early 1990s allows us to identify changes and understand why some attempts to resolve the conflict failed. During this time, international organizations, including the CSCE, began to play a role in the conflict's international resolution. Examining diplomatic efforts and the international situation from that period can provide us with a better understanding of why the conflict remained unresolved and how the situation evolved over time.

The main goal of the article is to evaluate the success of the CSCE activities and initiatives undertaken during the CSFR Chairmanship in 1992 and answer the question of whether the undertaken efforts led to a peaceful settlement of the dispute, calming of the situation, and improved relations between the parties to the conflict in the South Caucasus region. The article maps the peace activities and initiatives aimed at resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, initiatives that were born within the CSCE bodies over the course of 1992, with landmark events being the 2nd Council of Ministers in Prague and the 3rd Council of Ministers in Stockholm. The article proceeds diachronically, providing an analysis of the key events that took place in the wake of the war. It focuses primarily on how the CSCE authorities, particularly the Council of Ministers and the Committee of High Representatives, responded to the conflict, and maps the reactions, statements, and steps taken by political actors, including representatives of Czechoslovak diplomacy. The author has thus attempted to draw a detailed time axis of the history of the conflict through the lens of the CSCE initiatives, by which the Conference intervened in the war while coordinating its efforts with various actors during the period in question, putting this mosaic into the context of the CSFR Chairmanship in the CSCE. The article's perspective on the emerging conflict is indeed valuable because it provides a detailed retrospective from the viewpoint of a regional organization that was heavily involved in the conflict.

Therefore, the first part of the article argues in favor of the role of chairmanship and chair in international organizations. In addition, this part briefly maps the development of the chairmanship body within the Helsinki process. In the second part of the article, the author charts the steps taken by the CSCE between late January and early April 1992. The key milestones in this phase were three missions undertaken at the CSCE's initiative. The analysis of the following phase (April – May), discussed in the next part of the paper, focuses on the efforts to convene the Minsk Conference. The third part of the article surveys the first steps of the Minsk Group and the negotiations that took place in Rome from July to September. In a separate section, the author reviews concerted efforts to achieve a ceasefire between the conflicting parties, an ambition that was not only pursued multilaterally (through the Minsk Group) but also bilaterally, at independent initiatives of some of the CSCE's participating states. The final part of the paper describes the events of the last quarter of 1992, which conclude with the session of the 3rd Council of Ministers of the CSCE in Stockholm.

Of the writings that provide a more complex, or, contrariwise, a rather cross-sectional picture of the issue discussed in our article, and that were also used in this article, we would like to highlight especially the following works published in the recent past: *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives* (2022); *No Place for Russia. European Security Institutions since 1989* (2018); *Peace to Karabakh. Russia's Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict* (2014); *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (2013); *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence: Lessons from Post-Soviet States* (2013); *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (2012); *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union. The Role*

of the OSCE (2003).²

In addition to secondary literature, the paper is based on our own research of primary sources. These represent collected materials and historical records stored in the OSCE Documentation Center in Prague. They are mostly speeches by state representatives, preparatory and working materials, meeting minutes, resolutions, annexes, statements, and other documents. While previous works touched on the events of 1992, they did not provide a detailed analysis of the actions and initiatives taken by individual CSCE bodies and their representatives. Our article addresses this gap and offers valuable insights from this perspective. Moreover, our paper offers an interpretation of several primary sources that have not yet been examined in this context.

The power of the chair and chairmanship in the CSCE/OSCE

The role of the chairmanship and the chairman in international organizations matters because they provide leadership, have procedural roles in decision-making, and can influence agenda-setting and individual policy decisions. Simultaneously, formal leaders have special access to a variety of resources that may assist them in improving the effectiveness of negotiations and influencing how resources are distributed.³

From the beginning, the chairmanship within the CSCE was framed by certain institutional specificities. The CSCE's rotating presidency model was established in 1990 with the adoption of the Charter of Paris, and its authority has undergone considerable expansion since the early 1990s. Following Germany's tenure, the CSCE Chairmanship was taken over by the middle-sized countries of Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Italy. The primary qualification for holding this largely symbolic position at the time was the ability to host representatives of the increasing number of CSCE participating states during CM meetings.⁴ In 1992, while the CSFR chaired the organization, the chairmanship responsibilities were expanded to cover coordination and consultation on current CSCE issues.⁵ The institution of the CSCE Chairmanship was also strengthened by the establishment of the Troika, which was composed of the current, the previous, and the next presidential country. At the end of 1994, the chairmanship was granted full authority over the operational actions of the organization, which has since then given the position significant power to shape and influence the CSCE.⁶ In 2002, the duties and responsibilities of the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) were formally codified.⁷ Despite being considered a political role, the OSCE Chairmanship's political power is often exaggerated due to the OSCE's consensual decision-

2 M. Hakan Yavuz and M. Gunter, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives*, London, 2022; W. Hill, *No Place for Russia. European Security Institutions since 1989*, New York, 2018; V. Kazimirov, *Peace to Karabakh. Russia's Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow 2014; T. de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York – London, 2013; R. Vanderhill and M. E. Aleprete *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence: Lessons from Post-Soviet States*, Lanham, 2013; O. Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*, Farnham, 2012; M. R. Freire, *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union. The Role of the OSCE*, London, 2003.

3 J. Tallberg, 'The Power of the Chair: Formal Leadership in International Cooperation', in *International Studies Quarterly*, 2010, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 241–265.

4 C. Nünlist, 'Successful Small States in the OSCE and the German Chairmanship of 2016', in *Security and Human Rights*, 2015, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 48–64, doi:10.1163/18750230-02601002.

5 OSCE Documentation Center in Prague (hereinafter as OSCE DCiP), *The Challenges of Change, 3rd CSCE Summit of Heads of State or Government, Helsinki, 9 - 10 July 1992*.

6 Ibid., p. 52.

7 OSCE DCiP, *MC(10).DEC/8, Decision No. 8, Role of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office, 10th Meeting of the Ministerial Council, December 6–7, 2002*.

making process. As per Decision No. 8 of the 10th Meeting of the Ministerial Council, the Chairmanship must ensure that their actions are in line with positions agreed upon by all participating states. As a result, the Chairman's authority is limited to being the first among equals for a period of one year.⁸ The CiO's discretion as a broker is limited by the requirement of consensus; however, it can exert significant influence on outcomes by tabling a political program, making public statements on behalf of the organization, managing the agenda, and representing the organization.⁹

The current literature on political leadership often highlights the significance of informal influence or informal power.¹⁰ Informal leadership refers to the ability of an individual to be recognized as a leader due to their reputation, credibility, and personal networks. In simpler terms, an effective leader or chairman is the outcome of a combination of systemic and organizational characteristics, as well as personal factors. It is important to note that the personal factors required for effective leadership in one organization may not be suitable in another or even in the same organization at different times.¹¹ In specific historical contexts, the informal power of leaders and their involvement becomes a crucial factor in resolving a conflict situation. This dimension of the Chairperson's function has proven to be indispensable in several conflicts that the CSCE or OSCE has encountered in the past decades.

As our article focuses on conflict mitigation in Nagorno-Karabakh during the early stages when the CSCE Chairmanship was still in the process of institutionalization, we also examine the given conflict through the lens of "how chairmanship matters" and what role the former CiOs played in the conflict resolution.

First steps of the CSCE in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

In 1992, a total of fourteen Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) meetings, namely, the 5th–18th official sessions, took place during the CSFR Chairmanship in the CSCE, most of them in Prague. Hence, the 5th session of the CSO, which took place on January 8–10, 1992, was chaired by Wilhelm Höynck from Germany, as the preceding CM was held in Berlin in 1991 and led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher. The Czechoslovak delegation was composed of Ján Kubiš, then Director-General of the Euro-Atlantic Section in Czechoslovakia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ivan Bušniak, Head of the Department of European Security and Cooperation, Roman Hronek, František Janouch, and spokesman Egon Lánský.¹² At the meeting, the Russian delegation was welcomed as representing the successor state of the Soviet Union, and the delegates expressed their hope that all former Soviet Union republics would join the CSCE as participating states.

The 6th CSO session immediately preceded the 2nd Council of Ministers; it was held in Prague on January 27–29, 1992. In addition to approving the wording of the letter of accession to the CSCE, and confirming the date of accession of the former Soviet republics to be January 28, 1992, this session dealt primarily with preparing

8 W. Kemp, 'The OSCE Chairmanship: Captain or Figurehead?', in *Security and Human Rights*, 2009, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 9–12.

9 J. Tallberg, *The Power of the Chair: Formal Leadership in International Cooperation*, 2010, p. 258.

10 Cf. J. Tallberg, *The Power of the Chair: Formal Leadership in International Cooperation*, 2010, p. 242; A. Moravcsik, 'A New Statecraft? Supranational Entrepreneurs and International Cooperation', in *International Organization*, 1999, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 267–306.

11 M. G. Schechter, 'Leadership in International Organizations: Systemic, Organizational and Personality Factors', in *Review of International Studies*, 1987, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 197–220.

12 OSCE DCiP, *List of Participants, 5th Meeting of the CSO, January 8–10, 1992*.

proposals for the upcoming CM and the organizational aspects of the Follow-up Meeting in Helsinki.¹³ After midnight of January 30, 1992, Ján Kubiš took over from Höyneck as chairman of the CSO. Kubiš chaired most of the CSO meetings that took place during the Czechoslovak chairmanship.

Armenia and Azerbaijan became participating states at the 2nd Council of Ministers in Prague on January 30, 1992.¹⁴ Based on the resolution passed at the 2nd CM, the Chairman-in-Office sent a rapporteur mission to these two republics. The mission was carried out on February 12–18, 1992, and was led by the former chairman of the International Helsinki Federation, Karel Schwarzenberg (then Head of the Office of President of Czechoslovakia). While being a standard rapporteur mission similar to those sent to other recently admitted CSCE participating states, it had a special mandate to present a separate report on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁵.

At the 7th session of the CSO in Prague on February 27–28, 1992, the delegates present turned all their attention to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. In their arguments, they drew on the Interim report on the developments in the region, which the mission, led by Schwarzenberg, was commissioned to prepare and present. The CSO called on the parties involved to agree on an immediate ceasefire and to establish humanitarian corridors, urging all the CSCE participating states as well as the countries in the region (Iran and the Arab countries) to stop supplying arms and ammunition to the forces involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh fighting.¹⁶ From the beginning, the Republic of Armenia denied any involvement in providing arms, fuel, food, or other logistics to the Nagorno-Karabakh separatists. At that time, Armenia also defended their position at the CSCE, where the Armenian delegation clearly stated that it was primarily a conflict between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh and that Armenia had no territorial disputes with Azerbaijan, suggesting that it be resolved through a dialogue between the political representatives of the two parties to the dispute.¹⁷ At the same time, the CSO asked then CiO Jiří Dienstbier to actively participate in the dialogue with the individual parties to the conflict and, jointly with international organizations, help improve the humanitarian situation in the region.¹⁸

A second mission to Nagorno-Karabakh was established by the CSO at its 8th session on March 13–14, 1992; it was tasked with exploring possible solutions for ceasefire negotiations and sending observers to monitor the ceasefire. The mission, headed by the CSO chairman Ján Kubiš¹⁹, took place on March 19–23, 1992. Almost simultaneously, at the 1st Additional Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the CSCE in Helsinki on March 24, 1992, a resolution was adopted to organize a conference on Nagorno-Karabakh in Minsk at the earliest possible date under the auspices of the CSCE. This conference was to be conducted in the presence of selected CSCE participating states as mediators, and meant as a forum for further negotiations, with “elected and

13 OSCE DCiP, *6-CSO/Journal No. 1, 6th Meeting of the CSO, January 27–29, 1992*; OSCE DCiP, *Journal No. 3, 6th Meeting of the CSO, January 27–29, 1992*.

14 OSCE DCiP, *CSCE/2-C/Dec. 3, Summary of Conclusions, 2nd Meeting of the CSCE Council, January 30–31, 1992*.

15 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *CSCE Missions, September 1, 1992*. Retrieved 8 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=8a8HAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

16 OSCE DCiP, *7-CSO/Journal No. 2, Annex 1, 7th Meeting of the CSO, January 27–28, 1992*.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *CSCE Missions, September 1, 1992*, p. 14. Retrieved 8 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=8a8HAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

other” representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh also being invited on behalf of one of the interested parties.²⁰ As the ministers fully recognized the need for the CSCE to undertake further efforts to facilitate the peace process in response to the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, at an additional meeting, the CM tasked Dienstbier to visit the region and contribute to the establishment of the ceasefire.²¹ In March 1992, a decision was made to prepare a group of observers who would supervise its observance in the conflict region.²²

The CSCE mission to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, headed by Jiří Dienstbier, took place from March 30 to April 3, 1992. This was a crucial event, attended by Czechoslovak diplomats as well as by delegates of Germany and Sweden (i.e., representatives of the CSCE Troika), the USA, and the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Oldřich Andryšek.²³ The NATO Secretariat coordinated the transport while Canada and the USA provided the aircraft.²⁴ Dienstbier, who demanded a ceasefire in the region for the duration of the mission, called for the exchange of prisoners and hostages.²⁵ His ambition was to bring all parties to joint negotiations and to convene an international peace conference in Minsk. Dienstbier made every effort to convince Armenian and Azerbaijani politicians of its significance. Upon his return, he reported that all parties would welcome the sending of a small advance group from the CSCE participating states to Baku and Yerevan with a mandate to continue talks on security guarantees and possible deployment of unarmed observation and monitoring teams. Dienstbier promised to prepare a proposal for such an operation forthwith and expressed the hope that it could be discussed at the next CSO meeting.²⁶ Dienstbier’s visit fulfilled the stated goal, as, despite diverse positions, the parties involved accepted the idea of preparing and holding a peace conference, which indicated the political will to discuss concessions and seek a compromise.

The Minsk Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh

The preparations for the Minsk conference began. At the 10th session of April 29–May 1, 1992, the CSO adopted a general organizational framework and conditions for holding the Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh under the auspices of the CSCE in Minsk.²⁷ Shortly after his return from Yerevan, on April 7, 1992, Dienstbier commissioned the Italian socialist politician and diplomat Mario Raffaelli, who had gained respect for his success in peace negotiations in Mozambique, to chair the Minsk Conference.²⁸ In addition, the CSO decided to establish an observation mission with a mandate to monitor the maintenance of the ceasefire in the disputed region, which, however, was to be sent only after the ceasefire had been established and all parties

20 OSCE DCiP, *CSCE/C/1-AM/Dec. 1, Summary of Conclusions, Helsinki Additional Meeting of the CSCE Council March 24, 1992*. Although Azerbaijan agreed to invite Nagorno-Karabakh representatives, it emphasized that inviting its delegation did not imply the recognition of the region’s independence.

21 Ibid.

22 S. E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Report no. 46*, Uppsala, 1999, p. 119. Retrieved 7 September 2022, https://is.muni.cz/el/fss/jaro2019/POL587/um/Cornell_The_Nagorno-Karabakh_Conflict.pdf.

23 The author drew on the list of mission participants attached to the letter that J. Dienstbier probably addressed to the ministers of foreign affairs of the participating states of the CSCE following his return from the visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh.

24 D. Huňátová, *Sametová diplomacie. Vzpomínky na výjimečné roky 1989–1992* [The Velvet diplomacy. Memories of the momentous years 1989–1992], Praha, 2019, p. 287.

25 Ibid., p. 287.

26 Ibid., p. 287.

27 OSCE DCiP, *10-CSO/Journal, 10th Meeting of the CSO, April 29–May 1, 1992*.

28 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 51.

concerned had agreed to the sending and conditions of the mission.²⁹ Swedish diplomat Mathias Mossberg, who received the mandate from the CSO, established an observation unit to see that the ceasefire was not violated. This resulted in the establishment of a 7-man team headed by Mossberg.³⁰ However, in the absence of the ceasefire, the mission could not be deployed and, as it turned out, the parties were nowhere near ready for a peace conference.³¹ At a new attempt on May 13, 1992, Mossberg's team worked out the final Moscow Report containing a detailed plan for the deployment of observer teams to monitor the ceasefire and, as it was hoped then, to see to the implementation of a potential peace agreement.³² Yet, the documents show that this mission had a different mandate and was of a different nature than the observation and monitoring mission Dienstbier had promised to send during his visit to the Caucasus. The minutes of the CSO meetings of that period did not mention any other mission. In one of his files, Zdeněk Matějka wrote that Dienstbier had also considered the possibility of sending his special observers to the region, who would start a political dialogue on the spot and explore the possibilities of involving the CSCE in a peaceful solution.³³

This even caused a minor diplomatic incident when, during the CSO meeting, the Azerbaijani delegation demanded an explanation of the letter of April 16, 1992, which Jiří Dienstbier had sent to O. Sessaian. In the letter, Dienstbier addressed Sessaian as Prime Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh; what is more, the letter also mentioned the office of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh, a post held by the young Karabakh politician Artur Mkrtchian. Mkrtchian was a prominent representative of the Karabakh movement, who had joined the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) – a nationalist party – and was murdered under unclear circumstances in his apartment on April 14, 1992.³⁴ Azerbaijan objected that the letter disputed the Republic of Azerbaijan's sovereignty, interfering in its internal affairs.³⁵ The CSFR delegation responded that it was only a letter of condolence, in which the mentioned titles had no impact on the official position of the CSFR, nor did they indicate the type of political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

With the approaching date of the Minsk conference, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh further escalated. In May, Nagorno-Karabakh units captured the town of Shusha and, sometime later, also the Lachin Corridor, while the blockade of the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan grew stronger as a result of the ongoing fighting. At the 11th session of the CSO on May 18–21, 1992, which preceded the Minsk Conference, the Azerbaijani delegation described the situation as an act of Armenian aggression; Azerbaijan, which saw itself as a victim of annexation, called for strict sanctions against Armenia. While Azerbaijan regarded the Minsk conference as

29 OSCE DCiP, *10-CSO/Journal, 10th Meeting of the CSO, April 29–May 1, 1992*.

30 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *CSCE Missions, September 1, 1992*, p. 15. Retrieved 8 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=8a8HAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

31 S. E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Report no. 46*, 1999, p. 119. Retrieved 7 September 2022, https://is.muni.cz/el/fss/jaro2019/POL587/um/Cornell_The_Nagorno-Karabakh_Conflict.pdf.

32 W. H. Hill, *No Place for Russia. European Security Institutions since 1989*, New York, 2018, p. 410.

33 OSCE DCiP, *Zdeněk Matějka: Československo a KBSE [Zdeněk Matějka: Czechoslovakia and the CSCE]*, 1992, p. 10.

34 According to the official version, his death was allegedly an accident when he fatally shot himself while cleaning his gun, whereas others believe it to be a premeditated murder. As mentioned above, the Armenian government initially refused to place itself in the role of a party to the conflict. This not only testifies to the fact that Armenia was unwilling to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh's independence, but also proves that the political program of the Karabakh nationalist and separatist politicians did not always completely coincide with the ideas of the Yerevan leadership. After Mkrtchian's death, relations with Yerevan improved (T. de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York – London, 2013, p. 175).

35 OSCE DCiP, *10-CSO/Journal, 10th Meeting of the CSO, April 29–May 1, 1992*.

impossible under the given circumstances, Armenia demanded its prompt convention.³⁶ In the end, attempts to this effect failed.

The formation of the Minsk Group and its first steps

At the 11th CSO session, the delegations present decided to convene an extraordinary meeting.³⁷ It was supposed to be a “preliminary” consultation before the Minsk conference, which would serve as a platform for discussing problematic issues. Its ambition was to overcome mutual disagreements and to prepare for the organization of a potential conference. The Italian delegation invited representatives of eleven countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Germany, Italy, Russia, USA, Turkey, France, Czechoslovakia, and Sweden) for negotiations, with four rounds of talks taking place in Rome between June and August.³⁸ During the first three meetings, irreconcilable views on the status and modes of participation of representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians did not allow for any compromise. Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians rejected observer status, demanding the position of full participants as elected representatives of the region. This attitude was backed by Armenia, while Azerbaijan categorically refused to negotiate, claiming that since both Armenia and Azerbaijan sufficiently represented their communities in Nagorno-Karabakh, they were eligible for being the sole negotiators.³⁹ Another point of contention was the discussion about the ultimate status of Nagorno-Karabakh. While Armenia insisted that its future legal status be resolved only once the fighting had stopped and international peacekeeping forces had been sent to the region, Azerbaijan argued that any mandate for a peacekeeping operation would diminish Azerbaijan’s sovereignty over the disputed territory.⁴⁰ Although the Rome conference was also joined by a delegation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, these did not participate in the negotiations, as there was no generally acceptable principle to build upon.⁴¹ Following three rounds of talks, at the 14th session of the CSO on July 9, 1992, in its report on the status of the negotiations, the Italian delegation noted the impossibility of reaching a compromise on any issue; this created a serious complication to the ongoing phase of the negotiation process, hampering the search for a solution to the crisis.⁴²

The Nagorno-Karabakh representatives were subsequently persuaded to take part in the 4th round of negotiations in late July and early August. The “inferior” status of Nagorno-Karabakh, as it was labeled, remained a controversial subject.⁴³ The probability of convening a conference in Minsk was diminishing due to substantial differences on many issues between the parties to the conflict. In early August, members of the Minsk Group agreed to a call for a 60-day ceasefire, and Mario Raffaelli traveled to Yerevan and Baku to seek the approval of the respective authorities as well as of the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in Nagorno-

36 OSCE DCiP, *11-CSO/Journal no. 4, 11th Meeting of the CSO, May 18–May 21, 1992*.

37 Ibid.

38 The dates of the individual negotiations in Rome were as follows: June 1-5, June 15-20, June 29–July 6, July 31–August 5. The fifth meeting in Rome did not take place until September 7–10, 1992.

39 O. Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*. Farnham, 2012, p. 196.

40 Ibid., p. 197.

41 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union*, Congress, January 1993, p. 130. Retrieved 10 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=PvhoCDGOIMQC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

42 OSCE DCiP, *14-CSO/Journal, 14th Meeting of the CSO, May 18–21, 1992*.

43 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 57.

Karabakh.⁴⁴ Both the Armenian side and the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians agreed to suspend offensive actions. However, although Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan proposed a ceasefire from September 1, there was no clear answer from Azerbaijan. Eventually, in his letter of September 5, President Abulfaz Elchibey stated that he would stop hostilities only after the “Armenian Expeditionary Force” had withdrawn from Shusha and Lachin.⁴⁵ At the 16th session of the CSO on September 16–18, 1992, the delegates present took note of Mario Raffaelli’s report, in which he expressed his concerns over the current state of the Minsk process, stating that the negotiations had reached an impasse. The CSO urged Raffaelli and then CiO of the CSCE Council of Ministers and new Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic Jozef Moravčík to work on removing the obstacles and to look for a new impetus for continuing the process.⁴⁶

Parallel efforts at a ceasefire in the region

The CSCE’s efforts to broker a ceasefire were rivaled, albeit with very similar success, or rather lack of it, by attempts by Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation to negotiate a ceasefire bilaterally. On August 26, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev prepared a new ceasefire agreement. A day later, it was codified by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan in the Alma-Ata Declaration and, on September 3, in the Ijevan Protocol.⁴⁷ However, the negotiated declaration only applied to the Armenian-Azerbaijani border (i.e., not to the main front in Nagorno-Karabakh). In order to conform to the CSCE appeal, the Azerbaijani and Armenian ministers expressed their countries’ interest in suspending military operations from September 1, yet there was no real willingness to implement the declaration. Moreover, the fighting continued also in the border region. Soon afterward, Armenia withdrew from the Alma-Ata Declaration, once again frustrating attempts to reach a ceasefire. According to the Head of the Russian mediation mission, member and co-chairman of the CSCE Minsk Group for the Russian Federation in 1992–1996 Vladimir Kazimirov, the Alma-Ata agreement provoked mixed reactions in the Minsk Group. Part of the group favored the principle of synergy and complementarity over one party’s monopoly position in the peace process, and hence did not regard Kazakhstan’s initiatives with distrust.⁴⁸ Moreover, at its 7th session as early as February 1992, the CSO urged its participating states, especially Kazakhstan and Russia, to continue their efforts to support negotiations between the parties and broker a ceasefire based on the CSCE principles.⁴⁹ On the other hand, at the September meeting of the Minsk Group in Rome, dissatisfied voices were heard especially from the USA and Italy, which claimed that Alma-Ata made the entire situation even more difficult. The above countries harshly criticized Azerbaijan for Elchibey’s reluctance to give his consent to suspending fighting in Karabakh for a period of 60 days, as requested by the Minsk Group, while agreeing to the measures in the borderland.⁵⁰

Russia, as one of the presiding states of the Minsk Group, played its diplomatic double game when it took its

44 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union, Congress, January 1993*, p. 130. Retrieved 10 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=PvhoCDGOIMQC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

45 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 63.

46 OSCE DCiP, *16-CSO/Journal No. 3, 16th Meeting of the CSO, September 16–18, 1992*.

47 A. Aslanli, ‘The Politics of Ceasefire and the Occupation’, in H. M. Yavuz and M. Gunter (eds.), *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives*. London, 2023, pp. 150–167.

48 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 77.

49 OSCE DCiP, *7-CSO/Journal No. 2, Annex 1, 7th Meeting of the CSO, January 27–28, 1992*.

50 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 79.

own initiative to reach a ceasefire agreement. The contract, which came as a surprise for the Minsk Group, was signed by the defense ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia in Sochi on September 25.⁵¹ The ceasefire was supposed to constitute a moratorium on all kinds of military activity between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan along the entire borderline and in the Nagorno-Karabakh region for a period of two months.⁵² A gradual withdrawal of armed units and all types of equipment was planned. However, the deal resulted from chaotic management and an uncoordinated initiative by the Russian Ministry of Defense. This is exemplified by a diplomatic blunder as the text included an appeal to Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to send observers from their countries, which caught them by surprise because the call came without any prior consultation. Kazimirov emphasized that the enthusiasm and operational efficiency of the Ministry of Defense in deploying observers at the request of the minister himself was at cross-purpose with the response received from the Minsk Group by Russian mediators when they requested the assignment of a group of military observers as part of the preparations for ceasefire agreements in Karabakh.⁵³ As it turned out, the agreement soon fell apart due to mutual accusations of ceasefire violations.

The Armenian side was growing increasingly weary of the CSCE and the mediation efforts of the Minsk Group. On September 20, 1992, president Ter-Petrosyan admitted to eleven Armenian organizations in New York that the CSCE did not have proper mechanisms to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and that the UN should be more involved in diplomatic and peace initiatives.⁵⁴ Ter-Petrosyan had long demanded the sending of UN peacekeeping forces to the region, and so had the Armenian ambassador to the UN, who had asked Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to send UN observers to help achieve and, subsequently, monitor the ceasefire. Meanwhile, many public statements by Azerbaijani political leaders indicate that, for Baku, the CSCE was the only acceptable forum to resolve the conflict, probably because of the CSCE's commitment to respect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This was confirmed when the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister said that the only observers that were allowed were those from the CSCE (i.e., not those from the UN or other international organizations), or when President Elchibey in Moscow refused to engage the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeepers on the grounds that Azerbaijan was not a CIS member state.⁵⁵

In search of the stimuli for further involvement of the CSCE in the peace process

The last, 17th session of the CSO during the Czechoslovak Chairmanship, dedicated to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, took place on November 5–6, 1992. In an effort to find a way out of the impasse over attempts to achieve a ceasefire, the CSO decided to establish an open ad hoc group in Vienna, which was given the mandate to consider and approve the conditions and financing modalities for sending the Advance Monitoring Group (henceforth AMG) to the conflict area.⁵⁶ The group would be led by the CSO chairman, and once the conditions for sending an AMG were met, he was mandated to convene an extraordinary CSO meeting to deal with the AMG deployment. In accordance with the Paris Charter, the CSO could delegate tasks to open

51 A. Aslanli, 'The Politics of Ceasefire and the Occupation', in H. M. Yavuz and M. Gunter (eds.), *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives*. London, 2023, pp. 155.

52 V. Kazimirov, *Russia's Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, pp. 79–80.

53 V. Kazimirov, *Russia's Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 82.

54 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union, Congress, January 1993*, p. 130. Retrieved 10 October 2022, https://books.google.sk/books?id=PvhoCDGOIMQC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

55 Ibid., p. 131.

56 OSCE DCIP, *17-CSO/Journal No. 2, Annex 1, 17th Meeting of the CSO, November 5 - 6, 1992*.

ad hoc groups with a clearly defined mandate.⁵⁷

The experience of the previous months led the CSO delegates to issue a strong appeal to all CSCE participating states. These were urged to mutually coordinate their negotiation activities with the Minsk Group and, if individual states sent their own observers to the region, to include them in the AMG framework⁵⁸. Already in his September speech before the UN General Assembly in New York, Chairman of the CSCE Council of Ministers Jozef Moravčík criticized the general tendency to send unilateral observation missions to conflict areas, which also applied to Nagorno-Karabakh. Moravčík pointed out the need for coordinating UN and CSCE activities – an issue proposed by the CSFR as one of the items on the agenda for the UN General Assembly. He reminded the delegates of an instance when multiple international organizations or countries sent their own missions to the region, with the parties to the conflict not understanding the purpose of such duplicate missions, which asked virtually the same questions, without any visible difference in their purpose.⁵⁹

The issue of functional linkage between the CSCE and other existing integration structures and international organizations – a process that Dienstbier often referred to as an “integration of integrations” – was at the heart of the Czechoslovak CSCE chairmanship.⁶⁰ In the first stages of its institutionalization during the early 1990s, the Helsinki process faced an underlying problem which could be described as an overlap between the CSCE’s activities and other international organizations, along with an absence of their mutual synergy and the insufficiently developed individual mechanisms. As a result, the CSCE did not offer any tangible answers to the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh over the course of 1992. In the last quarter, the conflict stabilized militarily, with the end of the year seeing no progress in the Minsk Group negotiations. Even the 3rd CSCE Council of Ministers in Stockholm, where CSFR handed over the Chairmanship to Sweden, did not bring any new impetus. The final document was limited to an appeal to Mario Raffaelli and to the Minsk Group to continue with their efforts to advance the peace process.⁶¹

Conclusion

The present article aimed to map the reaction of the CSCE authorities in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh during the CSFR Chairmanship in the CSCE in 1992. In conclusion, we offered our assessment of whether the activities and peace initiatives undertaken during the given period were successful and led to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Following the accession of Armenia and Azerbaijan to the CSCE, the conflict between the two post-Soviet republics became the focus of attention and one of the most discussed issues at the meetings of the CSCE’s key executive bodies, the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and the Council of Ministers (CM). When comparing the CSCE statements on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with those made on the ongoing hostilities in the former Yugoslavia, one can easily see striking differences. The wording and tone of the documents and

57 OSCE DCiP, *CSCE/2-C/Dec. 2, Prague Document on Further Development of CSCE Institutions and Structures*.

58 OSCE DCiP, *17-CSO/Journal No. 2, Annex 1, 17th Meeting of the CSO, November 5 – 6, 1992*.

59 OSCE DCiP, *Statement by H. E. Mr. Jozef Moravčík, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, 47th regular Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, General Debate, September 25, 1992*.

60 D. Huňátová, *Sametová diplomacie. Vzpomínky na výjimečné roky 1989–1992*, 2019, p. 78.

61 OSCE DCiP, *CSCE/3-C/Dec.2, Summary of Conclusions of the Stockholm Council Meeting: Shaping a New Europe - the Role of the CSCE, 3rd Meeting of the CSCE Council, December 14–15, 1992*.

declarations adopted at the meeting of these two CSCE bodies regarding the situation in Karabakh were neutral and non-partisan. By contrast, in the case of the escalating conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the CSCE used a somewhat strong and unambiguous diplomatic language, with most appeals being addressed to the representatives of Serbia. The CSCE openly blamed the deteriorating situation on Serbia and the Yugoslav National Army. On the other hand, with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, the CSCE was rather restrained not only in naming the culprit but also in pinpointing the conflicting parties themselves. The document of March 1992, by which the CM convened a conference in Minsk, did not contain terms such as a “conflicting party” or “a party to the conflict”; rather, individual appeals were addressed to “all”, not to “both” parties.⁶²

In the first half of 1992, three missions were sent to the conflict region, with three representatives of the Czechoslovak diplomacy playing a major part: the CM Chairman Jiří Dienstbier, the CSO Chairman Ján Kubiš, and Karel Schwarzenberg as then Head of Office of President Václav Havel. From the very start, Dienstbier and Kubiš were very active in their efforts to help suspend the fighting between the parties to the conflict and sign a ceasefire. Dienstbier keenly sought to alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis in the region. However, the dispatch and mandate of any other observation missions were contingent on the establishment of the ceasefire itself. As a result of the lack of skill and experience with peace-building processes, the CSCE was trapped in a vicious circle, even when it came to deploying observers to the conflict region. While the individual parties insisted on the swift arrival of observers, the CSCE declared that they could only be sent under the assumption of a permanent ceasefire, which, however, could not be achieved.

The Minsk Conference was supposed to become a platform for negotiating the much-needed ceasefire. Its convention was hampered both by the developments on the front – the opening of the Lachin Corridor and other operations of the Karabakh militants – and by the persisting, irreconcilable differences between the parties to the conflict over their opinions on the very purpose of the conference. Whether to negotiate on Karabakh, on the relations between the two former Soviet republics, or even on the “Armenian aggression”, as demanded by Baku were matters of dispute. Hence, as a forerunner of the Minsk conference, a preliminary extraordinary meeting of the representatives of the eleven states that were supposed to participate in the conference was convened in Rome. This turned into a series of meetings, leading to the establishment of an auxiliary body, the so-called Minsk Group. The spontaneous nature of creating the Minsk Group led to discussions about its legitimacy, as although the CSCE decided on convening the Minsk Conference and specified the states that would participate in it, it never decided on the creation of the Minsk Group as a particular auxiliary body that would meet regularly, nor did it grant it any specific mandate.⁶³ The views and positions of the individual parties were so divergent that even the Rome meetings of the Minsk Group did not bring about any compromise. At that time, there were also parallel initiatives, such as Kazakh or Russian, which sought to achieve a truce between the parties. Like the Minsk Group negotiations, these initiatives were not crowned with success, either. In the fall of 1992, the negotiations appeared to have stalled and the possibilities of the cooperative security structures of the time, such as the CSCE, had been exhausted. They did not result in a constructive dialogue or in improved relations between the parties to the conflict, let alone in defusing the situation or a permanent ceasefire. Peace efforts required a new impetus, which, however, did not arrive, thus the year 1992 came to an end and the Minsk Group remained temporarily paralyzed. Even then, it was obvious that the interests of powers such as Turkey and especially Russia, which enforced their power claims in the South Caucasus, were stronger than multilateral diplomacy. Russia’s significance in the conflict

62 V. Kazimirov, *Russia’s Mediation in the Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Moscow, 2014, p. 50.


63 Ibid., p. 53.

showed also later, during the final mediation of the ceasefire, which, in 1994, brought the First Nagorno-Karabakh War to an end. It is important to note that Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was largely on the side of Azerbaijan, and its support for Azerbaijan was driven by shared ethnic and cultural ties, as well as economic strategic interests. Turkey provided diplomatic, political, and military support to Azerbaijan throughout the conflict. Moreover, Turkey, in coordination with Azerbaijan, imposed a blockade on Armenia, severely restricting its access to the outside world. This blockade had a significant economic impact on Armenia and further isolated the country during the conflict. Finally, along with the inexperience of the CSCE and the lack of consensus building within the CSCE bodies, Russian and Turkish regional interests actually contributed to the failure of the CSCE's involvement.⁶⁴

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the CSCE gradually moved from a soft mode of operation, mostly consisting of challenges addressed to the conflicting parties, to peace-building activities. Although, on the one hand, the CSCE lacked experience in peace-making and conflict resolution and there were no sufficiently developed or flexible enough mechanisms, which is a circumstance that hindered the CSCE's ability to act. Hence, one cannot compare the CSCE of the early 1990s with the UN, NATO, or European Communities with large machinery, generous budgets, and large-scale organizational or military infrastructure at their disposal. What is more, the CSCE was not an international organization with its own legal personality. The very institutional structure of the CSCE, which in the post-1992 period of escalation of new conflicts was still in the process of its formation, could not keep up with the dynamics of the political and social development in Europe.

During the mentioned period, several crucial diplomatic efforts were undertaken by the CiO and CSCE leading figures to resolve the conflict. However, the paper also underscores the difficulties in reaching a consensus among the conflicting parties and the limited success of these initiatives in achieving a lasting ceasefire or a comprehensive resolution. This led to a negotiation deadlock and failure due to the parties' inability to identify the areas of agreement. At that time, given the institutional setup of the CSCE during that time, the CSFR Chairmanship lacked the capacity to address such negotiation failure. Additionally, the article emphasized the need for coordination among international organizations in conflict resolution efforts, as overlapping and duplicative missions could hinder progress. The concept of "integration of integrations" was a central theme during the Czechoslovak Chairmanship in the CSCE, highlighting the importance of synergizing the efforts of different actors. However, the ambitious visions of several Czechoslovak politicians as Václav Havel or Jiří Dienstbier, pinning their hopes on the process of CSCE's institutionalization and appealing to the CSCE to become a standard international organization, to build its own peacekeeping forces and to represent a kind of "United Nations Organization of the Northern Hemisphere", thus remained unfulfilled.

64 Cf. M. R. Freire, *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union. The Role of the OSCE*, London, 2003, p. 395.



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