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Analysis

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By Mahir Zeynalov

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Stereotypes in national media – a closer look

By Elvin Yusifli

Negative stereotypes about Armenians are present in the majority of mass media outlets in Azerbaijan. Those stereotypes are somewhat shared by the public, and they definitely do not come out of nowhere. Stereotypical opinions circulating in the mass media have their deep roots..... **Read more on Page 10**

Let them decide themselves!

By Sasun Khachatryan

If it takes weeks or months for a bullet wound to cure, then it normally takes years, decades, if not centuries, to eliminate the effects inflicted by widespread and systematic use of certain words and expressions in the media that easily develop into stereotypes.... **Read more on Page 11**

ANALYSIS

International Court of Justice Ruling on Kosovo and the Ultimate power of Precedence

By Hovhannes Nikoghosyan

Right after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the highest court of sovereignty-centered and UN-led world order with universal jurisdiction – issued its advisory opinion on the lawfulness of unilateral declaration of independence regarding the one-time Yugoslav-Albanian enclave of Kosovo, tensions and discussions over its character swept media outlets. This is especially relevant to the regions where similar conflicts exist, where discussions of precedential weight of the advisory opinion swept all other issues from the agenda. The Foreign Ministry of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh rushed to issue a statement on July 24, 2010 that the ruling is “of extremely legal, political and moral, as well as universal precedent-related significance and cannot be limited just with Kosovo’s example.”

Whether or not the ICJ decision would be referred to as a precedent legally, as the statement above showed, it would encourage other secessionist entities around the globe to act and hope for international recognition. Naturally, whether Kosovo will be set as a precedent or not strongly depends on the stance of the leading countries supporting Kosovo’s bid to become a full member of the international community. Currently, those powers say all conflicts should be dealt individually, claiming that the international atmosphere over emerging statehoods has successfully transformed (ICJ, 2009a).

Thus, when it comes to other unrecognized entities around the globe, it is extremely important to acknowledge that the power of precedence rests not in the ruling itself, but within the proceedings and statements made by different countries at ICJ, which make the real atmosphere of change in international relations when it comes to the issues of territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, and self-determination. The change is legal in nature, not political.

As Russia is now enjoying a year of de facto unilateral mediation efforts, of course with coherent appreciation by France and the United States, two ideas voiced by the former Russian representative at ICJ, Ambassador Kirill Gevorgian, at its Public Sitting in December 2009 are worth discussing. Firstly, he noted that, “For Kosovo to be able to rely on ‘remedial secession’ in 2008, it has to demonstrate that the situation had aggravated as compared to 1999... By 2008, there was clearly no threat to the population of Kosovo coming from the Serbian authorities...” (ICJ, 2009b, p. 44). Drawing parallels with Nagorno-Karabakh, this logic grants even more rights for Stepanakert to seek international recognition as an attempt to secure the future of Karabakh in the face of daily threats voiced by Baku to solve the conflict with arms. Secondly, the ambassador claimed that violations of human rights of Kosovars during the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s could not justify the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 (ICJ, 2009b). It is noteworthy that after the humanitarian intervention by NATO forces in 1999, a UN transitional authority in Kosovo was established – obviously aiming to contribute to state-building in the breakaway region. Less than a decade later, the Kosovo Assembly, building the grounds for an effective statehood, expressed the will of the population of the enclave and declared independence, which, according to the ICJ ruling, the international law does not prohibit. On the contrary, the Karabakhis proclaimed independence in September 1991, in the course of USSR dissolution, though no State – even Armenia – has officially ever recognized that independence. As former Foreign Minister of Armenia Vartan Oskanian (2008) put it in speech in 1999, “We (Armenia) did basically NATO’s job, what NATO has done recently in Kosovo”.

Having presented this tiny instance, of course the ICJ ruling will stay politically meaningless until the states sponsoring it change their minds. However, legally this is yet the first-ever prestigious ruling in favor of unilateral declaration of independence of a secessionist entity to become a de jure statehood.

While the UN Security Council, a political body, in 1983 declared the unilateral declaration of independence of Northern Cyprus to be unlawful (Res. 541), the ICJ, a legal body, established a legal precedence that unilateral declaration of secession was a legal norm.

Today, no one seriously denies that the authorities in the (de facto) Nagorno-Karabakh Republic have their sovereignty over certain territories where some people live, and those people do recognize the legitimacy of the central authorities. Another important element to be labeled as statehood, according to the Montevideo Convention (1933), is a permanently functioning government, which is successfully configured at general elections. In 1992, a decision was made by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki where the states decided to establish and invite the “**elected** and other representatives” of Nagorno-Karabakh to the future Minsk Conference. Obviously, the conduct of general elections thus becomes implicitly encouraged by the OSCE itself, making it silly and unlawful to declare those elections as illegal each time. A well-known Karabakh researcher Thomas de Waal (2010) raised a question of why “the international community still routinely refuses to recognize elections [in Nagorno-Karabakh], in contrast to, for example, its more pragmatic approach to elections in Northern Cyprus.” The only reason for doing so is due to the fact that the OSCE exists on political grounds, not legal.

Since 2005, Azerbaijan has been trying, often successfully, to have alternative discussions and subsequent resolutions elsewhere (with unconditional support from Turkey), while Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh together with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs always criticize these efforts, claiming they undermine the mainstream peace process. For instance, during the 2008 vote in the UN General Assembly, the representative of the United States underscored that resolution A/RES/62/243, presented by Azerbaijan, “selectively propagated only certain of those principles (of Helsinki Final Act) to the exclusion of others, without considering the Co-Chairs’ proposal in its balanced entirety” (United Nations, 2008).

To put the discussion of this contribution on a wider canvas, we should acknowledge that a conflict resolution process in any pattern of international disagreements receives its solution in specific frameworks of international mediation, which is explicit only towards a particular situation, considering the politics, political economy, and geopolitics surrounding the conflict. In order to find and employ that specific mediation format, the consent from all relevant parties is required. And, it is notable that the usage of the wording “all relevant parties” means not only the ones directly involved in the hostilities but also all the stakeholders that have a share in the geopolitics. The snapshot of the issue of mediation is an utmost important component of the conflict itself since a short while later it actively plays a role of a determinant to the future solution. For instance, though “impartiality” is a vital component of any mediation effort, over time the peacekeepers side with either of the parties. Again, the example of KFOR in Kosovo is a good pattern to show how impartiality turns into side taking. The same is legitimately true regarding Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia. Thus, the format of mediation is a vital issue to secure a lasting settlement.

This is essentially true with the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, which underwent tremendous difficulties to find the current framework of negotiations. While countries such as Finland, Italy, Russia and Iran tried to have their own input in the pursuit of a lasting solution, in the 1994 OSCE Budapest Summit the institute of triple co-chairmanship was established. Despite the continuous efforts by Azerbaijan to jeopardize the Minsk Group’s contribution and take the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to other institutions such as PACE or the UN, the co-chairmanship proved to be mostly effective.

Since 2005, when the Karabakh peace process entered a decisive phase, the Azerbaijani leadership has done their best to push the process into a wider perspective involving other regional arrangements and the UN podium for that. An inter-parliamentarian commission on Nagorno-Karabakh within PACE (now suspended) and continuous attempts to adopt a resolution in the UN General Assembly (passed March 2008) are sound facts for this. During this course, both the leaderships of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and the mediators have repeatedly warned Azerbaijan that taking the issue out of the mandate of the OSCE Minsk Group is capable of being destructive to the whole resolution process. The best example of this negative approach of Co-Chair countries has been the “no” vote to the 2008 UN resolution. However, recently Azeri news services announced that a new draft resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh had been put into circulation for the upcoming UN 64th General Assembly, for a vote on September 7.

After years of tireless efforts at the UN General Assembly to condemn Armenians for winning the imposed war since the Kosovo ruling, the press spokesman of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, Elhan Poluhov, said in a public statement on July 25, 2010 that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is the monopoly of OSCE Minsk Group to deal with. For quite some time after the ICJ decision, the Azerbaijani leadership backtracked on other efforts, publicly supporting the OSCE format of the peace talks. Thus, a paradox popped up. Whatever it is, the UN General Assembly will vote on September 9, and the Co-Chairs and state parties will come out with predictable statements, as was the case in 2008.¹ The absence of any legal weight of General Assembly resolutions does not make sense for us to elaborate more, even though certain weight in domestic political manipulations will eventually take place. For instance, the parliamentary elections campaign in Baku will be starting in the days to come.

The ICJ ruling can potentially have the power of positive transformation on the Karabakh issue. Some reports and rumors have spread in late August that the Armenian authorities, co-signed and co-authored with the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh, were about to circulate a draft resolution in the UN General Assembly, asking the advisory opinion of the ICJ over the legality of the constitutional referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh, which took place in December 2006. The main legal obstacle for this to happen was the reservation made by the Armenian National Assembly in 1996 (decision N-131-1, October 23, 1996) regarding Article 66 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which requires the mandatory consent of all parties to any particular case before applying to an international court or arbitration. This might have been an utmost fascinating development of the peace process that did not happen, perhaps by the initiators assuming that someone on the other side of the barricade might assess that as a long-awaited pretext for waging a new war, while peace proved to be fragile thus far. Having said this, the only effective implementation of the precedential weight of the Kosovo case, as Serbia utilized, may be for the initial state-parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict — the people of Karabakh and the Republic of Azerbaijan — to turn to the “voice of reason” and seek a legal settlement in an international body of arbitration, instead of the political manipulations we have witnessed so far. Obviously, the imposed arms race and military buildup demonstrate the wrong way to go.

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At the time of finalizing this article on September 8, some controversial news popped up that there is a consensus between the parties, with the assistance of OSCE Minsk Group, to withdraw the Resolution A/64/L.57 from the provisional agenda of the General Assembly, and have compromise-driven win/win solution to the issue of hosting fact-finding mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. Indirectly, the statement of the Co-Chairs made in Baku on September 6 and available on the OSCE web site indicates that a win/win compromise has been reached.

Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo: Politically Precedent, Legally Different

By Mahir Zeynalov

As the world fixed its gaze on the United Nations International Court of Justice's (ICJ) unveiling of its advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on July 22, Serbia and dozens of other countries admonished that the ruling is perilous and might stoke and embolden secession-minded regions all across the world to reassert legitimacy of their cause.

In the latest twist to a saga, following a two-year silence, ICJ again rehashed the Kosovo's independence debate by sagely advising on July 22 that since there is no prohibition to secession in international law (Bayefsky, 2000), the court finds the Kosovar UDI is in line with international law (Beaumont, 2010).

Despite its legal language, the ruling reeks of politics and is at the mercy of various, sometimes completely opposite interpretations of different countries (BBC, 2010). Azerbaijan was swift to douse the ruling and stridently denounced the speculations claiming that similar parallels could be drawn in its perennial disputed breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians. Armenia immediately welcomed the decision, saying it may help international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh (Harutyunyan, 2010). Although the court ruling might be interpreted as a glimmer of hope for separatist territories and usher them a new prospect, states with minority problems have thus far adamantly opposed recognizing the new entity to prevent a potentially devastating spillover effect in their countries, arguing that the controversial ruling might boost secessionist movements all over the world (The Economist, July 2010).

The ruling will not only beef up minority movements seeking emancipation, but also cause intractable violence to go viral (Dyer, 2010), considering that armed conflicts take place as parent states do not consent to secession — as exactly in the case of Kosovo.

To assuage fears, the US, in cahoots with many European Union member states, obstinately insist that Kosovo's independence is a special and unique case — the case of a fringe on fringe — because years-long brutal Serbian oppression and ethnic cleansing campaign against the majority Albanian population of Kosovo made the country's independence legitimate (The Moscow Times, 2010). An international administration was formed in Kosovo in 1999, when NATO forces pushed out Serb forces after a 79-day aerial bombardment.

Court Ruling Highly Political

The court explicitly reiterated that it is not dealing with the question of Kosovo's independence but considering whether or not Kosovo's UDI was in accordance to international law (Stevenson & Tanner, 2010). It was also quite surprising that Kosovo and other secessionist entities were impatiently waiting for the decision; however, the court's ruling was largely predictable and legally insignificant (Cristol, 2010). Were it otherwise, the ruling would be a departure from orthodoxy and the court would invent something new in international law.

As mentioned above, despite its superfluous nature, the ruling is highly political, largely manipulated by various actors to make their cause legitimate. Despite its distinct legal characteristics, states that recognized the independence of Kosovo welcomed the ruling as if the decision merely bolstered the legality of Kosovo. The highly politicized ruling created the fear of an emerging precedent across the globe.

There is now no shortage of explanations for this imbroglio, produced primarily after Kosovo declared its independence that was recognized by 69 countries thus far. Not bizarrely, the real stumbling block to the peace process between parent states and secessionist entities is not legal, but political. Relevant regulations dealing with secessionist issues are the most politicized and thorny affairs of the international law (Mancini, 2008). Neither court could conclude any consequential verdict so far that would

set a precedent for other cases because each and every independence movement is unique in its nature and dynamics.

In its vast range of forms and expressions, arguments are made that the Kosovo case is “unique” or that it is an “esoteric legal point that will be forgotten in the rush of politics” (Borgen, 2008). Immediately following the court’s announcement of its ruling, the media outlets needlessly exaggerated the ruling and many mistakenly claimed that the UN’s highest court approved the legality of Kosovo’s statehood, because the crux of the ruling remained opaque for them (Gray, 2010). It further created a “public perception problem” (Stratfor, 2010), as the US and the EU treated the ruling as if the court in fact approved the legality on Kosovo’s independence. After the Kosovo ruling was made public, the US said that it was time for Europe to “unite” after the ruling, thus leaving no further debate on the legality of independence (AFP, 2010).

Since there is an ongoing debate among legal scholars regarding the framework of the self-determination principle, any verdict with respect to this could be politically motivated. James Ker-Lindsay, a Balkan expert at the London School of Economics, nicely argued in a New York Times article that the ruling has essentially said Kosovo’s legitimacy will be conferred by the recognizing countries rather than by the court (Bilefsky, 2010). Another troubling factor surrounding the court’s ruling was that the ICJ judges voted 10-4 in favor of it, and their decisions represented their own countries’ positions on this particular issue (Koogler, 2010).

Statuses of Kosovo and Nagorno-Karabakh Different

Although Kosovo was considered an “autonomous region” in Yugoslavia’s 1946 constitution, its status was largely upgraded in the 1963 and 1974 constitutions. The latest constitution boosted Kosovo’s power, bringing it to the status equal to the other founding six federative republics. Article 72 of the Soviet constitution said that each Union Republic “shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR” but failed to note anything about autonomous regions. The right to secession was not the case with Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian-populated autonomous region did not have an equal right with other 15 titular nations (USSR Constitution, 1977). Secession for self-determination of a people need not violate internal law of a parent state, unless there is an apparent genocide or apartheid. Kosovo’s secession did not violate Yugoslavia’s constitution, as did the other six federative countries, but the Soviet Union’s constitution did not grant the right to Nagorno-Karabakh to seek independence.

The Soviet’s **korenizatsiia** or nativization policy was aimed to make small nations assimilate into broader titular nations, and thus the principle of granting autonomy to ethnic minorities in Union Republics was not aimed at protecting minorities but in establishing titular nations.

While unilateral termination of an existing legal structure and non-consensual secession from a parent state did exist in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo enjoyed NATO-led international administration for nearly ten years, which made it a “special case” apart from Nagorno-Karabakh, which is largely controlled by Armenian military forces.

Kosovo was administered by the UN under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 until June 2008. Although the non-binding preamble of the resolution affirmed former Yugoslavia’s territorial integrity, it denied Serbia’s role in governing Kosovo and established an interim UN administration to spearhead a sustained effort to determine Kosovo’s future status. Then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a statement by the U.S. recognizing Kosovo as an independent state on February 18, 2008, that the “unusual combination of factors” in Kosovo, including the extended period of UN administration, “are not found elsewhere and therefore make Kosovo a special case.”

Involvement of Third State in Nagorno Karabakh conflict

While presenting its case during public hearings before the ICJ in 2009, the US said the Kosovar UDI did not violate any principle of territorial integrity because under international law, only states must

comply with this principle, and not internal entities. In this regard, the court did not have to decide upon the legality of Kosovo's statehood or independence but only a narrow aspect of declaration of independence.

Kosovo's case is different from the unilateral declaration of independence of Northern Cyprus or Southern Rhodesia, which were condemned by the Security Council based on the fact that "they were connected with the unlawful use of force or other egregious violations of norms of general international law." Similar to these cases, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had an intense military phase of a process where people asserted a change in an existing legal structure — the established borders of Soviet Azerbaijan. Moreover, the Azerbaijani populations both in and around Nagorno-Karabakh had been expelled en masse toward the east. These factors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and similar precedence in the cases of Southern Rhodesia and Northern Cyprus will most likely make the UDI of Nagorno-Karabakh ruled as being "illegal."

In addition to the use of force, the independence movement in Nagorno-Karabakh was not a pure reflection of people asserting self-rule but heavily supported by neighboring Armenia. On December 1, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia adopted a resolution on the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, which was a clear sign that Armenia was directly interested in annexing the territory.

Although there are notable signs that ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh have long sought emancipation, the movement itself would not have come into being had Armenia not lay claim over Nagorno-Karabakh in an irredentist manner. Irredentism is defined as the attempt by one state to detach land and people from another to achieve incorporation within its boundaries (Chazan, 1991). These ethnic conflicts involve whole communities and states with very little negotiations, high levels of violence, and occasional escalation to full-scale war (Carment & James, 1998). Political movements aiming to reunite "lost territories," where their ethnic "brethren" are concentrated, are considered to be sacrosanct in international law. While the Kosovar Albanians' independence movement was a legitimate claim of self-determination, Armenia's heavy involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh case rules out any Kosovo precedent over the disputed territory.

Close inspection of the differences between Kosovo and Nagorno Karabakh conflicts show that due to the political nature of the ruling, difference in statuses of Kosovo and Nagorno Karabakh at the time of secession and the existence of violence with the involvement of the third state make Kosovo case not applicable to Nagorno Karabakh.

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Measurements for Patriotism

By Edgar Khachatryan

This piece is an attempt to critically analyze the understanding of patriotism and its reflections of the societies of countries in conflict and regions in crisis.

The idea to prepare this piece arose after a small screening discussion in one of the NGOs in Vanadzor, Armenia by Peace Dialogue. The discussion was launched around the documentary “Neither War Nor Peace”^[i] created by the joint efforts of a member of Peace Dialogue and his Azeri colleague journalist. The documentary tells about the tragedies of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and its impact on the lives of ordinary people from Armenia and Azerbaijan who were in the center of events in the conflict. During the discussion, the participants often touched upon the topic of patriotism and problems of patriotic education for the young generation.

Many of the participants, mainly youths, were sure that real patriotism needed to be shown. “It’s not enough to just love the motherland, this love should be proved.” From my perspective, many expressions of participants were closer to nationalism than to patriotism itself. According to them, a “real patriot” should not try to justify the enemy’s view, especially when the issue supposedly relates to the security of the nation.

One participant after the screening discussion asked, “What does this documentary give me? Does this mean that we should not make sacrifices to protect our country? Wouldn’t it be better to indoctrinate new generations of patriots from their youth? Patriots who are willing to give their lives for their country?” Actually, the fact that the participants had ideas such as this pushed me towards trying to understand the border dividing these two concepts between patriotism and nationalism.

According to Wikipedia’s definition, patriotism^[ii] is a love and devotion to a country or homeland for no other reason than of being the resident there. My brief internet research did not give me other, more detailed definitions or one very different than the aforementioned. “Patriotism however, has had different meanings over time and its meaning is highly dependent on the context, geography, and philosophy,” continues Wikipedia. When analyzing the characteristics of patriotism, I am taking into consideration that patriotism is a feeling. As a consequence, it impacts human behavior as in any feeling. Patriotism is also defined by Merriam-Webster^[iii] nearly the same way, but it adds that patriotism is also the “devotion or love for one’s country.” I believe this definition does not capture the true essence of the meaning of patriotism. This definition would be perfect if there were not other conditions factored in this complex equation, but it seems that patriotism is a double-edged sword. So, the more a person loves their country, the more they hate everyone who is not of their country. In other words, they tend to become close-minded toward other cultures and groups.

However, in situations of crisis, when the borders between “us” and “them” is especially visible, the state war rhetoric and propaganda start to actively form and dictate the criteria of patriotism and is easily adopted by the populations divided by conflicts. Adopted by societies, these criteria then become social norms for the given societies. The norms become the determining characteristic of these societies, showing the borders between “us” and “them.” Society starts to require these criteria from its members. In other words, it sounds very easy to say, “If you don’t hate ‘them,’ you are not a patriot or you are not a part of ‘us.’”

For me, it sounds foolish when the society where I live demands from me the approval of my love towards my country and dictates to me how to “correctly” love my homeland. How would it sound if my society told me how to correctly show my feelings towards my family? Or, how would it sound if the fact that I don’t hate the neighbors in my apartment building is perceived by my society as an unreal love to my family?

The dictated criteria of patriotism are changeable, and depend on the selected enemy. For instance, Soviet propaganda told that “official Soviet Society” (we), who had an enemy under the image of

the US (them), and those whose voices were about good relations with the US were perceived as non-patriots. After the collapse of the USSR, the images of the motherland as well as the images of the enemy and “us vs. them,” were transformed. As a consequence, the criteria of patriotism in our societies were also changed. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in Armenian and Azeri societies, those who strive for reconciliation and peace are perceived as non-patriots – even traitors. Today, even those responsible for war crimes against each other’s societies during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are seen as patriots and heroes because of a simple reason: They killed the enemy and protected “us” from “them.”

My conclusion is very simple: in the situation of conflicts and crises, the border existing in society’s perception towards patriotism and nationalism is intentionally erased with militaristic rhetoric. Who does this? “In time of war, the loudest patriots are the greatest profiteers,” said August Bebel^[iv], in his speech to the Reichstag in November, 1870.

Reference:

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Stereotypes in national media – a closer look

By Elvin Yusifli

Negative stereotypes about Armenians are present in the majority of mass media outlets in Azerbaijan. Those stereotypes are somewhat shared by the public, and they definitely do not come out of nowhere. Stereotypical opinions circulating in the mass media have their deep roots in the public consciousness.

The use of familiar, commonly used clichés is particularly frequent when already fragile relations deteriorate as a result of high tensions between nations, especially after a failed round of negotiations between the states, the Armenian Diaspora’s active involvement in the processes or clashes on the frontline. In a nutshell, the reflections of these cyclic deteriorations between countries are usually followed in the media by the actualization of conventional perceptions.

Stereotypes most often encountered in the media about Armenians either demonize them by accusing them of all troubles that occurred between the countries or downplay their importance, trying to illustrate how minuscule their position and role could be against a morally right party, (i.e., the Azerbaijanis). As an outcome of my observations, I would list stereotypes of Armenians in the national mass media under four general titles: “Armenians are untrustworthy,” “Armenians are liars,” “Armenians have no culture of their own” and Armenians are cowards.”

For those who still cling to the past, the dogma of “Armenians are untrustworthy” is still of paramount importance. This attitude panders to the general perception that Armenians were “traitors and stabbed Azerbaijan in the back” and is supported by going back to the history and dredging up old stories. This kind of evaluation aims to prove that Azerbaijanis are morally right, because they were deceived and forced out of their lands by Armenians who in their turn used every possible way to achieve their dream of “Greater Armenia.” Particularly, advocates of this hawkish line in the national policy towards Armenia cite this argument to propose the meaninglessness of negotiations in terms of the restoration of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

The stereotype about “Armenians lying” essentially refers to the perceived fallacy of the Armenian narrative of history. History is the most controversial and sensitive aspect of the current relations between

the nations. That is the reason why folks are more receptive to this stereotype in Azerbaijan. The ongoing war of information also contributed to growing skepticism in whatever told or claimed by Armenians.

Another widespread and commonly accepted stereotypical argument is that “Armenians have no culture of their own.” Media is heavily involved in the “cultural dispute” with Armenians and reflects the prevailing view that Armenians imitated Azerbaijani culture and now unjustifiably claim it as their own. The sameness of music, dances, musical instruments and so forth breeds an endless, fiery debate around this topic. My assumption is that the newly materialized national independence (as is the case in both Azerbaijan and Armenia) demands exclusively specific heritage and products to consolidate and distinguish itself. At this stage of development of both nations and under the existing conditions of relations, any commonality in virtues peculiar to both of them is incompatible with newly realized national identities and therefore unacceptable to them.

When it comes to the current state of affairs, the media tries to strip Armenians of any positive characteristics they may have, among them claiming that “Armenians are cowards.” In other words, in the possible reemergence of war, they would not be able to resist the Azerbaijanis militarily. There is a traditional saga of previous heroism of Azerbaijani Turks throughout history and Armenians’ subjugation by Turks for centuries. This kind of evaluation of the nation’s qualities or capacities in a historical context targets at the audience comprised of folks who exclude the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict via negotiations and diplomacy in the current course of processes. It is not a coincidence that there is a deep popular conviction in Azerbaijan that the war was, in fact, fought against the Russians and Armenia’s temporary occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding districts is the consequence of direct Russian involvement.

There is an ongoing conflict between the two nations. Therefore, expectations regarding the immediate eradication of those stereotypes in the mass media of Azerbaijan (as well as Armenia) are at best an illusion. Besides, deep entrenched views can change by communicating, building a dialogue and sharing points of view — in brief, by letting the other party sense your existence and see the other side of the coin. What is obvious today is that neither the disturbing fact of failing negotiations nor the lack of communication (or more correctly, non-communication) contributes to the dwindling of the basis for growing misconceptions in public opinion.

My general observations of the national media should not be understood as utter generalization of thoughts circulating in it. Definitely, not all media groups are typically one-sided or overblown with their portrayal of certain facts.

But the bottom line is that an exaggerated negative image of the people on the other side of the frontline compounds the conflict even more. Sooner or later, both nations will come to terms with the reality of living together. I just hope we ultimately hold this truth dearer in our deeds....

Let them decide themselves!

By Sasun Khachatryan

If it takes weeks or months for a bullet wound to cure, then it normally takes years, decades, if not centuries, to eliminate the effects inflicted by widespread and systematic use of certain words and expressions in the media that easily develop into stereotypes.

This tried-and-true process of stereotype-formation needs due attention, particularly for neighbors like Armenia and Azerbaijan with their relations far from being benevolent and the ongoing saber rattling at the highest possible level currently showing no signs of retreat.

Armenian society – much in the same way as any other society – is not free from stereotyped thinking, which is widely reflected in all aspects of life and in mass media in particular.

Taken at face value, the atmosphere they create in people's both consciousness and sub-consciousness and the consequences they cause, stereotypes might not be of utmost importance. But, unfortunately, this is not the case as they do cause more harm than we can ever imagine, affecting the minds and hearts of the growing generation. The most feasible hope is that one day Armenians and Azerbaijanis will seek and find more favorable, beneficial ways for reconciliation.

Very often publications in Armenian mass media are aimed at (quite successfully) creating the stereotype that can roughly be summarized as, **“The Armenian nation is against a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while the Azerbaijani people want nothing but that.”**

Given non-stop statements by high-ranking Azerbaijani officials about bringing back (by force, if need be) the territories that came under Karabakh's (Armenia's) control after the horrendous war in the early '90s, this might not be considered as a stereotype but rather reality. Still, this is a stereotype. Firstly, it is not usually the whole Azerbaijani nation that makes such statements, but mainly officials. Secondly, there are still many Armenians, among them also high-ranking officials, who also consider military action as an option for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict.

Another widespread stereotype in Armenian mass media might be paraphrased as, **“Continuation of the confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be detrimental for Azerbaijan; it will lose more and more territories should a new war be unleashed, while Armenia has nothing to worry about given the current status quo and will recognize the independence of Karabakh, should all the options for a peaceful settlement be exhausted^[1].”**

This stereotype is mainly used by pro-government media outlets and officials representing the ruling authorities who systematically respond to the statements made by the Azerbaijani side. The motivation here is to preclude any possibility to rousing public ire over their inactivity and at the same time boost self-confidence and courage in the society.

While this is effectively working out so far, the reality is indicative of something else: no one can foresee what outcome a renewed war would have given the widespread reports about Azerbaijan using its oil bonanza to accumulate weapons. Nor can it be predicted whether or not other regional powers – well eager to seize the opportunity in an attempt to demonstrate their power and presence – intervene should military actions resume.

The next widespread stereotype found in the Armenian press – quite an instrumental part of the atmosphere in the information war and as much grave and alarming as the previous ones – is the use of myriad words and expressions that are only negative and pursue creating the image of the most horrible enemy, and even worse, dehumanizing it. By and large, they can be summed up as follows: **“All**

Azerbaijanis, as a nation, are ‘barbarians’ and ‘aggressors.’ They are a ‘perfidious,’ ‘bloodthirsty,’ ‘impudent,’ ‘mendacious,’ people who do not have any culture,” and so forth.

The reason why these kinds of words and expressions are injected in the press and, unfortunately, into the minds of people and are bearing fruit in a very short time, is quite simple – to create a dehumanized character of the other side and to always keep their own fellow citizens on the alert. It is these pernicious words and expressions that resonate with hatred, intolerance and preconceived opinions, shaping our attitude towards Azerbaijani and keeping us aloof from any contact with them unless we are courageous enough to take the first step and get over the seemingly insurmountable prejudices.

It would really be incorrect to say there are no aggressors and perfidious or impudent people among Azerbaijanis (as well as among Armenians). Nor would it be right to deem all Armenians (or all Azerbaijanis) as being innocuous or angels. The bottom line is that any U-turn in the present mainstream attitude among the two societies that the best optimists would ever conceive will hardly be feasible given the complex character of stereotypes and the depth they are rooted in peoples’ minds.

The elimination of stereotypes is a lasting and painstaking process with fresh, sober minds and immense efforts to be committed, and unfortunately, the younger generation is perhaps the most vulnerable when it comes to the influence and effects of stereotypes. The more prepared they are and the deeper their perception and understanding of stereotypes, the easier it will be to clear their minds and the media in the future. In that way, the youth will be given the much-deserved right to think about relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan themselves, as they are the future civil society builders, journalists, politicians, ministers and presidents.

For better or worse, this is the reality and willy-nilly, we have to deal with it as a lot is at stake – the future of our offspring, the future of our homelands.

[1] “Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations in Mass Media of Armenia and Azerbaijan,” Baku 2010, p. 29.

About The Journal of Conflict Transformation

The Journal of Conflict Transformation is an independent online publication that provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, starting researchers and bloggers to analyze as well as discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and issues related to it. The purpose of the publication is to contribute to sustainable resolution of the conflict by expanding scholarship on the subject and encouraging diverse perspectives and analysis.

The Journal welcomes contributions from established researchers and is also committed to include the voices of emerging analysts and writers within the peace process. This inter-disciplinary online publication accepts scholarly and analytical articles, as well as reflective writings, that contribute to the better understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and suggestions for improvement of the peace process and positive transformation of inter-societal relations. The articles can analyze the conflict as a whole or any factor that potentially has implication for the conflict and/or its resolution from the perspective of political science, economy, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, collective memory studies, comparative history, ethnic conflict, identity-conflict, conflict resolution, peace studies, mediation and facilitation, conflict transformation and comparative case studies.

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