

## VISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Dominant and Alternative Discourses on  
Gender, Militarism, and Peace Processes



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## Dominant and Alternative Discourses on Gender, Militarism, and Peace Processes

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# From the Editorial Team

Since the publication of the previous and inaugural hard-copy issue<sup>1</sup> of the *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition* in July 2016, the situation in the South Caucasus remained relatively stable compared to dramatic developments elsewhere around the globe. However, the dynamics in this region are hardly hope-inspiring, as the military build-up continues in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the region's recognized and unrecognized states all retreat from democracy. The crackdown on civil society and academia following the July 2015 coup attempt in Turkey puts an unhuman pressure on our colleagues there who continue to remain committed to the ideals of conflict transformation and building inclusive societies. Meanwhile, the Russian government continues not only to put pressure on its own civil society and institutions, such as independent media and academic communities, but also racks up the pressure on Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as on Armenia to behave similarly. The pressures on Azerbaijan to fall into line are much weaker, but still substantial. The Azerbaijani government, on the other hand, further tightens its own control over independent civil society and media. The case of the abducted journalist Afgan Mukhtarli compromised even Georgia's reputation as the safe haven of the civil societies of the South Caucasus. The presidential elections in the United States brought to power an erratic and isolationist administration that has openly retreated from the agenda of protecting human rights internationally. All of this further deprives the civil societies in the South Caucasus of political and financial resources.

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<sup>1</sup> The issue, titled "The South Caucasus and Its Neighborhood: From Politics and Economics to Group Rights", is available online on the website of the *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition* at [www.caucasusedition.net](http://www.caucasusedition.net). The *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition* is the analytical publication of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation.

The papers<sup>2</sup> in this second hard-copy issue of the *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition* examine how this challenging environment of protracted conflicts continually weakening the South Caucasus affects the discourses of political parties and movements, contributes to the rise of militarism, and negatively impacts gender relations and attitudes towards minorities. In the atmosphere of perpetual failure of the official negotiations in delivering tangible results, and despite this failure, the authors also contemplate about alternative peace processes that could contribute to reconciliation and move the societies out of the deadlock.

This issue titled “Visions and Strategies for Conflict Transformation: Dominant and Alternative Discourses on Gender, Militarism, and Peace Processes” is co-authored by researchers and analysts from the South Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

The issue begins with an essay aimed at opening up a conversation for alternative visions for the development of an inclusive and peaceful future for the South Caucasus. The essay is the product of the joint thought process and a visioning exercise of all the co-authors of this issue, as well as of the editorial team of the *Caucasus Edition*. The visioning exercise was conducted in March 2017 at the start of the project “Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus” that has resulted in the current publication. Some components of the generated vision bore immediate fruit: they became the themes for the papers that the group took on to develop for this very issue. Others, perhaps the more ambitious ones, stayed for now at the stage of ideas for the future authors of the *Caucasus Edition* to explore. A brief, yet what we believe inspiring survey of all of the generated visions is presented to your judgement as the first paper of this publication – “Imagining the Future: Visions for Conflict Transformation”.

Next, Part 1 of this publication is focused on the discussion of “Conflicts, Militarism, and Politics” in the South Caucasus and Turkey and contains two collections of papers.

The first collection of papers, titled “Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. An Analytic Review”, represents four parallel papers authored respectively by Mikael Zolyan, Jafar

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<sup>2</sup> The papers in this publication also appear online on the *Caucasus Edition* and some have a Russian version as well.

Akhundov, Çakır Ceyhan Suvari, and Andrey Devyatkov. The authors discuss the recent escalations in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Turkey, and Ukraine and their effect on the ideological and discursive landscape in the analyzed countries. Namely, the authors discuss the rise of militaristic rhetoric and revanchist sentiments and the active use of enemy images and discourses of trauma and triumph for political gains.

The second collection of papers titled “Political Parties and Conflicts” surveys the positions of the major political parties and movements in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey regarding the hostile dynamics in the region. Bakhtiyar Aslanov and Sevinj Samedzade, David Galstyan, and Tolga Er catalogue the similarities and differences in the positions of the political forces in these countries in regard to the Turkey-Armenia normalization process and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution.

Part 2 is devoted to “Discourses on Gender and Minorities in Conflict Contexts”.

In their paper titled “Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey”, Sona Dilanyan, Anna Iluridze, and Burcu Doğan argue that discourses of ongoing and past conflicts are often intertwined with discourses of gender and sexuality. They build on feminist critique to show how the “State” produces enemy images in the discourses of threat, security, and conflict in Georgia, Turkey, and Armenia.

The second paper of Part 2 is titled “Representation of Minorities in the Media in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey”, and it surveys the media in these countries in regard to shaping inter-group relations in the South Caucasus and Turkey. Zeynep Arslan, Giorgi Bobghiashvili, Leyla Djafarova, Eviya Hovhannisyan conduct content analysis of media discourses in regard to both ethnic minorities and populations displaced as a result of violent conflicts. They conclude with a series of policy recommendations.

Finally, Part 3 of this issue looks into variants of peace processes that have been employed and proved to be effective in conflict contexts around the world, yet have not made their way into the South Caucasus.

In the paper titled “The Mosaic of Solutions: Alternative Peace Processes for the South Caucasus”, Iryna Brunova-Kalishetska, Nisan Alıcı, Nino Kukhianidze, Regsana Kerimova, and Armen Grigoryan look into the cases of application of instruments, mechanisms, and processes such as transitional justice,

rehumanization, peace education, and multilingual education in Colombia, Turkey, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere and the potential of these experiences in the South Caucasus. They also engage with the debate about the benefits of building inclusive civic nations as the alternative to the exclusivist ethnic nations that have long been the unarticulated norm and articulated practice in the South Caucasus.

“South Caucasus Zones of Peace”, the second paper in Part 3 acts as a complementary piece to the previous one looking deep into one specific peace process. Bakhtiyar Aslanov, Irakli Kakabadze, and Arsen Kharatyan examine the theory and application of demilitarized zones of peace and discuss how some variations of such zones can be implemented in the South Caucasus changing the dynamics on the ground, strengthening relationships, and setting the ground for turning the entire South Caucasus into a zone of peace.

As with the first hard-copy issue of the *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition*, here too, the authors originating from the different countries of this divided region have come together to demonstrate that developing a shared vision and strategies for the region is a feasible and productive process. All papers in this issue have been co-authored or authored in collaboration and have been written through a tedious process of consensus building.

The editorial team and all the authors express their deepest gratitude to ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) / Funding program zivik and the German Federal Foreign Office for making this collaboration and publication possible through their support of the project “Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus”.

Editorial Team of the issue: Philip Gamaghelyan, Maria Karapetyan, Sergey Rumyansev, Pinar Sayan.

# Imagining the Future: Visions for Conflict Transformation

In March 2017, 24 analysts, journalists, and social scientists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine gathered together in a beautiful and castle-like venue in the famous-for-its-wine Kakheti region of Georgia for this year's edition of the "Breaking the Impasse" Series<sup>3</sup>. Building on the previous work of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation and its partners in the context of post-Soviet conflicts, the meeting aimed at the expansion of the regional network of professionals who engage in constructive dialogue and joint analysis, advocating for a joint vision and strategy for the peaceful transformation of conflicts in the South Caucasus.

The specific objectives for the gathering were to identify the topics of the second hard-copy issue of the *Journal of Conflict Transformation: Caucasus Edition*, form working groups around these topics, and engage in dialogue and build consensus within the groups. The analysts agreed, however, that starting the discussion from the realities on the ground which are rather grim is likely to lead the group to a dead end. Instead, the experts present decided to start from expanding the horizons of what's possible and sharing the vision for the transformation of the conflicts in the region and the development of inclusive and democratic societies that each person present in the room aspired for. The individual visions were then grouped into a few categories, creating a group vision. Some of them, such as the ideas of demilitarized peace zones and transitional justice, immediately became the topics around which some of the analysts coalesced. Others remained for now at the stage of ideas to be developed by future cohorts of analysts and scholar.

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<sup>3</sup> The "Breaking the Impasse" Series started in 2008 as analytic meetings of conflict resolution experts, civil society representatives, and diplomats facilitating the coordination of Track I and Track II efforts in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Over the years, the Series has expanded to include all of the South Caucasus and its neighborhood. The current phase of the Series advocates for a common vision, strategy, and action for regional peace and development and contributes to positive changes in the public discourses about the conflicts in the region and in the peace processes.

Some of the ideas discussed during this visioning exercise, such as democratization, are well-known, long-discussed, even commonsensical, and yet adopted by the societies in the South Caucasus in name only. The other ideas are antithetical to the current conventions, and thanks to that, innovative and inspirational.

## South Caucasus Integration

Call it Utopia or Dystopia, the idea of some form of a South Caucasus integrative process is as old as the region's nation-states themselves. That same timing, perhaps, can also explain why the idea never gained enough recruits either among the populations and the intellectual communities or the political elites, most of whom over the past century have been continually preoccupied with their mutually exclusive nationalist projects.

The failure to be heard, however, never deterred the intellectual minority invested in the promotion of the civic (as opposed to ethnic) form of statehood from keeping the idea of a united South Caucasus alive. The proponents see the integration of the South Caucasus as the only sustainable way toward a peaceful future that will benefit all, since the more traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are based on the model of the ethnic state and result in win-lose solutions when one group achieves its exclusivist goals at the expense of the others.

Throughout the past three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, various versions of such integration have been proposed. Many of them are detailed by Abasov and Khachatryan in their discussion of the variants of settlement for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict<sup>4</sup>. The scholars and analysts who gathered in Kakheti in March 2017, developed their own version of this integration.

Two possibilities were discussed. The first can be framed as an early-EU-style union where the constituting parts remain independent political ethno-nations, yet integrate economically. And the second one assumes a deeper socio-politically integrated confederacy where the constituting parts retain certain autonomy yet turn away from the concept of the ethno-nation and move toward an inclusive civic nation. This second and more integrated option would require

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<sup>4</sup> Abasov, Ali, and Harutyun Khachatryan. 2005. *The Karabakh Conflict. Variants of Settlement: Concepts and Reality*. Yerevan and Baku: Noyan Tapan and Areat.

also the creation of a regional identity, based on the revival of the notion of shared cultural heritage. The analysts also mentioned the need to take on the “dolma wars” and the promotion of the notion of cultural similarities in cuisine or music as shared rather than contested heritage and celebration of differences.

While they disagreed on the extent of integration, both the proponents of the less integrated economic union and the deeply integrated confederation, agreed on the need for open borders and the development of free trade within the region and with its neighborhood. Further, the need for gradual demilitarization and the investment of resources into other spheres of social life, such as art and science, was discussed.

The ideas of demilitarized zones and free trade were further developed in the piece on the zones of peace in this issue. We will aim to pick up the bigger questions of South Caucasus integration in one of our future issues.

## **De-Colonization**

Somewhat an antecedent to the South Caucasus integration idea has been the voiced need for the discursive and political de-colonization of the South Caucasus. The idea was expressed through a number of interconnected visions concerned with the ongoing political, economic, and military dependence of the new nation-states from their former metropole. Even those in the post-Soviet space, such as Georgia, that tried to assert their independence, paid a steep price in form of a direct confrontation with Russia and became home to intractable ethnically-framed conflicts that have kept them in the orbit of Russian influence.

Russia’s “soft power”, particularly the latest incessant promotion of social conservative values by Russian media and Russian-government backed local NGOs are seen as particularly problematic. The analysts described these as openly promoting anti-LGBTI, anti-gender equality, and otherwise anti-human rights agendas, discrediting the human rights and pro-democracy NGOs as agents of western influence. All this contributes to the weakening of strong and independent civil societies and democracy.

The analysts, however, did not advocate for severing the relationship with Russia as their former metropole. Instead, they focused on the possibility of transforming the relationship with Russia into one of equality and partnership, rather than of dependence and domination.

A related vision focused on changing the role of the South Caucasus states in the world arena from the played-by-others chess figurines on the “West”-“East” frontier into active players.

## **Democracy Building**

Perhaps a more expected, yet not less important or forward-looking vision concerned democracy building with all its attributes.

The analysts who chose to envision the future in discursively dominant and therefore seemingly more achievable and realistic categories focused on familiar notions of developing functional civil societies and democratization as necessary conditions for conflict resolution. Espousing liberal-democratic values, developing stable economies and the rule of law, forging transparency and accountability were all seen as integral parts of a democratic future.

The 2.0 thinkers in this category talked about “digital democracy”, or employing the up to date technology to the service of democracy building.

Popular among the analysts who favored the vision of building democracies within the existing nation-states, as opposed to focusing on regional integration, was the idea of transforming their states from exclusivist ethnic into inclusive civic nations. The idea gave rise to the civic nation section of the paper “The Mosaic of Solutions: Alternative Peace Processes for the South Caucasus”.

## **Reconciliation and Inclusive Societies**

The next cluster of ideas for the vision of the future focused directly on conflict resolution, or to be more precise, conflict transformation. In the context of a few decades of fueling mutual hatred and isolation by the nationalist state machines, immediate conflict resolution (understood as a political settlement) does not look possible, or even if achieved, does not promise to be sustainable. A longer road toward reconciliation, transformation of the inter-group relations, and even of the notion of the groups themselves were seen as necessary for conflict transformation.

The specific steps and a comprehensive strategy toward such transformation were discussed and included the following areas.

First of all, there is a big need for countering stereotypes and enemy images, which are currently promoted through the education systems, the media, memory politics and official commemoration practices. The present volume



takes on the topic of media in the paper titled “Representation of Minorities in the Media in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey”.

In order to forge diverse and inclusive societies, the group considered it critical to develop de-politicized historical narratives. These would not downplay the events from the past where the inter-group relations were neutral and positive, nor would they ignore the events where their own group acted as the perpetrator. While this topic has not been covered by the co-authors of the current issue, previous publications of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation have addressed it comprehensively<sup>5</sup>.

Ongoing reconciliation work was also deemed as very important, namely numerous inter-group dialogues that would culminate in the rehumanization of the other. Non-violent conflicts have to be accepted as a normal part of everyday life, but mechanisms developed to manage them creatively and peacefully, and not through violence that is direct (physical) or structural (discrimination, displacement, marginalization, exclusion, etc.). Peace education, learned from successful examples of its application in other post-conflict societies, can be one important vehicle toward building a culture of dialogue and resulting in celebration of diversity and coexistence of culturally distinct groups.

The analysts also paid particular attention to the political and cultural rights of minority groups. Multilingualism, was agreed to be an institution that can contribute to the formation of both multicultural and economically advanced societies. It is better than monolingualism which alienates the minorities and isolates the country from its neighborhood. It is also better than limited

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<sup>5</sup> See for example: Akpınar, Alişan, Sos Avetisyan, Hayk Balasanyan, Fırat Güllü, Işıl Kandolu, Maria Karapetyan, Nvard V. Manasian, et al. 2017. *History Education in Schools in Turkey and Armenia. A Critique and Alternatives*. Edited by Bülent Bilmez, Kenan Çayır, Özlem Çaykent, Philip Gamaghelyan, Maria Karapetyan and Pınar Sayan. History Foundation (Tarih Vakfı) and Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation. Accessed August 5, 2017. <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/history-education-in-schools-in-turkey-and-armenia/>; Karpenko, Oksana, Philip Gamaghelyan, and Sergey Rumyansev. 2014. *Проблемы и перспективы подготовки учебников и преподавания истории на Южном Кавказе [Challenges and Prospects of History Education and Textbook Development in the South Caucasus]*. Tbilisi: Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation. Accessed September 20, 2017. <http://caucasusedition.net/hard-copy/>.

bilingualism, not least because of the political implications of choosing the “second” language. Should it be the minority language? If yes, which one? Or should it be English that signals a pro-European orientation yet cuts off the country from Russia and other neighbors? Or should it be Russian that provides continuity but hinders prospects of European integration? Multilingualism – investment into the state language, English, Russian, and minority languages of choice – is certainly an expansive and resource-consuming investment, but one that – as the example of countries that have implemented it shows – pays off both economically and in regard to the development of a peaceful and integrated society.

Finally, transitional justice which is better known to be applied in post-conflict contexts was brought up as a mechanism of conflict resolution. Colombia, in particular, was cited as a success case where transitional justice led to national dialogue and catalyzed the peace process advancing reconciliation and resulting in a peace agreement. Transitional justice in the South Caucasus would require focus on the victims of the conflicts and on the restoration of their voice and their rights, on the return of the displaced and the acknowledgement of responsibility and possibly retributive actions towards the perpetrators of injustice.

The topics of transitional justice, rehumanization, peace education, and multilingual education were all taken up by the co-authors of the current issue who contributed to the paper “The Mosaic of Solutions: Alternative Peace Processes for the South Caucasus”. Moreover, it was agreed that a lot remained unsaid on the topic of transitional justice in the South Caucasus as a mechanism of conflict transformation. To fill the gap, one of the future issues of the *Caucasus Edition* will be devoted exclusively to transitional justice.

## **Post-Nation-State Form of Social Organization**

When discussing conflict resolution mechanisms such as confederation, transitional justice, and democratization that are absent from the South Caucasus yet otherwise well-tested, most of the analysts stayed within the confines of the liberal-democratic nation-state system. Others, at the same time, argued that the centralized nation-state model in itself has created conditions for nationalisms and ethnic competition, and through this has been perpetuating conflicts. Therefore, a number of alternatives to nationalist forms of social organization were also discussed, some innovative and others

reminiscent of early 20th century revolutionary ideas, which never materialized.

Institutionally, these alternative visions were rooted in the concept of decentralization and vesting the power into localities. The decision making locally, then, would be consensus-based. In other words, democracy (decision making by the majority) would have to evolve into “cooperacy” (consensus-based decision making). The needs of the minorities and other formerly discriminated groups would be moved from the margins of the society to the center of the conversation with the understanding that a society is as good as its least privileged members. The well-being of the previously marginalized, therefore, should become the cornerstone of the conflict transformation process. The society will focus on ongoing self-reflection and the acknowledgement and restitution of all past atrocities and will commit to the prevention of new ones. Moreover, as no society is immune to these, and in the future new groups might be marginalized or suppressed, civic dialogue and reconciliation should become an ongoing process.

The central government will continue to exist and its social functions expanded, while its repressive functions, such as police, prison, and army, will be very limited. It would have to necessarily represent the diversity of its society. The focus of the state identity will be the life and the well-being of all people and not the territory. In the reversal of the established doctrine that life has to be given for territory, the ultimate value will be placed in the person, not in citizenship.

The concept of citizenship itself would also change, away from its current patriarchal and gendered understanding and toward a pluralistic and inclusive one. This particular topic is discussed in more detail in the paper “Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey”. No identity should be deemed illegitimate (including various expressions of gender and sexuality, nomadism, and more), provided that they hold others free of harm. Ethnicity, while certainly important for many, can be celebrated similar to all other identities as a unique form of cultural expression and should be depoliticized.

Such shift away from politicization of cultural identities, celebration of diversity, decentralization of power, and the establishment of an ongoing dialogue intended to bring in the marginalized and underprivileged has been

described by some of the forward-looking analysts as the most effective form of conflict transformation where the voices of all are heard and included in the political process. The state, in turn, becomes in effect an affirmative action state committed to addressing marginalization and other forms of structural violence through ongoing intra-societal dialogue and building structural peace and an integrated society.

The same principles of inclusivity, diversity, and championing the welfare of the underprivileged, supplemented by the all-important global cause of environmental justice can become the cornerstones of inter-societal and international dialogue aimed at building a sustainable world.

# CONFLICTS, MILITARISM, AND POLITICS

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# **Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey: An Analytic Review**

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The recent years in the Middle East and the post-Soviet space have been marked by the escalation of Turkey's Kurdish conflict and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as the emergence of conflict in eastern Ukraine. These conflicts and their escalations not only spur up tension and violence, but are also accompanied by significant ideological and discursive changes within the countries. This analytic review aims to track the impact of these processes on the societies and the resulting rise of militaristic and mobilizing discourses in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey.

## Introduction

For Turkey and a number of post-Soviet states, the recent years have seen not only economic challenges but also rising tensions – the escalation of old conflicts and the emergence of new ones.

On the one hand, these conflicts seem to be similar or interrelated. Regional powers such as Russia and Turkey are involved in nearly all post-Soviet and Middle East developments. Elements of post-imperial nationalistic conflicts are present in all these cases. In this geographic region, the ruling political regimes of almost all the countries involved in the conflicts are characterized by a certain degree of authoritarianism. Furthermore, all these countries, in very different and often complex configurations, are interconnected through numerous transnational economic projects and relations.

On the other hand, each of these conflicts is unique and has a specific trajectory of development.

The Kurdish conflict has lasted the longest and has now transformed into a transnational conflict. Clashes between Turkish military forces and Kurdish paramilitary units take place in the vast geography of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and Syria. With terrorist attacks shaking Ankara and Istanbul, the clashes have recently become more violent causing numerous casualties among civilians.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine started in April 2014 and has already claimed the lives of over 10,000 soldiers and civilians, by the most conservative estimates. This conflict is also international in nature due to the direct participation of Russia, which it denies. A number of Western European countries – especially France and Germany – as well as the United States are actively involved in its resolution process. The conflict in eastern Ukraine not only affects the countries of the region, but has also led to strained relations between Moscow and the EU capitals, and the West<sup>6</sup> in general.

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<sup>6</sup> With reference to such civilizational constructs as “East” and “West”, the authors do not seek to reproduce orientalist or occidental categories, but only refer to the vocabulary of certain political discourses.



A sharp increase in tensions and massive military clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in April 2016 drew international attention to this “frozen” conflict, the negotiations for which are co-led by the West and Russia.

The goal of the sections that follow is to discuss the recent internal discursive trends that have emerged as a result of these escalations. These conflicts and their escalations not only spur up tension and violence, but are also accompanied by significant ideological and discursive changes within the countries. They contribute to the growth of militaristic and revanchist sentiments within the societies. The political regimes actively use enemy images and discourses of trauma and triumph for political gains. Within this review, the authors from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey attempt to trace the specifics of such tendencies in their own countries and societies.

# **Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Armenia: An Analytic Review**

**Mikayel Zolyan**

A sharp increase in tensions and massive military clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in April 2016 drew international attention to this “frozen” conflict, the negotiations for which are co-led by the West and Russia. This conflict and its escalations not only spur up tension and violence, but are also accompanied by significant ideological and discursive changes within the countries. They contribute to the growth of militaristic and revanchist sentiments within the societies. The goal of this review is to discuss the recent processes and internal discursive trends that have emerged in Armenia as a result of these escalations and to trace the rise of militarist and mobilizing discourses.

## Armenia: After the ‘Four-Day War’

### *The Case of the ‘Azerbaijani Apples’, the ‘Four-Day War’, and Radicalization in Society*

In April 2017, a scandal gripped Armenia. It came to light that apples from Azerbaijan were sold in numerous locations across Armenia, leading to a storm in the Armenian media and social networks (Muradyan 2017). Commentators fumed over the fact that Azerbaijani products were imported into Armenia, arguing that by buying them, Armenian customers were subsidizing the enemy’s army. Some also claimed that the apples may have presented a health hazard.

The very fact that this issue gained such prominence is a sign of a changed climate in Armenia regarding the perception of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There have been some reports about Azerbaijani products being sold in Armenia in the past, as was the case with Azerbaijani garlic in 2011 (Mkrtchyan 2011), but these did not produce a major scandal. In fact, there is no legal requirement in Armenia prohibiting the import of Azerbaijani products (Bbc.com 2017), but this did not stop the scandal from unfolding.

The change in perceptions had been happening slowly as the incidents on the line of contact and the Armenia-Azerbaijan border intensified during the last several years. However, the main catalyzer that changed the way many Armenians looked at the conflict was the escalation in April 2016, which in Armenia is often referred to as the “four-day war”. The aftermath of the hostilities saw a patriotic mobilization and hardening of attitudes toward the other side of the conflict. Yet while the society’s dominant position after the “four-day war” has hardened, the escalation also led to a more active discussion in Armenia over the necessity of compromise, even though today this discourse remains marginal compared to the dominant “patriotic” discourse.

### *From the April Escalation to the July Events: Impact on Politics and Society*

The April 2016 hostilities led to a “patriotic” mobilization and consolidation, and initially, the government was the beneficiary of this trend. Immediately after the “four-day war”, an Armenian opposition leader, former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, initiated a meeting with current President Serzh

Sargsyan, which was perceived as a sign of support by the opposition for the government during difficult times (Armenianow.com 2016). However, in the mid-term or long-term perspective, the effects of the April events on Armenia's political system are more complicated. Although the hostilities gave rise to a consolidation around the government in the short term, the legitimacy of Armenia's ruling elite may be undermined in the long term.

For over two decades the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was an important source of legitimacy for the ruling elite. The social contract, which existed between Armenian elites and society, was based on the argument that, despite all the internal problems, the government had been successful in providing security, avoiding large-scale war, and maintaining a status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh, considered to be favorable for Armenia. Against this background, any significant internal change, such as a change of government through election or "a colored revolution", would be an unacceptable security risk since war could break out. In the absence of any significant socio-economic achievements or democratic progress, this narrative served to legitimize the claim of the ruling elite for maintaining power.

However, ironically, even though the April events undermined one of the arguments that helped to legitimize the government, they showed that the prospects of renewed hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh were realistic. Therefore, from the point of view of some opposition forces, the government, as faulty as it was, was the only force able to organize and lead Armenia in case of a renewed war. Hence, there was a need to put aside differences and consolidate around the government. This sentiment was aired several times by Ter-Petrosyan and other opposition figures. And this influenced the behavior of the opposition. Although Armenian opposition leaders would denounce the government as "illegitimate", "oligarchic", "kleptocratic", and even "tatar-mongolian" (Abrahamyan 2007), the opposition's rhetoric significantly softened in the aftermath of the April war. Even during the election campaign for the 2017 parliamentary elections, most opposition parties refrained from such attacks on the ruling government. Moreover, when the official election results were announced, the largest opposition block, "Yelq" ("Way Out"), not only did not call for protests, but, in a development almost unprecedented in Armenian politics, accepted the results of the election as legitimate, even though electoral violations, particularly vote buying, were reported (Aljazeera.com 2017).

However, while formal opposition political forces may have softened their stance toward the government, it does not necessarily reflect the attitude of the wider layers of Armenian society. In fact, in the medium-term perspective, the April war has actually undermined the government's legitimacy. The "four-day war" showed that the high level of corruption and shortage of budget assets were affecting Armenia's security. Moreover, the questionable, from the Armenian point of view, position of Russia and other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) allies in the context of the conflict, also undermined the trust toward the Armenian government's foreign policy. Finally, in the aftermath of the "four-day war", the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan intensified, and rumors surfaced about a certain agreement draft, often called "Lavrov's plan", which included concessions on the Armenian side (Kommersant.ru 2016). The readiness of the government to make concessions in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, if true, would have contradicted the narrative of the ruling elite being the only guarantor of Nagorno-Karabakh's current status and security.

While Armenian government officials, including its president, have in the past affirmed their support for a compromise within the framework of the Madrid principles (Sargsyan 2013) in the international arena, they rarely attempted to explain that position to the Armenian population. On the contrary, the official discourse remained within the limits of "official patriotism", underlining the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh has de facto independence, which would be defended by the strength of the Armenian army, if necessary. The need for concessions, which any compromise would entail, simply did not fit into this official discourse. In the aftermath of the April events, there were several attempts by various government figures, such as Vice-Chair of the National Assembly Hermine Naghdalyan, to articulate the need for concessions, but such statements were met with strong criticism among political circles, the media, and social networks (Martirosyan 2016).

This process of erosion of the government's legitimacy, related to its readiness for concessions, manifested itself most strongly in the events of July 2016, when a group of armed men, named "Sasna Tsrer" ("the Daredevils of Sassoun", after the Armenian epic) seized a police station for about two weeks. The gunmen, among them several war veterans and members of the "Founding Parliament" opposition movement, hoped that their action would spark a mass uprising and lead to the deposing of the government. A mass uprising failed to materialize.

However, first hundreds and then thousands of activists went to the streets in support of the "Sasna Tsrer". While some politicians and members of intelligentsia, including former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, condemned the "Sasna Tsrer" action, others openly supported them, or at least condemned the government for the situation in the country that had led to the uprising (Zolyan, *The Daredevils of Sasun: Why an Armed Incident Triggered a Political Crisis in Armenia* 2016).

Of course, this attempted armed rebellion was not solely related to the presumed government concessions over Nagorno-Karabakh. The gunmen and their supporters identified internal factors to explain their actions, citing the need to get rid of the illegitimate oligarchic government. However, considerations related to presumed concessions played a key role in their actions as well as in the support they received from a segment of society (De Waal 2016). Coincidentally, since the "Sasna Tsrer" action, government officials and members of the ruling party have mostly refrained from discussing the need for concessions and compromise in Nagorno-Karabakh.

### *In Search of a Solution: 'Nation-Army' or Compromise?*

The "Sasna Tsrer" action showed the ruling elite that in order to maintain their position they needed to make some changes to their policies. Mostly, these amounted to personal changes in the upper echelons of power, with the arrival of a new energetic prime minister, Karen Karapetyan, a former GazProm executive. Many Armenians hoped that Karapetyan would revive the economy and bring order into government structures (Zolyan, "Éminence Grise" and "Efficient Manager": Why Armenia is Getting a New Prime Minister 2016). Changes happened also in the armed forces: immediately after the April war several high-level officials were fired (Ren.tv 2016), and eventually the minister of defense and the head of the general staff of the armed forces also lost their positions (1in.am 2016). It is early to say to what extent these changes have helped the Armenian economy, but indeed Karapetyan helped the Republican Party win the 2017 parliamentary elections, and to a degree, overcome the crisis of legitimacy that had led to the "Sasna Tsrer" action.

However, changes were not confined to the matters of socio-economic policy. In what seems to be a direct response to the April 2016 events, the Armenian government proclaimed that it would be transforming society into a "nation-army" aimed at increasing the defense abilities of Armenia (Grigoryan 2016).

Until now, however, the “nation-army” program has received little substance, as the only concrete step was the introduction of a new tax to maintain a foundation that would provide support to the families of killed soldiers (Khachaturyan 2016). This initiative was heavily criticized by the opposition and independent media, but it was adopted by the parliament, and the opposition to it was denounced as “unpatriotic” by recently appointed Minister of Defense Vigen Sargsyan. The program is unlikely to bring about significant transformations within Armenia’s armed forces, but the “nation-army” rhetoric is likely to remain for a long time, as it helps the government regain the legitimacy shaken as a result of the April 2016 events.

Finally, although the April 2016 events generally brought about “patriotic” mobilization and a hardening of attitudes toward the conflict, they also catalyzed new discussion about the possible resolution of the conflict. Ter-Petrosyan was the most vocal voice within this discourse. Not only did Ter-Petrosyan defend the need for compromise, as he had done numerous times before, but he also made it the key message in the 2017 parliamentary elections campaign. However, as the election results show, this discourse remains largely marginal in Armenian society: the Armenian National Congress-People’s Party of Armenia bloc received only 1.5 percent of the vote, the lowest result a political force led by Ter-Petrosyan has ever shown in any elections. Ter-Petrosyan, however, must have known what he was doing: after the election, he said that he hardly expected a different result, given the fact that Armenia is an autocracy (Zolyan 2017). Arguably, Ter-Petrosyan, realizing that his party had few chances to get into parliament, decided to use the opportunity provided by the electoral campaign to defend his views on the necessity for compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

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# **Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Azerbaijan: An Analytic Review**

**Jafar Akhundov**

A sharp increase in tensions and massive military clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in April 2016 drew international attention to this “frozen” conflict, the negotiations for which are co-led by the West and Russia. This conflict and its escalations not only spur up tension and violence, but are also accompanied by significant ideological and discursive changes within the countries. They contribute to the growth of militaristic and revanchist sentiments within the societies. The goal of this review is to discuss the recent processes and internal discursive trends that have emerged in Azerbaijan as a result of these escalations and to trace the rise of militarist and mobilizing discourses.

## Azerbaijan: The Situation After the 'April War'

### *The 'April War' and the Economic Situation*

The first round of devaluation of the national currency at the start of 2015 dealt a heavy economic blow to ordinary citizens in Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the authorities did not renounce the plan of the first "European Games", spending a significant amount of money on the opening and closing ceremonies. The second round of devaluation in December 2015 caused social unrest in several cities of Azerbaijan where the economic situation is worse than in the capital. Spontaneous rallies took place in Agsu, Siazan, Lankaran, Fizuli, Agjabadi, and Quba (Abbasov 2016). To put down the unrest in some places, the internal troops and special forces were deployed using tear gas, rubber bullets, and pressure hoses (Khalilova 2016). The social media was swarmed with videos in which outraged citizens demanded that the brutality be stopped, end be put to corruption, and inflation be curbed (Protests Against Price Increase in Azerbaijan 2016). These challenges tested the durability of the authorities that felt an urgent necessity to re-legitimize their regime and restore their credibility.

The "April War" of 2016 proved very "useful" to this end. The patriotic rhetoric regained momentum with slogans such as "we will not give up a single inch of land", "we have liberated tens of thousands of hectares of land; we will also liberate the rest of the territories", "we have demonstrated courage and heroism in the battle of Lele Tepe, where we now hoist the same flag that was raised during the triumphal European games", and "the construction and restoration of the settlements on the front line is a sign that the Great Return to Karabakh has started" (Baxşəliyev and Cəfərli 2017). These slogans were to be repeated until all citizens internalized them.

This rhetoric gave an impetus to the already militarized official discourse and its "all or nothing" ideology. The militaristic propaganda targeted everyone, including elementary school students. Students dressed in military uniforms marched publicly repeating the popular slogan, "Our homeland is indivisible; our martyrs are immortal".

### *The Discourse of Unity 'for the Sake of Victory'*

During the "April War", government and most media reports denied major losses and called for unity for the sake of the Homeland. The liberation of the occupied territories was to be the main issue for each citizen. Both top

government officials and numerous activists, voluntarily catering to the conflict, appealed to the public with these calls.

One such activist, publicist and poet Akhsin Yenisey, believes that the term "conflict" is damaging for national identity (Yenisey 2016). In his opinion, each nation, including Azerbaijanis, should have the right to go to war in order to develop its culture and take its place in history. And in April, according to Yenisey, people finally "remembered" this right. Referring to the role of intelligentsia, particularly writers, he stated that "they would be making a greater contribution to the common victory if they did not behave as women writing statements about humanity for getting 'likes'" (Milli.az 2016).

In a similar spirit, even the opposition activists of both nationalistic and liberal camps marginalized all divergent voices, labeling them as national traitors. Justifying their support of the government with "objective reality" ("it is not the time right now"), they called for unity for the sake of a shared victory. Yet, the authorities did not embrace the opposition's support, unwilling to share the halo of the guardian of national interests. Speeches about the "valiant victories" of the army in April 2016 were paralleled with accusations of the "cowardly and treacherous" policies of the early 1990s. The then authorities and current oppositionists were deemed responsible for the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent regions (Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev's Speech at a Meeting with a Group of Servicemen in Connection with the Anniversary of the April Victories of the Azerbaijani Army 2017).

### *The Effect from Suspending Military Operations*

Society reacted to the news of the advancement of Azerbaijani troops with great enthusiasm. The webpage of the Ministry of Defense and its Facebook page became popular resources and were "liked" by 100,000 people in a short period of time. After circulating the narrative of success in the April battles so widely, the news on the suspension of the military operations came on April 5, chilling the patriotic fervor. Discussions about the real losses and "the dubious games of the authorities" became popular.

In turn, the political regime invested all available resources to create a consolidating discourse. Before April 2016, the central events in conflict commemoration were January 1990 and the Khojaly massacre of 1992. After April, the discourse of pride and triumph came to replace the discourse of tragic losses. Statements about high public solidarity, mass readiness for sacrifice, the

heroic army, and the liberation of some parts of the occupied territories fed these discourses.

Numerous activists eagerly supported the authorities. Scientific and cultural institutions, the mass media, and bloggers joined the patriotic race. Their active participation in the construction of the new official discourse earned them the right to speak on behalf of the entire nation. This voluntary support was so widespread that it left the Organization for Karabakh Liberation (*Qarabağ Azadlıq Təşkilatı*), famous for its radical stands, in the shadow during and after the April events.

### *Popularizing the Mobilization Discourse Through the Education System*

The education system, working in close tandem with state administrative institutions and particularly local executive authorities, played an important role in the popularization of the official discourse. Events on military-patriotic education for primary school students increased in scale during the first two weeks of April 2016.

Mourning ceremonies organized in Baku accompanied the daunting funerals of soldiers and officers killed during the "April War". Escorts with flags playing military songs convoyed the funeral processions of the deceased. School students and teachers greeted them along the funeral procession route.

Another way of mobilizing society was through mandatory "voluntary donations" in all state institutions for the fund in support of the Azerbaijani armed forces.

Borrowing terminology from other conflict contexts became an ideological novelty of the mobilization. Some articles referred to the "April War" as a "counterterrorism operation". The usage of such terminology intended to portray the events as the purely internal affairs of Azerbaijan and to draw parallels with the Russian permanent "counterterrorist operation" and the Ukrainian "ATO" (antiterrorist operation).

### *Deepening the Militaristic Discourse*

The strengthening of the nationalistic and militaristic discourses in 2016 was directly proportional to the worsening of the socio-economic situation caused by the continuous devaluation of the Azerbaijani Manat. Protesting voices were

drowned out both by repressions and public reprehension. Criminal cases were opened against the employees of Meydan TV's website for reports on the number of casualties during the April military actions that exceeded the official data by nearly three times. In March 2017, access to this and four other websites was blocked.

Yet another round of defamation of government opponents began. Critically minded people were framed as agents of anti-Azerbaijani external forces who were trying to destroy the positive image of Azerbaijan and its internal stability. In September 2016, President Ilham Aliyev delivered a speech in which he stated that Azerbaijan was among the strongest countries in the world and in contrast with most other countries, it was moving forward largely thanks to its internal resources. According to the president, "patriotism", "national values", and the "national spirit" played a special role in this rapid development. "However, there are anti-Azerbaijani forces that want to interfere in the internal affairs of the country and break the will of the Azerbaijani people". With a reference to the countries of the Middle East in widespread devastation and crisis, the president stated that the young people and teachers should know "this reality" caused by external forces, that external pressures on Azerbaijan were also growing due to the independent policy that the president was pursuing, and that he would continue this policy no matter what (Azertag.az 2016). At subsequent meetings, many such statements and declarations followed, disseminated through the mass media and social media. The aim has been to embed these ideas into routine discourses with every citizen internalizing them as their own thoughts.

### *Creating New Images of Heroes*

The public commemoration held for Chingiz Gurbanov, who died on the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, became an instrument of the new official discourse. This case built on the tradition of personification of courage, heroism, and self-sacrifice in the name of the highest goal. Gurbanov died in December 2016, but his body was handed over to the Azerbaijani authorities only in February 2017. The very handover was framed as yet another victory over the enemy. Aliyev personally received the parents and brother of the deceased and handed them the golden star of a national hero (Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev's Speech at a Meeting with Family Members of the National Hero Chingiz Gurbanov 2017). Aliyev also signed an order providing the financially strapped family of the martyr with a three-room apartment in Baku and land for the construction

of a private house in their native Qusar district (Sputnik.az 2017). During the meeting with the family of the deceased, Aliyev stated, "We are proud of Chingiz. All of Azerbaijan is proud of Chingiz. This once again demonstrates that a citizen of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani youth, and Azerbaijani soldiers will never resign themselves to the current situation". In this phrase, one can trace the main thesis summarizing the outcome of the "April War" – the trinity of "state-army-people". In turn, the state also appears in the form of a triad – "state-government-president".

By comparing the December clashes that claimed Gurbanov's life with the April fighting, Aliyev stated the thesis on the crushing victory of Azerbaijani troops: "The Azerbaijani army dealt them a blow they still can't recover from. The April fighting shook not only the Armenian army but also the Armenian state. [...] Panic and anxiety has taken over Armenian society to this day". The President concluded his speech by expressing confidence that Chingiz would continue to live in the hearts of all Azerbaijanis, and that his name will be immortalized (Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev's Speech at a Meeting with Family Members of the National Hero Chingiz Gurbanov 2017).

### *Further Strengthening Personal Power*

The authorities continued to strengthen their positions through the referendum of September 2016, which expanded the powers of the president. The presidential term increased to seven years. The head of the state gained the right to dissolve parliament and call for extraordinary presidential elections. The constitutional changes abolished the minimum age requirement of 35 for presidential candidates and introduced the posts of vice-presidents and first vice-president, which was assumed by Aliyev's wife, Mehriban Aliyeva. She would become the head of state in case of his early resignation.

On April 3, 2017, at a meeting with a group of officers and soldiers wounded during the April fighting, Mehriban Aliyeva referred to the trinity of "nation-army-state". She expressed her admiration for the mothers of the deceased heroes, who even in that grave moment found strength to be proud that their sons became martyrs for the Homeland (First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva Meets with the Soldiers and Officers of the Azerbaijani Army Wounded During the April Fights 2017). In turn, public statements made by the relatives of the deceased have become part of state events on military-patriotic education, especially with the participation of the youth, including schoolchildren.

However, in general, the tone of the first vice-president's speech was much softer than the sharp and expressive speeches of the president. Aliyev's speech delivered during his visit to the strategic height of Lele Tepe, which was captured during the April fighting, was labeled the "Lele Tepe manifesto" by the mass media. In an attempt to show strength, the president said, "The April battles should go into military textbooks. [...] The Azerbaijani army is invincible. The Azerbaijani army can accomplish any task. There is not a single military target on the occupied territories and in Nagorno-Karabakh today that we would not be able to destroy. At present, the Azerbaijani army is among the strongest armies. We know this; the people of Azerbaijan and the whole world know this. [...] In January 1994, a successful operation was carried out in the district of Fizuli, which resulted in the liberation of 22 villages from the occupiers. [...] The Lele Tepe operation is a symbol of our heroism. Lele Tepe has gone down in history. If the Armenian armed forces do not draw the right conclusions from the April battles, there will be many more successful operations similar to Lele Tepe in the future" (Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev's Speech During a Scrutiny Visit of Operational Conditions at the Command Post Located on the Front Line 2016).

Experts called this speech a message not only to Armenia, but also to the OSCE Minsk Group with its "unconstructive" stance on Nagorno-Karabakh. The April fighting was described as the last warning after which Azerbaijan has the right to and must reclaim the occupied territories by force. These intentions were supposed to be manifested in the military exercises with the participation of 60,000 people, taking place at the time of the statements (Cebhe.info 2016).

### *Jojug Marjanli – A New Site of Memory*

On January 24, 2017, President Aliyev signed two milestone orders. In accordance with the order "on the 25th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide", commemorative events were more large-scale than in previous years (Aliyev, The Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Regard to the 25th Anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide 2017). In Baku 40,000 people marched in memory of the Khojaly tragedy victims (A National March Takes Place in Baku for the 25th Anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide 2017). However, another order "On measures to restore the Jabrayil District's Jojug Marjanli village, liberated from the Armenian occupation" played a more significant role on the ideological forefront (Aliyev, The Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Measures to Restore the Village of Jojug Marjanli of Jabrail



District, Liberated from the Occupation 2017). The preamble of the order notes that the successful military operation made it possible for people to live in the village safely, and the authorities were creating conditions for their return to their historical homeland (since 1994, due to a constant threat of shelling, only one family had been living in the village). To this end, the president ordered that funds be allocated for the construction of 50 houses and relevant infrastructure including medical and educational facilities. On February 10, the president signed an additional order on the construction of a highway stretching nine kilometers leading to the village (Aliyev, The Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Additional Measures for the Highway Construction 2017). These orders quickly become topics of wide discussions.

"This is the beginning of great events. The president once again demonstrated a strong will to reclaim our occupied lands" said Ali Akhmedov, the Deputy Prime Minister and executive secretary of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*, YAP) (The Order of the President of Azerbaijan on the Restoration of the Village of Jojug Marjanli is a Historic Decision 2017). According to military expert Uzeir Jafarov, this order shed light on the "Armenian lies that they will reclaim the lost lands", and now they accepted that construction and restoration could be done in Shusha and Khankendi as well (Apa.az 2017). The president himself commenting on this order once again noted that Nagorno-Karabakh would never gain independence, and Azerbaijan would never allow a second Armenian state to be created on its territory (Apa.az 2017).

Political scientist Gabil Huseynli thinks that the order created panic in Armenia and that many Armenians believe that if Azerbaijan was able to reclaim Jojug Marjanli, it would be able to reclaim Khankendi/Stepanakert and Shushi/Shusha. Furthermore, thanks to the president's efforts, the village would become a model: "The return has just started and will continue until Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is restored" (Apa.az 2017). The expert noted the historical importance of the order, stating "Probably, Jojug Marjanli will be mentioned in history books as the first sign of return to the native lands". Even though the construction has just started, the restoration is labeled as the "Great Return to Karabakh", and the single family who lived in the village for the past 23 years is used as an example of the Azerbaijani nation's courage and love for its land (Hüseynli 2017).

This order, as indicated in its preamble, is viewed in close conjunction with the April 2016 events and is aimed at strengthening the president's positive image. The spin of the "April War" as a glorious victory adds yet another virtue to the president's list – the laurels of a "victorious leader", similar to his father. The April operation is presented just as much of a glorious page in Azerbaijani history as the operation to liberate Horadiz in 1994 (Jojug Marjanli: Azerbaijan Has Taken the First Step for a Great Return 2017). Deputy Prime Minister Ali Hasanov's statement also stands out: "... Sooner or later Azerbaijan will reclaim its land, and very soon President Ilham Aliyev will turn Karabakh into a prosperous place" (Baxşəliyev 2017).

The presidential decree of January 2017 targeted external audiences as well. In February 2017, the heads of foreign diplomatic missions were taken on a trip to Jojug Marjanli to witness the vandalism committed by Armenians during the six months of occupation of the village in 1993-1994 and also to see Azerbaijan's strong desire to reclaim the occupied territories. Rashad Bakhshaliyev, the author of the article "Jojug Marjanli is Now in the Center of World Attention" published in the newspaper *Azerbaijan*, the official organ of the Azerbaijani Parliament, believes that the January order is a laudable response to everyone who doubted the "Concept of the Great Return of Azerbaijan" (Baxşəliyev 2017). The presidential decree of January 2017 was the first official document of this "concept".

### *The New Consensus*

After the "April War", a new social consensus was reached. Each member of society must understand that the "main problem is Karabakh", and multiple government agents contribute to this conviction. From now on, expressions of pride for the "heroism and self-sacrifice" of their sons by the relatives of the deceased and wishes that "the rest of the courageous sons of the nation reach the heights of glorious death for their homeland" will be mandatory elements of public rituals.

Isolated protests spur up only when power abuse and injustice by the authorities directly affects a segment of the population. These protests are purely local and are not supported by most citizens. Society as a whole responds positively to this new official ideology. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem has shifted away public attention from poverty and corruption to the need for unity between the authorities and society.

The April events opened a new era. A new myth that is built on triumph rather than mourning has taken a stronghold in the official discourse. New memorials have been established – Lele Tepe, Jojug Marjanli, and others. New commemoration ceremonies are directed not at distant but rather recent events to which all citizens of the country were “eyewitnesses”. This new discourse, albeit imposed by the authorities, finds mass support also from the grassroots, especially among the national intelligentsia.

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# **Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Russia: An Analytic Review**

**Andrey Devyatkov**

Since 2014, Russian public discourses have been overwhelmed with “patriotic”, nationalistic, and even militaristic elements. Russia used its military power in Ukraine and Syria, and surely this influenced Russian public opinion to a great extent. This paper aims to trace how Russian society has been reacting to Russian foreign policy of recent years.

## Evolution of Russian Militarism Since 2014

Since 2014, Russian public discourses have been overwhelmed with “patriotic”, nationalistic, and even militaristic elements. Russia used its military power in Ukraine and Syria, and surely this influenced Russian public opinion to a great extent. The stories about Russian soldiers – called “polite people” – saving Crimea from the bloodshed of Maidan, a baby allegedly crucified in Donbass by Ukrainian soldiers, and Russia’s massive use of missiles against “terrorists” in Syria are the most well-known examples of how key events in recent years were portrayed by Russian state-owned media. So how has Russian society been reacting to Russian foreign policy of recent years? Can we argue that many Russians have become adherents of nationalistic and imperialistic ideas?

Many responses have been given to the question of how the Crimean situation of 2014 could have happened at all and why the absolute majority of Russian citizens supported the move, which in fact remains denounced not only by the West but the entire world community. Many analysts argue that it was a “natural evolution” of the Russian political regime and society, which are allegedly becoming more totalitarian and aggressive towards the external world (Giles, et al. 2015). More moderate analysts claim that both the authorities and the people have fallen victim to a “struggle for recognition” – a quasi-Hegelian argument used by Francis Fukuyama to explain the growing nationalism in the world. In the Russian case, the story is about overcoming the “humiliation” Russia went through in the 1990s after the demise of the Soviet Union and that is now associated with Western foreign policy (Klimeniouk 2016). Another group of analysts argue that the Russian authorities simply manipulated Russian society in order to stay in power, so the Russian people were the victims of state propaganda (Grozovski 2014).

### *Crisis of the ‘Model of Stability’*

The decision to react to Maidan by taking Crimea emerged in a situation where the political legitimacy of the authorities had tremendously declined, and some kind of a frustration could be observed in the country. For instance, in a 2013 survey conducted by the state-owned sociological agency WCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) about the country’s achievements in the last 10-15 years, more than 40 percent of Russians stated that there were no reasons for being proud of the country (Gazeta.ru 2013). Approval ratings for President Vladimir Putin decreased in 2011-2013 to a historical low of 61-64 percent (the



average support used to be about 80 percent). The party "United Russia" gained the support of only 43 percent of citizens in the same period, while in 2008 its popularity amounted to 60 percent, according to WCIOM (The Rating of the President and the "United Russia" Party 2015). Russian society's critical stance was turning out to be more than simply a protest of "the middle class" on Bolotnaya Square in 2011-2012.

The "model of stability" that emerged in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s was under threat. It was a challenge not only for the authorities, but also for those citizens who were not determined to cause any revolutionary changes in the country despite growing discontent. This position could be explained both by a historical tradition of conformity and people's unwillingness to return to the 1990s, the decade now associated with the country's degradation in economic and social spheres as well as world politics. Within this context, Crimea became the reason for which Russian society's symbolic unity could be restored, in favor of both the authorities and the population. That's why the population was not simply an object for manipulation and propaganda, but rather an active agent in the elaboration of discourses; "popular geopolitics" was also flourishing. A nationwide consensus emerged on the unacceptability of any discussion about whether Crimea should be returned to Ukraine. It is remarkable that even the supporters of protests on Bolotnaya Square found themselves split – in the end, the majority of protestors decided that "reunification with Crimea" was a great achievement of historical importance. As a consequence, those who have been criticizing the Russian foreign policy remain a "minority within a minority". The consensus has proved to be quite sustainable over time (Volkov 2017).

Symbolic unity was also restored in terms of exercising power: the ratings of the president and the ruling party again reached 88 and 55 percent, respectively. Most Russian citizens are now much prouder of their country's achievements such as the "return of Crimea", the "organization of the Olympics", and the "strength of the Russian army". In comparison to 2013, the approval of the country's status in world politics grew from 50 to 72 percent (Russian Public Opinion Research Center 2016).

### *Limitations to Militarism*

But does this mean that Russian society became militaristic? All independent surveys give us a clear answer: militarism among Russians has a certain limit.

For example, surveys carried out by the polling agency ROMIR within the Norwegian research project “Nation-building and nationalism in today’s Russia” found little evidence of a surge in nationalist sentiments among Russians between May 2013 and November 2014. Levels of ethnic and civic pride, desires to defend dominant ethnic group privileges, and perceptions of national distinctiveness all changed marginally. From 2013 to 2014, the number of respondents who preferred expanding Russia’s territory – either to bring Ukraine and Belarus into a Slavic union or to incorporate all territories of the former Soviet Union – dropped from 47 to 38 percent. In 2013, the majority of Russians (56 percent) supported some form of territorial enlargement, while in 2014 a plurality (about 45 percent) supported the status quo (Alexseev and Hale 2015).

It can be argued that a key factor preventing Russian society from falling into true militarism is their belief that a modern great power should not simply be concerned about hard power but also guarantees of good living conditions for citizens (Ibragimova 2017). Despite the large-scale consensus on Crimea and an increase in the overall ratings of the political elites, the crisis of the “model of stability” persists due to lack of reforms, falling oil and gas prices, and sanctions (especially financial sanctions). The Russian economy began to show the first signs of stagnation in 2013. Russian foreign policy did not change the negative public opinion towards how the government manages to improve the quality of life in the country. According to the aforementioned WCIOM survey, the absolute majority of Russians (about 80 percent) responded that they are not proud of the quality of life in Russia at all – both in 2013 and 2016.

Liberal analysts in Russia tend to describe the discrepancy between the demands for a higher standard of living and support for foreign policy with the metaphor of the “struggle between the fridge and the television set”. It seems that so far, the “fridge” manages to win since most Russians seem skeptical of a very assertive foreign policy, particularly if it does not correspond with improvements in living conditions. It does not mean, however, that Russians are ready to rethink Russian policy in Ukraine or Syria. The support of Donbass and struggle against “terrorism” remain popular issues for Russians. But if we look at what the Russian people see as key foreign policy priorities for the country, “guaranteeing a peaceful and secure existence of the country”, albeit slightly, supersedes the “return of Russia’s great power status” (57 and 51 percent, respectively) (Levada.ru 2016). Besides, as WCIOM discovered, the

absolute majority of Russians perceive the annual Military Parade on May 9 not as a demonstration of strength but as a means for preserving historical memory and honoring veterans (The Victory Parade: A Tribute to Memory or Demonstration of Power? Press-Release N2821 2015).

In this context, it is not surprising that what has been happening in Russian foreign policy since 2014 is not qualified by the majority of Russian citizens as fighting a real war abroad. Russia's "war with terrorism" in Syria is an exception, but even there, most Russians believe they are observing something that can be called a "television war" – a war that is pursued without victims, except for terrorists. Analyst Andrey Kolesnikov applies the same framing of a "television war" not only to Syria but also to the Ukrainian conflict (Kolesnikov 2016). In the Ukrainian case, the Russian authorities argue that no Russian military has been participating (and therefore has fallen victim) in the conflict, while some independent media reported such casualties (Ponomarev 2014). Most Russians (70 percent) are against any land-based military operation in Syria and support only air strikes (Fom.ru 2015). Besides, the Russian authorities try to hide, and not glorify, the real victims of the warfare. In May 2015, President Putin signed a decree that rendered military losses "in times of peace" classified information (Khamshiashvili and Filipenok 2015). And in 2015, it took two weeks for the Russian government to officially recognize that the catastrophe with a Russian plane over Sinai was a terrorist attack and was connected with Russia's role in Syria (Gromov, Petelin and Ivanov 2015).

Thus, the Russian authorities feel very well where the limits are for "adventure-seeking" in foreign policy. For instance, in March-August 2014, President Putin actively used the term "Novorossiia". In one of his public speeches in April that year, he even underlined that cities with a large number of Russian speakers, such as Odessa, Kharkov, and Nikolaev, had never belonged to Ukraine in Tsarist times but are now under Ukrainian rule, and that citizens' rights should be protected with respective guarantees provided (A Direct Line with Vladimir Putin 2014). But in the Fall-Winter 2014, the Russian president began to abstain from using these notions publicly, constantly stressing that the Ukrainian conflict should be solved by peaceful means (Large Press-Conference of Vladimir Putin 2014). The same happened to the term "Russian world" ("*Russkiy Mir*"), which is now used much more cautiously. Our argument is that such a change in foreign policy rhetoric did happen due to not only external circumstances (sanctions, absence of any premises to realize these projects, etc.),

but also an explicitly negative stance of the Russian population to having any “real” war with Ukraine or the West.

### *‘The Crimean Syndrome’*

“The Crimean Syndrome”, as many analysts characterized the euphoria after the peninsula became a part of Russia, is almost over. This can be observed by looking at how the “reunification with Crimea” is now celebrated and represented publicly. For instance, in March 2017, the rally honoring the triennial was organized not close to the Kremlin, but near Moscow State University. President Putin neither attended the meeting, nor travelled to the peninsula, as he used to (Rbc.ru 2017). The second example can be provided by looking at the special exhibition in the Museum of Modern Russian History where the “greatest achievements” of the newest Russian history are demonstrated. Large stands illustrate Russian power in the oil and gas industry, military production, theater, cinema, and music, but only a couple of small stands are devoted to Crimea-related events. Crimea has become an ordinary topic.

Surely this does not mean that “the Crimean Syndrome” did not bring any structural changes to the Russian reality beyond the growing support for the authorities. In this sense, the proliferation of practices of deepening and widening state control over society as well as the society’s loyalty to the state could be mentioned. For instance, steps are being taken to control the Internet using the fight on terrorism as a reason (Goncharenko 2016). Besides, the Russian government drastically increased its funding for “patriotic education” – a new five-year governmental program was passed in 2015 with twice the amount of funding for it compared with the previous period (Government.ru 2015). More and more, intellectual uniformity is being established in Russian society, primarily in the educational system. Yet in general, all these activities will hardly help to solve the issue of functional legitimacy that the Russian authorities now face.

Russian politics is now heated due to a new wave of protests. These are not only Alexey Navalny’s demonstrations against corruption, which were surprisingly attended by many young people, but also nationwide movements involving truck drivers, farmers, and people striving against transferring Saint Isaac’s Cathedral to the Russian Orthodox Church or opposing the renovation program initiated by Moscow’s local government. All these events suggest that

Russia is returning to “normality”. Even if Russians do support the general direction of the current foreign policy, they demand more functional effectiveness from the government, for instance higher living standards, adequate fiscal policies, and healthcare system reform.

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# **Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Turkey: An Analytic Review**

**Çakır Ceyhan Suvari**

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, its official policy had been to deny the existence of a Kurdish identity. Since the 2000s, there has been a discursive shift towards acknowledging the Kurdish identity falling short of its official and legal recognition as an identity – national, ethnic, minority, or other. It seems that the halfhearted discursive shift towards recognizing the Kurdish identity has ironically served the cause of exacerbating the conflict. The superficial acknowledgment in the official discourse has promoted the acceptance of the Kurdish identity, yet the conflict has shifted from being politically framed to being identity-based or ethnically-framed. This paper aims to trace the shifts in these frames and paradigms and the rise of the nationalist and militarist discourses in Turkey.



## Kurds in Turkey: Changing Images of the ‘Other’

### *The Changing Frames of Conflict: From Political to Identity-Based*

Political discourses are often used to hold together the two most populous identities of Turkey – the Turks and the Kurds: “We have been brothers for a thousand years”, “We fought against our enemies as far back as Malazgirt<sup>7</sup> and all the way to Çanakkale<sup>8</sup>”, “Our religion/sect is the same”<sup>9</sup>. Despite all these unifying discourses, the conflict is increasing steadily. Considering the events of recent years in Turkey, it is no exaggeration that “Turkish” and “Kurdish” identities are now positioned as “Others” for each other.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, its official policy had been to deny the existence of a Kurdish identity. This view was accepted among the Turks and some Kurds. For this reason, the Kurds fighting for their identities only experienced a political conflict with the state. However, since the government’s de facto acknowledgment<sup>10</sup> of the Kurdish identity, many ordinary Turks and Kurds needed to face the new identity-based heterogeneity of their society. Political calculations stood behind the government’s new discourse of halfhearted recognition, and its reluctance to take the necessary democratization steps to meet Kurdish demands ultimately led to more polarization in society. Moreover, the government’s anti-Kurdish position in the ongoing war in Syria further deepens the polarization. This inevitably leads to reciprocal accusations, hatred, and anger, creating and deepening the gap between the sides. Therefore, people identifying with or sympathetic to either

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<sup>7</sup> The Battle of Manzikert (modern Malazgirt in Turkey’s Muş Province) was fought between the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuq Empire in 1071.

<sup>8</sup> The Battle of Çanakkale, also known as the Gallipoli Campaign or the Dardanelles Campaign, took place during the First World War on the Gallipoli peninsula (Gelibolu in modern Turkey) between April 25, 1915 and January 9, 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Most Turks and Kurds living in Turkey and practicing religion are predominantly Sunni Muslims.

<sup>10</sup> With the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, only three minorities were and continue to be officially recognized in Turkey – Armenians, Jews, and Greeks. In the 2000s, there has been a discursive shift towards acknowledging the Kurdish identity falling short of its official and legal recognition as an identity – national, ethnic, minority, or other.

side tend to neglect problems of poverty and class structures and are increasingly foregrounding the perception of identity.

For a long time, among the Turks, only the PKK<sup>11</sup> was held accountable for the conflict. Slogans were aired only against the PKK and mostly at military funerals. Now, however, two divergent tendencies have emerged. On the one hand, more and more people distinguish the PKK and Kurds in general. On the other hand, there is also a tendency to levy the responsibility of the conflict directly on Kurds. Slogans targeting Kurds have become more audible and visible at the funerals of military personnel killed by the PKK. Fighting has broken out between children; Kurdish houses and businesses have been stoned, looted, and even set on fire by Turkish nationalist groups.

On the Kurdish side, for years, the state or the power and the regime was given the sole responsibility for the suffering that the Kurdish people have experienced since the foundation of the Republic. In the past, people who were forced to leave their villages pointed their fingers at the regime as the perpetrator. And again, according to them, thousands of Kurds were killed by the state. However, in recent years, instead of the state or the government, ordinary Turks have become the addressee of the responsibility. The perpetrator of a child shot in the street is now called the "Turks", not the state. Although Turks are not yet being lynched in the Kurdish provinces, that potential is growing by the day. For instance, after the Kurdish politician Ahmet Türk was punched by a Turkish nationalist in Samsun<sup>12</sup>, slogans like "Amed<sup>13</sup> will be Samsun's graveyard<sup>14</sup>" and "Revenge" were spoken by Kurdish protesters.

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<sup>11</sup> The Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* in Kurdish) is a left-wing organization based in Turkey. Since 1984, the PKK has been involved in an armed conflict with the Turkish state. The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state as well as many other states and organizations.

<sup>12</sup> On April 12, 2010, Ahmet Türk, the former leader of the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), closed down by the Constitutional Court in December 2009, was attacked and punched in the face when leaving a court in the city of Samsun.

<sup>13</sup> "Amed" is the former name of the province of Diyarbakır. Kurds still use "Amed" instead of "Diyarbakır".

<sup>14</sup> Samsun is a city on the Black Sea coast of Turkey.

It seems that the halfhearted discursive shift towards recognizing the Kurdish identity has ironically served the cause of exacerbating the conflict. The superficial acknowledgment in the official discourse has promoted the acceptance of the Kurdish identity, yet the conflict has shifted from being politically framed to being identity-based or ethnically-framed.

### *The Irony of Resembling the 'Other'*

The Republic of Turkey was founded on the ideology of the existence – or claim to the existence – of a homogenous Turkish identity. Different identities were either ignored, assimilated, or expelled from the country through “acts” such as the “population exchange treaty”<sup>15</sup> or the “Wealth Tax”<sup>16</sup>, and the “Events of September 6-7”<sup>17</sup> applied to the remaining non-Muslims in the country (Oran 2015). In brief, everyone was considered to be a Turk, and this identity was further narrowed to a Muslim, Sunni, and Hanafi<sup>18</sup> Turk. As a matter of fact, this leveling of difference concerned not only ethnic and religious but also all other markers, such as class, in an attempt to rule out all sources of conflict. Mustafa Kemal<sup>19</sup> defined the “people” as a classless and non-privileged community. State institutions were also shaped according to this envisaged uniform identity.

Similarly, in his speeches Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan frequently uses his motto of “One Nation, One Flag, One Homeland, and One State” (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey 2017). Now we see that the same

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<sup>15</sup> The 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey was postulated by the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations” signed at Lausanne in 1923.

<sup>16</sup> The “Wealth Tax” was a tax levied on Turkish citizens in 1942, with the stated aim of raising funds for the country’s defense in case of an eventual entry into the Second World War. However, it is largely accepted that the underlying reason for the tax was to inflict financial ruin on the country’s minority non-Muslim citizens, terminate their prominence in the country’s economy, and move the assets of non-Muslims into the hands of the Muslim bourgeoisie.

<sup>17</sup> The “Events of September 6-7” were organized mob attacks directed primarily at Istanbul’s Greek minority on September 6-7, 1955.

<sup>18</sup> The Hanafi sect is one of the four Sunni Islam sects. Most of the Turks practicing religion are Hanafi in Turkey.

<sup>19</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, is still regarded as an important leader for secular nationalists who call themselves “Kemalist”.

tendency to reduce a multiplicity of identities into an imposed homogeneous block is also practiced by Kurdish politicians within and beyond Turkey. The identities of Kurmanc, Soran, Zaza, Goran, Yezidi, Kurdish-speaking Alevi, and others are all included in the Kurdish identity in the discourses of Kurdish politicians, but in fact they are groups with different identities, either linguistically or religiously. However, the Kurdish political movements declare those who emphasize the differences of these identities as “treacherous” and “separatist”. Furthermore, just like President Erdoğan, the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has also used the “one culture, one nation, and one state” phrase in campaign videos prepared for the independence referendum scheduled for September 25, 2017 (Diken.com 2017).

It seems that by challenging the homogenously framed identities that left no room for diversity, the Kurdish political and societal discourse is in the pitfall of the same nationalist paradigm using the same nationalist tools to paint a unitary and homogeneous imagery of Kurdishness in opposition to “Others”.

### *The Dilemma of the Lazy and Hardworking ‘Other’*

According to philosopher Slavoj Žižek, nationalism offers a privileged space for the eruption of enjoyment into the public space (Žižek 1992, 165). In connection with this, Žižek explains the perception of the “Other” as follows:

What really bothers us about the “other”, is the peculiar way he [sic] organizes his enjoyment (the smell of his food, his “noisy” songs and dances, his strange manners, his attitude to work – in the racist perspective, the “other” is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labor) (Žižek 1992, 165).

When we look at the official ideology in Turkey through Žižek’s explanations, Kurds regarded as the “Other” are imagined as no longer suitable to “contemporary Turkey” with their “smells”, “clothes”, “music”, “tribal traditions”, and “extensive family structures”. They are framed as a “primitive community” that damages the “Turkish image”. Perhaps that is why lynching movements towards the Kurds are more common in western coastal cities of Turkey, which are considered to be the contemporary face of Turkey.

The “workaholic” and “lazy” dilemma expressed by Žižek is a very suitable example for Turkey. We often hear the following comment in Turkey: “The Southeastern region has not developed because the Kurds are very lazy”. Moreover, the Kurds are regarded as parasites expecting everything from the

state<sup>20</sup>. However, Kurds who have settled in Turkey's western cities actively engage in various branches of business. Some people experience discomfort seeing them owning businesses and consider Kurds "invaders"<sup>21</sup>. In other words, these discourses frame Kurds as having an entrepreneurial and hardworking spirit in the west of Turkey as migrants while being lazy and parasitic in their homeland. Therefore, in both cases, Kurds are referred to as an ethnic group with negative traits "compromising the quality of life of Turks". In the first case, resentment is expressed that most of the tax paid by Turks is sent to the Southeast, so that "the lazy Kurds can survive thanks to hardworking Turks". In the second case, it is emphasized that "Kurds have seized jobs" in the western cities because they are "invaders", and as a result, "Turks are unable to find jobs or have to work for low wages".

Yet Turks, who have become the "Other" for Kurds, are being perceived as "pleasure thieves" as well, preventing Kurds from developing and modernizing. Analogous to this, Žižek said that the former Yugoslavian peoples blamed each other for depriving them of pleasure and wealth (Žižek 1992). And what Žižek says about the former Yugoslavian peoples can also be considered for Kurds. Among Kurds, there are complaints that their

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<sup>20</sup> A part of a column entitled "Parasitic Brotherhood" confirms Žižek's thought: "The naïf state is still vested into the process of increasing the population of Kurds [even though they are] loyal to the PKK. The state pays 20-50 Turkish Lira for each child of the ignorant Kurdish people from our pocket [...]. There are those who say a federative government is the solution. I am not against a federative state. But I saw it in Spain: Catalonia and the Basque Country are the richest and most educated, self-sufficient. They do not get a penny from Madrid; on the contrary, they are autonomous because they contribute to the central government, not vice versa! Why do Kurds who want a federation not want independence? Because it will both draw its flag and become autonomous, and it will finance its autonomy from our pocket!" (This Article of Mine Kirikkanat's will be discussed a Lot! 2005).

<sup>21</sup> In an online platform, the following was said about Kurds: "Kurds are not dividing Turkey, they are invading it. Today, half of the Kurds live in our western cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Izmit, Adana, Antalya, Mersin, Konya, Manisa, Aydin, and Samsun. Even in Thrace and the Black Sea, the Kurdish population is growing rapidly. [There are s]o many [of them] that, more Kurds live in other parts of Turkey than in the Southeast that Kurdish nationalists call Kurdistan. Moreover, Kurds are occupying the most important locations in all the regions they live in and are rapidly rising in economic, social, and cultural terms" (Cxonbasi.blogcu.com n.d.).

underground and aboveground resources were exploited by Turks, Arabs, and Persians, and that they were deprived of electricity even from the dams built on their rivers. According to these voices, had there not been colonial countries like Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, Kurdistan would have been among the richest and modern countries of the world <sup>22</sup>.

In fact, at the heart of this idea lies a developmentalist and modernist ideology. Since the beginning of this conflict, Kurds have reacted to Turkish nationalism because nationalists ignored their identities. Despite this causal relationship, Kurdish nationalism has modeled Turkish nationalism and defended essentially the same conflict-promoting principles. We can say that Kurdish nationalism is built on an effort to transform the modernization project initiated by Turkish nationalism into Kurdish modernization. Ironically, while Kurds support Turkish modernization in the context of democracy and human rights, the pioneers of Turkish modernization – the Kemalist elites – oppose this process because of a fear of revitalizing the discourse of the Treaty of Sevres. In summary, roles and expectations are reversed. Kemalist modernization, which initially created problems for the Kurds, has become the hope of liberation for Kurds, while it meets the resistance of Kemalists themselves.

### *Entering an Uncompromising Path*

The Kurdish issue is following an inconsistent path at an official level in Turkey. In 2005, the Turkish government began expressing commitment to solve the Kurdish problem. Beşir Atalay, the then Interior Minister and one of the coordinators of the process, pointed out that a change of paradigm in the resolution or peace process was launched by President Erdoğan's speech in

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<sup>22</sup> In connection with this idea, in an anonymous article titled "The Question of Nationalism and Colonialism from Past to Today and the Kurdish Problem", the following is said: "Let's also think about it like this: What would happen if the Kurdish nation and Kurdistan had not been divided, and Kurds had set up a national state, and there was no foreign occupation? Of course, capitalism would develop with its own internal dynamics in Kurdistan, and it would come to be a developed capitalist country. So, the reasons for the non-development of northern Kurdistan are capitalism's uneven development law and foreign occupation. The resources of North Kurdistan are plundered by imperialists and local collaborators. Capital accumulation and wealth flow from North Kurdistan to the West, thus preventing an independent economic development" (Halkinbirliigi.net n.d.).

2005 in Diyarbakır, and the "National Unity and Brotherhood Project" initiated in 2009 followed by the "Democratic Initiative" were the continuation of that change (International Crisis Group 2011). Then a series of steps were taken for the amelioration of the situation. For example, a Kurdish-language television station started broadcasting. Kurdish language and culture departments and institutes were established in universities. Various negotiations were held between the Kurdistan Workers' Party and some state institutions.

However, in 2015, the resolution process was abandoned, and the conflict resumed. In 2016, arrests of Kurdish politicians began. Both sides blamed each other for bringing the resolution process to a halt. The termination of the resolution process took place in parallel with the war in Syria. Kurds in Syria have obtained a considerable amount of land and have declared the establishment of cantons there. Moreover, these achievements of the Syrian Kurds are also greatly supported and accepted by the international community. These developments in Syria inevitably worry the Turkish government because the latter foresees that the Kurds in Turkey will also aim at separating from Turkey. For this reason, the Kurdish movement in Syria was declared a terrorist movement by the Turkish government and became a target of attack (Holland-McCowan 2017). The Turkish government even performed a military operation in Syria to prevent the unification of Kurdish cantons. As a result, the boundaries of the ethnic identities of Turks and Kurds are becoming more and more pronounced, and both groups are going down an uncompromising path.

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# Political Parties and Conflicts

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The deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and the bygone heyday of the Armenia-Turkey normalization is often attributed to a lack of political will of the ruling powers in these countries. The incumbent regimes, in their turn, often cite the presumed prevailing positions in their societies to explain their action or inaction in regard to conflict resolution or normalization.

But what are these prevailing positions? Analyzing the “prevailing” positions would be possible if Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey were fully-functioning or aspiring democracies and had an open political public sphere. The “political public sphere”, as defined by Jürgen Habermas, is central to a fully-functioning democracy as the latter, in addition to the legitimacy of electoral processes, also assumes plurality and dialogue where the public opinion could be shaped through open debate by political and societal forces – political parties, movements, labor unions, mass media, advocacy groups, citizens, etc. As Habermas put it, “Only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutionalized influence over the government through the instrument of law-making bodies” (Habermas 1964 (1974)).

Yet, in the past decades in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, we have seen how the ruling parties systematically instrumentalize state institutions and ideologies, such as the education system or militarism, to prevent or suppress pluralistic debate and dialogue. In addition to these relatively subtle forms of control, in recent years, persecutions of independent non-state actors such as the mass media or civil society organizations has led to a further vacuum in public engagement. As a result, there remains little public space where the presumed nationalist consensus can be challenged.

As analyzing the prevailing positions of the societies in the absence of public space is difficult and the available data unreliable, in this part of our publication, we have focused on a survey of the positions of the main political parties and movements in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and the Armenia-Turkey normalization

process. While interpretations vary on how political parties and movements shape public opinion and are shaped by it, analyzing their competing positions and visions does certainly give a perspective onto the attitudes that exist in the society (Duverger 1954) (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) (Mair 1997) (Sartori 1976).

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# **The Positions of Political Parties and Movements in Azerbaijan on the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

**Bakhtiyar Aslanov and Sevinj Samedzade**

## **Introduction**

There are more than 50 political parties and movements in Azerbaijan. Fifteen political parties and one political coalition, representing seven parties, participated in the last parliamentary elections in November 2015. The ruling New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*, YAP) gained the majority of the votes and received 71 out of the 125 seats in the Parliament. Ten political parties<sup>23</sup> received one seat each, and the Civic Solidarity Party (*Vətəndaş Həmrəyli Partiyası*, VHP) received two seats in the Parliament<sup>24</sup>. Independent candidates occupied the rest of the seats. (Cental Election Comission of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.) Azerbaijan is a one party dominant state, and the majority of the opposition parties are not represented in the Parliament.

The participation of the opposition in the political life has been more challenging for the last few years. A political coalition of several opposition parties, movements, and individuals emerged in the year of presidential elections in Azerbaijan in 2013 under the title of National Council (*Milli Şura*) (Azadliq.info 2013). Another coalition, called “125s Political Club” (*125-lər Siyasi Klubu*) was established in 2014 to run the candidacies of their members in the parliamentary elections in the following year. Overall, the passive political

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<sup>23</sup> Motherland Party (*Ana Vətən Partiyası*), National Revival Movement Party (*Milli Dirçəliş Hərəkatı Partiyası*), Whole Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (*Bütöv Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası*), Party for Democratic Reforms (*Azərbaycan Demokratik İslahatlar Partiyası*), Great Liberation Party (*Böyük Qurtuluş Partiyası*), Civic Unity Party (*Vətəndaş Birliyi Partiyası*), Azerbaijan Social Prosperity Party (*Azərbaycan Sosial Rifah Partiyası*), Social Democrat Party (*Sosial Demokrat Partiyası*), Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party (*Azərbaycan Demokratik Maarifçilik Partiyası*), and Unity Party (*Birlik Partiyası*).

<sup>24</sup> These ten parties and the VHP are formally considered opposition parties in the Parliament. Due to the similarity of agendas and narratives of the parliamentary opposition parties, we chose only the VHP for the study in this paper.

environment and the lack of possibilities for political activism have resulted in a public invisibility of the positions and programs of parties. Therefore, this paper looks at the positions on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of various political parties as well as movements, including the political opposition unrepresented in the Parliament in Azerbaijan.

The analyzed parties are the ruling party – YAP, parliamentary opposition VHP and extra-parliamentary opposition National Council (*Milli Şura*) coalition, Musavat<sup>25</sup> Party, Agh<sup>26</sup> Party, Future Azerbaijan Party (*Gələcək Azərbaycan Partiyası*, GAP), Umid<sup>27</sup> Party, Republican Alternative (*Respublikaçı Alternativ*, REAL) Party, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (*Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası*, AXCP), Citizen and Development Party (*Vətəndaş və İnkişaf Partiyası*, VIP), Azerbaijan Democratic Party (*Azərbaycan Demokrat Partiyası*, ADP). In addition, two opposition movements – NIDA Civic Movement (*NİDA Vətəndaş Hərəkatı*) and National Idea Center youth movement (*Milli İdeya Mərkəzi gənclər hərəkatı*) have been analyzed. The main source according to which the positions have been teased out are the twelve expert-interviews conducted by the co-authors of this paper with the leaders and/or representatives of these parties and movements. In addition, the election programs as well as speeches and statements by the leaders and spokespeople of the parties and movements have also been analyzed.

## **Prioritization of Nagorno-Karabakh in the Agenda of the Parties and Movements**

The interviews conducted for this paper have shown similar priorities in the agendas of some of the opposition political parties and movements. Improving human rights and restoring democracy and the rule of law in the country ranks first. Meanwhile, the ongoing ineffective peace negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh ranks as the first security threat to the country by all studied opposition parties. As people directly or indirectly affected from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including the IPDs and refugees, constitute very vulnerable social groups, all the political parties, including the ruling party, underline the

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<sup>25</sup> “*Musavat*” means “equality”.

<sup>26</sup> “*Ağ*” means “white”.

<sup>27</sup> “*Ümid*” means “hope”.

violation of the rights of those people as a result of the conflict (National Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2006).

Indeed, all the studied political parties and movements – both in power and in the opposition – possess somewhat similar approaches regarding the prioritization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by focusing on the restoration of territorial integrity, the sovereignty of Azerbaijan as well as the rights of IDPs and refugees. The government justifies its internal hard policies as well as failures through over-prioritizing and putting issues related to Nagorno-Karabakh first in its agenda. Still, the opposition parties criticize the ruling party on this issue and there are also differences in the agendas they set for themselves.

## **Policies Regarding Relations with Armenia and the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

### *Gradual Transformation Towards Democracy and Peace*

The conducted interviews have revealed that, given all options, most of parties and movements prefer the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The **NIDA** Civic Movement sees the resolution of the conflict only through peaceful means. They also condemn the escalations on the frontline and the killings of civilians and soldiers. Board Member of the NIDA Civic Movement Ulvi Hasanli explains his concerns: “In 2013, we were the co-organizers of the protest called ‘Stop the killings of soldiers’. We were demanding to put a stop to the deaths of soldiers in non-combat situations. We want to solve the conflict through peaceful ways” (Hasanli 2017). In a similar key, Chairman of the **Umid Party** Igbal Aghazade states, “I participated in the Karabakh war. Therefore, I am so much in favor of the peaceful resolution because I know that war will not bring any good to our nations and in general to the South Caucasus region” (Aghazade 2017).

There are several scenarios and strategies presented by the opposition political parties and movements in terms of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The first suggested scenario is that Armenia and Azerbaijan simultaneously develop their democracies, implement a pro-western foreign policy, sign the

EU Association Agreement, and decrease the influence of Russia in the region<sup>28</sup>. In this case, the parliamentary opposition VHP, as well as the Musavat Party, the AXCP, GAP, the Umid Party, and the NIDA Civic Movement believe that the conflict can be solved through mutual understanding and compromise.

Along these lined, Board Member of the **AXCP** Agil Maharramov states, “If both Armenia and Azerbaijan become democratic states and choose to integrate with the West, there will surely be more prospects for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Public diplomacy and official negotiations will accelerate. At least, both governments will not accuse their opposition for being pro-Armenian or pro-Azerbaijani. Inveterate hostility among the two nations will be eliminated” (Maharramov 2017).

The Musavat party, prioritizing democratization and peace, has been involved in the Potsdam processes since 2009. In 2010, Chairman of the Musavat Party Isa Gambar, Chairman of the Armenian National Movement Aram Manukyan, Chairman of the parliamentary group of the Republican Party in Georgia David Berdzenishvili signed the Potsdam Declaration aiming to increase cooperation between their countries in order to find solutions to the on-going territorial and political conflicts in the region (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom 2010). The agreement will come into action, if the involved political parties come to power in their respective countries and develop democracy in the region.

Explaining the post-Potsdam agreement situation, Deputy Chairman of the **Musavat Party** Elman Fettah speaks about the necessity of simultaneous steps towards democracy and peace: “The change of the current political regime only in Armenia and its democratization will have a positive and negative impact on the conflict. However, it will not completely solve the conflict. For instance, if Armenia has a democratic political regime while the authoritarian regime continues in Azerbaijan, it will be a dangerous situation for the interests of Azerbaijan. Because in such a scenario, Armenia will always be one step

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<sup>28</sup> Similar results were revealed in the study under EU FP7 CASCADE GA No. 613354 in 2016 and described in the manuscript submitted by Leila Alieva and Bakhtiyar Aslanov (2017) titled “How autocracy impedes de-securitization, or why democracy matters: case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”.

forward in the official negotiation processes. Armenia will not have to worry about human rights or democracy issues” (Fettah 2017).

The second scenario is to **develop the democracy in Azerbaijan and improve human rights and the rule of law** in order to attract the support of international and local stakeholders. The parties and movements that favor this scenario think that this will give the upper hand to Azerbaijan in the negotiations and prove that it will protect its Armenian citizens and ensure their security and well-being. Leader of the **National Idea Center** youth movement Shehriyar Mecidzade notes that the majority of Armenian political leaders are ex-militants: “It is impossible to have negotiations with a military junta. Therefore, we have to develop our economy and democracy, attract and integrate Armenians living in Karabakh, and save them from the repressive regime” (Mecidzade 2017).

The third scenario is **political change and democratization of Russia**, resulting in a new global and regional order. Parties and movements favoring this scenario believe that the role of Russia will diminish significantly in the South Caucasus, and Armenia, losing its political and military ally, will opt for compromise in the negotiations. Chairman of **VIP** Ali Aliyev highlights the role of Russia: “The best way to solve the conflict is to bring together the two conflicting nations. Simultaneously, it is essential that Armenia is released from the bondage of Russia. It all depends on the weakening of Russia as a political power” (A. Aliyev 2017).

The Chairman of the **Umid Party** considers the role of Russia a substantial element in the resolution of the conflict. However, he does not believe that the democratization of Russia will ultimately solve the conflict: “The change of political regime in Russia might open new opportunities for resolution. For instance, the parties might solve the conflict through the use of force. Azerbaijan might liberate a large part of Karabakh. Nevertheless, it will not be a fundamental way to solve the conflict. Moreover, Russia has large institutions and its foreign policy traditions do not change easily” (Aghazade 2017).

### *Stance on the Madrid Principles, the OSCE Minsk Group, and Russia's Role*

Almost all the examined opposition parties and movements believe that the current negotiations are ineffective. So far as the ruling YAP, carrying out the

negotiations, blames Armenia for a non-constructive position (İsgəndərova 2016). While the prevailing view internally and internationally is that the Madrid Principles<sup>29</sup> is by far the most feasible model for the resolution of the conflict, most of the opposition parties do not agree with all the principles and the compromise offered by the current government.

Particularly unacceptable for the **REAL Party** and the **Agh Party** is the possibility of the deployment of peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. As the **REAL Party** states in its main program, “We will try to establish the image of Azerbaijan as democratic state in the world, along with ensuring the strong and disciplined army in order to restore our territorial integrity, the maturity of our foreign policy. Moreover, we won’t let the deployment of peacekeeping forces of any foreign country in Karabakh and the conduction a referendum on separation of Karabakh from Azerbaijan be a subject of matter of Karabakh negotiations” (Republican Alternative Party n.d.). At the same time, the **REAL Party** has conducted an internal survey among its elites showing that 73.3 percent of the respondents opt for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Similarly, Chairman of the **Agh Party** Tural Abbasli states, “We are providing a corridor in the Madrid Principles. There are also points about status and peacekeeping forces. If we agree on that, Russia will locate its peacekeeping forces on the border. [In that case] there will be a huge vulnerability that, with a small provocation, the Russian army will start military operations just like they did in Abkhazia” (Abbasli 2017).

In their critique of the Madrid Principles, Chairman of the **ADP** Sardar Jalaloglu and Chairman of **VIP** Ali Aliyev go further arguing that the Principles aim to give Karabakh to Armenia and fulfill the interests of Armenia (Jalaloglu 2017) (A. Aliyev 2017).

Despite the disagreement on the Madrid Principles, the **REAL Party** believes that the OSCE Minsk Group format is feasible for the resolution of the conflict. Meanwhile most of the political opposition is critical about the position of the Minsk Group because of the unwillingness of the co-chair states to support the process as neutral mediators. The passive image of the OSCE Minsk Group and

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<sup>29</sup> For the full text of the Madrid Principles, see (Madrid Principles – Full Text 2016).



Russia's increasing influence in the region is not welcomed and appears as a large threat to the settlement of the conflict.

According to the conducted interviews, Russia's role in the region and its impact on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is also widely criticized by most of the political opposition. The pro-Russia policy of the current Armenian government and its wide dependence on the military support of Russia results in concerns and disbelief in the resolution of the conflict. Moreover, Russia's perceived impact on stopping the so-called "April War" in 2016 has brought to widespread skepticism over its role among political elites.

Some of the political opposition parties and movements believe that Russia as a mediator is taking sides with Armenia favoring the latter's interests in the negotiations, resulting in ineffective and long-lasting processes. Representative of the **National Council** Ibrahim Ibrahimli, states, "De-facto, Russia has occupied Armenia and a few days ago, they established a joint army. Right now, the territories of Azerbaijan are under the occupation of that joint army. This action once again proves that Russia's role as a mediator in the Minsk Group is just a formality. Russia is not in the position to solve the conflict; instead, it motivates the existence of conflict and influences Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is a good leverage, and Moscow does not want to miss this leverage" (Ibrahimli 2017).

In a slight contrast with the opposition parties discussed above and as demonstrated by the interviews, the **Musavat** and **Umid** parties, the **AXCP**, **GAP**, and the parliamentary opposition **VHP** believe that the presence of Russia is convenient for the political regimes both in Armenia and Azerbaijan. They also believe that in its turn, the current situation is auspicious for Russia to keep its power over the South Caucasus by allying with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan and supporting their existence in power. Since the beginning of the conflict, Russia has often been deemed as the main culprit that also benefits from the continuation of the conflict. Improving democracy and the rule of law in Armenia and Azerbaijan alone are not seen as sufficient to fully solve the conflict either. Thus, these parties see both the democratization of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the change of political power in Russia as an essential breakpoint in the future settlement of the conflict.

*Inevitableness of War as a Tool to Solve the Conflict vs. Compromise*

All studied parties and movements unequivocally believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be solved with the guarantee of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The seven regions around Nagorno-Karabakh should not be subject to negotiations, and they must be returned immediately. The current government established by the YAP claims that Azerbaijan reserves its right to restore the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Azerbaijan, as well as the rights of the displaced people through either peace or war, even though Baku prefers to achieve a peaceful resolution over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Hasanov 2011).

The **National Council** presents a strong position that Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan and should not have an autonomy, which also resembles the mainstream public opinion (Caucasus Research Resource Center 2013). Alternatively, the rest of the political parties see Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan with a high degree of autonomy, mostly cultural autonomy, protecting the rights of ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh that are de-jure citizens of Azerbaijan.

In this regard, long-term negotiations and the current position of the government in the negotiations are not easily accepted among the opposition. In case of the continuation of such negotiations without outcomes, the studied parties and movements do not exclude the use of force and military operations as a last resort to restore Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

The **AXCP** leader states, "We are in favor of solving the conflict through peaceful ways. However, not with the current 'frozen peace'. The ceasefire is always violated. Every day, a soldier is killed... If the Armenian government stays in the same position and does not step back in the negotiations, we will surely use force to bring back the territories" (Maharramov 2017). Similarly, Secretary of Political Affairs at the **REAL Party** Azer Qasimli notes: "We will continue the negotiations with Armenia. However, if there are any ceasefire violations on the border, we will respond back seriously. We will do twice more than what the current government did in April 2016. We will move 10 kilometers forward, not 1-2 kilometers" (Qasimli 2017). **VIP** and the parliamentary opposition **VHP** support the idea of using force to accelerate the peace negotiations.

Obviously, the use of force as a tool to resolve the conflict is in the possible agenda of all popular political parties. Despite aiming to achieve peace and coexistence, all parties have a preference to strengthen the military, use military operations, and ensure the territorial integrity at some point. The lack of trust in the negotiations and public diplomacy, as well as the unpredictability of geopolitical changes, or at least political changes in Azerbaijan, allows the political opposition, with minor exceptions, to follow the narratives of the ruling party.

The ruling **YAP** aims to restore authority over all areas of its internationally recognized territories that are currently Armenia-controlled. According to the Basic Principles that the current government is negotiating on within the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group, as a very first step and sign of willingness of peace, Azerbaijan expects Armenian forces to withdraw from the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. Then, a multinational peacekeeping mission is to be deployed to guarantee the security of Azerbaijanis returning and Armenians remaining in these areas. With peacekeepers on the ground, Armenian troops should also withdraw from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijanis who formerly lived there should be granted safe return (OSCE 2009).

Unlike the opposition parties, the incumbent government of YAP is offering a compromise on certain principles such as the deployment of a peacekeeping mission and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. One important suggestion is to keep Armenian troops in the lands connecting Armenians to Armenia until international peacekeepers are on the ground. Azerbaijan requests the withdrawal of military forces of Armenia from the regions of Kalbajar and Lachin after five years following the return of all territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's control. Although, Azerbaijan refuses to grant Nagorno-Karabakh the right to secede, it is ready to grant this entity "the highest degree of self-rule and autonomy" by arguing that this will be "less than independence but more than autonomy" (Rashidoghlu 2016).

Most of the political opposition disagrees with the current policy and the compromise offered by the government of Azerbaijan. In this regard, their positions present harsher and a more unambiguous approach to the resolution of the conflict, which is a waxing trend after the escalation in April 2016.

### *A New Status Quo and Disillusionment with War*

The majority of the political parties, including the studied political opposition supported the government during the military operations in April 2016. The parties essentially supporting peace gradually changed their narratives and officially declared their support for war. They all demonstrated a neat trust in the willingness of the government of Azerbaijan to solve the conflict through ongoing operations in early April 2016. In this regard, the opposition parties were ready to stop their activities and stand by the president.

On April 2, 2016, Chairman of the **AXCP** Ali Karimli addressed the public and the supporters of the party: “In fact, if the aggressor – Armenia has violated the ceasefire, we want our territories to be freed. [...] Do not worry about the opposition. We are the political power who established the Azerbaijani state, fought for Karabakh, and sacrificed many soldiers. We are ready to support our army by any means. [...] We will stop criticizing the government’s military policy or any mistakes regarding the military development during the heavy operations on the frontline” (Karimli 2016). After the ceasefire agreement on April 5 and seeing the outcomes of the war, some opposition parties changed their narratives and started criticizing the defensiveness and unwillingness of the government to continue the war. Russia’s role in stopping the victory of the Azerbaijani army (that was the perception at that time) and the death of many soldiers came unexpected for both the public and the political opposition parties. Therefore, the initial trust in the actions of the government turned into total disbelief and cynicism (Azadliq.org 2016).

Assessing the motives of the escalation and de-escalation, some opposition parties and movements perceived the “April War” as a pre-planned action to support the political regime in Azerbaijan and increase their public popularity. Samir Asadli from the parliamentary opposition **VHP** states, “In the April war, many people died in vein. This is not success. It was a provocation of Russia. It is not acceptable if a human being dies for such a minor so-called success” (Asadli 2017). The representative of the **National Council** highlights, “The April war proved that unless we are following the orders of Russia, we would have no good for people. We should either start war and free the territories or stop creating such kind of escalations” (Ibrahimli 2017).

Contrary to this position, the ruling YAP and the overwhelming majority of the parties represented in the Parliament (yet not studied in detail in this paper),

believed that despite stopping the war, the “April War” has been a victory. President Ilham Aliyev, who is also the Chair of the ruling YAP later also stated, “The Azerbaijani Army showed the enemy where they belong. Today we have gained superiority. However, we are ready to restore the ceasefire, only in case the opposing party also follows the ceasefire. We do not want war. We would like the problem to be solved through peaceful ways” (I. Aliyev 2016).

Some opposition parties also started following a similar discourse and saying that the Azerbaijani army is strong enough to solve the conflict or influence the negotiations. Nevertheless, there was no serious improvements in the negotiations afterwards. VIP believes that they will give similar statements if escalations happen again: “We are the party who wants Ilham Aliyev to liberate those territories. If he is capable of it, we as opposition are ready to do our best to help him. As soon as the war starts, we are ready to support the government” (A. Aliyev 2017).

In April 2017, amendments on the law about military situations were accepted. The amendments allow increased civic and political limitations during a military situation. In such a situation, the mass media will be censored and under surveillance. Additionally, all public meetings, street gatherings, protests will be prohibited (State Security Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2017). The amendments clearly legitimize the position of the government during war situations by giving them more possibilities, limiting the activities of civic and political groups. Growing wary of this scenario, **GAP** leader Aghasif Shakiroglu states, “If similar escalations happen again, we will first analyze the situation. We will see if those operations aim to postpone the 2018 presidential [elections] through war-related imitations. If there are military operations on the threshold of the 2018 elections, we will give a different reaction than we did in April 2016. Because, the government again can free one hill and postpone elections for an unknown period” (Shakiroglu 2017).

The current positions of the political parties on the use of force is largely motivated by April 2016. Despite the limitations to the activities of the political opposition, there is a shared consent among the **Agh Party**, **VIP**, and the **ADP** to follow a similar track and position in case of another escalation. Whereas, some opposition parties such as the **AXCP**, **GAP**, and the **Musavat Party** are more cautious about further events and believe that they can push the

government to be accountable and influence public opinion in order to prevent similar ineffective military operations from happening.

## Impact of Normalization of Turkey-Armenia Relations

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the clashing point and the reason why Turkey closed its border with Armenia in the early 1990s. In addition, Azerbaijan and Turkey are close strategic partners in the region.

As discussed in the previous sections, most of the parties and movements in Azerbaijan believe that Armenia greatly depends on Russia and its colonial policy. This injects disbelief in the parties and movements regarding the success of the rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia. However, there are a few different approaches regarding the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations and its impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict amongst the political parties and movements in Azerbaijan.

First of all, some political parties and movements, including the **REAL Party**, the **AXCP**, the **NIDA Civic Movement**, the **ADP**, and **GAP** assume that the restoration of political, economic, humanitarian, and other relations between Armenia and Turkey would enable Armenia to get out of the sphere of influence and dependency from Russia to some extent. **This in turn could positively impact the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since Turkey would be able to exert more soft power on Armenia.** In this logic, building strong economic, political, and other relations between stakeholders of these two countries could gradually eliminate the influence of negative memories between people and could bring these two nations to a consensus on different irreconcilable and uncompromising issues. However, these parties and movements claim that Russia unfortunately did not let the sides successfully finalize the normalization process by exerting influence through Azerbaijan and other leverages. The **REAL Party** notes, “The government of Azerbaijan did not approach this event in a positive way. Russia managed to stop this process via the hands of Azerbaijan... However, this would have positively impacted the peaceful resolution of [the] Nagorno-Karabakh [conflict]” (Qasimli 2017).

However, there are some political parties and movements, such as the ruling **YAP**, the parliamentary opposition **VHP**, as well as **VIP**, the **Umid Party**, the **National Council**, the **Agh Party**, and the **National Idea Center** youth

movement, that are totally against any kind of rapprochement process between Turkey and Armenia before achieving a final resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In their view, **the restoration of relations between Turkey and Armenia would negatively impact the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**. By condemning the current government of Turkey for their policies on this issue in 2009-2010, these parties and movements expect any government in Turkey to support the isolation policy of Azerbaijan towards Armenia until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is settled. The representative of the **National Council** emphasizes, "Turkey and Azerbaijan should act together on all the issues, not only on this one. Normalization might only be brought to the agenda after the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Economic and other types of relations can be built after the return of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan" (Ibrahimli 2017). In a different key, the **Agh Party** claims that all the parties and civil society representatives should support and not criticize Turkey, even though, Ankara made a mistake on this issue in the past (Abbasli 2017).

There is a third approach to this topic in Azerbaijan, which is mainly supported by the Musavat Party adherents. This party assumes that the restoration of relations between Turkey and Armenia would have neither a positive nor a negative impact over the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In line with its initial position discussed above, it believes that the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict only depends on the spread of democracy in Armenia and Azerbaijan. A peaceful resolution is realistic only if both countries improve and respect democratic values in their respective countries (Fettah 2017).

## Conclusion

Complications of the political environment and the one party dominance in Azerbaijan affects the roles and positions of the political parties and movements on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The lack of participation of the political parties, particularly the political opposition in the conflict resolution and peace-building processes, results with the limitation of alternative agendas on the resolution of the conflict. Simultaneously, it forces the political parties to see their roles as an actor only after becoming a ruling party and gaining power to act.

According to the conducted study, almost all political parties and movements prioritize the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a main element of foreign policy. Whereas, in contrast to the ideas of the ruling party, most of the political opposition believe that the development of foreign policy is highly depended on internal policy. Thus, the studied opposition parties and movements assume that the democratization and liberalization of Azerbaijan and its neighboring states will positively influence the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Second, they do not isolate the Nagorno-Karabakh issue from all other foreign policy issues. The development of a good image of Azerbaijan in the western world (unlike the policy of balance between the east and the west that the current government is leading) will bring more benefits to its capacity to solve the conflict. In this regard, the majority of them are in favor of diminishing the Russian influence, eliminating its soft and hard power in the South Caucasus. It is also visible that the willingness to join the EU and fully integrate into the West is not seen as a salvation in relation to conflict resolution either.

Contrary to the ruling party, the political opposition disqualifies the role of the OSCE Minsk Group and criticizes the ineffectiveness of its mediation processes. Russia's role is seen as the main obstacle in the relations with Armenia. Therefore, contrary to the position of the ruling party, the common discourse among some of the studied opposition parties and movements is that the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations would increase the influence of Turkey and simultaneously decrease the impact of Russia in Armenia. In their logic, this would impact positively the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, the other part of the opposition parties and movements objects to the normalization process and believes it will be against the interests of Azerbaijan. Thus, most parties and movements believe that the normalization process between Armenia and Turkey would affect the settlement of the conflict in one way or another. Only the Musavat Party, with their more compromising agenda on the conflict, considers the Turkey-Armenia normalization process intransitive to Azerbaijan-Armenia relations.

Following the narratives of the ruling party, all parties and movements support the idea of peaceful coexistence after the resolution of the conflict within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. However, not all of them are ready to compromise on the issues that the incumbent government is currently ready to



compromise on. Some political opposition fundamentally rejects to compromise on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. By disagreeing with the status of “highest autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh” currently displayed by the government of Azerbaijan in the negotiations, the parties accept the discussions about a cultural autonomy only after the return of the seven regions around Nagorno-Karabakh.

The persistency of the political parties to solve the conflict through a hard-power diplomacy and less compromise is more visible and common after the April 2016 escalations. Unlike their initial position in April 2016, the popular political opposition parties, such as GAP, the AXCP, and the Musavat Party, are critical about the effectiveness of such military operations. Nevertheless, they also believe that the use of force in conflict resolution is not excluded. These parties also question the frankness of the government in terms of solving the conflict by use of force and consider escalations as a supportive tool for the ruling party to remain in power. However, the majority of the political parties still have trust in the military strategy and military strength of the government and believe that they will support the government again if similar attempts of military operations happen. In this regard, the amendments on the law on military situations and the legitimization of giving all power and decision-making functions to the government during such escalations has been accepted easily and without much objection.

Finally, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the ultimate goal for all parties. There is surely willingness to resolve the conflict, but there is also a lack of participation and trusted dialogue on the issue. If the political environment in Azerbaijan changes and the political opposition gains opportunities to influence the decision making on the settlement of the conflict, with their current agendas, no crucial changes are expected to happen. However, if such changes take place, more internal open dialogue will bring about democratic and fair decisions, increase political will, and assist the development of alternative agendas for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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# The Positions of Political Parties in Armenia on the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Turkey-Armenia Relations

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## Introduction

There are 79 parties registered in Armenia, most of which are inactive and unknown to the public (Armlur.am 2016). Five parties and four party blocs participated in the parliamentary election on April 2, 2017. Two parties and two blocks entered the Parliament. The Republican Party of Armenia (*Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun*, HHK) with its 58 seats and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Hay Heghapokhagan Dashnaktsutyun*, HHD) Party with its 7 seats formed the ruling coalition. The “Yelk” bloc comprised of “Bright Armenia” (*Lusavor Hayastan*) Party, Civil Contract (*Kaghakatsiakan Paymanagir*) Party, and Republic (*Hanrapetutyun*) Party (with 9 seats) and the “Tsarukyan” bloc (31 seats) formally formed the opposition. (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017)

The Armenian National Congress (*Hay Azgayin Kongres*, HAK) Party, the Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan (ORO) bloc (with its nucleus of the “Heritage” (*Zharangutyun*) Party), the “Armenian Renaissance” (*Haykakan Veratsnund*) Party, the Communist Party of Armenia (*Hayastani Komunistakan Kusaktsutyun*), and the Free Democrats (*Azat Demokratner*) Party<sup>30</sup> also took part in the elections, yet did not pass the threshold (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017).

This analysis looks at all the parties and blocs in the Parliament as well as extra-parliamentary HAK, ORO, and the “Armenian Renaissance” Party. The “Founding Parliament” (*Himnadir Khorhrdaran*) movement was also reviewed because of the upheaval they caused in the country’s political and social life by

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<sup>30</sup> The Communist Party and the Free Democrats Party were not included in this paper due to a marginal electorate (0.75 percent and 0.94 percent respectively in the last parliamentary elections of 2017 (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017). Their stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Turkey do not provide a significant alternative to the other parties discussed in this paper either.

seizing the Patrol-Guard Service Regiment in Yerevan in Summer 2016. Their agenda on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in particular differs from the other opinions discussed in this paper.

Based on the positions of the parties regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia-Turkey relations, several model positions have been identified. These models are presented according to increasing harshness in policies towards neighboring countries.

Thus, the model of “Proactive Policy in Relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan” entails an explicit and blunt discussion of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement on the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group and the Madrid Principles<sup>31</sup> and an increased transparency of this processes in the eye of the public.

The second model, “Stabilization of Relations with Turkey Without Preconditions and Compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, emphasizes the reciprocal concessions of the sides towards the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict further conditioning the start of these substantive discussions with confidence- and security-building measures. Within the same model, the establishment of relations without preconditions with Turkey is a requirement set from Yerevan to Ankara; the latter demands concessions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a precondition for the establishment of further relations.

The third model, “A Tough Stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey” covers the parties and one movement that stand on a radical position towards Turkey and Azerbaijan. This means a varying degree of militaristic rhetoric and setting of harsh preconditions before substantive talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or no such talks at all. This position also entails a harsh reaction towards Turkey’s attempts at influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict coupled with conditioning normalization with demands to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The fourth model, “Lack of a Clear Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey” covers the parties whose agenda includes mainly

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<sup>31</sup> For the full text of the Madrid Principles, see (Madrid Principles – Full Text 2016). For the Basic Principles of the OSCE Minsk Group, see (OSCE 2009).

internal political issues and that follow the official line of the authorities in regard to foreign policy. The electorate of these parties has little interest in foreign policy, therefore its role in the programs of those parties is minimal.

The HHK appears in two models because the different echelons of the party use different positions depending on whether statements are made for an external audience, or internal. The “Yelk” bloc, on the other hand, appears in two models because its position regarding to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict fits with the tougher stance, while its approach to Turkey-Armenia relations is on a more constructive path.

The sources according to which the positions have been teased out are the pre-election programs as well as the speeches, interviews, and statements by the party leaders and spokespeople. Analytical articles and other sources have also contributed to this analysis.

## **Proactive Policy in Relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan**

### *Armenian National Congress (HAK, Hay Azgayin Kongres)*

The HAK party – in a bloc with the People’s Party of Armenia (HZhK, *Hayastani Zhoghovrdakan Kusaktsutyun*) – became the only political force out of the 9 blocs and parties running for the April 2017 elections to focalize the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in their pre-election program. The HAK party, also referred to as “Congress”, ran in the elections with the bold slogan of “Peace, Harmony, Good-neighborliness” that stood in stark contrast with all other party slogans.

“The imperative of Armenia’s and Nagorno-Karabakh’s security, and even existence, is to leave the economically suffocating state of the blockade and confrontation with neighboring countries and to transform into a country that peacefully coexists with neighbors, engages in free trade and mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and has open communication links”; this was the vision stated in the bloc’s program (Anc.am 2017). The program claims that only through the establishment of peace is it possible to save the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians, to halt the arm race, and reduce the military budget. As a result, Armenia will be able to participate in major regional projects, attract investments, ensure economic growth, and so on. (Anc.am 2017)

In a much-debated pre-election interview on the Public Television of Armenia, HAK leader, first President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan<sup>32</sup> said that both Armenia and Azerbaijan are ready for mutual concessions, and that there are only a few points on which the parties need to agree (Dashtents 2017) (Public Television of Armenia 2017).

When asked how HAK's willingness to go for a compromise differs from all other parties' visions, Ter-Petrosyan has stressed that no party can now offer a new peace plan; negotiations take place around an existing plan on the table – the Madrid Principles (out of which the first President cited “the return of territories”, “the assurance of non-use of force”, and “defining [sic!] the right of the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh”) elaborated on the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group. The first President also noted that if Armenia does not accept the current plan in the form of the Madrid Principles, then the next one will be even worse (Dashtents 2017) (Public Television of Armenia 2017). Earlier at the HAK party convention in December 2016, Ter-Petrosyan had also said that there is no other solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict then the stage-by-stage or phased solution that he was negotiating in 1997 (Aslanyan 2016).

In another appearance on the “Kentron” (“Center”) TV channel, Ter-Petrosyan reiterated his statement that the current authorities are conducting the negotiations around the Madrid Principles, and he qualified those who say “not an inch of land”<sup>33</sup> as “the grave-diggers of this nation” (Panarmenian.net 2017) (Kentron TV 2017). Ter-Petrosyan also criticized the current government – the HHK and its coalition – for not making clear public statements on the readiness for mutual concessions and stressed that the peace deal on the table can be implemented only if the Congress wins in the elections or gains a significant number of seats in the Parliament (Ilur.am 2016). At the same time, the first President has stressed that the Congress will support the current President and his government in the question of the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in line with the current negotiated plan – the only issue upon which a

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<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan resigned from his position in 1998 because of disagreement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement with an influential part of the Armenian political and military elites of the time.

<sup>33</sup> This is an often used phrase to characterize the constituencies against any territorial concessions.



shared position between the two powers is deemed plausible, according to Ter-Petrosyan (Kentron TV 2017).

HAK supports the establishment of Armenia-Turkey relations and views them through the prism of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. “The elimination of contradictions with Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the establishment of good-neighborly relations, depends only on one issue – the settlement of the Karabakh conflict”, was Ter-Petrosyan’s argument at the party convention where he also harshly criticized the concept of the “army-nation” that the ruling HHK started implementing in 2016. (Ilur.am 2016)

The rating of popularity of the Congress had already been on a continuous decline in the years preceding the April 2017 elections, and this position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict worsened the situation. After the elections, Ter-Petrosyan stated that it would be “political illiteracy” to expect a different result given that the power and wealth in the country is accumulated in a few families (Ter-Petrosyan 2017).

## **Stabilization of Relations with Turkey Without Preconditions and Ambivalent Compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

### *Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)*

The HHK fits under more than one category in the analysis of its positions on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Turkey. The different and sometimes divergent positions expressed by the party members are not accidental. Unlike all other parties, the HHK must present its position for audiences in Armenia, on the international arena, as well as in official negotiations. That is why very often the statements made by party affiliates within Armenia (for domestic consumption so to speak) and the official position of the party, hence the official position of Armenia in the negotiations, can differ significantly from each other, a tactic often criticized by the media (Are We Handing Over 5 or 7 Regions? Is This the Only Debatable Question of Today? What is the Real Size of the Concession on the Armenian Side Going to Be? 2016). HHK leader, President Serzh Sargsyan himself admitted in an appearance on the “Armenia” TV that his critics should take into consideration

“the audience towards which [his] messages are directed and the aims of the messages” (Armenia TV 2017). On the other hand, the power and resources of the HHK allow for the easy manipulation of the public opinion, among other means through “pocket” political scientists and experts, before the party’s position shifts in one direction or another.

President Sargsyan stresses periodically Armenia’s readiness to continue engaging in negotiations and doing so within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, seeing war as the alternative to negotiations (Armenia TV 2017). According to analysts, the same Madrid Principles lie on the negotiating table – the transfer of areas around the former NKAR (except a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh) to Azerbaijan in exchange for the status of Nagorno-Karabakh through the will of the people (referendum). Armenia’s foreign policy on the international arena is based on the formula “we are ready for negotiations and are also ready for high-level meetings albeit with little to no expectations, but Azerbaijan torpedoes them” (Armenia TV 2017) (Panorama.am 2017).

In the same TV appearance, President Sargsyan rejected that his government has ever expressed readiness to make unilateral concessions; their statements have always been about the readiness for reciprocal concessions and compromise (Armenia President: We Never Talked About Concessions 2017). The President also stressed that there is no “principled change” in the position of the government after the “four-day April war” and that the latter only showed that Azerbaijan is rejecting the Madrid Principles (Armenia TV 2017).

The vertex of the party and all official documents usually adhere to a discourse in line with the stabilization of relations with Turkey and mutual concessions with Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The more rigid voices coming from HHK are discussed in a later section.

As for relations with Turkey, eight years ago, the HHK could be placed within the first category of this analysis – active supporters of establishing relations with Ankara. However, President Sargsyan’s initiative to sign the Armenia-Turkey protocols, which should have led to the opening of the border, failed (Panarmenian.net 2015). After the failure in this matter, the ruling HHK decided not to rush things. As a result, there was no place for Turkey in the foreign policy of the pre-election program (Foreign Policy Aimed at Progress 2017). However, as President Sargsyan has stated in one of his interviews,

Armenia still wants to open borders with Turkey, yet do so without preconditions: “Unfortunately, after some time it became clear that the Turks are not ready to ratify these protocols and are in fact not ready to establish relations with Armenia without preconditions.” (Armeniasputnik.am 2016).

### *Ohanyina-Raffi-Oskanyan Bloc and the “Heritage” (Zharangutyun) Party*

The Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan<sup>34</sup> (ORO) bloc spoke with a similar platform of compromise during the election campaign. Similar to the HHK, that deems Russia’s arms trade to Azerbaijan one of the “painful points of Armenian-Russian relations” (Armenia TV 2017), ORO also insisted on the preservation of a military equilibrium with Azerbaijan and the rejection of unilateral concessions. On the other hand, they believed it was necessary to activate people’s diplomacy (Armlur.am 2017).

Like the current authorities, the bloc stated that without taking into account the wishes of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, the resolution of the conflict is impossible. Former Foreign Minister of Armenia and one of the formal leaders of the bloc, Vartan Oskanyan stated that it is possible to achieve international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh or its accession to Armenia (Vardan Oskanyan Prefers the Reunification of Armenia and Artsakh 2017).

In general, at the time of its creation, the bloc already had left an impression of something artificial, as the political views of the “companions” gathered in one force differed significantly from each other before. After the April 2017 parliamentary elections, the bloc de facto disintegrated.

Out of the three forces that hastily formed the bloc, the only full-fledged party with a certain electorate, albeit melting from year to year, is the “Heritage” Party. Its position on Nagorno-Karabakh is similar to the position of the bloc as a whole. As for Turkey, the “Heritage” party aims to establish an “open and honest dialogue with Ankara”: “Armenia-Turkey relations presuppose an open, honest dialogue through cultural, economic, and social cooperation. The two nations should gradually amend the archetypes governing over them, adopt universal human and European values, recognize their own history and

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<sup>34</sup> The *éminence grise* of the bloc was the former Commander of Self-Defense Forces of Nagorno-Karabakh and Minister of Defense Samvel Babayan.

resolve the Genocide and the issue of its heritage [...]". So, while the party is for the normalization of relations with Turkey, it proclaims the recognition of the Armenian Genocide as a foundation for partnership. (Heritage.am 2005) (Heritage.am 2012)

*'Yelk' bloc (regarding policies towards relations with Turkey)*

In the issue of the Armenian-Turkish relations, the bloc stands for their normalization without preconditions. There is one modest line in their program devoted to this issue: "Measures will be undertaken to open the Armenian-Turkish border without preconditions" (Brightarmenia.am 2017).

In one of his interviews, leader of the "*Lusavor Hayastan*" party, MP Edmond Marukyan gives a short explanation, where he calls the identity of the leaders of the two countries the main problem: "We affirm that the thesis existing until today, that is the restoration of the Armenian-Turkish relations without any preconditions, should remain on the agenda, but remain on the active agenda. We think that the absence of any steps in the current Armenian-Turkish relations, or the freezing of these relations (since, after the protocols no steps have been taken) is also connected with the leaders of two countries, in other words, it is a matter of leadership. And if it is changed, then the new political forces can be able to achieve a settlement in this direction." (Armedia.am 2017).

Overall, the stance of the three parties discussed in this section bears the mark of "compromise" and "mutual concessions" with a reservation. For the HHK, it is a stance that can be acceptable to the international community; yet it does not openly place this stance in the spotlight of public debate. Domestically, the HHK uses a harsher discourse discussed below, hence rendering its readiness for compromise ambivalent. While HHK uses the more diplomatic voice especially for foreign audiences, ORO and Yelk air what HHK cannot "afford" to say diplomatically.

## A Tough Stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey

*‘Yelk’ Bloc (regarding policies towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict)*

The agenda of the “Yelk” bloc focuses foremost on internal political issues, and foreign policy takes a modest share, perhaps out of caution not to lose its “pro-Western” stance. “Yelk”, the political force identifying itself as the only opposition force in the Parliament, uses the Nagorno-Karabakh issue extensively to criticize the authorities.

In their opinion, the restoration of the military balance should become the first step for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Additionally, they set other preconditions for the conversation on concessions to start: “There can be no question of mutual concessions in the issue of Artsakh under the conditions of Azerbaijan’s military rhetoric and its aggressive policy. The condition for the effective discussion of the option of mutual concessions is the clear readiness of Azerbaijan to recognize Artsakh’s right for self-determination” (Brightarmenia.am 2017).

In one of his interviews, one of the leaders of the “Yelk” bloc, Edmond Marukyan stated that there are no political forces ready for compromise at this stage in Azerbaijan. In his opinion, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict directly depends on the economic, military, and political development of Armenia. (Armedia.am 2017) He also deemed the Madrid Principles obsolete<sup>35</sup> (Girgoryan 2016).

Another leader of the bloc, Nikol Pashinyan, believes that HAK supports the ruling HHK’s program, and talking about compromise, these parties mean unilateral concessions (Aysor.am 2017).

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<sup>35</sup> Several analysts have also disqualified the Madrid Principles as obsolete and not corresponding to the realities of today. See, for example, (Arzumanyan 2015)

### *Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)*

Along with statements about the readiness for negotiations with Azerbaijan, the ruling HHK, using state resources and institutions of power, is actively promoting “patriotism”. Some evaluate these policy as the promotion of nationalism, others qualify it as militarism.

In its pre-election program, the HHK states, “Our goal is that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is finally determined by the people of Artsakh<sup>36</sup>. We shall never forego this principle”. Along with this, the program pledges “to continue working on the involvement of the Republic of Artsakh as a full-fledged party in peace negotiations”. (The Electoral Program of the Republican Party of Armenia 2017).

The ruling HHK obviously cannot openly disqualify the negotiations or refuse to engage in them on the level of the vertex of power – the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yet other leaders such as Spokesperson of the party and Vice-President of the Parliament Eduard Sharmazanov make cautious statements that there is no progress in resolving the conflict, putting the blame entirely on Azerbaijan for that (Martirosyan 2017).

In their turn, the leaders of foreign policy tie the deadlock in the negotiations on substantive matters to the war rhetoric of Azerbaijan putting de-escalation before discussions on content. Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Nalbandyan calls for the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to take measures against Azerbaijan for the threat of use of force (Nalbandyan. The International Community Should Take Measures Against Azerbaijan 2017). Returning from the May 2016 talks in Vienna, President Sargsyan said his main task was to minimize the

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<sup>36</sup> In February 2017, a referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh changed the constitution of the unrecognized republic that declared that both “Republic of Artsakh” and “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh” can be used. This discursive device has since accelerated the rate at which “Artsakh” – the Armenian name of the region – has been used in political discourse as a marker of rigid positioning that, among other aims, fulfills that of erasing any traces of understanding Nagorno-Karabakh as NKAO and adjacent territories and frames it as one unit.

danger of a new escalation, and only then move toward a step-by-step resolution of the conflict (International Crisis Group 2017).

Another thesis, actively replicated both by the HHK and in Nagorno-Karabakh is that Azerbaijan is no different from the “Islamic state”, and it is a terrorist state. Sharmazanov cited the mutilations of the bodies of civilians by Azerbaijani soldiers in the village of Talish as well as the dismembering of the corpses of soldiers to support his thesis. (Armtimes.com 2017)

Since Azerbaijan views bringing back Stepanakert to the negotiations as a legitimization of the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, Baku sharply opposes this. Yet, along with the willingness to negotiate, the HHK in its turn declares the need to return Nagorno-Karabakh to the negotiations: “The participation of Karabakh in the document forming the principles is mandatory,” said President Sargsyan in his interview in July 2017 (Karabakh's Participation in the Document Forming Around the Principles is Mandatory. Serzh Sargsyan 2017).

In the issue of Turkey, the HHK, as already mentioned above, officially supports the opening of the border without preconditions. However, the inevitability of the recognition of the Genocide by Ankara is constantly broadcasted into the society by party officials.

The opening of the border and the recognition of the Genocide are not directly related. Yet, relations with Turkey cannot be considered without addressing the history that divides the two societies and people. On the level of the official discourse, “opening the border without preconditions” is understood as demanding a non-involvement of Turkey into the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey not posing the withdrawal from any territories as a precondition to the opening of the border.

Official Yerevan reacts sharply whenever Turkey attempts to intervene in the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: “Turkey should keep its hands away from the Karabakh issue. Turkey has nothing to do here and that country must one day – whether they want it or not – recognize the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh as an international subject, since the world is moving by the victorious path of the right of self-determination. And if it is speaking about occupation, it should bring out as soon as possible its troops from occupied Cyprus, which is, by the way, an EU member state”, said Sharmazanov

(Armenian Official: Turkey Should Keep its Hands Away from Karabakh Issue 2017).

In these conditions, the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is receding into the background, and the main criticism of Turkey is connected with the support to Azerbaijan. Ankara's union with Baku, according to Sharmazanov, turns Turkey into an instigator of instability in the region, and this should have brought about a sharp critique from the international community (Azatutyun.am 2017).

The HHK is rather skeptical of the latest statement of MP and Deputy Chairwoman of the ruling Justice and Development Party Ravza Kavakchi Kan about Ankara's desire to normalize relations with Yerevan (Mkrtchyan 2017). "I believe that this statement is more about imitation, since Erdoğan's behavior suggests the opposite. If the Turkish side wants to develop relations with Armenia, it should ratify the Armenian-Turkish protocols, open the border, raise the blockade, abolish article 301, refrain from prosecuting those who speak loudly of the Armenian Genocide," said Spokesperson of the HHK Sharmazanov (Sputnikarmenia.am 2017).

### *Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhagan Dashnaktsutyun) Party*

Everything is much clearer with the "Dashnaktsutyun" party. Their programs state that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>37</sup> "continue to struggle for the liberation from the yoke of Azerbaijan and the international recognition of its right to self-determination" (Arfd.info 1998) (HHD Pre-Election Program 2017).

In a July 2017 interview, the leader of the parliamentary faction for the "Dashnaktsutyun" party Armen Rustamyan said that Azerbaijan is preparing ground for large-scale military operations. According to him, it is necessary not only to show the world the "true face" of Azerbaijan, but also to take retaliatory actions. He is sure that Azerbaijan is not ready for peace talks. (Stepanyan 2017)

The "Dashnaktsutyun" party considers Azerbaijan and Turkey to be one in integrity. According to Rustamyan, the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem created a hostile environment towards Armenia in the region: "We stand before an

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<sup>37</sup> The program uses exclusively "Artsakh" in reference to Nagorno-Karabakh.



unceasing threat. It is precise that we should rely on ourselves. Peace is not to be begged for, but to be conquered, and to conquer means to be ready for war.” (Sukiasyan 2017).

In the “Dashnaktsutyun” pre-election program, it is noted that there has not been any retribution for the Armenian Genocide. The party sees the Genocide as continuing today as well, especially since the Armenians of the Diaspora, being deprived of the opportunity to live in their homeland, are in danger of assimilation. The program of the party also indicates that Turkey destroys and distorts all those historical monuments that testify to the historically Armenian belonging of the regions of these monuments. Finally, the program’s far-reaching plans envision a “Free, Independent, and United Armenia that must encompass Armenian lands that the Treaty of Sevres provides for, as well as the regions of Artsakh, Javakhk, and Nakhijevan”. (Arfd.info 1998)

It is noteworthy that during the signing of the Armenian-Turkish protocols the party left the coalition with the Republican Party of Armenia.

### *Founding Parliament Movement*

The presence of the opposition movement “Founding Parliament” among the Armenian parties is not accidental. The representatives of the “Founding Parliament” movement created the “Sasna Tsrer<sup>38</sup>” group, which seized the premises of the Patrol-Guard Service Regiment of the Police of the Republic of Armenia in Yerevan in July 2016. The leader of the movement, Zhirayr Sefilyan, who is currently in prison (like the other members of “Sasna Tsrer” group), has repeatedly stated that Azerbaijan has adopted the strategy of exhausting Armenia, that the Madrid Principles should be abandoned, and that time has come to “solve the issue once and for all” (Azatutyun.am 2016).

In a 2003 interview, he expressed confidence that Azerbaijan should not be conceded “a single inch of land” and signing the resolution deal on the table would be “a national treason” and “it is well-know what happens to a traitor” (Armtimes.com 2003 (2016)). According to Sefilyan, he understands and accepts the concept of concessions, but the Armenian side made its share of concessions in 1994 when agreeing to sign the truce that Azerbaijan was requesting: If the

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<sup>38</sup> The group took its name from the Armenian epic “Sasna Tsrer” (“The Daredevils of Sassoun”).

war continued for a few more days, Azerbaijan would completely disintegrate, and the Armenian troops would easily reach the depths of Azerbaijan. [...] Concessions beyond this [agreeing to the ceasefire] are unacceptable for us" (Armtimes.com 2003 (2016)).

Sefilyan thinks that, after the April battles in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian side should not have agreed to peace, but moved to offensive actions. (Azatutyun.am 2016)

The "Founding Parliament" movement (and members of the "Sasna Tsrer" group) see the current government of Armenia as the culprit of the country's socio-economic problems, emigration, and many other issues. However, above all they are frustrated by the willingness of the current government to cede land. The representatives of the movement are confident that this cannot be a solution to the problem.

After his arrest, a well-known veteran of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, member of the "Sasna Tsrer" group, Pavlik Manukyan addressed all those who hold power in Armenia expressing a deep skepticism towards the concept of concessions: "Do you really believe that there will be mutual concessions, and not a [unilateral] concession, and that after the surrender of the liberated lands, certain forces will ensure the safety of our compatriots?" (Lragir.am 2016).

Regarding Turkey, the "Founding Parliament" movement's framework document says that Ankara not only does not recognize the Armenian Genocide, but also tries to prevent other countries from recognition. In addition, the framework document says that Turkey is trying to facilitate the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the interests of Azerbaijan keeping Armenia under a blockade. "The formal confirmation of the actual border between Armenia and Turkey will not ensure the security of the Armenian state. Unless Turkey recognizes the Armenian Genocide and carries the responsibility for it, it will remain a threat to the security of Armenia and its people," says the framework document of the organization. At the same time, it calls for the removal of the Russian Military base from Armenia brining the Russian-Armenian relations to a more "normal and collegial" format as opposed to the current "neocolonial dependency" of Armenia (Himnadir.am 2014 (2016)).

## **Lack of a Clear Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey**

### *‘Tsarukyan’ Bloc*

The Tsarukyan bloc and its base – the “Prosperous Armenia” (*Bargavach Hayastan*) Party, exist around one person – Gagik Tsarukyan. The party has always been a de facto a satellite of the HHK throughout its existence and does not have a clear foreign policy agenda.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or foreign policy topics are not mentioned in the 15-point priority list of the party’s pre-election program (The Program of the "Tsarukyan" Bloc. Free the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises from Taxes for 3 Years, Remove the Speedometers and the Red Lines 2017).

The bloc’s positions in the Parliament on fundamental issues are the same as those of the HHK demonstrated by the voting history of its MPs (It Happened by Itself. A Funny Episode from the New National Assembly 2017).

### *‘Armenian Renaissance’ (Haykakan Veratsnund) Party*

The “Armenian Renaissance” party does not have a pronounced position on either the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or Turkey-Armenian relations. In the party’s pre-election program, a link to which is no longer available (since the failure in the 2017 elections and to this day, the company’s website has ceased to function), journalists found only one mention of “Artsakh” in the commitment to “Strengthen the Armenia-Diaspora-Artsakh trinity” (Armlur.am 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be said to be the most sensitive sphere of not only foreign policy but also the social life of Armenia. Practically, the life of every citizen is in one way or another impacted by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Yet, most political parties, with the exception of HAK, avoid specific vocal programs for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, mainly referring to general principles that are naturally euphonious for the people.

The would-be state of the party system and political culture in the society has led to the fact that the pre-election programs and party platforms were pushed

to the background. The situational statements of parties and politicians play the main role for the public perception. Opposition parties, that do not bear foreign policy responsibility for their statements, often come out with a tougher stance.

The authorities, however, being involved in the negotiation process within the OSCE Minsk Group, behave much more cautiously, often using this fact in their defense. At the same time, the HHK tests the society's reaction to the possibility of implementing the Madrid Principles through various means and often through the mouths of others.

On the other hand, against the backdrop of the growth of militant propaganda in Azerbaijan, similar militaristic sentiments are cultivated by the authorities in Armenia. The existence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from time to time allows the ruling party to write off on it the difficult economic situation and the brutal oppression of opposition actions.

As for Turkey, it is, first of all, considered (or proclaimed) as an ally of Azerbaijan, which will take advantage of any case to assist Azerbaijan in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Political parties consider Turkey exactly in this way. Despite the fact that the program of some parties has "the establishment of relations without preconditions", this is more a nominal statement, no one party, except HAK, has made serious aspirations by this moment. In addition, the parties unanimously declare that Turkey, in the end, will have to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

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# **The Positions of Political Parties in Turkey on the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Turkey-Armenia Relations**

**Tolga Er**

## **Introduction**

Sixteen political parties as well as 21 independent candidates ran for Turkey's latest General Snap Election in November 2015 after the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) – the party in power at the moment – or any other political parties failed to get or form a majority in the Parliament during the General Election in June of the same year. Since the November 2015 General Election, four political parties are in the Parliament with the AKP in the government and Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP), Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) in opposition. These parties had 317, 134, 59, and 40 members in the Parliament respectively at the time they entered the Parliament.

85.23 percent of Turkish people eligible to vote turned out in Turkey's previous General Election. The AKP, CHP, MHP and HDP shared the 98 percent of the overall vote by getting 49.50 percent, 25.32 percent, 11.90 percent, 10,76 percent respectively<sup>39</sup>.

After the ratification of the bill to strip MPs of immunity, eleven Parliament members of the HDP – including Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, – the co-leaders of the party – and a member of the CHP got jailed. Further, four members of the HDP including Figen Yüksekdağ were stripped of their seats in the Parliament. Also, the MHP expelled four members from their party.

Therefore, the current number of MPs of the AKP, CHP, HDP and MHP is 317, 133, 55, and 36 respectively. There are also five independent – including four

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<sup>39</sup> Even though the HDP's votes are less than the MHP's, they do have more seats in the Parliament since seats in the Parliament are also determined by how many votes parties have in each city.

ex-members of the MHP – MPs in the Parliament. (Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2017)

Despite the political turmoil and polarization between parties becoming more and more obvious after the 2016 coup d'état attempt and the Turkish constitutional referendum which was held in April 2017, parties on the opposite sides of the polarization, with only few exceptions, are in union in the view on relations with Azerbaijan, the Turkey-Armenia border, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and forming an international committee to research the "1915 Events".

Therefore, the only parties outside the Parliament that have been included are the ones that albeit slightly add nuances to the positions already presented by the parliamentary parties. The most articulate are Islamic fundamentalist and eurosceptic Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP), cultural nationalist and Islamist Great Union Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP), socialist libertarian Freedom and Solidarity Party (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*, ÖDP), Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, TKP), and Patriotic Party (*Vatan Partisi*, VP) which describes itself as Vanguard Party and aims to bring socialists, revolutionaries, Turkish nationalists, and Kemalists together. Other parties outside the Parliament have not been included since they do not represent opinions that are radically different from those already present in the Parliament or among the extra-parliamentary parties that have been analyzed.

The positions according to which the parties are grouped are "formation of an international committee on 1915 and the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in favor of Azerbaijan", "a tough stance", and "normalization of relations without any preconditions".

The sources according to which the positions have been teased out are the election programs as well as the speeches, interviews, and statements of the party leaders and spokespeople as well as analytical articles and reports about the parties' positions.

Due to the AKP being the party in power during the Turkish-Armenian normalization process which started in 2007 and acting as the powerhouse directing Turkey's foreign relations for the last 15 years, international agreements and statements made by ministries of Turkey during this period have also been used to have a better understanding where the AKP stands regarding Turkey-Armenia and Turkey-Azerbaijan relations.

## **Formation of an International Committee on 1915 and the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in Favor of Azerbaijan**

### *Justice and Development Party (AKP)*

When the AKP, the party in power since 2002, leader and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was asked three years ago whether establishing Turkey-Armenia diplomatic relations and opening the border can be expected, he was quite frank where he and his party stands: "There are some conditions. The Karabakh conflict is the essential matter for us. Before reaching a solution on the Karabakh conflict, our government can't say yes to those things since there is a serious injustice in that matter. The Karabakh conflict must be resolved first" (Evrensel.net 2014).

Interrelated relations between the three countries and the AKP's view on the precondition of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for improving relations with Armenia have not changed much since then as it can be seen from the annual document titled "Our Foreign Affairs at the Beginning of 2017" published by Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the document, it is stated, "As long as there are no improvements in the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, any progress in the relations between Turkey and Armenia won't be sufficient and permanent". In the same document, it is said that the normalization process depends on the genuine steps Armenia will take: "Turkey's willingness for the normalization of relations with Armenia is preserved, but the process was interrupted by the suspension and recall of the Zürich Protocols from the Armenian parliament" (Mfa.gov.tr 2017).

The intention of the AKP to normalize relations with Armenia depends foremost on the resolve of the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but the party does not seek any military intervention according to the program announced for the 2015 election. In the program, it is stated that "the country will keep making efforts to bring the occupation of Azerbaijan's territory to an end and finish the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia with the goal of resolving disputes in the South Caucasus by peaceful means (Justice and Development Party 2015).

Although the election program sets the peaceful solution as the goal, it does not necessarily mean there are zero relations between the two countries' armies. Turkey and Azerbaijan have conducted joint military drills – the latest one was conducted this year. In June 2017, the Turkish Underwater Offence (*Sualtı Taarruz Grup Komutanlığı*) also trained navy forces of Azerbaijan in Turkey.

Turkey and Azerbaijan also signed an Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support in 2010 which will last till 2020 with the option to extend the date to 2030. The terms of the treaty declare that “if one of the sides suffers an armed attack or aggression from a third country or a group of countries, the sides will provide reciprocal aid” and “both countries will cooperate to eliminate threats and challenges to national security” (Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2010).

The other aspect of Turkey-Armenia relations for the AKP is surely the Armenian Genocide. President Erdoğan sees it as an “allegation, a tool for blackmail” and refuses to see the “1915 Events” as genocide by stating, “Turkey cannot accept the label ‘Armenian genocide’, because we do not carry a stain like genocide” on many occasions (TheGuardian.com 2015).

There are many in the AKP claiming the genocide allegations are not about the past, but present-day politics. One of them is the AKP's Parliamentary Group Deputy Chairman Naci Bostancı. For him, “the allegation of genocide in this case is not about what happened in the past, it is about international affairs” (Haberler.com 2017).

President Erdoğan has repeatedly proposed the formation of an international committee of historians, including people with a range of perspectives to debate the issue. He argued that a group of historians, political experts, and scientists would be better qualified than politicians to understand the facts.

AKP MP Markar Esayan, one of the three MPs with an Armenian background in the Parliament, has the opinion that the past condolence messages given by President Erdoğan on the anniversary of 1915 means “denial coming to an end” (Gültekin 2015). However, Erdoğan's many discriminatory remarks and refusal to call the “1915 Events” genocide can be interpreted as demonstrating that he does not wish to form an international committee to objectively reveal the truth and face it but to confirm his opinion on the matter.

### *Republican People's Party (CHP)*

Even though the CHP, Turkey's oldest political party, is at odds with the AKP over countless internal affairs and foreign policies, it shares the view adopted by the AKP regarding the country's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu supported the proposal to assemble an international committee to work on the "1915 Events" within a historical context, and he sees this proposal as a courageous step taken by Turkey. However, like Erdoğan, he and his party members denied the Armenian Genocide on many occasions.

Yet, willingness to have good relations with both countries could be seen from the party's election program. It was stated in the program that "the CHP will strengthen the brotherly relations with Azerbaijan, and the party will be aiming for establishing good neighborly relations with Armenia and solving conflicts between Turkey and Armenia" (Republican People's Party 2015).

However, according to the party program CHP has some preconditions to have better relations with Armenia: "Armenia putting an end to the invasion into Azerbaijan territory, stopping their approach against Turkey via Armenian organizations all around the world regarding genocide allegations, removing some parts of the Armenian state's official papers which gives the impression that Armenia desires some parts of Turkey's land" (Republican People's Party 2015).

CHP MP Öztürk Yılmaz added that the solution between Azerbaijan and Armenia must be reached by peaceful means, but the CHP emphasized many times that the OSCE Minsk Group's efforts were not efficient and far from achieving peace in the region (Republican People's Party 2016).

Regarding relations between Turkey and Armenia, there are also a couple of people with different perspectives within the party. One of them is Selina Özuzun Doğan. Doğan, an MP of Armenian background, said the suffering of the 1915 Events continues even today and Turkey should stop ignoring the past. She also highlighted the importance of opening the border in order for people of both countries to get to know each other closely (Odatv.com 2016).

## A Tough Stance

### *Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)*

The MHP is arguably the most controversial party in the parliament at the moment, and the path the party leader Devlet Bahçeli is taking the party through is not only criticized by its opponents, but also by its own MPs especially after Bahçeli expressed his support to the AKP for the referendum which will grant sweeping new powers to the president elected in 2019.

Five members who were not content with the leadership of Bahçeli got expelled from the party, and some of the five declared that they will be forming a new nationalist party. However, their mindset is not different from Bahçeli and his party regarding Turkey's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Years ago, Bahçeli stated that he opposes the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border and establishing diplomatic relations until Armenia puts an end to the occupation in Azerbaijan and their hostile politics questioning Turkey's territorial integrity (Hürriyet.com.tr 2009). It does not look like his opinion on the matter has changed since then.

The MHP considers Azerbaijani people kinsmen and kin-women. For them the unity of the Turkish people across the region is essential. This can be seen in their election program in which it is stated that the MHP wants to create a Turkish Energy Business Association with the other Turkic countries in the region (Nationalist Movement Party 2015).

Accepting the Armenian Genocide is also out of question for the MHP. Bahçeli articulated that there were many terrors and rebellions caused by Armenians at the time, and relocating Armenians doesn't mean annihilating them. In his opinion, it was done in order to ensure the security of the state (Diken.com 2016).

Some MHP members such as the historian Yusuf Halaçoğlu, one of the expelled MPs, went further during his time in the MHP by claiming that the Armenian gangs within the Russian army massacred hundreds of thousands of Turkish people (Haberler.com 2017).



### *Great Union Party (BBP)*

The BBP, a far-right Islamist and nationalist political party, also has a tough stance against Armenia. Preconditions of Mustafa Destici, the leader of the party, for opening the border are related to the Khojaly Massacre.

After the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia rose once again this year, Destici demanded that Armenia declare an apology message for the genocide they carried out in Khojaly and to pay a compensation for the massacres they have done. According to Destici, until Armenia fulfils these preconditions, Turkey should not have any relations with Armenia by any means, and the border should not be opened (Hürriyet.com.tr 2017).

### *The Patriotic Party (VP)*

VP leader Doğu Perinçek is perhaps best known from his conviction by a Swiss court for publicly denying the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide. After the preliminary hearing on the appeal, the Grand Chamber ruled in favor of Perinçek and confirmed his right to freedom of speech.

Claiming that the Armenian Genocide is an imperialist lie, Perinçek and his party state that they will start a mobilization to revoke decisions in foreign countries which recognize the Armenian Genocide (Patriotic Party 2015).

For the party, Azerbaijan having back Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia is also crucial (National Government Program 2015).

### *Felicity Party (SP)*

According to the party program of the SP, an Islamist political party, the Armenian genocide allegations have started to get recognition by countries which are accepted as allies of Turkey and at this rate, this might force Turkey to pay compensation and result in land concessions.

Furthermore, the SP sees the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia as the occupation of Armenia of Azerbaijan territory (Felicity Party 2014).

## **Normalization of Relations Without Any Preconditions**

### *Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)*

Co-leaders of the HDP, a pro-local democracy political party, called on Ankara to recognize the Armenian Genocide on several occasions. Selahattin Demirtaş, one of the two party leaders, said in an interview on TV that just because official Turkish history says so, he cannot deny that the events of 1915 were a genocide, and he emphasized the need to resolve this kind of issues in order to bring democracy into Turkey (Selahaattin Demirtaş: Armenian Genocide is a Fact 2015).

According to the election program of the HDP, the party supports opening the Turkey-Armenia border without any preconditions and establishing friendly relations with Armenia: "The economic embargo against Armenia will be lifted, and the necessary economic, diplomatic, and political relations will be developed. The Turkey-Armenia border which was closed by Turkey will be opened without any preconditions. Solution efforts regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be supported" (Peoples' Democratic Party 2015).

Demirtaş stated that Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region and the AKP is provoking both countries into the conflict which should have been resolved by dialogue between the countries in conflict (Agos.com.tr 2016).

The HDP was also the only party in the Parliament not to sign the declaration published by the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey concerning the Khojaly massacre. In the declaration, it is stated that an attack by the Republic of Armenia forces resulted with the death of hundreds of Azerbaijanis and almost one million Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homeland. With this declaration, parties in the Parliament also called on Armenia to withdraw from the Azerbaijani land which they occupy (Iha.com.tr 2016).

### *Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP)*

The ÖDP, a libertarian and internationalist socialist political party, believes it is impossible to abolish the truth or cover the issue with the denial method embraced by parties in power since 1915. By facing the events of 1915, they want to build a common future.

They want to have the border re-opened and be named after the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink who was assassinated ten years ago. According to the party, the embargo against Armenia should be lifted and economic, social, and cultural relations with Armenia should be established (Odatv.com 2015).

### *Communist Party of Turkey (TKP)*

After a period of internal strife, two rival factions of the TKP reached a consensus to freeze the activities of the party and that neither faction shall use the name and emblem of the TKP. However, the two groups the Communist Party (KP) and People's Communist Party of Turkey (HTKP) has the same view on Armenia.

When the party was split in two, they both published a message on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The KP used the wording "Meds Yeğern" to describe what they call the biggest suffering witnessed on the land of Turkey.

The HTKP stated on the same day that the pain of the Armenian nation is the mutual pain of this land. They see the events of 1915 as a disaster which is shared by everyone (Odatv.com 2015).

## **Conclusion**

In his famous article "A Just Memory for All", Turkey's former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was sidelined by Turkey's President Erdoğan just six months after the AKP won the majority in 2015, appealed to all stakeholders, policy shapers, and creative thinkers to seize the moment and to join them to reconstruct a better future for Turkish-Armenian relations. He declared that "Turkey stands ready", and they can only succeed if this endeavor is embraced by a wider constituency intent on leaving their mark on a historical process of reconciliation (Davutoğlu 2014).

However, even though Turkey's previous initiatives in the era of the 2000s such as the "Kurdish Opening" and the "Turkey-Armenia Normalization Process" can be considered as a valuable experience and gains for future initiatives, they were never truly transparent to the public and the attempts to make those initiatives embraced by the masses of people were often weak.

Facing the past and resolving a conflict “as a nation” was never one of the elements during the Turkey-Armenia Normalization Process. Instead, the authorities of Turkey chose directly to reach a conclusion on a state-to-state basis. As a result, Turkey could not face or half-faced the Genocide, and still, parties representing more than 85 percent of the country are not in favor of accepting the Genocide and do not wish to re-open the Turkey-Armenia border unless the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia ends in favor of Azerbaijan.

Only one party in the Parliament, the HDP, sees the Armenian Genocide as a fact and states in their party program that they will re-open the border and lift the embargo against Armenia, but they – it is the same for the TKP and the ÖDP – do lack the method which will make people living in Turkey come to terms with the past and accept the decision to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. It is a different question that many parts of the civil society not only have the necessary method and vision, but have exerted many successful efforts towards open dialogue and transformation.

Changing their stand on the trilateral relations between the three countries is also difficult for the parties amid the political turmoil. The results of the elections in June 2015 and the referendum in 2017 can be seen as an important indication showing how narrow the margin is and how quickly tables can turn in 2019 during Turkey’s first ever presidential elections. This circumstance makes it much more difficult for parties to embrace an alternative way of thinking or to shift their positions – not that there are implications towards a change – regarding intertwined relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

A statement by the historian İlber Ortaylı in response to the question “what would happen if Turkey were to accept the genocide allegation”, clearly explains how difficult it would be: “Accepting the genocide allegation can’t be compared to blaming Union and Progress, Sultan Abdulhamid or the one-party period of Turkey. People would call it a treason” (YouTube.com 2015).

However, with the start of the normalization process and due to countries, such as Germany, recognizing the Armenian Genocide, the past has emerged once again in Turkey, and this time it cannot easily go unaddressed – for better or worse. Yet, the decision to re-open the border and to establish good diplomatic relations is directed not only by internal politics, but also by the course of the

conflict between Azerbaijan, Turkey's important ally in the region, and Armenia.

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# **DISCOURSES ON GENDER AND MINORITIES IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS**

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# Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey

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**Sona Dilanyan, Burcu Doğan, Anna Iluridze**

Discussions of conflict, war, and violence very often make references to notions related to gender, such as “proper” womanhood and manhood, normative familial and kinship relations, sexual acts, and identities. In the context of the South Caucasus and Turkey, such discursive associations are abundant in societal and political discourses. In this paper, we use feminist perspectives on state, nation, army, border, enemy, threat, and security to look at particular examples from Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey of how gender and sexuality are reflected in the discourses of the nation-state in the context of conflicts.

## Introduction

Across various geographic and cultural contexts, the discourses of ongoing and past conflicts, along with the accompanying images of the Enemy<sup>40</sup> and beliefs about state security, are often intertwined with discourses of gender and sexuality. Discussions of conflict, war, and violence very often make references to notions related to gender, such as “proper” womanhood and manhood, normative familial and kinship relations, sexual acts, and identities. In the context of the South Caucasus and Turkey, such discursive associations are abundant in societal and political discourses. One needs to look no further than the ubiquitous evocations of the “need” to wage war to protect mothers and sisters, lullabies telling little boys to go to sleep so they grow up fast and go defend the *motherland*, or the anxieties about possible mixed marriages with the “Enemy”. Even though such cross-references are a very naturalized part of every culture and language use, a deeper look can reveal substantial interrelations between discourses of gender and sexuality on the one hand and the continued perpetuation of conflicts on the other.

In this paper, we deploy existing feminist perspectives on the state, nation, and citizenship to look at particular examples from Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey and question how the binary<sup>41</sup> gender categories and normative sexualities<sup>42</sup> are inherently interlinked with how the “State” (re)produces the image of Enemy in the discourses of threat, security, and conflict.

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<sup>40</sup> Throughout this text, words such as “State”, “Other”, and “Enemy” are often capitalized and in quotation marks. This is done in the cases when our use of their meaning is different from that in everyday use as well as the use in other disciplines. These words are not in quotation marks (but are still capitalized) when they appear in phrases with “the concept/s of”, “the framing/s of”, “the image/s of”, “the representation/s of”, “the discourse/s of”, “the perspective/s on”, and other phrases that already show that we are not speaking about a real-life referent but rather a concept. In cases when the everyday use of the word overlaps with our use, no special marking is used.

<sup>41</sup> “Binary gender” is the conceptualization or belief that there are only two genders aligned with biological sex and resulting in two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms of identity – masculine and feminine.

<sup>42</sup> “Normative sexuality” assumes the alignment of biological sex with a sexual orientation, a gender identity, and a gender role.

## **At the Intersection of Conflict Studies and Gender Studies**

The study of conflicts and conflict resolution and the interdisciplinary field broadly defined as gender studies have come into increasing contact with each other, despite having started as thematically different fields with differing objectives. Most frequently, these two fields have come together in order to look at the specific impact armed conflicts and violence have on women or to discuss and problematize the exclusion of women from peace and reconciliation processes (Cockburn 2013). Recent studies have also explored the relationship between escalations in violent conflict and the forms of masculinity that are dominant within a particular society (Messerschmidt 2015, 10-13).

Meanwhile, feminist scholarship has aimed at demonstrating how conflicts are “gendered<sup>43</sup>” by highlighting how the discourses, norms, and expectations of manhood and womanhood are in a reciprocally formative relationship with concepts and institutions from seemingly other domains, such as state, nation, army, border, enemy, and state security. Such institutions and concepts are not usually seen as relating directly to issues of gender or sexuality, and theoretical conceptualizations of the State and its apparatuses do not normally encompass the private practices of gender and sexuality. In other words, both in social practice and political discourse, “conflicts”, “enemies”, and “national security” are not normally seen as interlinked with the ways people experience gender identities or sexual practices. Nevertheless, both nationalist rhetoric and discourses of conflict have been thoroughly bound to the ways manhood and womanhood are conceived and perceived.

## **Conceptualizing State and Nation Through a Gendered Lens**

In order to address the relationship between people’s gendered subjectivities<sup>44</sup> and the discourses of ongoing conflicts, we first provide a brief overview of how feminist scholarship has proposed new ways of analyzing the concepts of State and nation. For the purposes of this paper, the notion of the State refers to all institutional structures whether they directly belong to the apparatus of a

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<sup>43</sup> “Gendered” means reflecting the experience as well as the prejudices associated with one sex more than the other; it also means reflecting stereotypical gender roles.

<sup>44</sup> “Subjectivity” means the perspective of the individual self on the experience, rather than some neutral or objective perspective from outside the self’s experience.

state or are auxiliaries of a state system, such as the power of the capital or institutional education. When we talk about the “State”, we do not refer to one unitary and coherent source of supreme power. Instead, we use “State” to refer to the multitude of institutional structures – from government to education to healthcare – that govern and organize citizen-subjects<sup>45</sup>, since it is impossible to deconstruct the “State’s” performance of power in the patriarchal discourse without paying attention to the “interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

On the most basic level, adding a gender and sexuality dimension to the analysis of the nation-state does not require complex feminist theorizing, since allusions to manhood and womanhood and gendered language are abundant in the discourses about nation-states and nationalism: references to motherlands and fatherlands, nurturing mother-nations, and strong and impenetrable states are ubiquitous across cultures and languages.

Nationalist rhetoric has explicitly and implicitly used allegories of binary gender to construct the nation-state framework. Within this dual framework, the nation and the state are identified as feminine or masculine entities, with their respective gendered attributes and characteristics. Depending on the particular discursive context and its peculiarities, such as political configurations, levels of militarization, and the trajectory of the nation-building process, the nation may be imagined as a feminine entity possessing qualities usually attributed to women – a caring and nurturing body to which citizens or members of that nation belong – and the state may be attributed with a masculine identity, seen as providing protection and strong borders within which the nation lives safely. Alternatively, the nation may be imagined as a collectivity of men, standing strong against the threat of the “Enemy”, with concepts such as the “military nation” in Turkey and the recent policy of the “army-nation” in Armenia (Altınay 2004) (Grigoryan, Armenia’s New Defense Minister Proposes ‘Nation-Army’ Concept 2016). The male symbols of the nation are usually represented as individual “typical” men, such as soldiers, while the female figures represent more abstract ideas and virtues.

Within these symbolic associations, the state and nation are often perceived as being under threat either by internal or external forces, necessitating the

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<sup>45</sup> When used in this sense, the word “State” will be capitalized.

protection of the “purity of the mother-nation” against the “penetration” (external) or “proliferation” (internal) of the “Other”. Furthermore, in this nation-state fantasy, not only are the state and nation gendered in their characteristics and features, but they also create a framework in which the perceived threat to the nation requires the cooperation of the citizens through performing normative manhood, womanhood, and related hetero-reproductive sexualities.

A key element in the regulation of gender and sexuality against the “threat” to the nation is the reproduction of the nuclear family. Lauren Berlant argues that “a familial politics of the national future came to define the urgencies of the present” (Berlant 1997, 1). The “urgency of the present” is the nuclear family, both a prototype and replica of the national fantasy. The heteronormative family, the patriarchal unity that is dependent upon neatly prescribed gendered and sexual roles, is seen as the only space for reproducing the future (generation) of the nation. The maternal framing of the nation can be understood in relation to a metaphorical and actual reproduction of the paradigm of patriarchy as subordination. In this framework of a nation-state, within which the nation is under threat, women are destined to become caring mothers and giving birth to men who will grow up to be soldiers and protect the nation, so that the mothers can continue the work of giving birth to more soldiers and mothers of soldiers. This process also involves the reproduction of patriarchal values, neatly prescribed gender norms and sexualities through the vein of the “possible route to happiness”. In this closed cycle, men’s involvement in state-making can be fulfilled also through military service, whereas the family is seen as the main citizen-duty for women who are in charge of reproducing future generations, including future soldiers. This vision of women and the female body is sexist; women are expected not only to demonstrate compliance with this role, but also take pride in being able to contribute to the nation’s reproduction.

Alongside these gendered expectations of lifestyle, gender and sexual performances and identities are also regulated through more abstract, affective categories of belonging, familiarity, and morality. For feminist theorist Judith Butler, the “State” is a force that controls belonging and can potentially control non-belonging. She argues that the “State” binds an individual in the name of the nation (Butler and Spivak 2007, 3). The invocation of the nation by the

“State” in these sexualized and gendered relations is the main field where affect<sup>46</sup> operates in the form of national attachment or a sense of (national) belonging.

In physical terms, the demarcation line of the “comfort zone” of belonging to the nation is the state border. As a political entity, a border “always marks a limit between two territorial and social entities”, and in this sense, it is associated with “dichotomous notions such as inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, we/them” (Sohn 2015, 4). The official or de facto border of the state is an affective field where the gendered and nationalized politics reproduced by the “State” intensifies. This kind of politics, the repetitive performance of the “State”, that is usually masculine and somewhat violent, is necessary for the reproduction of the “State’s” own identity for the creation and maintenance of borders. Without the everyday performance, the border itself is very futile, almost a fantasy. The border as a structure, is “not actual”; “it is neither actual, nor fictional, neither real, nor possible” (Deleuze 1967 (2004), 178). In this sense, a border gains meaning through the diversity of practices in which various actors engage. Thus, a border can also mean an invitation to transgression and desire for openness. The “State’s” bordering practices that can be found virtually anywhere within state territory (flag posts, maps, national symbols, etc.) intensify close to the border to counterbalance this centrifugal urge for transgression. Moreover, “the study of borders adds to our understanding of national, ethnic, gender and sexual identities, among others, because borders inflect these identities in ways not found elsewhere in the state” (Wilson and Donnan 1998). To render the futile border more tangible and sealed, the representation of the “neighbor” easily lapses into the representation of the “Enemy”. This kind of political representation could be read easily by analyzing how images of the neighbor and the Enemy change places to represent the same subject.

The right to belong to the nation involves an implicit requirement of possessing and performing a normative and predetermined gender identity as well as a normative sexuality. This requirement does not function in the formal sense of

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<sup>46</sup> “Affects” are the state of body and mind that are similar to feelings and emotions, yet are pre-subjective. They are not entirely contained in a person’s consciousness; they are in a constant dynamic without set meanings.



the word: usually it is not inscribed explicitly within the legal arena, and in fact, most state constitutions currently guarantee civic equity that traverses identities. Instead, what makes it possible to talk about the existence of such a “requirement” are the discursive constructions of various “Others” as not possessing the desirable normative and predetermined gender identity or normative sexuality.

These “Others” can be internal – inside the body of the nation and the state borders but not belonging to the state, nation, and land; they are considered not worthy of belonging. Usually, “Others” are used as reference points for what constitutes an undesirable element for the nation and as a threat to the integrity, safety, and survival of the state. These “Others” are, on the level of everyday culture and discourse, “what parents fear their children might become” or what is used as an epitome for “moral and ethical decay”. These “Others” can also be external – beyond the body of the nation and state borders – constituting an external “Enemy” or threat.

As a norm, for states with active conflict situations or perceived threats, the image of Enemy, whether internal or external, serves as this very point of reference for what is the undesirable “Other” as opposed to the morally, ethically pure, and desirable “Us” or “We”. Alongside the array of identities, characteristics, behaviors, performances, and other subjective configurations, this “Us”/“We” versus “Them”/“Others” dichotomy is also constructed in clearly gendered and sexualized ways. The state, as a paternal site, deploys the nation, as a maternal site to create an affective bond between the nation and the desired ideal heterosexual individuals, whereas the “Others” possess a deviant and undesirable gender and sexual identity. The “Others” are also often imagined and constructed as possessing a feminine or “effeminate” identity – the subordinate end of the gender binary.

To reiterate, the “State” does not possess a unitary rational identity through which this gendered nation-state and “Us” versus “Them” dichotomy is constructed. Begoña Aretxaga foregrounds the complexity of this process: sexuality and gender are central not only to the “State’s” regulation of the citizen’s bodies or the managing and producing of socially acceptable sexual practices; sexuality and gender, she argues, also shape state institutions, agencies, ideologies, and practices. We should, therefore, see the “State” as the complex assemblage of structures, discourses, and practices that are

fragmented, contradictory, and marked as much by subjectivity as by reason (Aretxaga 2005, 165).

In the following sections of this paper, we look into three different examples and manifestations of the entanglements of discourses of conflict, enemy, state, and gender in Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey. The three examples were chosen based on a few criteria: firstly, they correspond to our individual interests as researchers coming from these countries, and secondly, we tried to engage in each case a different focal concept – borders, militarism, masculinity, and homosexuality – to demonstrate how the abovementioned theoretical generalizations can be manifested across different regions, institutions, and discourses. The section on Armenia looks at the interrelations of the Enemy image and hate speech in the context of the conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the public discussions of sexuality, especially regarding the growing LGBTI visibility and movement. The section on Georgia takes off from a recent violent event in Batumi, a border city, where the invocation of “Tatars” through the “State’s” agencies mobilized the violent crowd of men, thereby protecting their masculine identity. The section looking at the Turkish context focuses on the sexist language used by the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces in the city of Silvan with the aim of exerting violence upon Kurdish citizens.

## **Armenia: Sexuality at Home and Beyond**

Homosexuality has been decriminalized in Armenia since 2003, and multiple state policy documents declare the state’s commitment to gender equality and the procurement of equal opportunities for men and women<sup>47</sup>. In practice, however, on the level of public discourses and the media, as well as various canonized historical, literary, and cultural texts, the image of the “proper” Armenian man and the “proper” Armenian woman is constructed with allusions to expected gender roles and sexuality. Moreover, the expectations of traditional gender and sexuality are presented as not only desirable, but also

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<sup>47</sup> Armenia is signatory to international conventions such as the United Nations convention on “On the Political Rights of Women” and the Council of Europe conventions “On Equal Pay for Male and Female Workers for Work of Equal Value” and “On Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation” (Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia n.d.).

immediate necessities for the survival of the nation and the sovereignty of the state. In other words, sticking to traditional gender roles is presented as a civic duty of each citizen upon which the survival of the state depends. Consequently, the image of the one who transgresses either traditional gender roles or sexual identities becomes that of the “Other” and is presented as the “Enemy” of the nation. The unmarried woman who has sexual relationships, the gay man, and the transgender woman are all presented as threats to national survival and state security. So most often, the exclusion, repression, and silencing of non-normative genders and sexualities are performed not through the more conventional (and still problematic) affective notions such as shame, inappropriateness, and personal reputation, but rather through evocations of “state” and “nation” as well as references to historical events, genocide, and current geo-political circumstances. The frozen conflict with Turkey – along with the unresolved historical trauma of genocide – and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are the main points of reference for the kinds of threats the Armenian nation faces, along with larger and more abstract concepts of victimhood, threat, enemy, and survival.

In the wake of the 2009 Zurich protocols that were being negotiated between Armenia and Turkey, the prospect of opening the Turkey-Armenia border since its sealing in 1993 raised many anxieties (Tert.am 2008), among them also sexual ones. A number of social media discussions raised the issue of controlling Armenian women’s sexuality in case Muslim/Turkish men were able to freely cross the border: how would the “State” and the nation make sure intermarriages and sexual intermingling would not happen? It is important to note that the same issue was rarely, if ever, raised regarding the marriage of Armenian men to Turkish women, since in the logic of traditional gender roles, a man’s sexual relations with a woman is a relationship of conquering and dominance; therefore, marrying Turkish women, even though still undesirable, would constitute a relationship of dominance over the “Enemy”. This widespread fear of Armenian women’s sexual relationships with Muslim/Turkish men, whether consensual or not, arose on a backdrop where domestic violence against women in Armenia is omnipresent. Recent research published by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women has called femicide in Armenia a “silent epidemic” (Coalition To Stop Violence Against Women 2016, 9-10). With at least 30 women having been killed by either a current or a former partner between 2010-2015, there is still no legislation addressing

domestic violence and no mechanisms for proper police investigation or protection of women. The parliament has repeatedly voted to reject such legislation proposed by women's rights groups. Outside of activist and advocacy groups, this situation has never been presented as alarming either from the viewpoint of national survival or state security.

Similarly, and even more accentuated, is the construction of gender and sexuality in relation to the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Whereas in the case of Turkey the main fear is women's sexuality, the discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – where there is no imminent prospect of “border crossing by masses of Azerbaijani men” – focuses more on the construction of a proper masculinity. Manliness and a heterosexual orientation are the discursive prerequisites of becoming a soldier, which is seen as the ultimate duty of male citizens. With the increased visibility of LBGTI people as a result of the work of human rights organizations and activists, gay men have come under attack from nationalist voices who claim that “while the brave boys are sacrificing their lives on the border to protect us, gays are disrespecting their sacrifice by engaging in homosexual sex” in their civilian lives<sup>48</sup>. So, the reproduction of traditional masculinity and heterosexuality is presented as the civilian equivalent of protecting the borders. In other words, the two paradigms for fulfilling male citizenship are military service and the social reproduction of heterosexual masculinity.

Consequently, this image of a masculine Armenian citizen-soldier is contrasted with the image of the emasculated and effeminate “Enemy”, who is the one that “lost the war”. The sexual “Others” then, particularly gay men, are seen as the internal “Enemy”, as the delegate-representatives of the external “Enemy”, in this case the imaginary unity called “the Turk<sup>49</sup>”, inside the country. Among social media discussions regarding homosexuality, one can often find enunciations such as “gays are Turks” or “gays are worse than Turks”. Notably, there have also been calls to “round up all the gays in Armenia and send them

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<sup>48</sup> A reader commented under an article titled “Sex, Choice, Fascism and the Nation” published on Hetq.am: “Create an army of homosexuals, with its generals and officers, and go protect the border of the fatherland instead of organizing gay parades and avoiding service in the army. It would not be a bad idea to send the gays to the army, to make up the number of women in the army” (Bournazian 2012).

<sup>49</sup> In public discourses, “Turk” is often used in reference to Azerbaijanis as well.

to Baku”, which also comes to demonstrate that the space of the nation-state is constructed to contain only a particular kind of sexuality, and within the hegemonic imaginary, the space of the “Enemy” nation-state is made to contain all forms of “Otherness” – ethnic, religious, moral, ethical, and sexual. In May 2012, a local bar in Yerevan, “DIY”, which was a gathering spot for the queer community, was subjected to an arson attack. The assailants later claimed that the attack was a reaction to the bar owner’s participation in the Istanbul Gay Pride event. This was a moment when the imaginary equation of homosexuality as perversion and Turkishness as “Enemy” was confirmed in the eyes of the assailants, and the crossing of an “internal Enemy” – an openly queer citizen – into the space of the “external Enemy” had turned her into an open threat to the stability of the nation-state framework.

### **Georgia: ‘The Night of the Tatar’**

In this section, the representation of Turkey as a neighbor posing threat and the related gendered and nationalized discourses that intensify particularly around the peripheral region of Adjara in Georgia will be examined. The construction of the image of Enemy happens through the “State” presentation of Georgia as a Christian nation-state and by perpetuating the dominant discourses on gender and sexuality.

Prior to Georgia’s independence, the region of Adjara, with its vibrant heritage and unique geographical position, had to tuck its potential of transcending borders in cultural and economic interaction behind the iron curtain. During the Soviet era, the inhabitants of this border region had adjusted to the existence of the iron curtain and had developed their own ideas about “Self” and homeland in a series of routinized interactions with the state according to the Soviet “nationalities policy”. After yet another nationalization project in the post-Soviet period, the affect of shame associated with their marginal Muslim-Ottoman heritage still maintains its power to disturb their identities (Khalvashi 2015).

The incident of the so-called “Night of the Tatar” has been chosen for the closer examination of the gendered representation of the nation-state and how this representation is linked and contributes to conflict. This representation is done in two ways: 1) by constructing the gendered fantasy of the nation as the “comfort zone” – the strong affective site – and 2) by reproducing fear or hate

through the exaggerated or fetishized sexual/gendered image of the Enemy, the Other. The two elements of representation are interlinked because the “State”, through the sexual representation of the Enemy, builds a strong affective bond that determines how and why individuals are drawn to the nation and the state.

On the night of March 11, 2017, the so-called “Night of the Tatar”, the rallies against the new police chief and tightened traffic fining policies in Batumi turned into a chaotic, disruptive, and spontaneous protest (Pertaia 2017). The crowd mostly consisted of men in their twenties. The protest that was largely influenced by the social inequalities in the developing city simply turned violent after news spread that the head of the police allegedly called the people in Batumi and Adjara “Tatars”. Whether these allegations are true or not is irrelevant for this analysis; what is important is that the slug of “Tatar” hit the nerve.

Why did the identification with Tatars trigger the outburst of violence? In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the name “Tatar” was used in reference to the Turkic-speaking populations of the Caucasus and is occasionally used today with a derogatory connotation towards Georgian Muslims. This discursive alienation and otherization sometimes takes a violent turn. In 2012, conflicts on religious grounds unfolded in the villages of Nigvziani, Tsintskaro, and Samtatskaro, where both Christian and Muslim Adjarian “eco-migrants<sup>50</sup>” live side by side, by other Christian and, in the case of Tsintskaro, other Muslim communities. A 2013 study of these conflicts and discourse analysis of interviews with local Christians revealed that their perceptions and behavior is fed by historic narratives of antagonism, such as “Adjarians were forcefully converted to Islam”, “Turkey is a conqueror”, “Georgians were thrown out of Saingilo”, and others. The local Christian communities tie the practice of the religious rights of the Georgian Muslims to a theory on the expansion of Turkish policies into Georgia. (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center 2013).

In a 1999 ethnographic study, Mathjis Pelkmans traces a shift in the (re)construction of Turks and Turkey as the “Other” to the early 1990s as the

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<sup>50</sup> Eco-migrants are the people who have been displaced from their homes due to natural disasters. In Georgia, since the early 1980s, climate change and natural disasters have given rise to a migration trend from densely populated mountainous areas in Georgia, including Adjara.

border between Turkey and Georgia opened. The increased interactions between the communities meant new experiences and the flow of people, commodities, and new images. Together with wide-ranging economic opportunities, the new patterns of trade were initially associated with a “grand liquidation of Georgia” as metals, machinery, and raw materials were taken out of the country across the border. In this process, the “Other” was endowed with values by which the new reality could be understood and justified and the “Self” could be defined as positive and be protected. Pelkmans uses Mary Douglas’s concept of a “wounded body” that she applied as a metaphor for a threatened bounded social system (Douglas 1966). The opening of the border was perceived as an attack on a body, and this perception was reciprocal. Adding onto Pelkmans’s analysis, we further claim that this attack on the body has been imagined as an attack on a female body. In Turkey, Georgian women have been held “responsible” for sexually transmitted diseases; in Georgia, anxieties grew about Georgian women having to remain “pure”. Citing an image from the newspaper *Izvestiya*, Pelkmans describes how the image of a new moral border between Turkey and Georgia was being constructed – “a border that contrasted somber prostitutes with horny Turkish men, scarcity with affluence and capitalism with corruption” (Pelkmans 1999). Since then, there is ongoing “moral panic” in Georgian border villages about the brothels that, according to locals, are created only to serve Turkish drivers who cross the border every day (Imedaishvili and Bigg 2012). This hyper-sexualization of Turks and their portrayal as lecherous are common fears (Kucera 2017)<sup>51</sup>.

So, while the dominant nationalistic discourse otherizes Adjarians based on their Muslim-Ottoman heritage, closer to the border these discourses intensify and gain stronger gendered nuances. In reaction, Adjarians constantly reject their own “Otherness” associated with the Muslim-Ottoman heritage, and Muslim and Christian Adjarians alike are easily triggered concerning their loyalty to the Georgian nation.

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<sup>51</sup> This is mirrored by a fear in Turkey of the “decay in values” with instances of Turkish government representatives complaining that the ease of travel to Batumi led men from Turkey’s Black Sea region to travel there for gambling, prostitution, and cheap alcohol (Göksel 2013).

Coming back to our case study of “The Night of the Tatar”, the alleged use of the word “Tatar” by an actor that represents the state hinted that the Adjarians are more Turkish than Georgian and are disowned by the nation. Further, the use of the word “Tatar” associated the Adjarians with the image of the Other with its entire complexity of gendered stereotypes. With the evocation of the “Tatar”, the social protest lost its original intent and shifted focus onto masculinity and the national identity that was used as a tool for political manipulation. The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center cites the failure of the police to intervene and isolate the early manifestations of violence. It reports that the analysis of statements of the protests show that one of the main reasons for the outburst of violence was the chauvinist rhetoric against people living in Adjara. The report also calls the authorities to take the age and gender factors of persons engaged in violent actions into consideration. “The explanation of such aggression and destruction should not be limited to the argument of ‘criminal thinking’ because it can be an expression of acute social crisis and nihilism”, reads the report (EMC Echoes the Events Taking Place in Batumi 2017). We would argue that an added reason to the social crisis of the young men that turned violent on the “Night of the Tatar” in Batumi was the challenge to their masculinity hinted at by the association with the stigmatized image of the “Tatar”. Violence was the effective means of reaffirming masculinity.

Another interesting detail about “The Night of the Tatar” was how the police responded to the protest. According to some observers, the government let the protesters vandalize the city infrastructure and property of residents for almost 12 hours (Kiria 2017). While there are speculations that this ineffective, somewhat delayed reaction to the crisis might be politically motivated and the government aimed to allow the mob to vent (Nodia 2017), the unwillingness of the police and security services to act properly in time could be argued to have given the mostly angry mob of young local males to re-gain their masculine identity by being extremely violent.

The analysis of the events that took place on March 11 in Batumi reveals the representation of the neighbor as a threat employed to disown the disobedient citizens. Turkey in particular is not represented as an immediate threat to Georgia in political discourses; however, becoming “Tatar” could be read as a threat to the population who lives near the border. The affective border between



Turkey and Georgia does not lie on the white building in the village of Sarpi, with an abstract architectural meaning, nor does the regulation of the border end with checking the documentation by the border police. It logically continues into the narratives about sexuality, threat, and the “wounded body” of the periphery of the nation.

## **Turkey: The Writings on the Wall**

This section looks at the case of the writings left by individuals from the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces inside and outside of citizens’ homes in the city of Silvan during the military operations following the 2015 elections in Turkey.

The background to this incident is complex. Turkey witnessed two general elections in 2015. In the first round of the elections held in June, the newly formed pro-minority Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) managed to cross the election threshold. Even though attempts to form a coalition eventually proved unsuccessful, and a second general election was called, the significant support shown for the HDP was seen as a democratic victory not only for the Kurdish population, but also many other unrepresented minorities, such as Alevis, Armenians, women, LGBTI citizens, and others.

The Kurdish question in Turkey has been burning since the 1980 coup d’état and remains on top of the national and civil society agendas. According to the review by Kerim Yıldız and Mark Müller on the historical background of the Kurdish question, “the relaxation of judicial supervision of government behavior under the OHAL [“Emergency Rule”] opened the door to chronic abuses commissioned by state security forces in their actions against ‘terrorist’ targets [...]. In the government’s view, the situation in the Southeast was characterized solely by terrorism inspired by Kurdish separatism, justifying all-pervasive repression of manifestations of Kurdish identity and pro-Kurdish expression” (Yıldız and Müller 2008, 106). This view is still reflective of the approach of the current government formed by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). After the HDP’s rise in the first election of 2015, the government immediately turned to similar discourses to otherize the HDP by associating it with terrorism and considering it and ethnically Kurdish citizens as being equal to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya*

*Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK)<sup>52</sup>. The ruling AKP, with the classic militarist approach of the “State”, has waged military operations that have lasted for months under the “Emergency Rule”, citing the threat of possible attacks.

As Murat Belge explained, “Of course, the possibility of a war with an enemy outside is at the top of the militarist ideology [...]. But if we do not have such a problem, we can say that militarism is needed to keep an obedient population in discipline rather than fighting against external enemies” (Belge 2012, 151). Therefore, this “Enemy”, which is needed as a “threat” to hold the nation together, may emerge inside the country as well, as in the case of the Kurdish question and at times when the incumbent political power thinks that its grip is weakening.

Against this general backdrop, we examine the manifestations of the rising militarist-nationalist and gendered discourses and practices in the Southeastern regions of Turkey in 2015. Following the military operations of 2015, individuals from the security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces wrote messages on the walls of residential homes and public buildings in the city of Silvan. The militarist, nationalist, and gendered writings read “The state is here”, “If you are a Turk, be proud of it. If you are not, obey”, “We will make you wear thongs once spring comes”, “You have the state, do not betray it”, “Girls, we came into your caves”, and other similar phrases. These writings cannot unequivocally be attributed to the formal security forces or the counterinsurgency/paramilitary forces because who really wrote them is not clear. However, as local people indicated, members of the “Esadullah Team”<sup>53</sup> carried out the military operations alongside the security forces in the Southeastern provinces, and many of the writings on the walls are signed with the group’s name.

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<sup>52</sup> The Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* in Kurdish) is a left-wing organization based in Turkey. Since 1984, the PKK has been involved in an armed conflict with the Turkish state. The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state as well as many other states and organizations.

<sup>53</sup> “*Essadullah*” means “Allah’s Lions”. It has not been clarified yet whether they are affiliated with the official security forces or an unknown group independent of the security forces. Still, the writings were made when security forces were in the region, and none of the writings were deleted by the official security forces.

It is not common for the security forces, the founding body of the “State”, to write on the walls. Wall writings and graffiti are usually made by dissidents – individuals from alternative and marginalized groups who do not have access to public spaces and are denied a voice. Given the nature of the writings, they could not appear in the official discourses in the phrasing they were put into. However, the narrative voice of the utterances is that of the “State”; the act of writing them on the walls of people’s homes is an act of threat and violence in the name of the “State”. The people whose houses bore these writings were dismissed from the “ranks” of “acceptable” citizens and were portrayed as “traitors”; the militarist and sexist discourse “otherized” them in a loud and unwavering manner.

The binary normative gender discourses, built on each level of society producing hierarchy and oppression, are an instrument for legitimizing the language of rape. A masculine language that clearly triumphs over the “Other” by feminizing and hurting “honor” is manifested in the writings on the walls in Silvan. Afsaneh Najmabadi, who wrote on gendered concepts in the context of Iranian modernity, gives a stimulating explanation, stating that “nation was largely conceived and visualized as a brotherhood, and homeland as a female, a beloved, and a mother. Closely linked to the maleness of nation and the femaleness of homeland was the concept of *namus* (honor)”, drawing attention to the moral motivation behind the socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity (Najmabadi 2005, 1).

In the cited writings on the wall, the words “girls, we came into your caves” and “we will make you wear thongs once spring comes” are the most saturated with misogyny and sexualized hate speech. “The girls they came into” are no other than the “Others” (pun intended) that are despised by gender and sex and deserted through extortion. According to Bell Hooks, “when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (Hooks 2006, 367). We think that the writings in Silvan testify to the concept of the Other that is called to surrender and be taken over, consumed, and transformed through sexual pleasure, as described by Hooks.

These writings demonstrate the kind of ideology, discourse, and practice in which the institutions of the “State” (re)produce and engage citizens, while both are a product embedded in such ideology, discourse, and practice. Of course, the production of nationalist and gendered discourses in a militarist state is not limited to militarist tools alone. In many domains of societal life, the “Enemy-traitor” rhetoric is spoken to the people within the security-insecurity dilemma. The most basic institutions, such as family and school, play a major role in the recreation and acceptance of single-type nationalist-militarist and gendered discourses in the socialization processes of individuals. We see that those who are labeled as “traitors” are automatically imagined in femininity, and that the rape discourse can turn into a legitimate one against the “traitor”. The soldier who engages in a fight as a hegemonic masculinity ritual confronts and attacks the “Other” as a “traitor” and threatens with a rape discourse by imagining him in a female body, forcing him to wear a thong on his body. This is the point where we can clearly see the normative gender relations in all their hierarchy and oppression. The “traitors” are subordinated in the face of all-powerful masculine domination and are imagined and raped as feminine bodies. The raped and the feminized are built to serve as the domain where the superiority and glory of the masculine nation can be exercised. In other words, in the conflict dynamics, power is exerted over “Other”/“traitor” men that are imagined as feminine and are again bound to the actions of men. The main actors are men on both and all sides.

## Conclusion

The discussion of the abovementioned contexts and examples has aimed to demonstrate how the gender and sexual roles of citizens are regulated and heteronormativity is enforced in conflict contexts through a dual mechanism: (a) the state is threatened to be defeated by the “Enemy” in case a citizen fails to perform a traditional feminine or masculine role, and (b) a citizen faces the fearful prospect of becoming *like* the “Enemy” with an effeminate or “deviant” sexual identity – the ultimate moral downfall in the national imaginary.

On the one hand, the image of Enemy has particular parameters of gender and sexuality, and on the other hand, the image of Enemy is used to construct, reproduce, and enforce the “proper” gender performance and sexuality of those who wish to belong to the nation-state. In such a discursive backdrop, the “enemies” of the nation are often identified with citizens whose gender or

sexual identity doesn't fit into the framework of hetero-reproductive masculinity and femininity. Another way this plays out is the imagination of the enemy as a woman or an emasculated and effeminate subject, and the subordination of the woman as the desired dynamics to be achieved over the "Enemy". As such, the discourses about Enemy and threat and discourses about sexual deviation and sexism often cross-pollinate each other in political and societal discourses, mass media, and pop culture.

The masculine hegemonic language surfaces in the field of tension, conflict, and war; gendered discourses of Others, Enemies, and traitors proliferate and are legitimized. Additionally, through the metaphoric connections between deviant gender roles/identities/sexualities and enmity/treason, the image of the national Enemy/traitor is projected from the public arena into the private one, so as to be made present in the most intimate and everyday practices and performances. The masculine hegemonic discourse is internalized. The gendered/sexualized representation of the Enemy/Other/traitor is embedded in our lives through everyday politics and reproduces present ways of life.

## **Recommendations**

One possible recommendation would concern the alliances between civil society organizations working in the fields of conflict transformation and resolution on the one hand and gender equality and feminist advocacy groups on the other. Women's and LGBTI rights groups have been increasing awareness about the entanglements of conflict discourses and the gendered order of the societies. Many such groups and organizations have tried to both reach out and build alliances with those practicing conflict transformation, as well as themselves run conflict transformation initiatives across borders and conflict divides. The conflict resolution practitioners and organizations have exerted far less efforts to face the gendered and sexualized aspects of conflict and to acknowledge the interdependency of the transformation of existing conflicts and the liberation from state-determined and state-enforced gender roles and sexualities. Keeping in mind this suggested interdependence, we would like to encourage individuals and organizations working towards the transformation of various conflicts in their societies to pay closer attention to how gender and sexuality complicate and sustain the conflict dynamics as well as to reach out to those working for women's and LGBTI rights to build alliances.

Another recommendation for the academic and policy-making communities would be to put more effort towards generating and using a gender-sensitive language that would both enhance possibilities of critique and explore alternative ways of conceptualizing social order. Since the sustenance of the militarist discourse and culture relies on gendered language, awareness and sensitivity about the uses of gendered imaginaries and references in relation to conflict can contribute to the transformation of militarist sentiments. This awareness is necessary, particularly by groups and initiatives working towards conflict resolution and peace processes.

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# Representation of Minorities in the Media in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey

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“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.”

Mahatma Gandhi

The current international system of nation-states, established following World War Two, has created a solid ground for ethnically-framed conflicts. The institutions of the nation-states have played a critical role in making ethnicity one of the politically salient identities. Among others, these institutions are mandatory education, national armies, and the media. In this paper, we examine the role of one of these institutions – the media, with regards to shaping intergroup relations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, and more specifically the representation of ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in the media of these countries. Beyond reporting on the general situation in this regard, the paper also draws comparative conclusions and offers recommendations to various actors in furtherance of inclusive intergroup relations, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence in these countries.

## Introduction

The discourse of the nation-state goes back to the Peace of Westphalia in the 17th century. The nation-state is a modern form of the state where the territorial delineation of a country has a claim to coincide with a culturally and ethnically homogenous population (Gellner 1983 (2006)). As a result, the “design” of the nation-state features a dominant group, emphasizing its characteristics as overarching. The current international system, largely based on the logic of nation-states, has politicized culture and ethnicity and, as a result, has been struggling with the elaboration of proper strategies for the management of ethnic and cultural diversity. Although, most of the countries recognized by the United Nations (UN) currently claim democracy as the form of their governance, where all citizens, regardless of their various identities, enjoy the same rights, in practice, this is not necessarily the case. Segregation, discrimination, social exclusion, injustice, and the improper allocation of resources happens on a daily basis and creates violent conflict.

There are ongoing theoretical discussions around governmental policies for the better management of ethnic and cultural diversity. A conventional form of diversity management is **assimilation**, when the dominant group tries to make minority of “its like” (Rodríguez-García 2010). While assimilation is largely discredited as a policy choice theoretically, it is still applied in many countries practically. **Multiculturalism**, on the other hand, embraces diversity based on social justice and equality, at the same time giving a “cultural autonomy” to the minority groups (Rosado 1997). However, due to its theoretical criticism and practical failure to bring about a peaceful cohabitation of different groups in some countries, a new model has been formulated, called “interculturalism”. **Interculturalism** shares the same values and principles with multiculturalism, but it also emphasizes the importance of an “interactive process” in a diverse society, where the majority does not simply accept other groups and treat them as equals, but also engages with them, is aware of their culture, and respects exchanges among these groups (Zapata-Barrero 2017). Interculturalism assumes the same type of interaction among all groups; as a matter of fact, it emphasizes interaction between members of diverse communities, rather than “groupism”.

Besides the governments, other societal actors also play an important role in the management of diversity. Beyond doubt, one of them is the media, a key public opinion-maker. For the interculturalist approach, the media is a tool for

building a society where different groups know about each other as a starting point. Further, it can facilitate “intercultural dialogue”, raise awareness, and build the “intercultural abilities” of each member of the society, thus contributing to social cohesion and, ultimately, a well-integrated society. However, often media actors, incompetently or purposefully become instruments and sources of discrimination, polarization, and circulation of stereotypes against minorities or vulnerable groups. Hate speech and discriminatory language in mainstream media can be the key hindering element of societal integration or cohesion.

The South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia – and Turkey face significant challenges in diversity management. At the level of state documents and declarative statements by many state and media actors, all these countries do respect diversity and are also “proud” of it. However, in practice, the situation is different. All four countries have experienced conflicts that allegedly derive from improper diversity management as well as a massive polarization within the society. Considering this link between diversity management and conflict as well as the role of the media as a “social broker”, we aim to analyze the representation of ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in the media of these four countries.

This paper starts off summarizing the existing international and national media standards for reporting on minorities. This is followed by a section on the methodology used for sampling, monitoring, data collection, and analysis. Then, the findings of the analysis on the four countries is provided. In the concluding sections, the findings are compared and recommendations are made for all stakeholders to take into consideration for overcoming the problems related to the representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the media.

## **International and National Standards of Media Reporting on Minorities**

In order to lay a basis for the discussion of the representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the media of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, a discussion of the national and international standards on such representation is due. All four countries claim democracy as the form of their governance, and their constitutions protect the freedom of speech, expression, and the media. All of them are members of the UN as well as regional organizations such as

the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – all structures that entail responsibilities and standards to live up to both in democracy and freedom of expression.

## **International Standards**

A number of important international documents exist on media standards that also include specific, albeit non-binding, guidelines for reporting on minority issues. One of the oldest universal documents is the “Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists” adopted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in 1954. Principle 7 of this document stipulates:

“The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins” (International Federation of Journalists 1954).

The CoE Parliamentary Assembly passed an important recommendation in 1995 urging member state governments to take adequate measures for ensuring a better representation of migrants and ethnic minorities in the media (Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly 1995). Based on this document, the CoE Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation N R (1997) 21 to member states on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance. This document outlines specific standards for media organizations on proper reporting on minority issues (Recommendation N R (1997) 21 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Media and the Promotion of a Culture of Tolerance 1997).

Further on, the OSCE has also developed a tool for media self-regulation with specific recommendations on minorities. The “Media Self-Regulation Guidebook” declares that a code widely approved nationwide may serve as the main source for various types of individual codes, and that a national code of ethics can reflect “different sensitivities within every society, based on the nature of democracy and on the social-cultural-ethnic-religious codes of conduct”. Yet, it also underlines that what matters is the commitment of each media outlet to its own standards, and that “true ethics standards can be created only by independent media professionals, and can be obeyed by them only voluntarily”. (OSCE Representative of Freedom of Media 2008)

## National Standards

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have also adopted national standards of media reporting that include the representation of minorities as well.

In Armenia, Article 29 of the Constitution prohibits “discrimination based on sex, race, skin color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion, world view, political or other views, belonging to a national minority, property status, birth, disability, age, or other personal or social circumstances”. Article 42 of the Constitution prohibits the “incitement of national, racial, and religious hatred and the propaganda of violence”. The Constitution also establishes the right to “seek, receive, and disseminate information”. (Constitution of Armenia 1995 (2015))

Article 22 of the Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting prohibits the use of radio and television for “inciting ethnic, racial, and religious animosity”. By Article 26 of the same law, the Public Television and Radio Company “is obliged to provide the audience with programs that consider the interests of ethnic minorities, different social groups and different regions of Armenia”, and it “must provide airtime for the ethnic minorities in their languages<sup>54</sup>”. (The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Television and Radio Broadcasting 2000 (2017))

In Armenia, some media outlets have also elaborated mechanisms of self-regulation. The first attempt at self-regulation of the media in Armenia was the “Code of Conduct” for the members of the Yerevan Press Club adopted in 1995 (Melikyan, et al. 2013). Later, other media outlets and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) developed individual and group codes such as the

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<sup>54</sup> The existing legislative provisions on public radio and television do not guarantee a *minimum* time for broadcasting in minority languages. Instead, the total duration of such programs is set *not to exceed* two hours per week on television and an hour per week on the radio (The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Television and Radio Broadcasting 2000 (2017)). Currently, only the public radio has programs in minority languages, while Armenian public television does not produce programming in minority languages except for some films in Russian with Armenian subtitles (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 2017).

“Code of Ethics” of the Media Initiatives Center<sup>55</sup> (MediaInitiatives.am n.d.) and the “Code of Ethics” of the “Investigative Journalists” NGO (Hetq.am 2002). In 2007, by the initiative of the Yerevan Press Club, 18 media outlets and NGOs signed a joint “Code of Ethics” and formed a body called the Media Ethics Observatory. Signed by 44 media outlets as of today, this code specifically stipulates that editors and journalists are obliged “not to promote in any way ethnic or religious hatred and intolerance, or any discrimination on political, social, sexual, and language grounds” as well as to “exclude hate speech” (Ypc.am 2007 (2015)).

In Azerbaijan, Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees equality “irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, origin, property status, social position, convictions, political party, trade union organization and social unity affiliation” and prohibits limitation of rights based on “race, ethnicity, social status, language, origin, convictions and religion”. Article 50 of the Constitution guarantees the freedom of mass media and prohibits state censorship. (Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan 1995 (2016))

Article 7 of the Law on Mass Media, further guarantees the freedom of information and confirms the inadmissibility of censorship (The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Mass Media 1999 (2002)). Public broadcasting is regulated by the Law on Public Television and Radio Broadcasting. Article 32 of the law prohibits the propaganda of “violence, cruelty, religious and racial discrimination”. (The Law of Azerbaijan Republic on Public TV-Radio Broadcasting 2002).

However, the media landscape in the country is seen as restrictive according to the reports by several international organizations (Azerbaijan. Freedom of the Press 2016 2016) (Human Rights Watch 2016) (Irex.org 2017). The restrictive environment of the media has had consequences for the functionality of the self-regulatory mechanisms.

In the field of self-regulation, the Press Council in conjunction with the OSCE’s Baku office, developed the “Code of Professional Ethics for Journalists of Azerbaijan” in 2003 that among other things declares that “journalists shall not condemn people for their nationality, race, sex, language, profession, religion, and place of birth or residence and shall not highlight such data” (Code of

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<sup>55</sup> The organization used to be called Internews Media Support.

Professional Ethics for Journalists of Azerbaijan 2003). The Press Council itself is deemed a crucial self-regulatory mechanism. Established in 2003 at the first Congress of Journalists of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Press Council is meant to be an independent organ ensuring public control over the respect of the “Code of Professional Ethics for Journalists” (Mass Media in Azerbaijan 2017). Yet, it has been criticized for dependence and affiliation with the government and not standing up for the rights of media outlets and journalists (Irex.org 2017).

In Georgia, similar to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees equality “regardless of race, color of skin, language, sex, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic and social affiliation, origin, property or social status, place of residence”. Anti-discrimination is framed in Article 38 as allowing citizens of Georgia “to develop their culture freely, use their mother tongue in private and in public, without any discrimination and interference”. The freedom of speech and mass media are protected by the Constitution as well through Articles 19 and 24. (Constitution of Georgia 1995 (2013)) However, there are a number of cases when this right can be limited, in particular when there is “public incitement to acts of violence [...] in order to cause a discord between certain groups based on their racial, religious, national, provincial, ethnic, social, political, linguistic” characteristics (Criminal Code of Georgia, Article 239).

There are additional regulatory mechanisms obliging the media to follow standards of reporting on minority and diversity issues. Article 56 of the Georgian Law on Broadcasting prohibits “broadcasting of programs containing the apparent and direct threat of inciting racial, ethnic, religious or other hatred in any form and the threat of encouraging discrimination or violence toward any group”. It further prohibits discrimination based on “disability, ethnic origin, religion, opinion, gender, sexual orientation or on the basis of any other feature or status” or “highlight[ing] this feature or status [...] except when this is necessary due to the content of a program and when it is targeted to illustrate existing hatred”. (Law of Georgia on Broadcasting 2004 (2017))

Furthermore, the Georgian National Commission of Communications developed the “Code of Conduct of Broadcasters”. Articles 31, 32, and 33 set standards for reporting on “diversity, equality and tolerance” including refraining from the publication of any material inciting hatred, stereotypes, or intolerance towards ethnic origin or based on other criteria; insulting any ethnic

group; drawing unjustified parallels between ethnic origin and negative events; and mentioning ethnicity unless there is a “necessity” to do so. (Georgian National Commission of Communications 2009)

The third mechanism is a self-regulatory one designed by an independent body of journalists. The “Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics”, currently signed by 280 journalists, has mechanisms for appeal by individuals or legal entities. The Charter establishes 11 guiding principles for the signatory journalists. Principle 7 warns the journalists against the dangers of encouraging discrimination in the media (Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics 2009).

Article 10 of the Constitution of Turkey guarantees equality “without distinction as to language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds”. Article 26 guarantees the freedom of expression, and Article 28 guarantees the freedom of press (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey 1982 (2010)). Turkey has no legal provisions against hate speech. On the other hand, Article 216 of the Criminal Code, without naming and defining hate speech or hate crime as a concept, aims to prevent attacks against any group on the basis of social class, race, religion, or sectarian or regional difference (Criminal Code 2004). However, even though the minority groups increasingly tried to appeal to this to address the violation of their rights, the article continues to be used primarily as an instrument of limiting the freedom of speech. It sets the legal basis for sentencing journalists and other commentators for political purposes without providing protection to minorities (Turkey. Freedom of the Press 2016 2016).

There are also a number of ethics codes published by several civil society initiatives in Turkey that include provisions for the coverage of minority groups. The most prominent among them are the “Code of Professional Ethics of the Press” published in 1989 by the Press Council, the “Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Turkish Journalists” issued by the Journalists Association of Turkey in 1988, and the “Ethics Code for Journalists” adopted in 2011 by the Media Association (UNESCO 2014) (Journalists Association of Turkey 1988). However, the main shortcoming of these codes is that they do not have any power of enforcement. Thus, the problems in the implementation process of these codes continue.

To date, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey do not have comprehensive national legislation dealing with hate speech, and their criminal, civil, and



administrative laws remain deficient in dealing with the issue. Georgia is making certain steps in this direction, and the “Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination” was adopted and entered into force in 2014. (ECRI Report on Turkey 2016) (ECRI Report on Armenia 2016) (ECRI Report on Georgia 2016) (ECRI Report on Azerbaijan 2016)

## **Monitoring Methodology**

The aim of this paper is to compare the representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the media of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. To conduct this media monitoring, we relied primarily on content analysis (Neuendorf 2002) and to a lesser degree on critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk 1995). In each country, we selected at least three online media outlets, chose random dates for the monitoring, and analyzed news articles and opinion columns that contained keywords pre-determined by the co-authors (detailed in Annex 1).

Only electronic media outlets were selected for monitoring. Supported by social media, the electronic media outlets have become more popular than the print media during the last decades, particularly in the South Caucasus. Although print media preserves its popularity in Turkey, the comparative nature of this research and the need to align methodologies led us to the choice of electronic outlets for Turkey as well.

The media outlets examined in each country were selected based on these criteria:

- Popularity: The popularity of outlets was determined through Alexa.com (The Top 500 Sites on the Web. By Country 2017) and supported by other data whenever necessary and possible.
- Ownership: If more than one popular outlets belong to the same company, we selected the next most popular outlet.
- Accessibility of archives: When the archives of the popular outlets were not accessible online, we selected the next most popular outlet.
- Number: We analyzed at least three outlets for each country. We added more outlets when we thought the research was not conclusive.
- Content: We did not consider the outlets that publish items exclusively related to entertainment, sports, or advertisement.

The period for the analysis was randomized. As a base rule, we analyzed media materials published on the first Tuesday of each month between June and December 2016. Whenever the research was not conclusive because of insufficient coverage, the monitoring period was extended.

The greatest challenge of the research was to determine the selection criteria for the groups to be analyzed. The gravity of the challenge derived not only from finding common criteria to employ for all four countries but also from the very definition of minority – a very disputed concept that may encompass various meanings.

Jennifer Jackson Preece argues that since the end of World War One, the theoretical and legal scholarship and the accompanying practices have used the criterion of citizenship as a distinguishing factor between minorities and similar non-citizen groups such as immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers, and a different body of theoretical and legal scholarship has developed for the latter groups. She, therefore, defines “minority” as essentially identical to “nation” and quotes Hugh Seton-Watson’s definition of “nation” as “a community of people who share certain characteristics”. Minorities are thus “ethnonations who [...] exist within the political boundaries of some other nation’s state” (Preece 1998, 28-29). However, she offers to underline the distinction between citizen and non-citizen groups by the term “national minorities” that she defines as:

“a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, well defined and historically established on the territory of that state, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion, or language” (Preece 1998, 29).

This definition captures the current understanding of “national minority” very well; however, more than a numerical relationship with a majority, the concept of minority often denotes an unequal power relationship (Galbreath and McEvoy 2012) (Balibar 1991, 82-83). Louise Wirth offers a sociological conception of a minority that concentrates on power and problematizes discrimination:

“We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. The existence of a minority in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group with higher social status and greater privileges. Minority carries with it the exclusion from full participation in the life of the society” (Wirth 1945).

Consequently, we decided to analyze at least one group for each country that fits the definition of “national minority”. We further developed the criteria of size, assumed conflict potential, and rights deprivation as our research question is built on the media dimension of the link between minorities and conflict. So, we selected local Yezidis in Armenia; local Lezgis in Azerbaijan; local Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Ossetians, Abkhazians, Kists/Chechens, the Roma, Assyrians, Udis, and Avars in Georgia; and finally, local Kurds in Turkey for the monitoring and analysis.

In Armenia and Turkey, we also analyzed the representation of Syrian refugees in the media. Similarly, in Azerbaijan, we analyzed the representation of displaced persons (as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) in the media. We are well aware that none of these groups are considered national minorities, especially since refugees in Armenia and displaced persons in Azerbaijan are considered to have the same ethnicity with the dominant population. Yet, their situation in the society carries a certain degree of resemblance with the minorities we analyzed in terms of size, assumed conflict potential, and rights deprivation. Therefore, they fit the sociological understanding of the concept of minorities. Moreover, the novelty and the urgency of the conflicts they are associated with create curiosity for the comparison of their representation with the other groups and between the countries. However, we continue to use the term “minority” for the first category, and we use the term “group” for the second category throughout the paper in order to avoid confusions.

During the data collection phase, we paid attention to aspects such as the main topic and content of the media items, quotations or references, adjectives and metaphors for naming and describing groups, positive or negative attributions, numbers and statistics. The findings were documented through a data

template. We also analyzed the media items for hate speech. The CoE definition of hate speech was employed in this research<sup>56</sup>.

## **Main Findings**

This section reflects the main findings of the media analysis for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. For each country, we first present general information about the media environment, the background information about the analyzed media outlets and groups, followed by the main findings of the analysis.

### **Armenia**

#### *The Media Environment in Armenia*

Media digitization in Armenia in the 2000s has surely increased the diversity of media outlets and the plurality of opinions. Yet legislation remains flawed, and the independence of the only regulatory institution for television and radio – the National Commission on Television and Radio of Armenia – is disputed while print media and online media do not have a regulator or supervising body at all. Media ownership is not transparent with editorial independence compromised by explicit and implicit pressures from political and business elites. The uncompetitive radio and television licensing and the incomplete digital transition continue to obstruct the development of the media sector. (Melikyan, et al. 2013) (Armenia. Freedom of the Press 2016 2016) According to the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, an annual report released by the international organization Reporters Without Borders, Armenia ranked 79th among 173 countries (Reporters Without Borders 2017).

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<sup>56</sup> In this research, the criteria through which hate speech was identified are based on the CoE definition and include all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants, and people of immigrant origin (Recommendation N R (1997) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on "Hate Speech" 1997).

## *Analyzed Media Outlets*

We selected the media outlets Hetq.am (with monthly total visitors at about 250,000), A1plus.am (with monthly total visitors at about 550,000), Azatutyun.am (with monthly total visitors at about 760,000), and Tert.am (with monthly total visitors at about 4,800,000) to analyze for this research (SimilarWeb 2017). While the popularity of the outlets according to Alexa.com was the main criterion of selection, we had to exclude some outlets<sup>57</sup> that ranked as the most popular based on interviews with experts and journalists in Armenia. According to them, the main portion of the traffic of the most popular media outlets in Armenia revealed by Alexa.com derives from “parasite news”; that is coverage related to showbusiness, sport, emergencies, and the like (Journalists from the Independent Journalists’ Network 2017). According to a 2014 overview of ranking platforms as well, Alexa.com does not reflect the real picture in the country (Martirosyan 2014). Therefore, Alexa.com rankings were supplemented by other rankings, such as the survey of the “Armenian Media Landscape” conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (Pearce 2011) and the report “Mapping Digital Media: Armenia” by the Open Society Foundation (Melikyan, et al. 2013) to identify the outlets to be analyzed.

According to a cross-analysis of the above sources, A1plus.am, Azatutyun.am, and Hetq.am are among the most popular online media outlets in Armenia despite their low ranking on Alexa.com. Tert.am was among the most popular both on Alexa.com and the other sources.

Launched in 2008, Tert.am is a multi-genre news website providing coverage of the most important developments in Armenia, the region, and worldwide. It is a pro-government media outlet (Melikyan, et al. 2013). In May 2014, Tert.am joined the Pan-Armenian Media Group that owns a considerable portion of the media sector in Armenia.

Launched as a media agency in 1993, A1plus was the last independent TV channel in Armenia. On April 1 of 2002, the National Commission on Television and Radio of Armenia decided that A1plus would lose its license; this decision was largely claimed to be implicitly conditioned by the outlet’s critical stance towards the government and its policies (Nyman-Metcalf and Richter 2010, 14).

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<sup>57</sup> News.am, 1in.am, shamshyan.com, mamul.am, armlur.am, lragir.am, lurer.com were omitted even though they ranked higher on Alexa.com (Top Sites in Armenia 2017).

Since then, A1plus operates online and broadcasts through its website and the ArmNews TV<sup>58</sup> channel with only 20 minutes of air time daily.

Hetq.am is an online newspaper published in Yerevan by the “Investigative Journalists” NGO in 2001. As highlighted above, Hetq.am was the first media outlet in Armenia to adopt an ethics code. It also has been and remains the leader in disseminating investigative content in Armenia.

Azatutyun.am is the website of the Armenian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Azatutyun is not only an online news platform but also a radio channel and has the largest newsroom among all Armenian media outlets even compared to TV channels. Its newsroom has mainly socio-political content, which was also important in our selection.

All the selected media outlets are inclined to be critically disposed towards the Armenian realities. They also highlight their adherence to journalistic ethics and professionalism. They try to instill the culture of fact-checking and consulting a variety of relevant sources in public journalism; that is engaging citizens and creating public debate. In contrast to the fully-controlled television, these media outlets try to maintain their independence from the authorities.

### *Analyzed Groups*

There are assumed to be 20 ethnic groups living in Armenia today (Asatryan and Arakelova 2002). According to the last census in 2011, minorities constitute three percent of the population, approximately 60 thousand people (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). Minorities are often underrepresented in different institutions and discriminated against regarding their culture, language, and traditions. Even though the law and the state authorities promote the concept of inter-group tolerance and understanding in society (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 2017), Armenia is widely perceived as a mono-ethnic and mono-religious state. This perception, when coupled with the lack of media attention and representation, limits the visibility of minorities and leads to their isolation and exclusion from the society. Keeping this context in mind, we have decided to analyze the media coverage about Yezidis and Syrian-Armenians for Armenia.

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<sup>58</sup> ArmNews TV is also a member of Pan-Armenian Media Group.

Yezidis are an ethno-confessional group and the largest minority in Armenia. They speak Kurmanji, a Northern-Kurdish dialect related to the North-West Iranian dialects. However, in an attempt to delimit the Yezidi identity from the Kurdish identity, part of the community itself refers to the language not as a dialect of Kurdish but as “Ezdiki”, a separate language, and distinguishes themselves from Kurds not only religiously but also ethnically (Armenia - Kurds (Kurdmanzh) n.d.) (McIntosh 2003). According to the 2011 census, the number of Yezidis of Armenia is 35,308 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). Yezidis live compactly mostly in rural areas of the regions of Aragatsotn, Armavir, and Ararat as well as in the cities of Yerevan, Echmiadzin, Armavir, Ashtarak, Artashat, and Gumri.

We also decided to analyze the representation of Syrian-Armenians in the media in Armenia. Despite their ethnic Armenian identification, Syrian-Armenians carry socio-cultural differences from the local Armenian population. They began to migrate *en masse* to Armenia from the beginning of the civil war in Syria. According to the UNHCR data, as of December 31 of 2016, there were about 14,000 Syrian-Armenians (refugees and/or asylum-seekers) registered in Armenia (United Nations 2016). Legally, Syrian-Armenians are refugees, but some of them do not see themselves in this way, as they consider Armenia as their historical homeland and reject the term “refugee” as stigmatizing. Others refuse to be called “repatriates” as their migration has been forced by conflict. (Hakobyan 2014) (Tert.am 2016)

### *Main Findings*

We screened four media outlets through the keywords “Yezidi” and “Syrian-Armenian” for a six-month period from June to December 2016. More specifically, we chose the first Tuesday of each month from June to November. We screened the media outlets for the entire month of December since the collected material for the previous period was not enough for a meaningful analysis. A large number of the analyzed media items were based only on a single source, and almost none of them had hyperlinks. While the majority of these items were presented as the media outlets’ own production, the content was explicitly taken from other sources as duplicates were frequently identified. This is indicative of a dominating single discourse in the media and a lack of qualified personnel in many outlets.

Overall, the representation of these two groups in the media is very limited. Table 1 presents the number of media items identified through the screening criteria and analyzed in this research.

*Table 1 Number of the Analyzed Media Items*

	Tert.am	A1plus.am	Azatutyun.am	Hetq.am	Total
Yezidis	4	3	2	6	15
Syrian-Armenians	11	9	5	7	32
Total	15	12	7	13	47

Syrian-Armenians appear twice more popular on the agenda of the media outlets than Yezidis although their population is half of that of Yezidis. One reason for this could be the general urgency to cover the Syrian civil war and the refugee flows in 2016. More subjectively, this reflects the above-stated overall limit in covering vulnerable groups with a further bias towards “Armenian issues”. Syrian-Armenians identify themselves and are largely identified by the society as Armenian. This allows the media outlets to represent Syrian-Armenians as a part of the wider Armenian people, and the issues concerning them are covered in the media much more broadly, resonating with an overall “Armenian agenda”.

*Table 2 Main Topics*

Assistance to Syrian-Armenians	21
Syrian-Armenian entrepreneurs	5
Integration of Syrian-Armenians	4
Yezidi rights	4
Difficult living conditions in Yezidi villages	3
Yezidi soldiers killed during the escalation in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in April 2016	2

We did not find instances of open hate speech in the analyzed media items. However, this is not indicative of the overall situation with hate speech in conventional and social media targeting different vulnerable groups in the country (Anti-Discrimination Center "Memorial" 2017) (Epress.am 2017). As



explained above, the choice of the media outlets with a stricter stance on ethics and professionalism has played a role for the results of the analysis. The period under analysis might also have cast influence over the content of the media items. After the escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone in April 2016, there was a period of ethnic solidarity in Armenia. The overall “invisibility” and marginalization of ethnic groups and their issues plays a role not only in the limited number of media items but also in manifesting hate speech – perhaps for the better. A very small number of actors – official, civil society, media – is interested in speaking up about the issues of ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups. Discriminatory speech is mainly manifested through underlining the ethnic belonging of some criminals or troublemakers. In these cases, the ethnic identity – presumed by the media item or assumed by the individual – is associated with the crime and linked with an entire group.

Most of the retrieved material was about the resettlement and integration of Syrian-Armenians in the Armenian society (see Table 2 above). Another issue reported for both Syrian-Armenian and Yezidi communities was the lack of knowledge of the literary standard of the Armenian language. Armenian is the only official state language. While the state language policy maintains to support minority languages, it mostly promotes the use of Armenian.

*Table 3 Media Items Published about Language/Religious Discrimination in Armenian Schools*

Yezidis	4
Syrian-Armenians	2

A small number of media items mention the problems that Yezidis face. One such item concerns the latent violation of their religious rights and freedoms in the secondary schools in Armenia where Yezidi children are taught the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church against their will (Boris Mourazi: 'Your Employees Want to Keep You Away from the Truth' 2016).

According to the media items, Yezidis are more likely to have lower levels of education than individuals from other communities. This is partly because of the poor economic climate, shortage of Yezidi teachers, and the remoteness of many Yezidi villages. Yezidis also have reportedly been disadvantaged in the allocation of privatized land and water supply.

The general lack of media coverage of problems experienced by Syrian-Armenians and an even smaller one for Yezidis also results in almost no

coverage of cultural aspects of the lives of these communities in the media items analyzed.

*Table 4 Quoted Actors*

Government, the President	18
Group representative	11
NGO representative	9
Entrepreneurs from Armenia and the diaspora	5

In terms of agency, the minorities are represented as bearers of various issues, and the authorities as those who can give solutions to their problems. The problem-solving capacity was mainly attributed to the authorities and in particularly to the President, the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Defense, those of Education and Culture, as well as to entrepreneurs from Armenia and the diaspora. As can be seen from Table 4, only in one fourth of the media items, a group representative was quoted.

Complementing content analysis with discourse analysis, we identified one recurring theme – the reference to the “brotherhood” of Armenian and Yezidi peoples.

*Table 5 Media Items on the “Brotherhood” of Armenians and Minority Groups*

Yezidis	5
Syrian-Armenians	2

“We do not consider Yezidis of Armenia as a national minority; we walk the same path of history together with the Yezidi people, and our march is in procession”, – noted in his speech Minister of Education and Science Levon Mkrtchyan (The Yezidi Language in the Schools of the Republic of Armenia: The Concerns of the Yezidi Community 2016). A similar statement was made by a member of the President’s administration, Gayane Manukyan, at the presentation of the newly published book “The Yezidi Hero Who Stands on the Border” dedicated to the ethnic Yezidi soldiers that died during the April 2016 escalation in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: “This is our gratitude to our brother nation, for the blood their hero-sons shed for the Armenian statehood, for the protection of the borders of our joint Fatherland” (The Book ‘The Yezidi Hero Who Stands on the Border’ Was Published 2016).

The discourse of “brotherhood”, while not entirely new, is very much in line with the rising militarism in the policies implemented by the government after the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in April 2016. While all citizens of Armenia are already obliged to serve in the army, on October 5 of 2016, in his inaugural speech at the National Assembly, the new Defense Minister of Armenia Vigen Sargsyan called for building a “nation-army”. Given Armenia’s political challenges, he declared, the armed forces should play a greater role in the country’s social and economic life, and the entire population should be linked to the army by means of scientific, economic, industrial, or other projects, and the army must become a “school and workshop of society” (Grigoryan, Armenia’s New Defense Minister Proposes ‘Nation-Army’ Concept 2016). The topic of the “age-old brotherhood” of the two peoples neatly fits into the frames of the discourse of the “nation-army”. While the theme of “brotherhood” featured also in the representation of Syrian-Armenians as well, no media items were detected underlining the belonging of Syrian-Armenians to the “nation-army”.

## **Azerbaijan**

### *The Media Environment in Azerbaijan*

Several international organizations have underlined the deterioration of media freedoms in Azerbaijan during 2016 as government control tightened further, relatively independent sources ceased functioning, and dissident journalists and bloggers received threats or were subject to violence (Irex.org 2017) (Human Rights Watch 2016) (Azerbaijan. Freedom of the Press 2016). This situation inevitably affects the quality and professionalism of journalism. Among media actors, there is increasing self-censorship as well as dependence on funding or grants, which leads to the production of content conforming to the views of the donor-parties (Irex.org 2017, 7-10).

With regard to the coverage of minorities and vulnerable groups, this deterioration of the situation translates into further silencing of criticism and dissatisfaction about the issues of these groups. In the past, the coverage of the minorities was estimated to be as low as 1 percent (Media Diversity Institute 2006). One of the main reasons is the perception of minorities as a potential threat to the country’s unity and stability (European Centre for Minority Issues 2011, 99). Another factor bringing “invisibility” to the issues of minorities is the imposition of the official discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism that

shrinks the space for voicing criticism. Thus, the ownership and control over the media, self-censorship, and the controversial perception of the topic prevents media outlets from producing content on minority issues.

### *Analyzed Media Outlets*

For Azerbaijan, we chose the media outlets Oxu.az (with monthly total visitors at about 2,700,000), Milli.az (with monthly total visitors at about 1,650,000), Haqqin.az (with monthly total visitors at about 2,350,000), and Yenicag.az (with monthly total visitors at about 200,000), based on Alexa.com rankings (Top Sites in Azerbaijan 2017) (SimilarWeb 2017). Although Metbuat.az is ranked as the most popular outlet, we could not analyze it as its archive is not accessible. Also, Big.az was not analyzed despite its popular ranking as it mostly produces coverage on entertainment.

Operating since 2013, Oxu.az has national and international coverage, and it is considered the second most-read online outlet after Metbuat.az. It currently belongs to the Garant Media Holding Company.

Milli.az was launched in 2010, as the Azerbaijani-language version of the Day.az news portal, belonging to the Day.Az Media Company.

Haqqin.az was founded by Eynulla Fatullayev, a dissident journalist, imprisoned during 2007-2011 allegedly for his criticism of government policies. Soon after his release, Fatullayev admitted changing his attitudes, and started targeting the alleged “enemies” of the government through Haqqin.az (Kucera 2017). This media outlet provides latest news and analysis only in Russian and English.

Yenicag.az, founded in 2006, provides coverage of events in the social, political, and cultural spheres of life in Azerbaijan and around the world. It was added to the analysis to obtain more data about Lezgis as the data from the other sources was insufficient.

### *Analyzed Groups*

Among the minorities in Azerbaijan, we selected Lezgis for the analysis of representation in the media. Lezgis are the largest minority group in Azerbaijan (Matveeva, *The South Caucasus: Nationalism, Conflict and Minorities* 2002) (Azerbaijan - Lezgins n.d.). According to the 2009 census, there are 180,000 Lezgis in Azerbaijan, making up 2 percent of the population (State Statistical

Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2009). Lezgis are a Caucasian people related to smaller groups including Aguls, Rutuls, and Tabasarans. Their language belongs to the northeast Caucasian language group.

In addition to Lezgis, we decided to analyze the displaced persons, forcibly relocated as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijanis forcibly displaced during the Nagorno-Karabakh war are not considered minorities; nevertheless, they constitute a large section of the population, experience various problems in the society including exclusion and discrimination, and necessitate specific policies for protection (Iskandarli 2012). According to the data provided by the State Committee for the Affairs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, there are around 1,200,000 refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and persons looking for asylum in Azerbaijan (State Committee for Affairs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2017)<sup>59</sup>.

### *Main Findings*

We monitored the media outlets for the period of June-December 2016. We screened the media outlets on all days within the chosen period. As this period revealed insufficient data for the representation of Lezgis in the media, the monitoring was extended till March 2006, again screening all days within this period. Table 6 illustrates the number of media items analyzed.

*Table 6 Number of the Analyzed Media Items*

	Milli.az		Oxu.az		Haqqin.az		Yenicag.az		Total
	News article	Opinion column/other	News article	Opinion column/other	News article	Opinion column/other	News article	Opinion column/other	

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<sup>59</sup> The number of refugees, IDPs, and asylums-seekers varies depending on the sources. The International Crisis Group estimates the figure at 600,000 (International Crisis Group 2012); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan claims over 1 million (Mfa.gov.az 2013); researchers Yulia Gurayeva-Aliyeva and Tabib Huseynov argue it is 700,000 (Gureyeva-Aliyeva and Huseynov 2011).

Displaced persons	9	3	7	1	7	1	N/A <sup>60</sup>	N/A	28
Lezgis and other minorities	3	1	4	0	0	3	4	0	15
Total	16		12		11		4		43

Overall, 43 news articles and opinion columns were analyzed. Opinion columns appear less frequent than news articles. Furthermore, some of the analyzed media items placed in the opinion columns of the media outlets do not strictly fall into the category “opinion”, as in several cases, they represent a reportage or simple coverage rather than analysis. Tackling the issue of these groups analytically or through individual opinion columns is uncommon. The media coverage is generally very low for both groups. Yet, the coverage of the displaced persons is twice more than that of Lezgis.

The analyzed media items frequently referred to Lezgis within the ideology of multiculturalism, an approach that Azerbaijan formulated during the consolidation of the newly independent state, affected by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Along with multiculturalism, it is argued that the concept of a civic nation and a civic understanding of “Azerbaijanism” is also promoted pragmatically to maintain social cohesion and peace and prevent foreign powers from instrumentalizing ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences (Cornell, Karaveli and Ajeganov, *Azerbaijan’s Formula: Secular Governance and Civic Nationhood* 2016)<sup>61</sup>. The attempt to combine multiculturalism with civic nationalism in practice translates into a contradictory blend of ethno-nationalistic ideas and discourses of tolerance and ethnolinguistic pluralism, with the concept of the civic nation remaining rather declarative.

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<sup>60</sup> Since Yenicag.az was added to the analysis to obtain more data about Lezgis as the data from the other sources was insufficient, it was not screened for the representation of displaced persons.

<sup>61</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the concept of Azerbaijanism and the discourse of tolerance, see (Abbasov, et al. 2016, 181-228).

Other common topics were related to the past and potential conflicts. The 1918 massacre in Guba, the attacks perpetrated by the Sadval movement in 1994<sup>62</sup>, the looming Islamist threats and increasing recruitment to ISIS in the neighboring Dagestan were mentioned often in relation with Lezgis.

*Table 7 Topics about Lezgis*

Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan	5
Terrorist acts/threats, including the Baku metro bombings in 1994	3
Common historic tragedies, including massacres in Guba and Qusar during World War One	2
Other	5

The media items quoted the President and Azerbaijani officials more often than Lezgis in the articles related to them.

*Table 8 Quoted Actors about Lezgis*

Lezgis and representatives of their community	4
Azerbaijani officials, the President	6
International officials	0
No quoted persons	6

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<sup>62</sup> For more information on the Sadval movement, see (Matveeva and McCartney, Policy Responses to an Ethnic Community Division: Lezgins in Azerbaijan 1997, 233). In brief, the Sadval movement formed in Dagestan, Russia, and campaigned for the redrawing of the Russian-Azerbaijani border to create a single Lezgin state – Lezgistan – in the areas of the compact residence of Lezgis in Dagestan and Azerbaijan, although the claim for statehood was rejected in 1996 as unrealistic and “producing a negative effect on the relations between Azerbaijanis and Lezgis” (Matveeva and McCartney, Policy Responses to an Ethnic Community Division: Lezgins in Azerbaijan 1997, 233). Meanwhile, researchers point out that the Sadval movement does not receive large support among the Lezgi people, and assume that the movement receives foreign backing serving the purposes of the destabilization of the country (Matveeva and McCartney, Policy Responses to an Ethnic Community Division: Lezgins in Azerbaijan 1997) (Cornell, Azerbaijan Since Independence 2011). It could be argued that currently the movement lost popularity on both sides of the Russian-Azerbaijani border (Azerbaijan - Lezgins n.d.).

Generally, the media represents Lezgis and other minority groups positively as people loving their traditions and living in peace and harmony with the majority. In some instances, one could critically view the denotations of minorities as “numerically small people”, “national minorities living in our country”, or the interchangeable use of “ethnic group” and “nationality” to imply ethnicity, more characteristic of the Soviet “nationalities policy”<sup>63</sup> (The 5th Republic Festival of National Minorities Has Been Held 2016) (The Results of the Project 'Youth and Multiculturalism' Have Been Summarized 2016).

In several cases, the media items attempted to transmit the image of a “good minority”, portraying behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that deserve to be approved. In this line, inherent devotion and patriotism are seen as desired among minorities (Azerbaijani Military March Has Been Held in the Lezgin Language 2016) (A Contestant to the 'Grandmothers' of Lenkeran is Coming Out -'Didiar' 2016).

The analyzed media items did not explicitly indicate the ethnicity of perpetrators when referring to terrorist attacks, crimes, or recruitment to ISIS. Rather, media items made implicit references to ethnicity. For instance, one media item pointed out that the ISIS commandant spoke Lezgi as his mother tongue (The ISIS Commandant from Qusar Threatening Azerbaijan 2016). In a similar implicit manner, a media item remarked that the perpetrator of the Baku metro bombings was “a member of the Sadval Lezgi National Movement” (It Has Been 22 Years Since the Baku Metro Bombings 2016). Furthermore, media items claimed that “ethnic separatists” are susceptible to the influence of outside forces who turn them into a tool in their hands (Adamova 2016), (It Has Been 22 Years Since the Baku Metro Bombings 2016).

*Table 9 Topics about Displaced Persons*

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<sup>63</sup> Rogers Brubaker elaborates on the nation-making policy of the Soviet Union in his publication. Brubaker asserts that the Soviet Union was “sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing, even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level” (Brubaker 1996, 29). According to Brubaker, “tension between territorial and ethnocultural nationhood, and between territorial and extra-territorial national autonomy, was endemic to the Soviet nationality regime (Brubaker 1996, 40). And ethnicity was clearly the more fundamental concept in the Soviet scheme (Brubaker 1996, 46).



The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the peace process, and the need of the displaced persons to return to their homes (including the escalation in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in April 2016, return to Jojug Marjanli)	9(2)
Desperate living conditions of displaced families	4
Government policies and measures towards displaced persons	9
Discussing the possibility of cutting allowances and benefits for displaced persons	5
Other	1

Regarding displaced persons, the main topics were related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Another popular topic was the government policies and measures taken to improve the living conditions of displaced persons. A media item discussed the possibility of curtailing allowances and benefits for displaced persons (The Status of Refugees and IDPs May be Reconsidered 2016). In rare cases, the media depicted the daily hardships of displaced persons and their desperate living conditions, voicing mild criticism on the inaction and lack of interest of the officials in charge.

*Table 10 Quoted Actors about Displaced Persons*

Azerbaijani officials, the President	19
International officials	8
Representatives of displaced persons, displaced persons themselves	5
No quoted person	3

Few media items reflected the opinions and attitudes expressed by the displaced persons and their representatives. The media items analyzed preferred to showcase opinions and views expressed by Azerbaijani officials and the President. Most articles quoting displaced persons were directly related to a more “critical” topic discussing their poor housing conditions and daily hardships.

The analyzed media items often portrayed the displaced persons as “our compatriots” or “Azerbaijani people” (Ilham Aliyev: 'One of the Main Natural Resources - Oil Serves the Interests of Our People' 2016). However, this discourse of the media does not necessarily reflect social attitudes towards

displaced persons, often marked by marginalization and exclusion. Some media items used neutralizing and de-personalizing expressions such as “this category of people” or “persons related to this category” in the discussions on the reduction of the social benefits to displaced persons (The Status of Refugees and IDPs May be Reconsidered 2016).

We did not identify hate speech in relation to Lezgis or displaced persons in the scope of this analysis; however, hate speech and negative portrayal of Armenians was observed when the media items referred to the issues of displaced persons or Lezgis ('The Turk and Muslim World Should Fight Together Against Armenian Aggression' 2016) (Mammadyarov on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict at the UN 2016) (The Armenians Wiped Out Thousands of Lezgins in Guba and Qusar. Common Tragedy 2016).

## Georgia

### *The Media Environment in Georgia*

Like the other South Caucasus countries, Georgia also experiences issues with media freedom, albeit to a different degree. The Freedom Houses' 2016 report notes the political polarization of the media environment and the indirect but strong links between media outlets and different political parties (Georgia. Freedom of the Press 2016). The TV channels of the Georgian Public Broadcaster are the primary subject and source of the power struggle among the political parties. However, as noted by the Transparency International Georgia report: “The ownership of Georgian media outlets is transparent. [...] None of the major media outlets are *directly* [emphasis added] owned by a political group” (Transparency International Georgia 2015). In the 2017 Reporters Without Borders index, Georgia ranked the 64th becoming a leader in the Eastern Partnership and Caucasus Region (Reporters Without Borders 2017).

On the other hand, online media in Georgia seems less studied, and information regarding the ownership or political affiliation of online media is hard to come by. In 2015, Transparency International Georgia noted that despite the diversity of online media, in recent years, several groups of media outlets have formed, united around common political preferences (Transparency International Georgia 2015).

## *Analyzed Media Outlets*

We selected the online media outlets Ambebi.ge, Newport.ge, and On.ge for analysis based on Alexa.com rankings (Top Sites in Georgia 2017). The rankings were also cross-checked through the Georgian system of Top.ge that also provides the daily average visitor numbers (Rating of Popular Georgian Sites 2017). Since Ambebi.ge belongs to the media agency Palitra, we omitted the other media outlets owned by the same agency, also given that Ambebi.ge feeds off these media outlets, republishing materials.

Ambebi.ge with the number of daily average visitors at 130,500 is the most popular and one of the oldest online news outlets that collects and republishes content from other sister websites from the media holding it belongs to. It reports on politics, society, economics, international affairs as well as “yellow press” and celebrity stories.

Newsport.ge with the number of daily average visitors at 80,186 has one of the largest numbers of Facebook subscribers in Georgia at 661,400, and it reports on politics, society, law, economics, crime, religion, and culture.

On.ge with the number of daily average visitors at 23,248 is a relatively new website, with advanced IT support and cutting-edge visual design. The related agency, On.ge, in parallel, runs more websites, such as Goodnews.on.ge and Teoria.on.ge. The main message it aims to convey is “quality reporting” and “trust”, and this might be the reason why it has gained popularity in a short period of time<sup>64</sup>.

## *Analyzed Groups*

Although there is no official legal definition of ethnic or national minorities in Georgia, with the ratification of the CoE “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” in 2005, Georgia effectively recognized the

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<sup>64</sup> This outlet has its own “Editorial Code” that contains a section on discriminatory language and stereotypes, maintaining that ethnicity should not be mentioned in any material (especially in the criminal section) unless there is a confirmed correlation to the story or in case of a search for a wanted suspect or coverage of a hate crime motivated by ethnicity (Editorial Code n.d.). This outlet can serve as an example of how reporting on minorities can be done ethically. The results of the monitoring of the outlet for the given period revealed only one material that contained a somewhat controversial text about ethnic Armenians living in Georgia.

definition suggested by the document and ever since uses these terms interchangeably in its strategic or policy documents (National Concept for Tolerance and Civil Integration 2009) (State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020 2015). According to different sources, there are more than 50 different ethnic groups living on the territory of Georgia. The latest census from 2014 shows that 13.2 percent of the total population of the country identify themselves as not ethnically Georgian with the most numerous groups from the ethnic Azerbaijani (6.3 percent) and Armenian (4.5 percent) communities (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016). We analyzed the representation of Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Ossetians, Abkhazians, Kists/Chechens, the Roma, Assyrians, Udis, and Avars in the identified media outlets. We also screened media items that referred to Molokans and Dukhobors, religious groups of Russian origin. Additionally, we included in the search variations of the names popularly and sometimes mistakenly used for the Avar identity – “Daghestanian” or “Lak”.

### *Main Findings*<sup>65</sup>

The research period targeted the entire calendar year of 2016. We screened the media outlets on all days within the chosen period. However, in cases where sufficient data could not be obtained, the second half of 2015 (July-December) was also entirely included into the analysis. This was mostly the case for numerically small groups, such as Russians, Ossetians, Abkhazians, Kists/Chechens, Assyrians, the Roma, Udis, and Avars.

*Table 11 Number of the Analyzed Media Items*

Ethnic Group	Number of Media Items
Armenians	19
Azerbaijanis	11
Russians	5

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<sup>65</sup> There is a lack of literature dealing with the representation of minorities in the Georgian media. Although the media monitoring research by the Media Development Foundation focuses on hate speech and gender representation before the elections for the period of April-October 2016, no significant indication can be found on hate speech based on ethnicity in that particular report (Media Development Foundation 2016).

Ossetians	3
Abkhazians	7
Kists/Chechens	8
Roma	6
Assyrians	2
Udis	2
Avars	3
Different minorities mentioned in one media item	10
Total	76

We screened out 76 media items with at least one of the keywords. These included news pieces, articles, and interviews. However, only 40 of these media items were relevant for this research as the remaining media items were related to a foreign country (for example, Armenians of Armenia)<sup>66</sup> or could not be related to the understanding of the representation of the group in the media.

The most important pattern was that ethnicity within the articles was mentioned without proper justification or need to do so. According to Paragraph 4 of Article 33 of the “Code of Conduct of Broadcasters” developed by the Georgian National Commission of Communications, when unjustified referral to ethnicity derives from a respondent, this should not go unchallenged, even in live broadcast, and presenters should ask the authors of offensive statements to substantiate their views (Georgian National Commission of Communications 2009). This standard is not observed in many cases.

For example, there was a report on Satanist groups in Georgia, and reference to the Armenian ethnicity popped out through the narrative of one of the interviewers claiming that “Satanist groups always gather in a house previously owned by ethnic Armenians” (‘I Am Ashamed That I Wanted to be a Satanist’ - Dangerous ‘Game’ of Georgian Youth 2016). Similarly, the analysis revealed that ethnicity was mentioned primarily when a criminal or otherwise negative story was reported. For example, the only time a media item featured

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<sup>66</sup> Media items that referred to both foreign countries and ethnic groups living in Georgia were included.

Avars, a small ethnic group living in the Kakheti region, was in a story about possible cases of genital mutilation of young females in the community (International Organization IWPR: 'Young Girls are Forced to Circumcize in Kvareli Region' 2016). Another context where ethnicity was mentioned unnecessarily was the coverage of history. Pieces with a historical perspective, where reference to Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Avars, as well as Turks and others appear most frequently with negative connotations, for example, in connection with wars, impede the promotion of tolerance and the integration of diverse communities as well as reinforce certain stereotypes.

In the analyzed media items, the largest number of instances of hate speech and deviation from the standards were observed regarding ethnic Armenians living in Georgia. Although there were a couple of positive articles (Two Oldest Hotels in Tbilisi Whose Reconstruction Cost Millions of Dollars 2016) (Tragic History of Everyone's Beloved Actor - Frunzik Mkrtchyan Beyond Camera 2016), stories where ethnic Armenians are mentioned often include the following negative patterns:

- Frequent revitalization of alleged historical enmity between Georgians and Armenians: For example, there was an interview with a historian with the following title: "Armenians Deceived Naive Georgians and Won the War". The interview described the events of 1917 and alleged an invasion of Armenians in Georgia through the betrayal of Armenians then living in Georgia (Armenians Deceived Naive Georgians and Won the War 2016).
- Reports that ethnic Armenians act against ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia: Every now and then there were articles or interviews describing the situation in Abkhazia with references to the negative role that the Armenian community plays aiding Russians in the conflict.
- Narratives that Armenians (including those from Armenia) steal the historical and cultural heritage of Georgia: There was yet another huge scandal at the beginning of 2016 when the media reported in headlines that "Armenia can be represented in the Eurovision song contest with a Georgian song" (Armenia Can be Represented in the 'Eurovision' Song Contest by 'Country of Flowers'? 2016).

Another pattern was the reference to ethnicity in connection with conflicts. For example, Abkhazians were framed mostly in the context of the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict. There were a number of articles with interviewers recalling

the “barbarous and torturous” acts of ethnic Abkhazians against Georgians during the conflict ('And This is the 17th Georgian Killed in My Name" - Words of the Occupant While Killing Giga Otkhozoria 2016) ('I Was Electrified in Abkhazia' - Interview with Former Prisoner in Abkhazia 2016). Different respondents (mostly displaced persons from Abkhazia) narrated one-sided dramatic stories that invigorate hatred against this particular ethnic group. This can be easily observed in the comments section following these media items. The other group that was associated with conflict is the Kists/Chechens. Nearly all media items containing reference to ethnic Kists/Chechens were about religious radicalization, terrorism, or the war in Syria. This, on the one hand, reinforces stereotypes about this ethnic group and, on the other hand, creates a somewhat negative image among the public. In these cases, the constant reiteration of ethnicity, religion, or the geographical location (the Pankisi gorge, where more than 90 percent of the population are ethnic Kists/Chechens) leads to the demonization of this group.

Despite many recommendations<sup>67</sup> to the media outlets, only a few media items analyzed aimed to promote ethnic diversity and tolerance, such as an article reporting on a village in Samtskhe-Javakheti with a Dukhobor population (A Village Inhabited by Dukhobors in Javakheti 2016), an article covering the history of ethnic Abkhazians in Adjara (On.ge 2016), or the one reporting about the Molokan settlements in the Kakheti region (Holy Villages in Georgia 2016). While two of these media items feature the numerically small groups, the general observation is that these groups are not represented properly. Some numerically small groups, such as Assyrians, Udis, Ossetians, or Avars (the last group with the exception of the above-mentioned negative context) were not featured in any of the analyzed media items.

The use of discriminatory terms or tags for ethnic groups – instead of the proper names – has always been an issue in the media in Georgia. For example, in the public domain, the word “Tatar”, loaded with a negative connotation, is frequently used for ethnic groups predominantly adhering to Islam

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<sup>67</sup> These include the Second Opinion on Georgia of the Advisory Committee on the CoE “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” and the “Code of Conduct of Broadcasters” of the Georgian National Commission of Communications (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 2016) (Georgian National Commission of Communications 2009).

(Azerbaijanis, Turks, Kurds, and sometimes Georgians living in Adjara). Within this study, we did not find this particular term. Yet, we found a couple of instances of discriminatory terms regarding the Roma. One media item was about a Facebook post of a famous Georgian singer, complaining about the Roma people in the streets, using the word “Tsigan” (Newposts.ge 2015). The media outlet reporting on this post failed to inform the readers that using such terminology is discriminatory against this group as provided by a number of regulatory mechanisms. Another case was the reference to a location in Tbilisi called the “Bazar of Tsigans” that the media outlet made in reporting of a demonstration (Four Persons Have Been Detained During the Protest Close to Shopping Mall 2016).

## Turkey

### *The Media Environment in Turkey*

Turkey is currently going through a period in which racism and polarization are on the rise. According to the final report of the Hrant Dink Foundation’s Media Watch on Hate Speech Project (Engindeniz Şahan 2016), hate speech against ethnic, national, and religious identities as well as discriminatory discourses against women and LGBTI individuals increased in 2016 because of several factors such as political agenda, economic instability, and immigration, especially from Syria. Moreover, media monitoring reports of the Independent Communication Network (BIA) demonstrate that the number of journalists behind bars rose from 31 to 131 in 2016. In addition, again in 2016, 2,708 journalists and media workers were fired or forced to resign (Onderoglu 2017).

The state policy on media in Turkey has been shaping the media-state relationship since the establishment of the first newspaper in the late Ottoman period. Besides, almost all big media groups have investments in the energy, telecommunications, financial, or construction sectors of the economy. There are no barriers for preventing these groups from participating in public tenders. Consequently, while public interest is sacrificed for business interests, the media competes with the government for political power and profit rather than performing its watchdog function (Kurban and Sözeri 2012). A network map published in 2013 shows media patrons and their other investments in the construction and energy sector and demonstrates how and to what extent the ownership of media damages its independence (Networks of Dispossession 2013). Thus, the political economy of the media as well as the general political



context have had severe consequences for the media including the coverage of minorities and vulnerable groups.

### *Analyzed Media Outlets*

According to Alexa.com for the analyzed period, the most popular online news outlets in Turkey were Sabah.com.tr (with monthly total visitors at about 83,200,000), Haber7.com (with monthly total visitors at about 48,500,000), and Ensonhaber.com (with monthly total visitors at about 28,200,000) (Top Sites in Turkey 2017) (SimilarWeb 2017). However, as the archives of Haber7.com and Ensonhaber.com were not accessible, the fourth and the fifth most popular online news outlets, Hurriyet.com.tr (with monthly total visitors at about 161,000,000) and Milliyet.com.tr (with monthly total visitors at about 134,500,000) were analyzed (SimilarWeb 2017).

The Sabah newspaper was founded in 1985 and started to be published online in 1997. Since 2008, the Turkuvaz Media Group owns the newspaper. The Group itself belongs to the Çalık Holding whose former chief executive officer, Berat Albayrak, is the son-in-law of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the current Minister of Energy (Economist.com 2008). It is a pro-government news outlet reporting heavily on the position of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and President Erdoğan.

Hurriyet.com.tr is the fourth most popular online news outlet, while its printed version, founded in 1948, is the most popular daily of Turkey since November 2016 (Medyatava.com 2016). It currently belongs to the Dogan Media Group owned by the Dogan Holding. It has been known as the flagship media outlet of the secular position in Turkey. However, for the last few years, it has been criticized for self-censorship and producing pro-government publications.

Milliyet.com.tr is the fifth most popular online news outlet. As a printed newspaper, it was founded in 1950. In 2011, it was purchased by a joint venture of the Demirören Group and the Karacan Group. Milliyet was known as a social democrat outlet, but since the ownership of Demirören, in parallel with the escalation of pressures on the media and journalism in Turkey, the newspaper fired several reporters and columnists and became more pro-government.

### *Analyzed Groups*

For Turkey, we selected Kurds and the Syrian refugees as the groups for analysis. Although Kurds are not recognized as a minority officially, they fit the

definition of national minorities<sup>68</sup>. The Syrian refugees, on the other hand, are not defined as a minority; however, they face similar problems in the society, and their number continues to grow along with a conflict potential in the society.

Kurds are one of the indigenous communities of geographic areas now under the administration of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia. Kurds are not only one of the oldest indigenous communities of Turkey but also the one with a history of struggle for rights through both political and armed means. Mesut Yeğen places the Turkish state's engagement with the Kurdish question from 1923 until the 1990s on three pillars – assimilation, repression, and containment (Yeğen 2015). However, since the 1990s, Turkey has faced the Kurds' very strong resistance to the politics of assimilation and repression both in military and political domains. Besides, the candidacy for full membership to the EU also led Turkey to the peace process, which was initiated by the AKP government in 2007. However, following a series of elections, the polarization accelerated. Since the bomb attack of June 5 in 2015 during an election rally of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) in Diyarbakır, several attacks took place in Turkey in different cities, including Ankara and Istanbul. As a result, the peace process came to an end. Currently, the "fight against terrorism" is again back on the agenda of Turkey, the military operation in Southeast Anatolia has resumed, and the co-presidents and several members of the HDP have been arrested.

Syrian refugees have been arriving *en mass* to Turkey since 2011 as a result of the civil war. As of April 2017, the UNHCR declared that 2.97 million Syrians were registered in Turkey by the government. The arrival of Syrians has fueled already existing problems, such as unemployment, shortcomings in education in the mother tongue and the social security system, exclusion, and discrimination. Even though five years have passed since the first Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey in large numbers, there are still unmet urgent humanitarian needs that cannot be ignored, alongside welfare concerns related to labor, education, and language (Mackreath and Sağrıç 2017).

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<sup>68</sup> Minorities in Turkey were officially determined by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923.

## Main Findings

We analyzed all news articles and opinion columns containing the keywords “Kurd” and “Syrian” in three online media outlets on the first Tuesday of each month between July and December 2016. The number of analyzed media items can be seen in Table 12 below.

Table 12 Number of Analyzed Media Items

	Sabah.com.tr		Hurriyet.com.tr		Milliyet.com.tr		Total
	News article	Opinion column	News article	Opinion column	News article	Opinion column	
Syrian	13	2	54	4	17	1	91
Kurd	4	2	12	1	10	0	29
Total	21		71		28		120

The first significant finding was the small number of opinion columns compared to news articles during the period we analyzed. However, the power of columnists as opinion leaders to set the social and political agenda is non-negligible. Also, there was more coverage on Syrian refugees than Kurds. Although the problems and discussions about both are quite crucial and urgent, the refugees occupy more space in the media probably because it is a new topic for Turkey.

As the peace process ended by June 2015, the monitored period is a time when the armed conflict between the state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK)<sup>69</sup> restarted. With this new dynamic, the main topic of almost half of the articles (12 out of 29) including the word “Kurd” was terrorism or fight against terror. The Kurdish population, therefore, was often represented in the media in association with terrorism.

Table 13 Topics about Kurds

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<sup>69</sup> The Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* in Kurdish) is a left-wing organization based in Turkey. Since 1984, the PKK has been involved in an armed conflict with the Turkish state. The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state as well as many other states and organizations.

Terrorism, fight against terrorism	12
Violation of rights	3
Call for peace	2

There were only two media items that gave space to calls for peace. Additionally, three media items talked about the violation of rights of the Kurdish people. These media items quoted the words of an HDP deputy, a member of the Democratic Regions Party (*Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi*, DBP), and a Turkish teacher who prepared a video about coexistence with his students.

Apart from the main topics of the media items, the theme of “brotherhood” with Kurds also emerged in the media items. The expression “our Kurdish brothers” was mostly mentioned by government members or the President. This approach of seeing Kurds as brothers of Turks creates a hierarchic perception between identities putting Turks in a superior position. It also provides a basis for the distinction between “good Kurds” and “bad Kurds”. Defining the large part of the Kurdish population as the Muslim and faithful brothers of Turks and Turkey, “other Kurds” who demand their rights or vote for the HDP or support the PKK are framed as all the same and are marginalized. This distinction also appears when we look at the quoted persons. Although Kurdish citizens of Turkey were one of the most quoted ones, all of them were the relatives of a “martyr”, expressing their faith for Turkey.

As for the Syrian refugees, it is already known that Syrians are one of the most excluded and discriminated groups in Turkey both in the media and in daily life. The Hrant Dink Foundation’s hate speech report shows that the Syrian refugees are the third group most subjected to hate speech in the printed media by the third quarter of 2015 (Engindeniz Şahan 2016). In 2014, the Foundation also published a separate report focusing on discriminatory discourses against Syrian refugees, underlining three main tendencies – lack of a rights-based point of view, security-oriented approach, and reproduction of discrimination and otherization (Ataman 2015). Although our research was more limited in scope, it also showed similar results.

The first significant finding was that there is a confusion on how to name Syrians. As they do not have an official status of refugees<sup>70</sup> and are protected under a temporary protection law, some media outlets call them “asylum seekers” or “immigrants”. In the analyzed media items, they were often referred to as simply “Syrians” (Syrian children, a Syrian family, a Syrian boy, etc.). Seven articles (five in *Hurriyet.com.tr* and two in *Milliyet.com.tr*) underlined that these people had to leave their country because of the ongoing internal war in Syria. Even though the term “refugee” is not officially applicable, it would be important for the media outlets to explain that they escaped from war to show the humanitarian dimension of the crisis.

*Table 14 How Syrian Refugees are Named*

Syrian	56
Syrian asylum seekers	6
Syrian refugees	6
Syrian citizens	4
Syrian immigrants	3

Only eight articles gave statistics about the Syrian refugee population. Since most of them were through quotes rather than official numbers, we can assume there has been a lack of statistical information about the refugees.

*Table 15 Quoted Actors about Syrian Refugees*

Government, the President	29
NGO representative	12
Local government	9
Syrian person	7

Media items quoted mostly government members, the President, and NGO representatives that work on the refugee problem. Most of these NGOs have a close relationship with the government or the President. For example, an article

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<sup>70</sup> Turkey has geographical reservations on the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; therefore, it does not officially recognize Syrians as “refugees” (Asylum Information Database 2017).

on Sabah.com.tr quoted the vice-president of KADEM (Women and Democracy Association) who is President Erdoğan's daughter (Altindis 2016). Only seven times in a total of 91 media items, a Syrian person's opinion was quoted while writing about Syrians.

The most popular topic was the issue of citizenship with 22 media items. Developments in the period under research have contributed to the popularity of this theme. Prior to the failed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15 of 2016, the government had signaled mixed messages over its intentions to grant Syrians Turkish citizenship. This has prompted some controversy from the opponents of the ruling AKP, who are concerned that President Erdoğan is seeking to turn the Syrian community into a loyal constituency for the future – another politically charged move in the context of increasingly curtailed citizenship rights for Turkish citizens during the state of emergency (Mackreath and Sağrıç 2017). The popularity of this theme for the public and media agenda is also demonstrated by the fact that six opinion columns over seven talked about citizenship issues. While the media items on Sabah.com.tr supported citizenship for Syrians, the other media outlets gave voice to opposing arguments on this idea. However, these counter-arguments failed to stay focused on the politically charged nature of granting citizenship or other critical approaches and mostly reproduced discrimination.

Compared to five media items about humanitarian aid projects, only one piece was detected about a rights-based project. This approach strengthens the perception of Syrians as “aidless” instead of individuals with ownership and claim to their rights.

Finally, in two news articles, covering a singular criminal incident, the identity of the victims as Syrian was highlighted though we find it was not relevant to the incident. Independently from this example and more generally, the national or ethnic identities are very commonly mentioned without any reason when the suspects are from a minority group, labeling minorities as possible threats.

## **Comparative Overview of Findings**

This paper has aimed to discuss the representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in four countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey – also with a comparative lens. In each country, we monitored the selected media outlets during a limited period to expose the patterns in the media discourses about minorities and vulnerable groups. In addition to analyzing the media

discourses, we took into consideration the political independence of the media outlets, the economic affiliations of the media owners, the protection of the freedom of expression, and the respect for media ethics codes for each country as the media discourses are largely shaped by these factors.

Varying degrees of state pressure over media outlets are present in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. The persecution and arrests of individual journalists or institutional fines on media outlets affect the content of the publications, also causing self-censorship by media actors. Moreover, the monopolization of media outlets by a few companies and the business interests of these companies jeopardize and limit the plurality of opinion and the freedom of the media in these countries. While outright persecution of media actors is not widespread in Georgia, its media environment has its own challenges in the form of tacit affiliations of media outlets with political forces or politically motivated decisions concerning the media as illustrated by the court case of TV channel Rustavi 2.

Against this general background, the voices of minorities and vulnerable groups are largely excluded by the media outlets. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the analyzed groups are almost “invisible”, and their voices are rarely included in the media coverage. In Turkey, although there is a considerable number of media items published about the analyzed groups, the pro-governmental approach is dominant in the media coverage. In addition to the above-cited general challenges in the media environment, the lack of journalists specializing in minority issues and human rights can be another reason of this “invisibility” or the negative representation of minorities and vulnerable groups. It should also be noted that, in the cases when media representation of displaced persons or refugees was analyzed, the media coverage on these groups was far more extensive than the minorities.

Even if the minorities and vulnerable groups are covered, media outlets of all four countries tend to refer to identity unnecessarily or when a criminal or other negative story is being reported. However, according to various media ethics codes discussed for all countries, the media should refrain from reference to the individual’s race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, any physical or mental disorders and other characteristics of vulnerability unless there is necessity.

The media items that can be perceived as covering minorities in a positive key, do so predominantly building a positive image of “Us” or “Self” within the frames of multiculturalism, tolerance, and “brotherhood” in the country. In this respect, these discourses perpetuate subordination and serve the opposite aim of polarization. For example, in Turkey “good Kurds” and “bad Kurds” came into prominence due to the discourses about “brotherhood”. Similarly, in Azerbaijan and Armenia, “good” minorities are identified as patriots or brothers of the titular group, but not necessarily as equal citizens. Besides, in the Azerbaijani media, it is also seen that some minorities are identified as “separatists” that are susceptible to the influence of outside forces and that can become a tool in their hands. This framing, even though it was not directly observed in the monitored period, is also very common in the political and media discourses about “foreign forces” in Turkey.

Related to the above and yet another similar pattern is that the minorities and vulnerable groups become a subject matter in the media in relation to conflicts. For example, in Turkey, Kurds are referred to most of the time in association with terrorism; in Azerbaijan, displaced persons are always mentioned in relation with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; in Georgia, Abkhazians regularly become a subject matter in the context of the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict; in Armenia, Yezidis are recalled in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

On the other hand, there is little or no media coverage of the rights or problems of the minorities and vulnerable groups and close to none on the cultural or routine life of these groups. Also, their voices are rarely heard directly.

Our monitoring of the selected media outlets for the defined period did not detect any major instances of hate speech except for the case against Armenians in Georgia discussed above. There were also some examples of hate speech produced by political actors and quoted by media outlets. Nevertheless, this situation does not mean that the media in these countries are totally free from hate speech. First, we should emphasize that a very limited period was evaluated in this research. Besides, all the media outlets that were selected for monitoring, are mainstream portals and generally are careful not to (re)produce hate speech in general. However, hate speech is still on the rise in the overall media sphere as demonstrated by research that specifically targets its manifestations. Moreover, if instances of outright hate speech are easily spotted, called out against, and therefore kept in check, discriminatory discourses are produced much more commonly. By definition, discriminatory



discourses are less explicit than hate speech and are harder to detect. The findings of this research prove that the media in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey is not free from discriminatory discourses.

The comparison of the discursive representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the media outlets in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey reveals recurring patterns and brings out shared problems. To address these problems, to contribute to a healthy media coverage of minorities and vulnerable groups, and to build an environment of interculturalism, we have developed joint recommendations for various actors.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the identified challenges in this paper and taking into consideration the standards and principles of reporting on minority issues as well as the importance of proper representation of minorities and similar groups for building inclusive, peaceful, and integrated societies on the principles of interculturalism, the following recommendations have been drawn:

For media organizations and outlets, editors and journalists:

- Those media organizations and outlets that do not have their own ethics codes should elaborate such codes or editorial principles with specific clauses on standards of reporting on minorities and vulnerable groups that reflect national or international standards.
- Media organizations and outlets should join self-regulatory mechanisms and fully and actively participate in their effective enforcement.
- Editors and journalists should participate in capacity-building programs on rights-based journalism, including modules on the significance of the proper representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the media as one of the means of building peaceful societies. If such programs are not offered, the establishment of in-house training mechanisms within media organizations and outlets can build and support the capacity of editors and journalists.
- Editors and journalists should work hard not to allow the stigmatization of minorities and vulnerable groups for the sake of curtailing demonization, polarization, and radicalization in the society.
- Editors and journalists should work hard towards covering contentious and critical themes related to minorities and vulnerable groups,

bringing to light their grievances, giving them voice in expressing their problems and difficulties themselves.

- The editorial policy of media outlets should include the constant coverage of minorities and vulnerable groups, including their culture, daily life, problems and achievements, so that there is a greater societal awareness on diversity and difference. These policies should ensure that the quality of such coverage is high and that the audience will be willing to read, listen, watch, and engage with the topic.
- The editorial policy of media outlets should ensure the coverage of cultural, ethnic, and religious communities and vulnerable groups in a manner that reflects these communities' own perspectives and outlook.

The collision of the principle of the freedom of speech and the role the media can sometimes play in the (re)production of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization, puts the state institutions at a very delicate position. Therefore, for relevant state institutions, we recommend:

- On the one hand, state institution should refrain from any kind of limitation of the freedom of speech, as much as this principle is the cornerstone of a democratic society.
- On the other, due to the potential of the media to invoke violence and mobilize public opinion against different parts of the society, the state institutions should deploy comprehensive and clear mechanisms (legislation or administrative acts) and bodies to work against discrimination and hate speech.
- While mechanisms and bodies against discrimination and hate speech are necessary, governments should create conditions for media pluralism and refrain from all government control over the media. State institutions should support the establishment of fully neutral and independent self-regulating bodies and mechanisms.
- State institutions should support educational and capacity-building initiatives aimed at raising the standards of covering minorities and vulnerable groups in the media, leaving these initiatives independent from government influence.
- In their own communication in the media, state institutions should always underline the importance of equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

For independent media monitoring institutions, civil society, and activists:

- Institutions such as press councils, self-regulatory mechanisms and bodies, and media ombudspersons should mainstream issues of minorities and vulnerable groups and their representation within their work.
- Independent monitoring institutions should concentrate on the identification of hate speech and discriminatory practices against minorities and vulnerable groups. They should also monitor and analyze the proper representation of these groups in the media.
- Civil society organizations and activists, alongside with the self-regulatory mechanisms and bodies, should join their forces in acting as societal observers of the conduct of media organizations and outlets.

For international organizations and donors:

- International organizations should liaison with the state institutions and media organizations to establish or improve national legislation on freedom of expression, anti-discrimination, and against hate speech; ethics codes; media standards and principles with effective enforcement mechanisms through self-regulatory bodies.
- International organizations should consistently be vocal and take action when governments pressure the media or when the media transgress international, national, or their own standards and principles.
- Donors should support monitoring and self-regulatory bodies and mechanisms in order to ensure sustainability and increase the trust of these actors within the media outlets.
- Donors should require their beneficiaries to implement editorial policies sensitive to minorities and vulnerable groups as well as to mainstream themes around these groups in their outlets.

For higher education institutions:

- Universities and colleges offering degrees for journalists and other media actors should adopt or develop curricula, syllabi, courses, or modules on diversity, peaceful coexistence, and sensitivities associated with the coverage of minorities and vulnerable groups.

Similar to education, the media is an institution that shapes every aspect of the public and private sectors. Nowadays, its function as an opinion-maker for the individual and the society booms as the simplicity of its access grows. The media can play an important role in the development of social cohesion and the

promotion of peaceful coexistence of diverse groups or the contrary – the exacerbation of division lines. We have conducted this analysis and drawn these recommendations to contribute to the a more critical outlook to the role of media in diversity management in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The recommendations we endorse should be implemented with a vision of achieving a more pronounced media presence for the minorities and vulnerable groups; they should be able to actively participate in shaping the media in their societies and by extension the societies themselves.

## Annex 1

We analyzed media items that included the following keywords:

	In the language of the media outlet	Translation into English
Armenia	սիրիսիս, եզդի	Syrian-Armenian, Yezidi
Azerbaijan <sup>71</sup>	qacqın, qacqınlar, məcburi köçkün, (daxildəki) məcburi köçkünlər, ləzgi, ləzgilər беженец, беженцы, (внутренне) перемещенное лицо/вынужденный переселенец, (внутренне) перемещённые лица/вынужденные переселенцы, лезгин, лезгины (for Haqqin.az)	refugee, refugees, (internally) displaced person, internally displaced persons, Lezgi, Lezgis
Georgia <sup>72</sup>	სომეხი, სომხები, აზერი, აზერები, აზერბაიჯანელი, აზერბაიჯანლები, რუსი, რუსები, მოლოკანი, მოლოკნები, მალაკანი,	Armenian, Armenians, Azeri, Azeris, Azerbaijani, Azerbaijanis, Russian, Russians, Molokan, Molokans, Malakan,

<sup>71</sup> The keywords (both plural and singular) have been searched in a way to include all possible grammar cases.

<sup>72</sup> The keywords (both plural and singular) in Russian have been searched in a way to include all possible grammar cases.

	მაღაკნები, დუხოზორი, დუხოზორები, დუხაზორი, დუხაზორები, ოსი, ოსები, აფხაზი, აფხაზები, ქისტები, ქისტები, ჩეჩენი, ჩეჩნები, ბოზა, ბოშები, ასურელი, ასურელები, აისორი, აისორები, ასირიელი, ასირიელები, უდი, უდეები, უდინი, უდინები, ავარი, ავარები, დაღესტნელი, დაღესტნელები, ლეკი, ლეკები	Malakans, Dukhobors, Dukhobors, Dukhabor, Dukhabors, Ossetian, Ossetians, Abkhaz, Abkhazians, Kist, Kists, Chechen, Chechens, Rom, Roma, Assyrian, Assyrians, Aisori, Aisoris <sup>73</sup> , Udi, Udis, Udin, Udins, Avar, Avars, Daghestanian, Daghestanians, Lak, Laks
Turkey	Suriyeli, Kürt	Syrian, Kurd

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<sup>73</sup> "Aisori" is a variation used for the Assyrian identity.

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# PEACE PROCESSES

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# **The Mosaic of Solutions: Alternative Peace Processes for the South Caucasus**

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The conflicts that originated with the collapse of the Soviet Union are often named “intractable” in academic and analytic literature. Indeed, the conflicts in the South Caucasus are nearing their thirty-year “anniversary” without a solution in sight. Violence in Ukraine erupted much later, but the conflicts there quickly repeated the trajectory of the conflicts in the South Caucasus “catching up” in the number of the displaced as well as the isolation and alienation of the breakaway regions that make reintegration and reconciliation incredibly difficult.

In this paper, we attempt to place the past and present peace processes in the post-Soviet space within the academic debate surrounding conflict resolution and transformation and suggest alternative approaches to peace processes that have not been considered in the contexts of the post-Soviet conflicts. Using examples from both neighboring countries and the global context, we look into the following range of interrelated methodologies that have not been applied in the South Caucasus and that could contribute to conflict transformation – transitional justice mechanisms, rehumanization practices, peace education, multilingual education, and civic nation aspirations. While these approaches are usually applied to post-violence peacebuilding processes, we are offering to consider these approaches even in the contexts of ongoing violence to open prospects and a long-term vision of transformation.

## Introduction

The conflicts in the South Caucasus and Ukraine are far from getting resolved. It is not, however, for the lack of peace initiatives led concurrently by intergovernmental bodies, such as the UN or the OSCE, international organizations, as well as international and local civil societies. The problem, therefore, is not in the absence of attention nor the quantity of peacebuilding efforts but their adequacy for the post-Soviet context.

For the past few decades, three distinct schools led the debate surrounding the approaches to conflict – Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, and Conflict Transformation. **Conflict Management**, linked closely with the realist school of international relations, assumes human nature to be inherently competitive and violent and solutions to conflicts unattainable. Instead of seeking lasting solutions, Conflict Management is focused on managing the levels of violence to minimize human suffering as conflicts remain intractable. Following Paffenholz's theoretical review, Conflict Management relies on diplomatic initiatives and peace agreements with a focus on the short-term management of violence without addressing the roots of the conflict (Paffenholz 2009). **Conflict Resolution** is conceptually closer to the liberal school of international relations that believes in the benefits of cooperation and win-win solutions. While working with state actors is central to the school of Conflict Resolution as well, this variation sees conflicts as solvable and can rely on non-official efforts and civil society to address root-causes of conflicts complementing the official efforts. Conflict Resolution is oriented at searching for long-term solutions and building or rebuilding relationships with various activities. The **Conflict Transformation** approach, closely associated with the constructivist paradigm, is best known from the works of Lederach who focuses on the transformation of conflicts through building "long-term infrastructure" for peacebuilding (Lederach 1997). Central for Lederach's version of Conflict Transformation is the concept of reconciliation and the strengthening of the society's peacebuilding potential on three levels – state mediation (Track 1), work with inter-societal relations with mid-level leaders (Track 2), and a wide range of grassroots peacebuilding approaches, such as local peace commissions, community dialogue projects, or trauma healing for the majority of the population (Track 3).

Up to date, almost all systematic peace initiatives in the context of the post-Soviet conflicts fall into the category of conflict management. State actors and

intergovernmental organizations have been managing the levels of violence keeping them relatively low, while no sustainable solutions have appeared in sight. The displaced populations and others affected by the wars have continued suffering; the ethnic and linguistic groups have increasingly grown apart. In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, proponents of the conflict resolution approach have made occasional attempts to agree on a peace plan that will involve a comprehensive peace agreement and the return of the displaced. However, such attempts have always been short-lived with no chance to succeed considering that efforts preparing the populations for peace have been absent.

A series of grassroots initiatives have also been taking place through all these years. It is hard to place them, cumulatively, into the conflict transformation paradigm as these have rarely been systematic, have been conducted often ad hoc and on a short-term basis without any particular methodology or long-term strategy in mind. In turn, the near-monopolistic control over peacebuilding resources by the international NGOs, who would come in when funding was available and leave when it was not, made it hard for the local institutional capacity to develop (Gamaghelyan 2017).

Before continuing, we also find it important to make it explicit where we stand in our conceptual understanding of conflict and approaches to it. While “conflict” is often mistakenly equated with violence, we see “violence” as only one possible manifestation of conflict. The latter also includes many non-violent stages, such as contradiction of interests or absence of effective communication and understanding. Conflicts, therefore, if transformed, can remain entirely non-violent. To be able to deal with conflicts non-violently, however, the societies need to work on transforming their attitudes toward self, others, and conflict, accepting the latter as a normal part of social life.

In this paper, we suggest considering a longer-term investment in the approach of conflict transformation, aimed at addressing relationships, achieving mutual understanding, and transforming the conflict dynamics from destructive to constructive on various levels of the society. While a variety of approaches to conflict transformation have proven to be effective in conflicts around the world, here we discuss transitional justice, rehumanization, peace education, multilingual education, and building a civic nation as some core approaches that we find particularly pertinent to the South Caucasus.

**Transitional Justice** has been used traditionally as a process of *post*-conflict reconciliation by *state* actors. This combination might explain why, despite its popularity among peacebuilders worldwide, it has not been considered in the context of the ongoing conflicts in the South Caucasus. As is discussed in the first section of this paper, however, in recent years, transitional justice mechanisms have been used not only in post-conflict contexts, but also as a peace process mechanism employed by *non-state* actors during *ongoing* conflicts, particularly in Colombia and Turkey.

**Rehumanization**, discussed next, is a process aimed at transforming enemy images. Similar to transitional justice, it often takes place after a violent conflict is resolved politically. Yet, it can also be used for the prevention of violence and conflict transformation. This paper discusses the use of this approach to counter the practices aimed at dehumanizing displaced persons in Ukraine and the relevance of that experience for the South Caucasus.

**Peace Education** is discussed in this paper as a peace process mechanism that can become efficient for both long-term transformation and conflict prevention. We discuss peace education as a mechanism that can counteract negative attitudes toward the outgroup often promoted by the traditional national education curricula, particularly by the subjects of Literature, History, Early Education, and even Civic Education. Japan and Germany can serve as case studies for building peace education policies for the South Caucasus.

Continuing the topic of education, **Multilingual Education** approaches are proposed here as an example of a peace process mechanism in a complex context where the titular language is important for nation-building, while the “minority” languages, as well as Russian and English are competing for the status of languages of intergroup and interstate communication. The case of multilingual education in Kazakhstan is put under scrutiny for generating learning for the South Caucasus.

In the section **Building a Civic Nation as a Step Toward Conflict Transformation**, we discuss the potential of violent mobilization along the lines of “ethnic/cultural nation” on the one hand and “civic nation” on the other with examples from the South Caucasus and the region of Trentino-Alto Adige in Italy. While we acknowledge that the “civic nation” paradigm has its own problematics, we argue that it is better positioned to bring about a solution and transformation to conflict-torn societies compared to the “ethnic/cultural



nation” paradigm that contributes to exclusion based on ethnic or cultural identity and creates a potential for violence.

## Limitations

Given the limitation of space, we are conscious that we are able to discuss only a few possible approaches to transformative peace processes in this paper. A non-exhaustive range of other possibilities that could well complement the approaches proposed in this paper include:

As discussed above, the term **Track 1 diplomacy** refers to official negotiations by state actors, and **Track 2 diplomacy** denotes unofficial interactions between influential members of the society who aim to support the official negotiations. In between these, there is also **Track 1.5 diplomacy** – unofficial interaction between official representatives of states or authorities that can fill the gaps between the first two tracks, help overcome a deadlock in official negotiations, and directly influence the power structures, yet not be driven by political agendas (Mapendere 2005).

**Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration** (DDR) is an approach aimed at increasing security in a post-war and post-settlement situation and can be part of peacekeeping operations. According to UN definitions, disarmament is the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons from combatants and often from the civilian population. Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces and groups including a phase of “reinsertion”, which provides short-term assistance to ex-combatants. Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire a civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. It is a political, social, and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. (United Nation Peacekeeping n.d.)

**Elections** are also seen as a possible stabilization mechanism *after* violence is stopped and as a final step in implementing a peace agreement. Elections can move a divided society to peace if they increase confidence toward democratic institutions and trust between former conflict parties toward each other and can legitimize new, post-conflict relations within the society (Flores 2014). It should be acknowledged, however, that in divided societies, elections can also mobilize the populations along sectarian lines leading to a continuation of the conflict.

**Mediation and negotiations** are approaches based on the distinction between positions and interests and looking for solutions that satisfy the interests of all parties. Negotiations, ideally, result in a signed agreement.

**Reconciliation** is a long-term, deep, broad, and a very inclusive process aimed at rebuilding relations between conflict parties, in which “perpetrators” are expected to acknowledge and repent, and “victims” to forgive (Lerche 2000). It addresses collective trauma and advances truth, justice, forgiveness, healing, and peaceful coexistence.

**Art, sport, and culture** can also be used for helping people to overcome traumatic violent experiences. Art and photo exhibitions, festivals, sport contests and events bring people together, tell stories of people affected by conflicts, release various emotions, and in general, provide a solid background for mutual understanding, reconciliation, and the prevention of violence in the future.

Finally, **Zones of Peace** or demilitarized zones can be an example of a practical conflict transformation mechanism in times of an ongoing conflict.

To illustrate the possible benefits of one of the further possible approaches mentioned above, this paper is followed by a short article co-authored by researchers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on the transformative potential of establishing Zones of Peace in the South Caucasus.

## **Transitional Justice in Ongoing Conflict**

Transitional justice has been increasingly used in post-conflict contexts to deal with the legacy of a violent past. According to Teitel, it is “a concept of justice, intervening in a period of political change, characterized by a juridical answer to the wrongs of past repressive regimes” (Teitel 2003). The UN defines transitional justice more widely as “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation” (United Nations 2010). It is an approach that “provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses” (United Nations 2008).

The change or transition that this mechanism refers to may either be from violence to peace or from an authoritarian to a democratic regime with the aim

of preventing the recurrence of violence. One of its main objectives is to provide recognition for victims and promote a social and political setting of non-violence, reconciliation, and democracy (Spoerri 2011). Transitional justice may include both judicial (criminal prosecutions and trials) and non-judicial mechanisms, such as truth-telling, reparation, institutional reforms, reconciliation, social reconstruction, and memorialization (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009); public access to police and government records, public apology, reburial of victims, compensations, and rethinking of historical narratives (Andrieu 2010); amnesty, lustration, and vetting (Sriram 2007).

Due to the characteristics of contemporary armed conflicts, which often continue in low intensity, conflict and post-conflict settings often intertwine with each other, and the lines between peace and war are blurred (Engstorm 2013). This has an impact on transitional justice attempts as well, which has been increasingly used when transition is unclear, vulnerable, or even non-existent (van Nievelt 2016). Especially protracted conflicts, such as the Kurdish one in Turkey and the South Caucasus ones, might be examined as contemporary armed conflicts in which the separation between peace and conflict cannot easily be made.

As already mentioned, conventionally, transitional justice has been implemented after a peace deal had been reached, as part of a broader post-violence peacebuilding framework. Establishing transitional justice mechanisms amid an ongoing conflict is a rather new approach, and the literature on this topic is currently evolving. In the few cases in which transitional justice has been implemented during the conflict, the pursuit of accountability was the main focus and judicial mechanisms, such as prosecutions, have played the biggest role to achieve this end (Engstorm 2013).

In this paper, we are interested in the feature of transitions between violence and peace which affect transitional justice itself. What benefits could we extract from transitional justice during a peace process and before a formal peace deal is reached? We suggest that the success of the formal negotiations and of transitional justice are very much interdependent and both seek to achieve sustainable peace.

Therefore, transitional justice might be used to facilitate the ending of a conflict especially through transforming social relations (van Nievelt 2016). In fact, it

may precede the official peace process by fostering its onset and durability through relevant mechanisms.

While each conflict is of course unique and the design of any intervention should take the specifics of the context into account, there are several standards that a transitional justice process should reach. First, in order for transitional justice mechanisms to achieve their goals, they have to pursue political and societal transformation, which would eventually lead to a structural change. Van Nievelt argues that transitional justice amid conflict should employ a transformative approach rather than restoring the status-quo prior to the conflict (van Nievelt 2016). As the conflict often penetrates all domains of life of a society, and politics is often built on the conflict dynamics, transitional justice practitioners should acknowledge that it will be a political struggle to transform the conflict, and it will probably continue long after violence has ended.

Another important factor of a successful transitional justice period concerns the participation from below. This refers to local ownership of the process, as well as the involvement of victims as the agents to design and implement transitional justice. Especially internationally-led transitional justice processes tend to deprive victims from their agency as political actors and reduce them to passive subjects (Uçarlar 2015). Indeed, since the victims are those who have been marginalized, discriminated, and dispossessed systematically by a regime or a system that has maintained its power based on the inequalities within society, the victims' agency in bringing a sense of justice is paramount. By empowering victims to guide the process of transitional justice, power relations between perpetrators and victims can be transformed, and this can eventually pave the way for the transformation of the conflict itself.

Finally, considering the tendency of many peace initiatives to further marginalize the victims, one major critique is important to take into consideration when designing a transitional justice mechanism prior to a peace accord – the critique of a solely legalist approach to transitional justice. Andrieu argues that transitional justice often over-emphasizes the legal response to atrocities, getting detached from those who were actually affected by the conflict (Andrieu 2010). Nagy similarly criticizes the influence of the international legalist paradigm on transitional justice and argues that this tendency leads transitional justice to stay indifferent to the socio-economic implications of the conflict, such as poverty. Another consequence of the legalist approach is the limited definition of victimhood as only those affected by

intentional physical violence, excluding those who were affected by structural violence and social injustice. Forced displacement, sexual violence, and disappearance are the most common violations that are often not included in transitional justice mechanisms (Nagy 2008).

While legal (as in retributive or punitive) mechanisms are the most common tools to pursue justice in transitional periods, they do not seem to contribute much to delivering justice and peace in the eyes of those who have been victimized (Engstorm 2013). Restorative justice mechanisms that focus on the restoration of the victim rights as opposed to the punishment of the perpetrator consist of non-judicial means to repair the broken social relations and can set the ground for a possible peace process<sup>74</sup>. Conflict transformation, therefore, requires the development of transitional justice mechanisms which go beyond the legal tools, engage restorative justice as well, and have the capacity to include marginalized voices and transform relations and, as a consequence, the ongoing conflict.

While the above factors will augment the likelihood of success in a transitional justice process, there are still various challenges to transitional justice, and its mechanisms should be designed carefully to minimize the risks that might be especially high when the conflict is ongoing.

The first challenge is that transitional justice runs the risk of being instrumentalized for political goals during the conflicts (van Nievelt 2016). As an example, it can be used by a government as a means to prosecute the opposing party while leaving the crimes perpetrated by the government supporters unaddressed. Secondly, while physical violence is still present and political consensus does not exist, criminal prosecutions, which are the most common judicial transitional justice mechanisms, could undermine the efforts for negotiations, mediation, and reconciliation. The third challenge is that with the societies often radicalized as a result of an ongoing conflict and mobilized against the other, a non-violent mechanism of conflict resolution might meet staunch resistance.

These three challenges, similar to the efficiency factors discussed above, indicate that social relations should be addressed for transitional justice to be

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<sup>74</sup> Unlike retributive justice, the restorative justice approach defines crime not as a violation of the law but rather as harm given to people and relations.

successful. Besides, as creating a legitimate official mechanism during an ongoing conflict will be difficult, considering an informal forum becomes a viable option. Further, while legalistic (punitive) justice is likely to be abused by power holders and exacerbate the conflict, focus on restorative justice based on the rights of victims, reconciliation, and the reintegration of those who committed wrongs into the society can help transform the power dynamics and social relations.

### *Transitional Justice as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Colombia*

Colombia is one of the rare cases where transitional justice was implemented as a conflict transformation tool prior to a peace accord and as a complement to the official process. First of all, the “Justice and Peace Law” was passed in 2005 to demobilize the state-friendly AUC<sup>75</sup> fighters. Although there was no direct reference to transitional justice in the text, the government recognized it as an instrument that could lead to truth recovery and reparations (Center for Justice and Accountability 2005). While this document carries an obvious bias in favor of state-friendly paramilitaries; human rights activists, NGOs, and victim groups also used it, and the victims’ rights to truth, justice, and reparation acquired a key role in the transitional justice and peace debates that followed (van Nievelt 2016).

After this initial step, the “Victims and Land Restitution Law” came into force in 2012 to regulate the reparations for more than 5 million people, who had been forcefully displaced (van Nievelt 2016). According to the government, this law was “unique in that it applies transitional justice mechanisms during an ongoing armed conflict, created a complex institutional framework, combining administrative and transitional justice mechanisms, for delivering reparation, including land restitution, to victims” (Amnesty International 2014). Later, the “Legal Framework for Peace”, a constitutional amendment, came into force to

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<sup>75</sup> AUC stands for “Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia” (United Self-Defenders of Colombia). It was a paramilitary organization in Colombia and was known for drug trafficking, displacement, kidnapping, and extortion.

facilitate peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC<sup>76</sup>. Thanks to the prior transitional justice work, victim rights, including reparations, truth, political participation, and land reform, became part of the negotiations agenda. Although there is still work to be done, Colombia presents an inspiring case of innovative approaches that could be a path to follow for our region as well.

### *Informal Transitional Justice Practices in Turkey*

Different from Colombia where transitional justice was implemented with the involvement of the government, Turkey offers an example of informal transitional justice implemented during an unresolved conflict. Non-governmental organizations, such as the *Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi* (Truth Justice Memory Center), have been working on transitional justice by building databases in relation to enforced disappearances in Turkey after the 1980 military coup d'état. They have produced comprehensive publications in relation to the Kurdish issue in Turkey (Budak 2015). Moreover, while the peace process between the state and the PKK was still ongoing in Turkey, establishing truth commissions on the local level was numerously suggested by human rights activists and left-wing political parties. Journalists, human rights activists, academics, and politicians were getting together to discuss the possibilities for sustainable peace, believing that peacebuilding should start from below and include different segments of the society. The "Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Prison"<sup>77</sup> was established in 2007, prior to the human rights activists taking the cause of transforming the Prison into a memory site (Krajeski 2011). There have been meetings with more than 500 persons who were subjected to human rights violations between 1980-1984 in the prison, and the resulting reports were shared with the public. This was an

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<sup>76</sup> FARC stands for "*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*" (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and was a guerilla group that was involved in the armed conflict in Colombia since 1964.

<sup>77</sup> The Diyarbakır Prison was built by the Ministry of Justice in 1980. It transferred to the army after the 1980 coup d'état. It has been notorious for severe human rights violations of the inmates, including torture and rape. The estimated number of those who were tortured is around 5,000, and the litigations of ex-prisoners were dropped on the grounds of statute of limitation. The Diyarbakır Prison remains to be the most symbolic manifestation of the 1980 coup d'état human rights violations.

unofficial attempt to deal with the past as a starting point for developing official truth commissions for the other atrocities and wrongdoings in the history of the Turkish Republic (Bickford 2007).

We agree with Bickford; non-official transitional justice attempts can serve as a starting point for conflict transformation and official peace accords. However, the difficulties of this approach in the current political atmosphere in Turkey should not be underestimated. Currently the state of emergency, declared after the coup d'état attempt on July 15 in 2016 and extended several times since then, narrows the space where any political initiative can take place. The oppression of the authoritarian political regime makes peace seem less urgent and important to people who suffer from expulsion, arbitrary detention, lack of social security, and political frustration. Additionally, the continuing clashes between the state armed forces and the PKK have further polarized the society.

Despite these challenges, there is still ground for unofficial initiatives. Since the ongoing conflict and polarization is hampering a widespread and comprehensive conflict transformation process, modest steps, such as local truth commissions, could serve as a starting point. Starting from this level would also ensure the local ownership and a bottom-up peacebuilding process in the future.

Another form of informal transitional justice is connected with memory work. In the Turkish context, one example of such work taking place in a post-conflict environment is the project "*Habab Çeşmeleri*" by Fethiye Çetin and the Hrant Dink Foundation. Fethiye Çetin, who is the granddaughter of an Armenian genocide survivor, formed a group to restore a damaged fountain in the village of Çetin's grandmother. The volunteers in the group had Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish backgrounds and spent two weeks in the village. As Çetin and her group restored the damaged fountains, people from the neighboring villages and towns visited Çetin to share the stories of their own Armenian grandmothers. These sentimental encounters offered an opportunity to confront the violent past and reconcile with each other in a safe setting. At the end of the project, both the participants and coordinators told that the Muslims around this village became more tolerant to maintaining the Armenian heritage, and local authorities supported the project, which in return generated hopes that in the long-term, the state might also confront the violent past on the national level (Truth Justice Memory Center n.d.).



### *Implications for the South Caucasus*

As argued in the previous sections, transitional justice mechanisms can be applied not only in post-official accord contexts but also as integral parts of peace processes that facilitate conflict transformation. They can be particularly effective in cases of protracted conflicts with no political solutions in sight, as are the conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia-Abkhazia-South Ossetia, and Ukraine. As we saw, despite their shortcomings, transitional justice processes applied during ongoing conflicts have helped advance conflict transformation processes in Turkey and particularly in Colombia.

In ongoing conflicts, like the ones in the South Caucasus, the primary focus should be on restorative justice, including addressing the rights of victims and restoring the broken relations between communities.

In this regard, the displaced populations as well as other groups affected by the conflicts are a particularly important group that could benefit from such a process. Even without the prosecution of those guilty of war crimes at this stage of the process, searching for truth and advancing healing could be a constructive first step. Moreover, civil society-led mutual truth commissions, during which the sufferings of victims would be acknowledged by the wider public, could enjoy greater trust and not carry the risk of political manipulation, which is often present in government-led commissions. Further, acknowledging atrocities and war crimes in these non-judicial settings could lay foundation for further official attempts to deliver justice to victims. The acknowledgment may be coming either from state authorities in the form of an apology or from non-official truth commissions and community reconciliation initiatives. Whether these processes are implemented through official or non-official mechanisms, the voice of the marginalized and victimized groups should be at the core of it. This is a crucial step in guaranteeing a transformative transitional period and long-lasting peace.

### **Rehumanization in Peacebuilding Practices**

Most people affected by violent conflicts are familiar with expressions describing the “Other” as a “non-human”. Stable peace becomes unattainable when official and mainstream discourses in the societies divided by conflict include such dehumanization. Individuals, communities, the media, and politicians pose questions such as “Is peace with the ‘beast’ possible?” or “Is it safe to reconcile with the ‘evil’?”. “Tumor”, “vampires”, “Colorado beetles”,

“cockroaches”, “monkeys”, “terrorists”, and other words that contain animal, medical, or criminal labels are attached to those seen as the enemy. Such perceptions make peace and reconciliation hard to achieve, and the need to rehumanize the “Other” becomes an indispensable part of the peace process. In this paper, we discuss peacebuilding practices aimed at rehumanization within the relationship between the internally displaced populations (IDPs) and host communities in Ukraine.

### *Dehumanization and Rehumanization in Socio-Psychological Research*

Dehumanization – the cognitive process of the denial of the humanness for a person or a social group – has been studied by the discipline of psychology for over 40 years. As a routine process, dehumanization is explored through its cognitive and emotional consequences (Bastian and Haslam 2011) including its relation to social ostracism (Bastian and Haslam 2010), through the prism of social neuroscience (Harris and Fiske 2009), etc. In his synthesis of dehumanization studies, Haslam mentions various scholarly domains where dehumanization becomes an object for research and study – ethnicity and race, gender and pornography, medicine, disability, technology, and others. Analyzing numerous studies of dehumanization, Haslam has described its two common forms – denying humanity through animalization or mechanization (Haslam 2006). At the same time, dehumanizing semiotics can also be conveyed through the usage of labels of antisocial groups such as criminals, terrorists, fascists, etc.

Dehumanization has its place in the psychological dimension of intergroup conflict as well. In the mutual perception of conflict parties, it becomes a factor of conflict escalation and a precursor for mass violence, violation of human rights, and more. Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim have outlined how name-calling and dehumanization contribute to conflict escalation and violence: “Name-calling strengthens the impression that Other is morally inadequate and dissimilar to Party. Some names make Other seem particularly subhuman. Name-calling makes it easier for Party, and for those who hear Party’s statements, to aggress against Other – since Other is thereby dehumanized” because “dehumanization makes the universal norm against harming other human beings seem irrelevant”. If the “Other” is perceived as less than human, the norm of non-violence does not apply. (Pruitt, Rubin and Kim 1994, 90)

Relying on our experience with various peacebuilding practices, we propose a few mechanisms of peacebuilding that employ rehumanization based on empathy-building: 1) facilitating a communicative shift from the representation of own positions into the representation of own needs, emotional attitude, and personal experience; 2) facilitating a transformation of the dehumanized image of an abstract “Other” into a rehumanized image of a specific person; 3) facilitating the transformation of relationships from intergroup to interpersonal. In practical terms, this involves a dialogue where the perceptions of participants undergo transformation – from seeing positions as incompatible to noticing mutual or similar human needs interwoven with personal experiences that involve secondary<sup>78</sup> emotions of vulnerability, guilt, shame, hope, pride, and more.

### *Practices of Rehumanization of IDPs and Host Communities in Ukraine*

One of the consequences of a war is the appearance of the new social category of displaced people – IDPs and refugees. As of February 2017, the number of the displaced in Ukraine is estimated at 1.63 million people (Foundation.101 2017). Most of them are from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, with the number of the displaced originating from Crimea not exceeding 60 thousand.

Several inquiries and monitoring surveys conducted by NGOs offer insight into the dehumanization processes applied to the displaced in Ukraine. The NGO “Detector Media” in its media-monitoring identified a number of stigmatizing and dehumanizing words used towards the displaced, such as “Dawnbass” (a combination of negative stereotypes toward individuals with the Dawn syndrome and the inhabitants of the Donbass region) (Bezkorovaina, et al. 2016). The dehumanizing label of “terrorists” often applied towards the combatants and civilians who continue living in the separatist regions of Lugansk and Donetsk, is sometimes applied to the displaced individuals from these territories as well. Labeling the displaced as “terrorists” creates ground for discrimination and violence against them.

The NGO “STAN” conducted another research aimed at “revealing stereotypes about IDPs during trainings and workshops with the representatives of both

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<sup>78</sup> Secondary emotions are the reactions to primary emotions; for example, the anger one might feel as a result of feeling sad is a secondary emotion.

IDPs and hosting communities". The research detected other dehumanizing stereotypes, such as "They run like mice" or "We've sheltered a viper near the heart" (Minkin, Oslavska and Skorkin 2015). The displaced were also named "criminals" and "zombies". The findings of a sociological study by researchers from the Ukrainian Catholic University reaffirm that the media representations also use elements of "othering" and stigma towards the displaced (Mikheeva and Sereda 2015). Such "othering" creates exclusion in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the communities and the whole society and, thus, demands corresponding peacebuilding programs. These include dialogues based on various methodologies, such as non-violent communication, restorative circles<sup>79</sup>, Living Library<sup>80</sup>, Forum Theatre<sup>81</sup>, and others.

In Ukraine, a number of such programs have been implemented aimed at changing the dehumanized image of the displaced. With the help of a small questionnaire, 10 expert-facilitators of such various practices shared their observations of rehumanization from their dialogue activities in different parts of Ukraine. According to the expert-facilitators, among the dialogue participants, the perception of the "Other" as "Alien" changed to the perception of the "Other" as "Different", a human being but with a different experience, needs, interests, and feelings. This shift happened partly because dialogue participants had the opportunity to speak up about their lived experiences, emotional states, needs, and interests.

The expert-facilitators have illustrated their observations quoting the dialogue participants<sup>82</sup>:

"Mutual understanding on the level of needs was a real discovery!"

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<sup>79</sup> For the methodology of restorative circles, see for example (Restorative Circles n.d.).

<sup>80</sup> For the methodology of the Living Library, see for example (Living Library n.d.).

<sup>81</sup> For the methodology of the Forum Theater, see for example (Forum for All n.d.).

<sup>82</sup> The quotations have been provided by 10 expert-facilitators of various dialogues held in Ukraine between 2014 and 2015. They were collected at the request of one of the co-authors of this paper Iryna Brunova-Kalisetska as part of her research for a report at the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine.

“I’ve realized that there is a need to come to an agreement making small steps. But the main thing is to understand the needs of the other person. Later we will agree.”

“In a short period of time, I felt like previously unknown alien people have become close ones, friends.”

“I’ve realized that before I met IPDs, I was full of stereotypes, but IDPs and their stories have totally changed my attitude.”

“I was able to find like-minded persons – partners, with whom I want to stay in contact and cooperate.”

As illustrated by the last comment, after dialogue initiatives that put great effort into rehumanization and relationship-building, participants become ready to transfer from sharing their experiences and feelings about the conflict towards joint solution-oriented activities, identifying individual partners in the dialogue group and planning joint actions with them.

### *Rehumanization Lessons for the South Caucasus*

Due to wars, natural disasters, political crises, and other events, the countries of the South Caucasus have had to deal with a few waves of displaced populations since the late 1980s. The focus of the governments and the international organizations, with a varying rate of success, has since been on addressing the visible and material problems of the displaced, such as shelter, medical help, education, social payments, documents, etc. At the same time, integration cannot be limited to material factors. It also requires support in building relations with host communities, developing social networks, and forming social capital in their new environments. Even when these issues are addressed, time and ongoing efforts are needed to achieve sustainability. Displacement is a challenge for both the displaced and the host communities. Yet, the needs of the hosting groups are often lost in the vision of those elaborating various integration programs and strategies.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, after more than 20 years, many of the displaced in Azerbaijan still need to deal with “segregated education, discrimination against children of the displaced and IDPs’ limited participation in decisions that affect them” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2014). The problems with integration are sometimes the results of seeing displacement as temporary.

Limited public participation and the view of displacement as temporary is a challenge for integrating the displaced in Ukraine as well. Here, the public participation of the displaced in the local elections in 2015 caused tension within the host communities as the displaced were seen by locals as temporary inhabitants who should not have the right to elect local authorities. The negative stereotypes towards the displaced as “those who would vote in a ‘pro-Russian’ way as they did in Donbass that caused the current war” exacerbated the situation.

The social discourse about displacement as a “temporality” is also prevalent in Georgia despite the parallel expectation that “the majority of the IDPs originating from South Ossetia and Abkhazia will not be able to return in the foreseeable future” (Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009, 14). Even with time, the displaced have difficulties with being accepted as “locals” and stay with the label “IDPs” or “refugees” attached to them as it happened with the so-called “old IDPs” from the early 1990s (for a more nuanced discussion of the isolation faced by the displaced people in Georgia see (Mitchneck, Mayorova and Regulska 2009).

Armenia also has a large number of displaced people who try to overcome similar problems. In her research of second and 1.5 generations (those who were born in Baku and as children fled to Yerevan) of Armenian refugees from Baku, Tatyana Sargsyan found several dynamics that segregate the displaced from the rest of the Armenian population. This includes the use of Russian and the difficulties with becoming fluent in Armenian, living in compact settlements, mutual negative stereotypes with locals, the low level of social capital and linkages, not feeling “rooted” enough in Yerevan, and more. Thus, the “1.5-generation of Baku refugees marks its social status as victims of a monoethnic state, aimed at the clear social differentiation of ‘locals’ (Yerevan/ours) and ‘Bakuvians’ (visitors/strangers)”. (Sargsyan 2011, 60)

The Ukrainian experience might be instructive in devising integration programs in the South Caucasus since a number of state and civil society programs aimed at the integration of the displaced populations have already been implemented. A state program supporting the social adaptation and reintegration of IDPs was adopted by the government and included an article on “the prevention of the negative attitudes towards displaced citizens, providing social harmony and social cohesion in local communities that accept displaced citizens” (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2015). The civil society is also active in advancing the integration process.

The Ukrainian experience shows that interpersonal contacts and dialogue initiatives can help with integration; programs aimed at de-segregation and the involvement of IDPs into decision making can address discrimination. The rehumanization processes and empathy building can help in changing the image of the displaced from a “problem” or the “beggars” to an attitude towards them as individuals who are an integral part of the society.

The explicit efforts aimed at the rehumanization of the displaced can also serve as an important experience in conflict transformation that could be applied to advance mutual rehumanization of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Turks, Georgians and Abkhazians and Ossetians, and others.

### *Peace Education and Conflict Transformation*

This paper, as already discussed above, aims to identify structures and dynamics that contribute to the reproduction of the conflicts and prevent the peace processes in the South Caucasus from moving forward successfully, offering alternatives. One such structure are the educational institutions in the region that tend to promote ethnic nationalism coupled with the absence of peace education principles from curricula. Before delving deeper into the discussion of peace education as a conflict resolution mechanism, the first facet of the coin – education promoting ethnic nationalism – needs to be demystified.

The protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus are multi-dimensional and take origin in the ideology of nationalism prevalent during the past two centuries that sowed divisions in the region where multi-ethnic coexistence had been the norm for centuries. Another contributing factor to the conflicts have been the nation-building processes in the Soviet Union that created a hierarchy of ethnicities. As a consequence of the peculiar organization of the Soviet Union into ethno-territorial units, the post-Soviet violent conflicts have all been framed ethnically<sup>83</sup>. The South Caucasus, with its diverse ethnic composition, became home to the majority of such conflicts.

Even though the beginning of these conflicts can be traced back to an earlier period in history, they turned into violent conflicts only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The further instrumentalization of ethnicity for political

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<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the politicization of ethnicity in the Soviet Union and the ethnic framing of the conflicts in the South Caucasus see (Abbasov, et al. 2016).

mobilization, which emerged openly in 1987-1989, was the triggering factor for the development of violent conflicts (Cornell 2001).

The openly nationalist agenda of the first president of independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, coupled with separatist movements, led to violent conflicts in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, resulting in thousands killed and up to 250,000 displaced. Following ceasefire agreements in 1992 and 1994 respectively, the conflicts remained “frozen” until a new wave of escalation took place in 2008, known internationally as the Russia-Georgia war over South Ossetia or simply the August 2008 War.

The beginnings of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the late 1980s similarly falls on the last days of the Soviet Union, although some authors and particularly the media tend to describe the conflict as historic (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 2016), (Cornell 2001). The intense territorial dispute between the Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the late 1980s turned into an open war in 1991 as they gained independence. The war ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire in 1994, leaving hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis and Armenians displaced.

Since then, in all of these cases, negotiations brought minimal to no results, and the Nagorno-Karabakh context has been showing signs of escalation and preparation for a new war. One of the contributing factors to enforcing the mindsets of war, regrettably, have been the education systems. They have been used as a tool to implement nationalist policies aimed at building enemy images and dehumanizing the “Other”, preparing the populations for war, portraying the conflicts as historical and unsolvable, and sustaining mobilization for war efforts.

According to a leading voice in critical pedagogy Freire, education is designed to serve political agendas (Freire 1985). In other words, as long as the state controls and mandates education, it cannot be seen as a neutral disseminator of knowledge but a tool to promote particular political agendas and affect the minds of new generations.

In a multicultural and extremely delicate region as is the South Caucasus, it is important for the education systems to promote inclusion and coexistence and be conscious of the role that education and educators can play in either promoting peace and stability or divisions and war.



Some commentators go further in their recommendations for the role of education in promoting peace. According to one of the founders of the field of Peace Studies, Galtung, peace education should not simply focus on the knowledge of the concepts of peace and war, but it should actively promote conflict competence. Young people and adults alike can learn self-awareness and how to cope with self-destructive anger. They can learn about violence and reconciliation after violence, about justice and injustice. Degree programs in Peace and Conflict Resolution can be promoted. Peace education should actively prevent the intensification of tensions and stereotypes between groups that contribute to the emergence of negative attitudes, which in turn results in violent behavior. (Galtung 1969)

According to Galtung, the traits of the “cultural mentality” held by the people of the Caucasus pose considerable obstacles for any peace process. When discussing the “Warrior Mentality”, he refers to violence, being a professional pursuit in the Caucasus: statues of man on horseback and textbooks on warrior heroes enforce a perception of violence as normal and natural. This mentality also entails the idea that conflicts as well as negotiations are about winning, not solving. The “Chief-Sheikh Mentality” refers to the poor civil society traditions the region has, where all the decisions, including those on war and peace and foreign policy, are made by the Chief-Sheikh-type of a leader while people submit. Though if he (assuming that the leader must be a man) does not deliver concrete results, people soon begin to look for a new Chief. The final of the three cultural traits, the “Victim Mentality” has formed because of the suffering that the groups have experienced from others. Each group demands undivided attention and focus only on their own trauma. Therefore, a dialogue easily turns into parallel monologues: nobody listens to each other, but each participant articulates their grievances. This mentality is the prerequisite to preserving the status quo of conflicts as new ideas are not welcome if they do not put “our” concerns in the center of the discussion. (Galtung 1997)

The combination of these cultural traits inhibits the shift from mindsets of war to mindsets of peace. Even though school students in the region might have not directly experienced conflict manifestations, nor have a memory of them, history textbooks help maintain an image of the other country being the enemy, which prevents a sustainable resolution to their problems (Sultanova 2012) (Akpınar, et al. 2017) (Karpenko and Javakhishvili 2013) (Karpenko 2014) (Zolyan and Zakaryan 2008). The state-approved education system through its

textbooks of Literature, History, and more recently Civic Education forces the new generation to maintain the historical memory of conflicts, which evokes by-gone conflicts as present-day ones, as well as intensifies the stereotypes, assumptions, and negative attitudes towards the “Other”, that have been culturally constructed within the societies throughout time. Thus, promoting a culture of tolerance, anti-discrimination, and peaceful conflict transformation is challenging in the face of the content of the textbooks of the above-mentioned subjects.

In addition to the studies cited above, another one conducted on the role of state education policies on history textbooks in Azerbaijan and Armenia has shown that the state uses history textbooks to create a negative and dehumanized image of the other country’s people and disseminates that in the society (Hakobyan 2016).

A study on Georgian History, Literature, and Civic Education school textbooks for Grades 9-12 conducted in 2016 also showed that the textbooks of Georgian Literature as well as History use xenophobic language or contain texts of xenophobic content; some questions and comments of the authors of the textbooks are also biased and xenophobic. In several textbooks of History, Literature, and Civic Education, some texts are based on stereotypical attitudes used to portray various religious and ethnic groups. Stereotypic qualities are generalized and assigned to different ethnic or religious groups portraying them as a common negative feature of the entire group. (Mindiashvili, Gakheladze and Taboridze 2016)

The current state of affairs with education in social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus is also at odds with international standards. In 1995, UNESCO made a pledge to improve textbooks and teacher training as well as implement other necessary activities “with a view to educating caring and responsible citizens open to other cultures, able to appreciate the value of freedom, respectful of human dignity and differences, and able to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-violent means”. According to Article 1 of the UNESCO document, tolerance – and one that is not understood as concession or condescension – is the virtue that makes peace possible and that contributes to the replacement of a culture of violence by a culture of peace (UNESCO 1995). Education for tolerance should encourage the development of independent judgment, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning skills (Page 2008).

The constitutional mandate of UNESCO notes that war begins in the minds of individuals, so too should the defenses against war be constructed in the minds of individuals (Page 2008), implying that education systems should not be used as a weapon to form negative images of the “Other”; instead peace education principles should be implemented in national educational curriculums.

Article 26 of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of 1948 proclaims that “Education shall be directed [...] to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship [...] and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (Page 2008). According to the UN resolution 39/11, “Right of Peoples to Peace”, peace is seen as a human right, therefore “people should have the right to be educated and informed about that right, as any particular right is rendered meaningless if individuals and societies are not informed that they have it” (United Nations 1984) (Page 2008).

The “Vienna Declaration and Program of Action”<sup>84</sup> sees peace education as part of human rights education and human rights education as crucial for world peace: “Education should promote understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relations between the nations and all racial or religious groups” (World Conference on Human Rights 1993).

These international standards have translated into concrete policies for several countries. Japan and Germany have successfully experimented with peace education for the past 50 years. After its defeat in World War Two in 1945, Japan reformed its education system on the basis of a new Constitution and specifically the “Fundamental Law of Education” or the “Basic Act on Education”. The Constitution, particularly its Article 9, proclaims pacifism and democracy to be its core and renounces war forever as a sovereign right and the use of force as a means of settling international disputes (Library of Congress 2015) (Hara 2012). In line with the Constitution, the preamble of the “Basic Act on Education” aspires to further develop democracy and “to contribute to

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<sup>84</sup> The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action is a human rights declaration adopted by consensus at the World Conference on Human Rights on June 25 in 1993. The United Nations General Assembly subsequently endorsed the declaration as part of Resolution 48/121.

world peace and to improving the welfare of humanity” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan 1948 (2006)).

As the consequences of and the damage caused by the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to be revealed to the public, the Japan Teachers Union adopted the slogan “Never send our students to the battlefield again”, and it became the central focus of the Union’s activities for a long time. In 1968, the Hiroshima Municipal Board of Education distributed its first official guidelines for teaching the subject of peace education to elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. Since then, peace education has been taught not only as an independent subject, but also across different subjects, such as social studies and Japanese literature, as well as through special activities, such as school excursions to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, since the 1980s. (Hara 2012)

Similarly, in the entire post-World War Two Germany, “re-education” or “re-orientation” was an important factor in rebuilding the societies. The process entailed dismissing teachers with Nazi party affiliations and backgrounds and destroying ideologically biased textbooks. The new Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, also promoted peace and democracy, and granted educational autonomy to the State (*Länder*) governments, which helped to decentralize the education system, setting basis for grass-roots peace education in the Federal Republic of Germany. Since then, the textbooks in Germany are not written and published by the central government or government-selected scholars and therefore differ between the States. Based on the belief that school education should not undermine the independent and critical thinking of children, textbook drafts have been judged based on whether they were in line with the Constitution, and not infused by ideology. Although the educational guidelines of individual German States vary to some extent, they have a lot in common in terms of their attitudes towards history education that is today regarded as a part of peace education. (Hara 2012)

In order for conflict transformation processes to take place in the South Caucasus, a shift in educational policies is necessary. Peacebuilding is a long-term process and as Lederach stated, it might take 20 years of peacebuilding efforts to achieve lasting, positive peace. Using education as a tool to promote a culture of tolerance, equality, and non-violence is an integral part of a peace process with longer views.

As one of the founding fathers of the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, Galtung has put it, ending direct violence is only possible by changing conflict behavior, which will ensure peace, though a negative one; ending structural violence is possible through removing structural contradictions and injustices; while ending cultural violence can be achieved by changing attitudes, and the latter two will lead us to positive and sustainable peace (Galtung 1969) (Galtung 1990).

## **Multilingual Education Policies as a Mechanism of Conflict Transformation and Prevention**

The protection, revival, and development of a native language, national culture, and guaranteed rights of national minorities feature prominently among the popular demands that contribute to the onset and intensification of ethnically-framed conflicts. In this regard, some authors emphasize the importance of negotiating on the middle-ground, which excludes the “all-or-nothing” positions represented by a discriminating state and a secessionist group (Thomas 2015). The achievement of this “middle-ground” is largely determined by the adequate constitutional changes on state and regional levels, including the provision of sufficient infrastructure. While language policy alone cannot solve all the frictions, it is one of the crucial components of the prevention or mitigation of intergroup conflicts. Therefore, a coherent and inclusive language policy is an integral aspect of peace processes.

This section of our paper attempts to analyze the opportunities and implications of implementing multilingual policies aimed at addressing the potential and already existing conflicts in the South Caucasus. As a prior paper by the *Caucasus Edition* writers deals with language policies and minority integration questions in Georgia (Bobghiasvili, Kharatyan and Surmanidze 2016)<sup>85</sup>, in this paper, we focus on the cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan and their language policies. Even though sizable parts of the populations of these countries have maintained bilingualism to a certain degree, the role of the Russian language has been continually declining since the collapse of the Soviet Union. And English, despite its steadily increasing popularity, is not yet spoken by enough people to replace Russian as the language of regional and intergroup

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<sup>85</sup> For other background and policy recommendations on minority rights including language rights in the South Caucasus, see (Duygulu and Karapetyan 2017)

interaction. While we support the need to enhance education in state languages, we argue that a parallel education in additional languages and language policies addressing the ethnic minorities' rights leave much to be desired.

We argue that a properly implemented multilingual policy would improve communication among various language communities within and between the societies; moreover, it would also ensure the rights of minorities to education in their native languages leading to improved relations.

### *Language Policies in Armenia and Azerbaijan*

In the post-Soviet space, the linguistic factor is not only a means of ethnic identification, but also an instrument for realizing the interests of political elites. For the last 25 years, almost every country of the region has been undergoing a process of consolidating the monopolistic position of the dominant group's language, which became also the state language. The process has been popular, since decades of Soviet rule had marginalized the role of the languages of the local majorities in the Soviet republics and privileged the Russian-speakers, repercussions of which are still felt in the outright or latent frictions within the societies. And yet, the consolidation of the dominant status of the state language often happens at the expense of the positions of the languages of other ethnic groups and, as a result, leads to the infringement of their rights. The simultaneous loss of Russian and absence of any other common language also breaks down communication between and among the populations of the states in the South Caucasus as they lose access to a common language.

### *Azerbaijan: Language Policies and Ethnic Minorities*

In Azerbaijan, the implementation of a language policy demands special concern and delicacy from the leadership of the country in view of the multi-ethnic population of the country. The Constitution acknowledges the official status of the Azerbaijani language and guarantees the free use and the development of other languages spoken by the population of the country. Article 45 on "the right to use a native language" emphasizes the citizens' rights to use their native language, receive upbringing, education, and engage in creative activities in any language" (Milli Majlis of the Azerbaijan Republic 2009).

Today only around 10 percent of the population of Azerbaijan are ethnic minorities. According to the census conducted in 2009, the largest groups are

Azerbaijanis (8,172,800 or 91.6 percent), Lezgis (180,300 or 2 percent)<sup>86</sup>, Armenians (120,300 or 1.3 percent)<sup>87</sup>, Russians (119,300 or 1.3 percent), the Talysh (112,000 or 1.3 percent), Avars (49,800 or 0.6 percent), and others (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2009). In October 2000, Azerbaijan ratified the “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” initiated by the Council of Europe. According to the report the country has been said to undergo a few positive developments; the latest resolution has particularly emphasized Azerbaijan’s open attitude and willingness to cooperate, as well as measures taken by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in printing some textbooks for minority schools, initiation of cultural events by national minority associations with the support of local authorities, NGOs, the Ministry of Culture (Council of Europe 2015).

There are a number of schools with Russian, Georgian, and Jewish language instruction sanctioned by the MoE. Seven secondary schools continue to provide classes in the Lezgin language until ninth grade in regions where Lezgis live compactly (Council of Europe 2015). Talysh, Avar, Udin, Tat are typically studied for two hours a week in Grades 1-4 in areas where the respective minorities reside compactly (Government of Azerbaijan 2017), but the quality and availability of the textbooks and the lack of adequately trained language specialists makes the education ineffective (Advisory Committee on The Framework Convention for The Protection of National Minorities 2013). The Baku branch of the Dagestan State University that prepared specialists in the Lezgi and Avar languages was closed in 2008, and currently only one institution prepares teachers of Lezgi – the Kusar branch of the Baku

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<sup>86</sup> Alternative sources provide far bigger numbers of Lezgis and the Talysh with a reference to numbers provided by these communities (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization 2015).

<sup>87</sup> The official assessment of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan includes Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the 2015 census of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (National Statistical Service of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic 2015), 144,683 Armenians lived on this part of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan. According to Head of Information and Public Affairs Department of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Rafael Suleymanov, the number of Armenians living in Azerbaijan (excluding the occupied territories) was 220 with 140 of them residing in Baku according to the 2009 Census (Oxu.az 2015).

Pedagogical School. The only opportunity for Lezgis to continue education in their native language is in Dagestan, Russia.

The Azerbaijani government has recently made some efforts to improve the quality of teaching materials in several minority languages. New textbooks have been published in Lezgi and Talysh replacing the outdated or foreign textbooks. However, according to a number of sources, textbooks for studying other minority languages, such as Tat and Avar, still leave a lot to be desired (Rust 2008), (Matveeva 2002) (Advisory Committee on The Framework Convention for The Protection of National Minorities 2013).

Although there are occasional talks of independence among Lezgis and the Talysh in particular, so far, these intentions are mitigated and these minority groups have political voice through elected representatives to the Parliament, government, and especially the local governments (Rust 2008). However, the European Commission notes that national minorities in general are hesitant to claim their linguistic and cultural rights because of the tense atmosphere and suspicion toward minorities resulting from the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (Advisory Committee on The Framework Convention for The Protection of National Minorities 2013).

### *Armenia: Language Policies and Ethnic Minorities*

Following the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis at the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia became a nearly monoethnic state. Still, the Constitution of the country recognizes the rights of the minorities for the “preservation and development of their traditions, religion, language and culture” (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia 1995). As Article 1 of the “Law on Language” states “The Republic of Armenia guarantees the free usage of minority languages on its territory” (Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia 1993). The principles and priorities of the state towards the Armenian language as well as the minority languages are defined in the “State Program on Language Policy” adopted in 2002. The Program acknowledges that the minority languages need to be promoted for the sake of democracy and compliance with international standards; yet it securitizes the “factual prevalence of the Armenian language in all domains of social life”, naming it a “factor of national security” (Government of Armenia 2002).

According to the census conducted in 2011, around 2 percent of the population of Armenia were from ethnic minorities. The largest groups are Armenians



(2,961,801 or 98.1 percent), Yezidis (35,308 or 1.2 percent), Russians (11,911 or 0.4 percent), Assyrians (2,769 or 0.09 percent), Kurds (2,162 or 0.07 percent), Ukrainians (1,176 or 0.04 percent), Greeks (900 or 0.03 percent), and others (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). The number of ethnic minorities in the country has consistently declined resulting from waves of immigration caused by the economic conditions. Among the South Caucasus states, Armenia is the only one that has ratified the “European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”. Accordingly, the Yezidi, Russian, Greek, Kurdish, and Assyrian languages are protected under the Charter (Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 2017). There is a number of unions of ethnic minority NGOs functioning in the country (Russian, Yezidi, Assyrian, Kurdish, Greek, and Jewish).

The languages of the ethnic minorities are taught in secondary schools in the places of their compact residence: there are 43 schools where education is in Russian, 24 schools where Yezidi is taught (although none in Yerevan despite 10,000 Yezidis living there), 7 schools where Kurdish is taught, and 6 schools where Assyrian is taught. Greek is taught through no systematic efforts and sometimes through Sunday schools. Even though the government has brought considerable improvements in the update and publishing of the textbooks in the Yezidi language, there is still a lack of textbooks for all grades and for the other minority language textbooks. There is also a lack of qualified teachers and professional training of the minority language specialists. (Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 2017)

Most of the representatives of ethnic minorities are fluent in Armenian, which allows them to pursue their higher education in the state language. Many of them are also fluent in Russian. Since 2005 the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Yerevan State University also offers free or partly subsidized places reserved for Yezidi, Kurdish, and Assyrian minority representatives who wish to specialize in their native language and culture and who have been put forward by their own community. However, single students up to date have taken advantage of this opportunity (Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 2017). The problems with minority language and education, therefore, are less political and mainly about the lack of enough financing, qualified teachers, and sufficient infrastructure.

In general, the languages of minorities in Azerbaijan and Armenia are in a state of regression: their transmission from generation to generation has declined

due to the state language policies aimed at deeper assimilation under the single national identity. The younger generation often moves to larger cities and assimilates with ethnic Azerbaijanis or Armenians in order to have equal job opportunities.

### *The Role of the Russian Language in Armenia and Azerbaijan*

The Russian language stands apart among all other non-dominant languages in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It has not been assigned the status of an official language in either of these countries, although in Armenia it is recognized as a minority language under the “European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages”. In Azerbaijan, it is referred to as the language of interethnic communication, particularly for communication with the societies of the neighboring countries. Russian is the second popular language in both countries, particularly among ethnic Russians, bilingual native speakers, and certain ethnic minority groups. In a 2013 survey, around 85 percent of individuals in Armenia indicated that they know Russian on an intermediate or advanced level, and around 35 percent did so in Azerbaijan (Caucasus Barometer 2013). Still the use of Russian has been declining in both countries – to some extent due to the language policies implemented since the first years of independence.

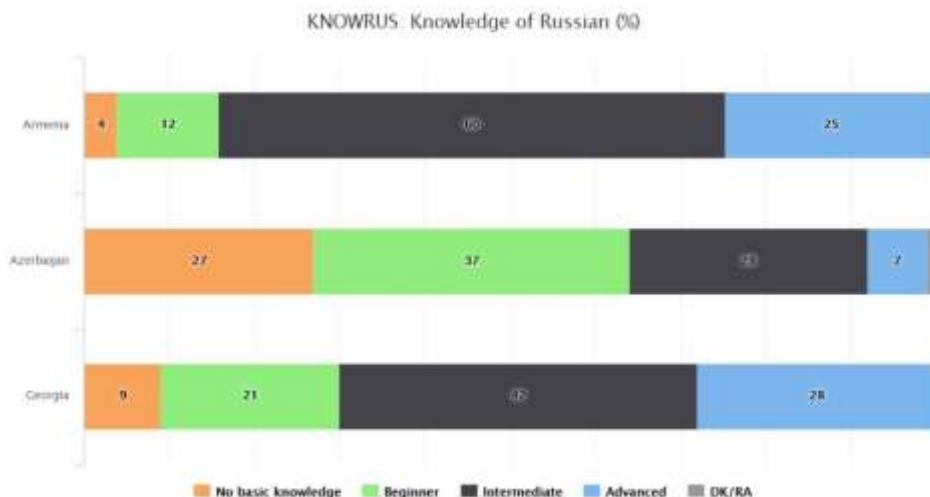


Figure 1 Knowledge of Russian According to Caucasus Barometer 2013 Regional Dataset (Caucasus Barometer 2013)

The early period of Azerbaijan's independence saw a number of policies aimed at the advancement of Azerbaijani as the dominant language. These included its designation as the official language, making it the primary language of instruction in the educational system, restructuring the lexical system in line with modern communication needs, intensifying the study of its history. In the first years of independence under the Azerbaijani Popular Front party, the Russian language and ethnic Russians residing in the country experienced particularly strong pressures. This changed with the ascension to power of Heydar Aliyev in 1993, and while Azerbaijani remained the primary language, a more favorable political climate developed for the Russian language.

Similarly, entering office in 1991, the Armenian Allnational Movement party initiated the transition of all documentation and education to the Armenian language. Going a step further than Azerbaijan, it also closed practically all the university departments and schools with Russian as the language of instruction. This process led to the outflow of a considerable number of Russian-speaking specialists from the country. The rest were largely marginalized.

Today, there are 43 schools that offer classes taught in the Russian language with textbooks published in Armenia and supplementary materials arriving from Russia (Advisory Committee of Experts on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 2017). According to a MoE regulation, only children of ethnic Russians, Russian citizens, and children from mixed marriages when one of the parents is a foreigner of any nationality are allowed to study in the Russian language sectors of public schools (Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia 2010 (2014)). Still, considering the economic and cultural ties, such as the large Armenian diaspora in Russia, the percentage of the Russian-speaking population remains high compared to Azerbaijan and Georgia as shown by Figure 1 above.

Despite the vocal opposition to teaching in the Russian language in both countries, the general population still favors the teaching of Russian as a mandatory language in schools, according to Figure 2 below. The marginalization of the Russian language, however, in the absence of another international language widely spoken by the population hinders cooperation in the scientific, technical, and educational spheres, as the translation of professional literature into the national languages is practically not carried out.

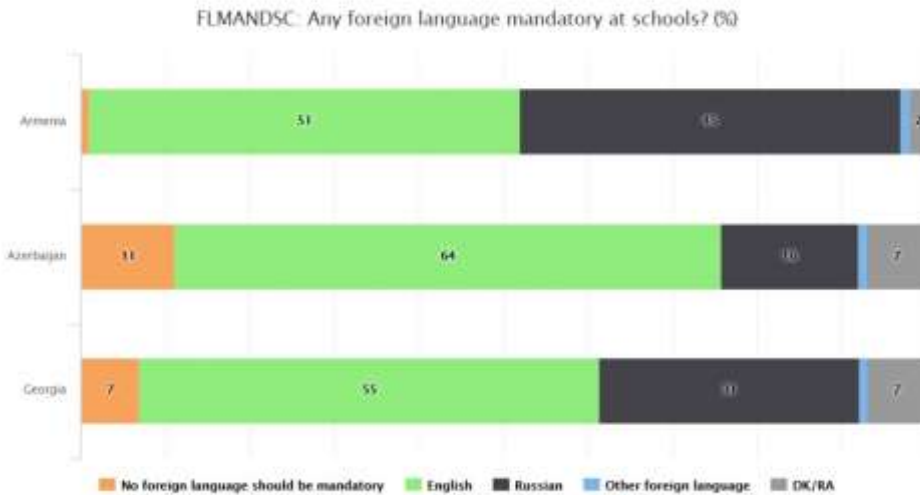


Figure 2 Mandatory Foreign Languages at Schools According to Caucasus Barometer 2013 Regional Dataset (Caucasus Barometer 2013)

Curiously, the importance of Russian was acknowledged by President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili, who at the international forum “NATO-Georgia” called it on the one hand an “instrument” and even “weapon”, which can be used by the “external enemy” against the national interests of the country, and on the other hand, a “convenient language for spreading information” especially “in delivering our single message to Abkhazians and Ossetians” (Dvali 2017).

In the same tone, according to Deputy Director of the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of Azerbaijan, Gulshan Pashaeva, in the framework of the active public diplomacy conducted by Azerbaijan, the Russian language is an indispensable tool for protecting the national interests of the country in the post-Soviet space (Pashaeva 2017). Similarly, in a 2016 interview, Minister of Education and Science of Armenia Levon Mkrtchyan noted that “the field for Russian is more favorable since our people with its thinking and post-Soviet system comprehends it easier than English”. While stressing that the “Law on Language” declaring Armenian the only state language should not be changed<sup>88</sup>, the Minister is also of the opinion that the knowledge of foreign

<sup>88</sup> In Summer 2017, a new wave of heated public, media, and political discussions in Armenia was triggered by a new law adopted in the Parliament of the Russian

languages is important for Armenia not to be an “auxiliary country” but a scientific and educational space in the world (Zakharyan 2016).

The disappearance of a common language for the countries of the South Caucasus also has negative implications on the already complicated interstate and inter-societal relations. Its absence makes the already deep isolation almost impenetrable and dialogue difficult not only ideologically but also technically. Apart from this, the absence of a shared language can smooth the way for informational abuse and manipulation of the societies drawing them further into conflict. Therefore, the coherent implementation of a multilingual policy in the South Caucasus countries can to a certain degree contribute to the peace processes or at least prevent the deterioration of the situation.

### *Multilingualism as an Instrument of Conflict Transformation*

As a result of the expansion of the political, economic, and cultural connections of the former Soviet republics with the international community, the position of the English language is gradually strengthening in the region. This process leads to presumed competition between English and Russian in the linguistic space of a number of post-Soviet countries. And Russian prevails as up to date, only a small and affluent part of the population has been able to master English. According to the latest surveys conducted by the Caucasus Barometer, 16 percent of Azerbaijanis know English at a beginner’s level, 7 percent at an intermediate level, and 1 percent at an advanced (Caucasus Barometer 2013), whereas 25 percent of Armenians know English at a beginner’s level, 12 percent at an intermediate level, and 3 percent at an advanced level (Caucasus Barometer 2015). However, in contrast to the Russian language, which currently faces resistance from a considerable part of the population as the language of cultural colonialism, the English language is accepted favorably, especially among the young generations of both countries.

But are policies promoting English and Russian mutually exclusive? Do the Armenian and the Azerbaijani societies, or for that matter, the Georgian society, have to choose? The experience of some other post-Soviet countries, particularly of Kazakhstan and the Baltic states shows otherwise.

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Federation allowing citizens of countries where the Russian language has a constitutionally accepted official status to work in Russia as drivers without having to exchange their national driver’s license (Grigoryan 2017).

Trilingualism or even multilingualism, rather than bilingualism, can serve a number of beneficial roles: it can ensure more than one language for intergroup interaction and through this contribute to improved communication and conflict transformation; it can ease the worry of cultural colonialism as a result of learning one foreign language as it will be balanced by the knowledge of another; and it will make the society better prepared for integration into the global economy.

In this context, the case of Kazakhstan is particularly instructive. The tensions initiated by the nationalistically-spirited citizens have intensified along with increased accusations against the government of Kazakhstan in promoting Russian colonialism represented by the Russian language. The introduction of the English language as a part of a trilingual policy of the country served to ease these concerns and achieve the mentioned goals.

Initially the idea of introducing trilingualism, i.e. mastering of the Kazakh, Russian, and English languages by Kazakhstani citizens, was announced by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev in October 2006 at the XII session of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. In his address to the people of Kazakhstan in 2007, President Nazarbayev proposed the beginning of a phased implementation of the cultural project “Trinity of Languages” – “...Kazakh – the state language, Russian – the language of interethnic communication and English – the language of successful integration into the global economy” (Official Website of the President of Kazakhstan 2007). The introduction of the English language can be seen not only as favorable for successful integration into the global economy but also a counterbalance to Russian and giving the population access to the western narrative. Another step in this direction was the recent Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet<sup>89</sup>.

Alongside with an overall enhancement of education and competitiveness of human capital, the trinity of languages has another very important meaning – larger societal cohesion and the preservation of interethnic harmony and peace. Considering the large number of ethnic groups residing in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government of independent Kazakhstan has been especially cautious about its language policy: on the one hand, there was a strong impetus to revive the Kazakh language; on the other hand, it was

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<sup>89</sup> Before the introduction of Cyrillic characters during the Soviet time, the Kazakh alphabet was Latin-based.

crucial not to provoke conflicts among the diverse ethnic communities that for several decades had been speaking the Russian language. This has been reflected in the policies that attempted to encourage rather than force representatives of other ethnic groups to learn the Kazakh language although comprehensive measures on the enhancement of the role of the Kazakh language have also been introduced. The Russian language has remained relevant, and the Russian-speaking citizens enjoy the same rights as ethnic Kazakhs do.

The recent language policy aims to achieve 100 percent of the population speaking Kazakh, 95 percent speaking Russian, and 25 percent speaking English by 2020 (Yeskeldiyeva and Tazhibayeva 2015) (Jankowski 2012). Currently the country is intensively engaged in reforming the education sector, introducing e-learning, training highly qualified trilingual specialists, issuing books and other teaching aids in three languages. Still, the vast majority of the research on the topic primarily concerns the quality of teaching and the training of multilingual specialists rather than the particular role played by trilingualism in preventing ethnic tensions. In her speech at the Conference on “Education and Cultural Diversity in Central Asia”, education expert Marina Gurbo underlined that multilingual education has an essential element of social justice (Gurbo 2016), and it would be very important to explore the changes in inclusion and respect for diversity with links to multilingual education in Kazakhstan and elsewhere where such policies are being implemented.

Within the South Caucasus region, multilingual education policies can serve a number of goals. Multilingual and transformative language policies should go beyond the acquisition of state languages by minorities. The introduction of multilingual policies where the population is provided with the opportunity to learn the national language along with English, Russian, as well as a minority language where there is demand would contribute to integration and conflict transformation, along with other benefits.

Such policies, of course, require extensive investment in competent and qualified teaching staff, sufficient infrastructure, and adequate supply of materials. The investment, however, is certain to pay off and yield disproportional return in form of both regionally integrated, well-educated, globally competitive, and peacefully coexisting societies.

## **Building a Civic Nation as a Step Toward Conflict Transformation in the South Caucasus**

The liberal consensus that dominated the global arena for a few decades after World War Two assumes that developed and internally coherent nations should profess the values of the rule of law and democracy and not just an “endogamic” affinity to a specific ethnic group. Yet the formal adherence to liberal values does not guarantee acting in accordance with them, and the consensus might be illusory. In the past several years, a number of nationalist leaders have been increasingly active manifesting their resentment against liberal values, including in the Euro-Atlantic zone. Such leaders do not openly reject the rule of law and democracy; they preach democracy but of a different sort, which they call “sovereign” or “illiberal”, with a specific kind of rule of law that aims at a divided society with a further strengthened majority at the expense of various minorities. This aids them in making their power perpetual, and at the same time, promotes cronyism in the economic sphere. Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Balkan states and several post-Soviet states, are plagued by such policies.

Another division exists between two competing nation-building models, the civic versus ethnic nations. In his discussion of Kuhn’s ideas, Calhoun writes that the divide is seen as originating from the essence of different nationalist ideas: the Central and Eastern European nationalism “stressed particular national identities, an emotional connection to history, and development rather than transcendence [...] drew on myths of the past, dreams of the future, and distinctive intellectual traditions to imagine an ideal fatherland, closely linked with the past [...] focused on developing culture and thus was initially more remote from projects of practical reform,” while the Western (at least in its idealized form), in particular French and English nationalism, focused on transforming existing states (Calhoun 2007, 138).

This idealized version hardly exists in reality: as Brubaker noted, the difference between civic and ethnic understandings of nationhood is more complex, and the essentially “civic” quality of West European nationalism becomes problematic, particularly considering the ethno-political conflict in Belgium and the successes of xenophobic parties in many countries (Brubaker 2004, 133-134).

Accepting the challenge that Brubaker presents and that the civic nation is also not the ideal type, we, nevertheless, argue that it is a preferred form of societal



organization that has a bigger potential of contributing to the formation of inclusive societies and through this to conflict resolution. As experience shows, most mainstream political parties in Western countries continue to maintain a devotion to civic nation-building<sup>90</sup>, while the situation is manifestly different in most of Central and Eastern Europe where ethno-nationalism prevails. Lately, of course, ethno-nationalism has been on the rise in the countries which joined the NATO almost two decades ago as well, and in various parts of the European Union, as well as in all post-Soviet states.

There is also a close resemblance between the situation in many post-Communist, and particularly post-Soviet states, fitting Brubaker's description of newly-emerging or re-emerging nationalisms which "involve claims made in the name of a 'core nation' or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole". Calling this type of nationalism "nationalizing", Brubaker analyzes how "[t]he core nation is understood as the legitimate 'owner' of the state, which is conceived as the state *of* and *for* the core nation". Brubaker notes that this form of nationalism is challenged by "transborder nationalisms of [...] 'external national homelands' [...] oriented to ethnonational kin who are residents and citizens of other states", and particularly puts Russian nationalism into this second category, which "asserts a state's right – indeed its obligation – to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, and protect the interests of 'its' ethnonational kin in other states". At the same time, Russian minorities tend to profess the third form of nationalism, demanding a state recognition of their distinct ethnocultural nationality, as well as collective, nationality-based cultural or political rights (Brubaker 1998, 277).

It may also be observed that "core nation" and transborder nationalisms can coexist in cases when the "core nation" of one state has ethnic kin in another. The Armenian case falls into this category: the "core nation" nationalism within the country is supplemented by the "external national homeland" type, particularly regarding the case of ethnic Armenians in Georgia's Samtskhe Javakheti region, where, in turn, the minority nationalism may be observed. All that is augmented by what Brubaker considers the fourth form of nationalism: one that seeks to protect the mores or cultural patrimony against alleged threats

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<sup>90</sup> The "mainstream", of course, may change with time, considering the percentage of votes in favor of nationalist parties in recent European and American elections.

from outside, brands its political opponents as antinational, idealizes the past, and criticizes the imaginary ills of the “West” and of “modernity” (Brubaker 1998, 277-278). Numerous hateful populist statements as manifestations of this fourth form of nationalism might serve as object for a separate study. Some particularly bizarre examples include a statement by the Public Council of Armenia against the non-discrimination law: “It is an irrefutable fact that the draft establishes grounds for the legalization of immorality and perversion [...] the ultimate depravity will be unavoidable” (Public Council Subcommittee on Religion 2013), and recurrent statements, particularly by the clergy, that people not belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church cannot be considered Armenians (A1plus.am 2017).

The Armenian case may seem extreme. However, as already mentioned, in some cases NATO and EU membership may not prevent the rise of ethno-nationalist parties as evidenced by the Brexit, the rise of Le Pen’s National Front, Pegida, and many others. The political gains from playing the ethnic card may particularly be observed in the Hungarian case. After Fidesz’s return to power in 2010, ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries were granted citizenship and allowed to vote by post, while Hungarian expats cannot vote the same way. The result was a significant electoral advantage for the ruling Fidesz-KDNP<sup>91</sup> bloc in subsequent elections. Similarly, since granting citizenship to ethnic Armenians in Samtskhe Javakheti, the ruling Republican Party of Armenia has been bussing them to voting stations in Armenia for each election; Armenian expats who are mostly critical of the government are not allowed to vote (Coalson 2013).

As a contrast, the “core nation” approach could be observed in Slovakia: the process of national self-identification is still more on the ethnic and cultural side than on the civic and territorial one and therefore minorities cannot be fully accommodated. Slovak reality can be characterized by the notion “*Kulturnation*”, rather than “*Staatsnation*” (Dostál 2006, 144). Anti-minority sentiments and accordingly shaped policies, specifically against the Hungarian minority, were applied in the 1990s, as well as in 2006-2014. The situation sometimes became rather bizarre with hate speech and apocalyptic pronouncements by leaders of a government coalition party. For example, the

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<sup>91</sup> KDNP stands for “*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*” (Christian Democratic People’s Party).

party announced that the construction of road infrastructure and new bridges paved a road for “Hungarian military invasion” (while both Hungary and Slovakia already were members of the NATO and the EU) or that the usage of the Hungarian language in public sphere should be limited not to infringe on the Slovak language, contrary to the “European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”, and so forth (Grigoryan 2010).

The political gains of populist mobilization by means of narratives related to the “cultural nation” mean that in the short term, the situation in the East European neighborhood may hardly change. However, there are also examples demonstrating that historical determinism and the prevalence of ethnic and cultural self-identification over a civic and territorial one can be overcome without relinquishing one’s identity.

South Tyrol or Alto Adige, located in the north of Italy on the Austrian border, is one of the two provinces that make up the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige and covers 2.4 percent of Italy’s territory. It was annexed by Italy in 1919. According to a pre-war Austrian census, 93 percent of the region’s population was German, 4 percent were Ladins whose language is related to Rhaeto-Romanic, and 3 percent were Italians. In 2009, the region’s population was about 500,000 – nearly 70 percent German-speakers living mostly in rural areas, about 26 percent Italian-speakers concentrated in 4 major cities, and 4 percent Ladins (Benedikter 2009, 69).

During the interwar period, the Italian government undertook repressive measures forbidding German-language schools and forcibly changing personal names into Italian. (Benedikter 2009, 69). A 1946 agreement attached to the Italian-Austrian peace treaty provided for a “substantial autonomy”. However, Italy’s Constituent Assembly extended the regional autonomy also to the adjacent province of Trentino, a region with an overwhelming Italian majority. Disappointment among the South Tyroleans resulted in mass demonstrations and, beginning in 1957, even bombings. A joint Italian-South Tyrolean commission appointed to seek a compromise eventually proposed a 137-point package providing for an effective autonomy. It was adopted in 1969, and a new autonomy statute was approved by the Italian Parliament and enforced from January 1972. It took another 20 years of negotiations before the principal measures contained in the package were implemented. The Italian government sent a notification of implementation to Vienna on April 22 in 1992, and the

Austrian government officially declared before the UN on June 11 in 1992 that the conflict had been settled.

The “South Tyrol Autonomy Statute” is aimed to ensure the maintenance and cultural development of the German and Ladin linguistic groups within the Italian state. At the same time, the autonomy is a territorial one, i.e. the benefits of self-government apply to the members of all three official linguistic groups (Benedikter 2009, 70). The central government has no veto power over the provincial legislation. Public officials must prove their knowledge of both Italian and German, while in the Ladin areas three official languages must be mastered (Benedikter 2009, 72). The province has few taxation powers but it is entitled to the 70 percent of the value added tax collected locally and almost 90 percent of other taxes, and also receives benefits from the EU sector funds (social, structural, and agricultural), so its financial situation is quite advantageous (Benedikter 2009, 73).

In the case of South Tyrol, Austria acted as a guarantor of the rights of the German-speaking population; so, the autonomy package adopted in 1969 had also to be approved by the Austrian government. That was a provision of the 1946 peace treaty, which is not the case in most of the other kin-state situations. Most importantly, however, the issue was not exploited for domestic populist mobilization. Even though violent conflict potential in the region of South Tyrol was overcome through decades, the effort for building civic citizenry is still underway even today both for enhancing the current mechanisms of diversity management and in the face of new challenges, such as migration flows. The Institute of the Minority Rights of the European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano produced a number of recommendations to continue guaranteeing both the integration of new migrants and the protection of traditional autochthonous communities and minorities of South Tyrol (Medda-Windischer and Carlà 2013).

## **Recommendations**

In this paper we, a group of authors from Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, discussed a number of peace processes that have proven to contribute to conflict transformation in conflict contexts worldwide, and yet up to date, have not been applied or considered thoroughly in the context of the South Caucasus conflicts. While many other transformative processes exist, we limited our discussion here to transitional justice, rehumanization, language

policies, and the concept of the civic nation as we see these particularly important as steps that can move the societies of the South Caucasus out of the current deadlock. The proposed peace processes can be applied individually although they would bring the best results if applied in combination.

- Transitional justice is a particularly important process to start early. Most of the time, a peace accord does not immediately address the root causes of conflict, and a very long period of time is needed to overcome the long-term effects of a violent conflict. As it has been seen in most of the cases, signing a peace accord does not necessarily assure that the conflict has been transformed and sustainable peace has been fully achieved. For this very reason, transitional justice is implemented for the purpose of a long-lasting transformation of societies, structural changes, and the ultimate abolition of the root causes of the conflict. Certain transitional justice tools may be initiated beforehand with the aim of addressing and transforming social relations. Memory work, unofficial truth work, art projects, local reconciliation practices, and community dialogue attempts may be effective entry points. Although a certain amount of state support is fundamental for transitional justice mechanisms in general, civil society efforts are highly important for unfolding the will of the society to end the conflict. The attempts to establish an unofficial truth commission by human rights activists in Turkey indicates that it is possible to increase such efforts without expecting an immediate state involvement. On the other hand, the Colombian case demonstrates that an early and complementary approach to transitional justice and peace may facilitate the actual beginning of official peace talks.
- In regard to the integration of the displaced populations, the states and the civil societies should pay attention not only to the material conditions (which of course are critically important), but also to the rehumanization and social integration of the displaced, their socio-psychological state, the relations and interactions between the displaced and the host communities. The peacebuilding practices aimed at rehumanization should take into account the views of representatives from various parts and strata of the society that would help to build connections in both horizontal and vertical directions. Such practices can also help reduce tensions and prevent conflicts within and between the communities. Rehumanization of the displaced and their inclusion

into the development of state strategies of integration will enrich solutions to economic, social, humanitarian, and other challenges.

- The development of peace education curricula would also prepare ground for peaceful conflict transformation in the region and within each society as it will prepare the new generations to work with conflicts constructively. To this end, the reform of textbooks and teaching methodologies, particularly in the disciplines of history, literature, as well as civic and early education in accordance with the principles of peace education is crucial in regions affected by protracted conflicts.
- The language policies are also critical for conflict prevention and resolution. So far, the countries of the South Caucasus have been promoting one official national language making the interethnic and cross-border communication difficult and contributing to the isolation of the societies from one another. These policies and the colonial past also contributed to the worries associated with learning Russian; yet forgetting Russian further exacerbates the mutual isolation of the groups from each other and from the world. Initiation of public discussions on the models of multilingual education, therefore, can help alleviate all of these concerns. Introduction of multilingual education will require to reconsider the laws on the state languages with the improvement of legal guarantees for the protection of languages of national minorities and allow the use of minority languages in administrative and educational structures, contributing to positive peace. The simultaneous learning of both English and Russian will solve political questions, alleviate the worries of the societies about the Russian “soft power”, and allow the societies to better integrate into global economy.

The successful implementation of multilingual education should go beyond the primary school level. Multilingual departments at the universities with a number of concurrent languages of instruction particularly in departments preparing teachers for minority languages with provision of scholarships for representatives of ethnic minorities could further the goal. Changes to the legal framework, such as the 1+4 policy in Georgia aimed at promoting the Georgian language among the minorities and facilitating their access to higher education, can serve as the basis for development of multi-language education (Agenda.ge 2017) (Bobghiashvili, Kharatyan and Surmanidze 2016). Introduction of

strong English and Russian language teaching at public schools and universities in addition to the titular and minority languages with adequate textbooks and well-prepared teachers would complete the picture.

- All of the above recommendations, in turn, require a firm commitment of all the countries of the South Caucasus to the principles of a civic nation, with derivative commitments to the rule of law and democratization. Considering the multi-ethnic composition of the region and the long history of violent conflicts, taking the ethno-national route is a building step toward perpetual divisions and violence detrimental both to each state and the region as a whole. The adherence to the values of an inclusive and democratic civic state, instead, can pave the way for the transformation of relations and coexistence.

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# South Caucasus Zones of Peace

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**Bakhtiyar Aslanov, Irakli Kakabadze, Arsen Kharatyan**

This paper explores the transformative potential of establishing Zones of Peace or demilitarized zones in the South Caucasus as a practical conflict transformation mechanism in times of ongoing conflicts. Since the official peace negotiations are currently in a stalemate and have not achieved tangible results in the past, it is vital to start rebuilding linkages between the societies of the South Caucasus. Learning from the experiences of other countries in establishing Zones of Peace, the formation of demilitarized and integrated communities that gradually expand could precede the future peace in the South Caucasus.

## Introduction

The South Caucasus has suffered from armed conflicts since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the past 25 years, official negotiations have delivered few results, human suffering has continued, societies have grown further apart, and very little effort has been spent to advance interconnection and interdependence between the region's societies, a step necessary for conflict resolution.

Prior to the ethno-national policies of the Soviet Union followed by the post-independence nationalist politics, ethnic or religious identity was not a defining factor of the communities of the South Caucasus. Yet, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, nationalism and identity politics became the primary political instruments of attracting the support of the masses<sup>92</sup>. Within the last 25 years, the groups who held power have used increasingly more divisive nationalism and enemy images to mobilize society, which in turn made the conflicts increasingly intractable.

Another important factor regarding the South Caucasus is the influence of external forces, which plays a significant role in shaping the political situation inside the region. The South Caucasus continues to suffer from the collision of global interests and powers, such as Russia and the "West". Turkey backs Azerbaijan and Russia is Armenia's ally, while Georgia strives to join the NATO and the EU. These divisions contribute to a further alienation between the South Caucasus countries and societies. The seeds of a global conflict already exist in the South Caucasus. If the international community does not prioritize conflict resolution in the region, conditions are ripe for a full blown global conflict. Relations between Russia, the US, the EU, Turkey, and Iran are tense over multiple issues. New international actors, such as China and India, could positively contribute to changing the dynamics of the South Caucasus political map, complementing the role that the other global actors with entrenched interests play in the region.

Creating demilitarized Zones of Peace in the South Caucasus may be a unique starting point to help restore the multicultural and peaceful life of all communities in the region.

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<sup>92</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the politicization of ethnicity in the Soviet Union and the ethnic framing of the conflicts in the South Caucasus see (Abbasov, et al. 2016).

## The Concept and Implementation of Zones of Peace

Zones of Peace, or “safe zones”, have been designed in different formats in armed-conflict regions around the globe. They can take varying shapes ranging from maritime trade zones, nuclear free zones, or demilitarized zones. All Zones of Peace are designated territories where integrative acts are encouraged and violent acts are forbidden (Hancock and Iyer 2007).

The method is not new. Places where individuals, groups, or community members have been immune from arrest and physical attack or other types of violence have existed throughout history, from the Egyptian civilization to classical periods to Medieval Christendom (Mitchell and Nan 1997).

We have identified three models of Zones of Peace based on their endurance and quality:

- The first is the zone of negative or hazardous peace, in which peace is kept on an unstable or temporary basis by deterrence, threat, or lack of capacity or will to be involved in violent conflict. In other words, this is called “absence of war”, although the probability of war stays real and tangible (Kacowicz 1998). The South Caucasus today hangs between war and negative peace.
- Another one is the zone of stable peace, in which peace is kept on a consensual and reciprocal basis. The possibility of war and violence is small. The core conditions to the development of a stable peace zone include: a) the option of changing the territorial status quo through violence is removed from national agendas; b) a nation’s nonmilitary intervention in the internal affairs of another is minimal; c) the states of the zone of stable peace support economic cooperation rather than a heroic or romantic glance toward the future. Unlike negative peace, stable peace requires no violence both within the country’s borders as well as in international relations. A stable peace zone is a community of political entities that is pleased with the status quo, in which international and domestic conflicts may happen but are managed through non-violent means. (Boulding 1991)
- A third type, the pluralistic security community has expectations of peaceful change, in which members share common values and norms as well as political institutions and are deeply interdependent. The idea of

a pluralistic security community is directly associated with the notion of integration. (Kacowicz 1998)

Some of the best known contemporary examples of conflicts where Zones of Peace have been successfully implemented are in Colombia, the Philippines, and Ecuador. Zones of Peace functioned to maintain inhabitants of these countries and secure them from violence neighboring these zones. Eighty-six communities were saved in a larger Zone of Peace in Ecuador and throughout the mountainous Peru-Ecuador border (Nan, et al. 2009). In these countries, Zones of Peace were proposed by a variety of actors – community members and organizations that were targeted by violent armed conflicts, civil society and grassroots peace and development organizations, or local government entities. These zones declared themselves impartial in the conflicts and requested that none of the parties in conflict should view these communities or their members as “the other”.

Zones of Peace may be established in three different time frames – before, during, or after a peace agreement.

Since none of the conflicts in the South Caucasus are resolved, we suggest focusing on experiences of implementing Zones of Peace prior to an agreement as an integral part of the peace processes.

Zones of Peace, which have a primary aim of protecting civilian populations, create policies and practices of neutrality, non-belonging, and non-alignment with any conflict party to prevent violent activities from happening within the Zones of Peace. Zones of Peace might also be set up on humanitarian grounds during both the intra and inter-state conflicts (Hancock and Iyer 2007).

## **Experiences in the South Caucasus and Looking Ahead**

Safe areas, or demilitarized Zones of Peace for the people living in the South Caucasus, can be implemented prior to reaching comprehensive peace agreements in the region. The South Caucasus already has some experience with such zones. The market of Sadakhlo, with its trans-border trade community on the Armenian-Georgian border, used to be a self-spurred contact zone for Azerbaijanis and Armenians, while Georgians met people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia at Zugdidi and Ergneti markets, respectively. Tbilisi and Moscow, where Armenians and Azerbaijanis regularly meet and cooperate, can also be considered a Zone of Peace.

Not only were the Georgian markets economically beneficial, they also enabled day-to-day communication between people from across the conflict divides, thus building confidence. These markets, however, were shut down under the pretext of fighting, smuggling, or economic unviability, although government regulation could have been a more effective way of handling the markets without damaging their peace-building potential. The Ergneti market, where Georgians and South Ossetians cooperated, functioned the longest from among the three, but it also was shut down in 2006, shortly before the escalation that culminated in the five-day war of August 2008.

Since developing full-fledged Zones of Peace, especially in areas where military escalations still take place, will take time, reopening previously existing marketplaces that allowed Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, and others to trade across the conflict divides could allow the parties to the conflicts to build confidence before engaging in more advanced steps.

Learning from the experiences of other countries in establishing Zones of Peace, the formation of demilitarized and integrated communities that gradually expand could precede the future peace in the South Caucasus.

Since the official peace negotiations are currently in a stalemate and have not achieved tangible results in the past, it is vital to start rebuilding linkages between the societies of the South Caucasus. Mutual isolation contributes to dehumanization and makes the progress in official negotiations impossible. In order to prevent another disastrous war in the fragile South Caucasus, it is highly important to find ways of creating safe areas for the daily communication of people in the region.

To date, the political leaders of this region have failed to find a peaceful and suitable mechanism for moving the region forward. Thus, it is time to learn from successful international experiences and translate them into effective peace processes in the South Caucasus. During ongoing conflicts around the world, Zones of Peace have been established and have helped to advance the peace processes. Similarly, Zones of Peace in the South Caucasus could be instrumental in transforming the currently existing negative peace – a “no peace and no war” situation – into a positive one. As already mentioned, these zones would create a precedent of peaceful coexistence where the parties benefit from daily interaction. The spaces can be chosen within the recognized boundaries of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, or that of the unrecognized

Nagorno-Karabakh, or partially recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A tax-free system could be applied in several smaller Zones of Peace in the South Caucasus, hence encouraging international businesses and trade. The populations near the borders and lines of contact most affected by war and isolation would benefit, and they would build mutual trust and economic prosperity. The Zones of Peace can be demilitarized areas organized by the regional countries with the international community's support. The zones can have a special status, with their own laws and regulations that ensure inclusivity and local-level democracy. As a later stage, the entire South Caucasus could become a single Zone of Peace.

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# Acronyms and Initialisms

AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)

CoE – Council of Europe

EU – European Union

HDP – *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party)

IDP – Internally displaced persons

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

LGBTI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex

MoE – Ministry of Education

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NKAO – Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PKK – *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

US – United States

WCIOM – Russian Public Opinion Research Center



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