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# Third-Party Mediation and Confidence-Building in the Azerbaijan–Armenia Peace Process, 2022–2025

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## Abstract

This article examines the involvement of third parties in the Azerbaijan–Armenia peace process in terms of confidence-building and the implementation of agreements. The study aims to determine under what conditions mediation supports bilateral negotiations and when the multiplicity of formats and external interests create additional difficulties. The research is based on qualitative analysis of official diplomatic documents and a comparison of selected events. The empirical framework primarily covers 2022–2025. The analysis proposes evaluating third-party contributions not by the number of meetings held, but by the clarification of the negotiation agenda, the specification of reciprocal commitments, and the development of implementation procedures. The article's principal conclusion is that mediation creates conditions for more sustainable outcomes when it supports legal principles accepted by the parties and institutions for direct cooperation, rather than substituting for the parties' political will. Confidence-building, in turn, requires a shift from general statements to measurable, reciprocal, and verifiable steps. The text of a peace agreement being agreed upon and that agreement entering into legal force are treated as separate stages.

**Keywords:** *mediation diplomacy; Azerbaijan–Armenia relations; confidence-building; peace negotiations; direct dialogue; regional security*

## 1. Introduction

Restoring interstate relations after regional conflicts is not limited to reaching a political agreement. Security concerns, the effects of past confrontation on public memory, and doubts about whether the other side will fulfil its commitments complicate negotiations. The Azerbaijan–Armenia peace process is an example in which these challenges are interconnected across high-level diplomatic meetings and technical discussions on border issues, humanitarian matters, and transport links.

In such circumstances, third-party involvement may serve to create space for communication, maintain the continuity of negotiations, and facilitate the development of mutually acceptable decisions. However, the presence of a mediator does not automatically produce an agreement. The external actor's resources, its acceptance by the parties, and the

compatibility of its objectives with the negotiation agenda must be assessed separately. The intensity of political contacts and the institutional sustainability of peace are not the same indicator.

The article's central research question is: Through what mechanisms can third-party support in the Azerbaijan–Armenia peace process be translated into confidence-building and implementable agreements? Rather than comparing the standing of mediators, this question seeks to clarify the conditions under which their activities produce results. The analytical proposition advanced in the study is that the benefits of external support are linked to the parties' ownership of the process, a common legal framework, and the possibility of verifying reciprocal commitments.

## 2. Methodological Framework

The study is based on qualitative document analysis and a structured comparison of selected events. The source base includes the United Nations guidance document on mediation, a diplomatic statement by the European Union, joint statements by Azerbaijan and Armenia, information published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and official materials from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The empirical analysis focuses on the Brussels meeting of 6 April 2022, the joint statement of 7 December 2023, the meeting of the border commissions on 19 April 2024, and the Washington phase of 2025 (European Council, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024, 2025; Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia & Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023; President of the Republic of Azerbaijan & Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2025).

The events are examined against three criteria: the parties' participation in preparing the agreement; the specificity of commitments; and the procedures that make it possible to monitor implementation. These criteria constitute the author's analytical framework and are not a statistical index. The article does not claim to measure mediation's impact on peace numerically or to establish conclusively, in causal terms, the contribution of any particular actor.

An important limitation of the method is the lack of access to records of closed negotiations. Official statements indicate the parties' public positions but do not fully disclose the sequence in which concessions were made. Accordingly, events confirmed in the documents are distinguished from their possible diplomatic effects. Limiting the temporal scope of the analysis to the end of 2025 also prevents unverified conclusions from being drawn about subsequent developments.

## 3. Theoretical Links Between Mediation and Trust

The United Nations guidance document on effective mediation identifies the consent of the parties, impartiality, national ownership of the process, compliance with international law, and coordination of mediation efforts among its key principles (United Nations, 2012). In the Azerbaijan–Armenia case, these principles provide a framework for assessing the acceptable limits of external involvement and the sustainability of outcomes.

Mediation, facilitation of negotiations, and political witnessing are closely related but distinct functions. A mediator may put forward proposals to bring the parties' positions closer together. An actor facilitating negotiations primarily provides a venue, communication channels, and procedural support. A witness may increase the political visibility of an agreement that has been reached. Witnessing, in itself, does not provide a legal guarantee of implementation; such a guarantee requires a separate and clearly defined commitment.

Confidence should not be treated as a single, unchanging relationship either. Even when the parties doubt each other's political intentions, they may still trust a specific technical procedure. For example, an agreed rule requiring information about a border incident to be transmitted to the other side within a specified period and jointly investigated may reduce uncertainty even when overall political confidence is low. In this context, confidence rests not on an assumption of the other side's goodwill, but on observing conduct agreed in advance.

This approach clarifies the task of mediation. Before seeking to resolve all disagreements, a third party can help clarify which commitments the parties will fulfil, by what deadline, and under which procedures. This sequence is one possible mechanism through which small agreements may contribute to broader political dialogue. However, it does not follow that individual successful steps necessarily guarantee final peace.

## 4. External Support in Shaping the Negotiation Agenda

In his statement following the Brussels meeting of 6 April 2022, European Council President Charles Michel noted that the parties had agreed to task their foreign ministers with working on a future peace agreement and to convene a joint border commission. The document also addressed humanitarian issues and communication links (European Council, 2022). These facts demonstrate the function of an external platform in translating broad political discussions into separate areas of work.

Analytically, the importance of such agenda-setting lies in dividing complex disputes into manageable issues. Border delimitation, humanitarian measures, and the drafting of an agreement require different kinds of expertise. Expecting all these matters to be resolved at a single high-level meeting would overstate what the process can achieve. A diplomatic platform can be more useful when it directs each issue to an appropriate working mechanism.

A second issue concerning the role of an external actor is the balance of its relations with the parties. A mediator's political and economic interests do not automatically render its efforts ineffective. Nevertheless, if one of the parties does not accept that actor, the legitimacy of the negotiations may be weakened. An impartial procedure does not mean mechanically equating the parties' legal positions; it means applying agreed rules consistently.

The existence of multiple platforms can open alternative channels of communication. At the same time, overlapping agendas, differing expectations, and competition for influence among external actors create additional coordination costs. Public documents are insufficient to explain any specific delay in the Azerbaijan–Armenia process solely in terms of competition among platforms. Nonetheless, as a general institutional risk, responsibilities need to be allocated, and previous agreements need to be taken into account consistently across different formats.

## 5. Direct Dialogue and Reciprocal Confidence-Building Measures

The joint statement of 7 December 2023 was presented as the outcome of negotiations between the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan and the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia. It stated that Azerbaijan would release 32 Armenian military personnel and Armenia would release two Azerbaijani military personnel, and it also set out reciprocal support concerning COP29 and the COP Bureau (Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia & Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). This example confirms the possibility of agreeing on concrete and observable commitments through direct dialogue.

The analytical value of such measures lies in the new information they provide about reciprocal behaviour. Fulfilment of a promise gives the parties some basis for assessing the credibility of a subsequent commitment. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that a limited humanitarian agreement resolves all security problems. Its contribution is primarily associated with preserving a channel of communication and demonstrating that reciprocal steps are possible.

Strengthening direct negotiations does not require the elimination of all forms of external support. While determining the substance themselves, the parties may receive assistance from third parties through expert advice, technical preparation, and financing for agreed projects. This division of roles leaves authorship of the agreement with the parties while enabling additional resources to be mobilized for implementation.

For confidence-building measures to be sustainable, reciprocity should not be understood as mechanical numerical equality. Different steps may carry different humanitarian, political, and technical significance. The key issues are whether the parties accept the measure, whether the commitment is clearly formulated, and whether implementation can be confirmed. For research purposes, it is important to track not only the number of measures, but also whether they are repeated and whether they create a pathway to subsequent agreements.

## 6. Border Issues and Institutional Cooperation

The eighth meeting of the border commissions, held on 19 April 2024, is an officially documented event showing that border issues were discussed within a bilateral working mechanism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024). Its institutional significance lies in the possibility of following up on directions agreed at the political level through expert and commission-level work.

Delimitation refers to the legal and cartographic determination of a boundary, whereas demarcation refers to marking it on the ground. These stages complement one another but are not the same operation. Without technical precision, mutual verification of documents, and an agreed sequence of steps, it may be difficult to implement political statements on the ground.

The article proposes several indicators for assessing border cooperation: continuity of meetings, the existence of agreed protocols, rules for information exchange, and communication procedures in the event of an incident. These are criteria for future research and implementation monitoring, not a claim to provide a complete list of existing mechanisms. International technical assistance on border issues can support institutional work only with the parties' consent and a clearly defined mandate.

Border management also affects the daily lives of local residents. Taking into account roads, water, economic activities, and safe movement may strengthen the practical acceptance of agreements. Accordingly, while maintaining the confidentiality of interstate negotiations, it is advisable to provide the public with accurate information about decisions that affect people's rights and everyday activities.

## 7. Moving from Political Agreement to Legal and Practical Implementation

According to information published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 August 2025, the agreed text of the Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations was initialled by the foreign ministers on 8 August (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025). This event indicates that agreement had been reached on the text. Initialling, signing, and entry into legal force are separate

procedures; the completion of one does not automatically confirm that the others have been completed.

The Washington Joint Declaration notes the need to continue subsequent steps toward the signing and final ratification of the agreement (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan & Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2025). This distinction is important when evaluating the outcomes of mediation. A diplomatic event may have a significant political impact, but its legal consequences must be determined on the basis of the relevant procedures and the conditions for the document's entry into force.

The Declaration links the opening of communication links to the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the jurisdiction of states (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan & Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2025). The article's analytical conclusion concerning economic relations is that mutual benefit may increase incentives to preserve peace. However, the announcement of an infrastructure project does not in itself guarantee its revenues, security, or political consequences. Customs procedures, tariffs, the allocation of responsibilities, and dispute-resolution rules must be clarified separately.

According to the OSCE, the closure of the Minsk Process and related structures was carried out pursuant to the decision of 1 September 2025 and completed on 30 November (OSCE, 2025). This is a factual outcome concerning the closure of a mediation institution. The organizational change should not be interpreted to mean that all problems in the region have been resolved or that external diplomatic support is no longer needed.

## 8. Discussion and Practical Implications

The selected events support assessing third-party contributions at several distinct levels. At the communication level, the objective is to sustain dialogue. At the substantive level, it is to reach agreement on disputed matters through an acceptable formulation. At the implementation level, the central concerns are fulfilment of commitments, explanations for delays, and the management of disagreements through peaceful procedures. Distinguishing these levels reduces the risk of equating a political event with final peace.

Under the approach proposed in this article, an implementable agreement should clarify at least the responsible body, the sequence of actions, information exchange, and the means of resolving disputes. Rather than setting a single deadline for every provision, intermediate stages can be established according to the nature of each issue. This proposal is not a description of the content of existing agreements, but a practical framework for managing the outcomes of negotiations.

It is also worth considering whether humanitarian issues can be handled through a separate working channel as far as possible from political disputes. In matters such as information about missing persons, cooperation on mine hazards, and other humanitarian activities, it is important to measure outcomes in terms of human security. Confidentiality should be maintained for sensitive information, while the public should receive confirmed general information about the work carried out.

The division of responsibilities among third parties should be based on the parties' consent. One actor may provide a venue for negotiations, another technical expertise, and a third financial support for agreed projects. Such a division is useful only when mandates complement one another. The extent of external support should not blur the parties' decision-making authority or their responsibility for the agreement.

Finally, public communication is a distinct dimension of peace diplomacy. The expected benefits of agreements and the issues they do not resolve should be explained clearly. An excessively optimistic presentation may lead to disappointment when subsequent delays occur. Communication that better supports confidence clearly distinguishes confirmed outcomes, work still in progress, and the next procedural steps.

## 9. Conclusion

The selected stages of the Azerbaijan–Armenia case show that the outcomes of mediation should be assessed in relation to the functions it performs, rather than its formal existence. The Brussels meeting can be analysed in terms of agenda-setting, the 2023 joint statement in terms of concrete reciprocal measures, and the work of the border commissions in terms of institutional cooperation. The initialling of the agreement's text in 2025 highlights the distinct importance of legal formalization and implementation stages.

The study's main finding is that third-party support and direct dialogue are complementary tools. External actors can expand opportunities for communication and access to resources, but the acceptance and fulfilment of commitments depend on the parties' political decisions. The implementation of concrete steps, continuity of procedures, and agreed information exchange are central to building sustainable confidence.

These findings should not be treated as a universal model that can be applied automatically to regional conflicts. The historical and legal characteristics of the Azerbaijan–Armenia process must be taken into account. Nevertheless, ownership of the process by the parties, clarity in the functions of mediation, and monitoring of implementation offer testable analytical propositions for future comparative research.

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