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Azerbaijan Lawmakers Urge French Removal From Karabakh Mediation

By AFP

November 26, 2020



France along with Russia and the United States co-chairs the Minsk Group, which has led talks seeking a solution to the conflict for decades but has failed to achieve a lasting agreement. **Karen Minasyan / AFP**

Azerbaijani lawmakers on Thursday called for France to be expelled from a group mediating in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute after the French Senate backed the breakaway region's independence claim.

The French upper house on Wednesday adopted a non-binding resolution calling on France to recognize the ethnic Armenian enclave of Azerbaijan as an independent state.

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The move came after Armenia agreed to a peace deal earlier this month that ended weeks of fresh fighting over Karabakh, which broke from Baku's control during a war in the early

1990s.

France along with Russia and the United States co-chairs the Minsk Group, which has led talks seeking a solution to the conflict for decades but has failed to achieve a lasting agreement.

In a resolution adopted on Thursday, Azerbaijani lawmakers urged the government to appeal to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) — which oversees the Minsk Group — to expel France from its presidency.

They also urged Baku to revise its "political... and economic relations" with France.

Parliament speaker Sahiba Gafarova said a "dirty political campaign against Azerbaijan" had been organized in the French Senate and that Azerbaijani lawmakers had to respond.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had praised the French resolution as "historic."

Under the Moscow-brokered peace agreement — which leaves Karabakh's future political status in limbo — Armenia is losing control of parts of the enclave's territory as well as seven surrounding districts of Azerbaijan it held since the 1990s.

The Armenian separatists are retaining control over most of Karabakh's territory and some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have deployed along frontline areas and to protect a land link connecting Karabakh with Armenia.

Nagorno-Karabakh's declaration of independence from Azerbaijan has not been recognized by any country, including Armenia, which strongly backs its separatist authorities.

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