

Azerbaijan, Armenia Hold Talks Over Disputed Nagorno-Karabakh

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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PARIS — Officials from Azerbaijan and Armenia met in Paris on Monday for talks over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was the cause of a war that killed about 30,000 people in the early 1990s.

The conflict between ethnic Azeris and Armenians erupted in 1991 over the area, a mountainous enclave within Azerbaijan but with a majority Armenian population, which Armenian-backed forces seized along with seven surrounding Azeri districts.

A truce was signed in 1994, but there was no peace treaty. Violence still flares sporadically along the cease-fire line and Azerbaijan's border with Armenia, underlining the risk of a conflict in the South Caucasus, where Turkey, Russia and Iran have interests.

The enclave of about 160,000 people has run its own affairs with heavy Armenian military and financial backing since the war. Oil-producing Azerbaijan often threatens to take it back by

force, though it says it favors diplomacy.

The one-day talks held in the French capital between Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and his Armenian counterpart, Edward Nalbandyan, was a new effort to advance the peace process, said a statement from Russia, France and the United States.

The three countries, known as the Minsk Group, have led years of mediation under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

“The foreign ministers reiterated their support for a peaceful settlement and their determination to continue negotiations. ... [They] agreed to a further discussion of the peace process in the coming weeks,” the Minsk Group said.

An Azeri diplomatic source in Paris said he did not think that talks were moving closer to a resolution, although his country remained committed to negotiations.

“We are trying to find a solution to this impasse with a large autonomy for the Armenians, but it [Nagorno-Karabakh] has to stay in Azerbaijan territory,” the source said. “We don’t want war even if we are ready for it.”

There have been several rounds of talks between the neighbors since 1994, and the foreign ministers of both countries met in Paris last October.

In the same month, Armenian President Serzh Sarkysyan accused Azerbaijan of accumulating a “horrendous quantity” of arms in preparation for a resumption of fighting but said he wanted a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

In August, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev pardoned and freed a soldier convicted of killing an Armenian soldier with an ax in Budapest, drawing furious protests from Armenia.

Sarkysyan said the pardon showed that Nagorno-Karabakh could not be part of Azerbaijan.

Armenia has a security agreement with Russia, while Azerbaijan has one with Turkey.

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