

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR ON GEORGIA'S NON-DOMINANT ETHNIC GROUPS



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Social Justice Center

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Introduction

On September 27, 2020, the second Karabakh war broke out between the countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The military conflict lasted for 44 days and ended with the signing of a trilateral agreement between the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia, and the President of Russia on November 10, 2020, after the takeover of the city of Shushi by the military forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This war had significant ramifications not only on the countries involved in the war but also on the region as a whole and impacted the balance of power in the region.

With regard to the implications of the second Karabakh war, the context of Georgia should be considered separately, where the ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian communities are the two largest ethnic groups in the country, after the ethnic Georgians, and reside in the same regions, municipalities, and villages. The resilience of these groups to conflict is significantly affected by the fragmentation and perfunctoriness of state policy in Georgia toward civic equality and integration, as well as institutional, systemic administrative, and social barriers at the central and local policy levels, due to which these groups are not fully able to participate in the public and economic life of Georgia. Experiences of inter-ethnic-religious dialogue and cooperation in shared social practices are even more feeble at the local level.

It is noteworthy that during the Second Karabakh War, the ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in Georgia frequently held rallies and demonstrations in support of their respective countries in war. Georgian citizens, due to their ethnic belonging, also wanted to go to fight in Karabakh during the war. There were reports of separate experiences of confrontation between these ethnic groups in Georgia. Moreover, ethnic-Azerbaijani and ethnic-Armenian Georgian citizens often argued and exchanged insults on social media on the topic of war. The conflicting positions of local ethnic groups were largely focused on the theme of war, and there seemed to be excessive identification and emotional involvement in the politics of the neighboring country. At the same time, the language of the representatives of these ethnic groups clearly emphasized their connection with their country citizenship namely Georgia, which nudges them toward peaceful strategies and actions on the territory of Georgia.

The presented document aims to investigate the effects of the Karabakh war on Georgian citizens. It should be noted that in the process of working on the document, more than twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in Georgia. The authors of the study observed ongoing discussions on social networks and in public and closed groups. In addition, informational and analytical materials disseminated through the local media as well as that of neighboring countries were analyzed during the preparation of the document.

The document consists of four main parts. The first part provides general information about the ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian communities living in Georgia. The second part describes the narratives of the states of Azerbaijan and Armenia around Karabakh. The third part entails Georgia's position and

its assessment from the perspective of both neighboring countries and Georgian citizens from non-dominant ethnic groups. The fourth part presents the attitudes of Georgian citizen ethnic groups around the Karabakh war. In the last, concluding section, recommendations are proposed with regard to the change of the current situation.

The document is a working report and it aims more to depict the primary trends and dynamics of the presented issue.

Brief information about ethnic groups living in Georgia

When examining the ramifications of the Second Karabakh War on ethnic groups in Georgia, it is important to briefly review the Georgian context before discussing the war period itself. In particular, what is the geographical area of the ethnic groups that may be affected by the war; What are their historical or cultural ties with Georgia and the countries involved in the Karabakh war, and how successful is the Georgian state's integration policy toward these ethnic groups?

Armenian and Azerbaijani communities have lived in Georgia for centuries. The development of historical processes in the Caucasus often gave rise to migratory flows, which is why the area of settlement of different ethnic groups often included the territories that are currently represented as three independent, sovereign states in the South Caucasus.

The Armenian community of Georgia

Today, Armenians are most densely populated in Samtskhe-Javakheti, although they are actively represented in Tbilisi and the municipalities of the Kvemo Kartli region. Their concentration is particularly high in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki municipalities, accounting for 94% of the population in Akhalkalaki and 96% in Ninotsminda.¹ Armenian historical settlements existed in Kakheti, Shida Kartli, and Kvemo Kartli. Currently, a small number of Armenians live in these areas. Apart from Javakheti, an important place of Armenian settlement remains in Tbilisi, a city ruled for many years by ethnic Armenian city heads (mayors). According to the 2014 census, Armenians make up 4.5% of Georgia's population.² This figure is significantly lower than in 1989 when they accounted for 8.1% of the population, and according to the 2002 census, the percentage of Armenians in the Georgian population was 5.7%.³

¹ 2014 General Population Census. Available here: <http://census.ge/>

² ibid

³ Komakhia M. - Formation of ethnic map in Georgia. Available here: <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/18103/1/EtnikuriRukisFormirebaSaqartveloshi.PDF>

There are several reasons for the decline in the numbers of the Armenian community in Georgia. During the social cataclysms and unemployment in Georgia in the 90s, many people left the country due to labor migration. For Armenians living in Javakheti, going to Russia for seasonal work remains an important source of income.⁴ Along with the process of labor migration, an important reason for the decline of the Armenian community is the ethno-nationalist rhetoric and chauvinism of the 1990s, which was characteristic of a large number of political organizations within the national movement. This period is associated with vicious practices of changing the family names, with which ethnic minorities sought to avoid chauvinistic attitudes and the threat of persecution. The unfavorable atmosphere pushed all non-Georgian ethnic groups, including Armenians, to leave their homes for safety reasons.⁵

Under Eduard Shevardnadze's rule, these openly chauvinist attitudes ceased, however cultural and political integration remained elusive. The control of the Javakheti region was entrusted by the central government to loyal, quasi-criminal groups that exercised full control of the region. This situation increased the isolation of the Armenian community in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The modernization project launched under Mikheil Saakashvili's rule introduced some positive dynamics in the process of civic integration, although initially there were also risks of confrontation in Javakheti.⁶

Ultimately, under Saakashvili's rule, the infrastructure connecting the center and Javakheti was relatively mended, and a 1 + 4 education program was introduced for Armenian and Azeri-speaking youth. The program has eased the opportunity for Armenian youth to receive education in Georgian higher education institutions and to study the state language. Nevertheless, the region was still governed semi-formally, through clan principles, without the democratic participation of the local population.

Against the background of the failure of the education system, only the 1 + 4 program can not fulfill foster full integration. Due to many challenges in the general education system, many students are no longer able to participate in the 1 + 4 program.⁷ Ethnic Armenian citizens of Georgia study in schools mainly with books produced in the Republic of Armenia, because bilingual books created in Georgia are of poor quality and can not fulfill their function. Added to this is the teachers' lack of knowledge of the Georgian language and the general lack of qualified teachers. This issue is even more critical among ethnic minority groups. The real problem in the education of ethnic minorities is not only the

⁴ Tarzyan T. Chachibaia K. "Thousands of people from Javakheti await for the restoration of Georgian citizenship." Available here: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/atasobit-adamiani-javakhetidan-sakartvelos-mokalakeobis-aghdgenis-molodinshi>

⁵ Zaal Anjapadze, How Emigration Affects Georgia <https://jamestown.org/program/how-emigration-affects-georgia/>

⁶ Veloy Mateu S. "Armenian Minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region: Civic Integration and Its Barriers". Available here: <https://grass.org.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/somekhi-umtsiresoba-samtskhe-javakhetis-regionshi.pdf>

⁷ Dalakishvili M., Iremashvili N. "Systemic Challenges of Education Policy for Ethnic Minorities". Available here: <https://bit.ly/3BIvhyx>

teaching of the Georgian language but also access to quality education, which hinders the development opportunities of ethnic minorities and creates structural factors of social or economic inequality.⁸

Another problem is that young people who go through the only path of integration for them, their employment opportunities are almost nonexistent, including in public institutions. Employment in municipal bodies in Javakheti, as well as throughout Georgia, is unattainable because of nepotistic and party influences. In general, there are no special support measures for ethnic minorities in the country in the employment process,⁹ which makes it impossible for the new wave of educated youth to make use of their resources. This in turn contributes to social frustration.¹⁰ The location of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region and the geographical distribution of the villages, as well as the harsh climatic conditions and damaged social infrastructure, which can not compensate for the natural asymmetry of the region, lead to economic peripheralization and weaken the economic development opportunities of residents.

In these conditions, the solution for the local community is to migrate to Armenia and Russia and get by with seasonal work. This process is called "Khopani" in Javakheti. The migration process was delayed after the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 and it became necessary to obtain a Russian visa. Due to this, a significant part of the population received Armenian and Russian citizenship. After the 2013 reform, citizens of other countries automatically lost their Georgian citizenship. The exact number of people left without citizenship is unknown. According to locals, there are more than ten thousand people in such a situation in Javakheti.¹¹ This reality is a double challenge for the population. On the one hand, the residents without citizenship do not have access to basic programs and services (universal health care, social protection, etc.), on the other hand, because of this, the region is connected to the Russian Federation and Javakheti becomes the subject of excessive geopolitical and security speculation. The security lenses make it difficult to properly address the challenges of this region and foster real democratic processes.

The problem of Armenophobia in Georgia, which is often manifested in the statements of certain individuals, has a devastating effect on the integration process.¹² According to the 2020 report of the Media Development Fund, Armenophobia is the most common case of hate speech against different ethnic groups in Georgia (13.2%).¹³ It is worrying that these attitudes are not thwarted by the state government through equality-based rhetoric and information policy, which exacerbates the negative consequences of hate speech and weakens social connectivity.

⁸ ibid

⁹ Tsursumia E. Employment policy for ethnic minorities. Available here: <https://bit.ly/373waDM>

¹⁰ Gabrielashvili M. Frustrated and unrecognized youth from ethnic minority communities. Available here: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/imedgatsruebuli-da-araghiarebuli-akhalgazrdebi-etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-temebidan>

¹¹ Thousands of people from Javakheti are waiting for the restoration of Georgian citizenship, Available here: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/atasobit-adamiani-javakhetidan-sakartvelos-mokalakeobis-aghdgenis-molodinshi>

¹² Armenophobia: "The Ancient Form of Xenophobia" in Georgia <https://oc-media.org/armenopobia-ksenopobiis-udvelesi-porma-sakartveloshi/>

¹³ Hate Speech 2020 Report <https://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/Sidzulvilisena2021.pdf>

It should be noted that infrastructural problems are also acute in the Javakheti region. Access to pre-school education is sharply weak in the villages where the Armenian community of Georgia lives.¹⁴ Natural gas, drinking water, roads, etc. are problematic in many villages. The issue of accessibility remains a challenge. Moreover, the Javakheti region is characterized by the concentration of excessive power of political clans and the problematic work of the state security services. For example, the 2021 local self-government elections were held without political battles - the candidate of the ruling party in several majoritarian constituencies in Ninotsminda participated in the elections unchallenged, without competitors.¹⁵

Azerbaijani community of Georgia

In Georgia, the ethnic group living mainly in the Kvemo Kartli region is often referred to as the Azerbaijani community, although in some cases the reference to Azerbaijanis is criticized by the members of this group and is considered undesirable. Kvemo Kartli is not the only area where Azerbaijanis reside, they live compactly in several municipalities of Kakheti and non-compactly (except for Ponichala settlement), but not in small numbers in Tbilisi. According to the 2014 census, Azerbaijanis make up 6.2% of Georgia's population and are Georgia's largest ethnic group after ethnic Georgians.¹⁶ According to 1989 data, they constituted 5.7% of the Georgian population.¹⁷ This percentage data should not mislead us, because, in fact, we did not have a clear growth dynamic of the Azerbaijani population during this period. In the 1990s, Azerbaijanis were the second largest group to leave the country on a large scale. In fact, it was only Slavs that outnumbered.¹⁸

The community of Kvemo Kartli remembers the tensions and conflicts of ethnic connotation with the local population, which were encouraged by the inaction and sometimes active action of the members of the National Movement. Chauvinist actions and slogans are mostly attributed to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, but other leaders of the National Movement have sinned no less and sometimes even more. The address of the chairman of the Georgian National People's Front, Nodar Natadze, at the congress of the People's Front, after the killings in 1989 in Kvemo Kartli, attests to this: "There are no victims, only two Tatars were killed." "Tatar" is a word used in a negative, derogatory sense towards Georgia's Azerbaijanis. Naturally, such a social environment complicates the integration of Georgia's Azerbaijanis.

¹⁴ Action Plan of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2020-2021. https://smr.gov.ge/uploads/Files/%E1%83%98%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A2%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%90/danarti_2_-_samoqmedo_gagma.pdf

¹⁵ Elections in Ethnic Minority Regions - Analysis of Key Trends and Practices <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/archevnebi-etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-regionebshi-dziritadi-tendentsiebis-da-praktikebis-analizi>

¹⁶ 2014 General Population Census. Available here: <http://census.ge/>

¹⁷ Komakhia M. - Formation of ethnic map in Georgia. Available here: <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/18103/1/EtnikuriRukisFormirebaSaqartveloshi.PDF>

¹⁸ იქვე.

Chauvinist attitudes towards Georgian Azerbaijanis also appeared in time. For example, in 2020, the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic was marked by the spread of hate speech against the ethnic Azerbaijani population on social networks, in which certain cultural figures were also involved. In parallel with the actualization and political instrumentalization of the Davit-Gareji issued by the Georgian government, the Azerbaijanis of Georgia, along with the state of Azerbaijan, were also referred to as the enemy of Georgia, in public debates.¹⁹

Beyond problematic attitudes and rhetoric, the integration opportunities are complicated by the state's weak policy toward minorities. Particular emphasis should be placed on systemic shortcomings in the education system: poor quality textbooks, low qualification of teachers and general staff shortages, damaged infrastructure in rural schools, and a language barrier that does not create opportunities for progress in this direction.²⁰

Like the Armenian youth in Georgia, the 1 + 4 program gave Azerbaijanis some opportunity for integration, although in their case employment opportunities are limited due to the same nepotistic and clan systems in local governments and public institutions. Added to this is the generally negative attitude towards their ethnicity, which is noted by the Azerbaijanis themselves.²¹

In addition to the failed integration policy of the Georgian state, cultural domination, and the erasure of traces of Azerbaijani culture in Kvemo Kartli,²² in the entire political spectrum,²³ there is no clear vision and full perception of the ongoing processes in these ethnic groups, their involvement in politics and society.²⁴

When discussing the shortcomings of integration policy, we should not forget the issue of substantial segregation of ethnic minorities from the Georgian media. According to the ISSA study conducted in 2018-2019, not knowing the Georgian language, Georgian citizens, instead, often follow the ongoing socio-political events in neighboring countries.²⁵ According to statistics posted on the website of the Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 80% of Azerbaijanis living in Kvemo Kartli and 70% of ethnic Armenians living in Samtskhe-Javakheti do not speak the state language.²⁶ In this regard, the

¹⁹ 2020 report on "Hate Speech" <https://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/Sidzulvilisena2021.pdf>

²⁰ Dalakishvili M. Iremashvili N. "Systemic Challenges of Education Policy for Ethnic Minorities". Available here: <https://bit.ly/3f2ZiPP>

²¹ Gabrielashvili M. „Frustrated and unrecognized youth from ethnic minority communities.“ <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/imedgatsruebuli-da-araghiarebuli-akhalgazrdebi-etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-temebidan>

²² Arjevanidze N. "Signs of cultural domination and erasure of minority culture in Kvemo Kartli region." Available here: <https://bit.ly/3BOqBag>

²³ Ethnic Minority Rights in Parties' Pre-Election Visions - 2020. Available here:

<https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-uflebebi-partiebis-tsinasaarchevno-khedvebshi-2020>

²⁴ Mammadli K. "The issue of political participation of non-dominant ethnic groups in the Constitutions of Georgia." Available here: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/aradominanturi-etnikuri-jgufebis-politikuri-monatsileobis-sakitkhi-sakartvelos-konstitutsiebshi>

²⁵ A study of the participation of ethnic minorities in political life. Available here: <https://osgf.ge/publication/etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-warmomadgenlebis-politikur-ckhovrebashi-monawileobis-kvleva/>

²⁶ The distribution of population by regions, knowledge of native language and Georgian language. Available here: <https://smr.gov.ge/ge/page/33/demografiuli-statistika>

role of the Georgian Public Broadcaster is especially important, one of the main functions of which is to meet the information needs of national minorities. However, according to a study conducted by the Social Justice Center in 2020, the public broadcaster, even in a pandemic, failed to fully inform non-dominant ethnic groups about the ongoing processes in Georgia.²⁷ It should be noted that in recent years, both in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, local media organizations have begun to disseminate information in minority languages. With few exceptions, the major revenues of most of these organizations are linked to neighboring countries.

When discussing the influences of neighboring countries, we ought to separately mention the influences of the state of Azerbaijan in the Kvemo Kartli region. In the 2019 article, Georgian citizens, and ethnic Azerbaijani activists talk about the negative influences and direct interventions of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and its direct interference in damaging the democratic process in Kvemo Kartli.²⁸ It should be noted that local activists also see the responsibility of the Georgian state in the increase of the influence of the state of Azerbaijan, as Georgia sees its citizens through the neighboring countries. A clear example of this was the reference to the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia,²⁹ when commenting on the conflict with ethnic connotations in Dmanisi in 2021.³⁰ The statement of the local priest at the confrontation between the clergy of the Diocese of Marneuli and Juhab and the local residents in the village of Second Kesalo in Marneuli, in early 2021, that the land of ethnic Azerbaijani citizens was on the other side of the Red Bridge, is another example of representing the Azerbaijani community of Georgia as a part of the neighboring country and as a foreigner.³¹

Narratives of neighboring countries and Nagorno-Karabakh

A brief description of the experiences and lives of the ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian population living in Georgia helps us to see the channels (education system, media space, etc.) through which a significant part of the narratives of neighboring countries reach the citizens of Georgia. In addition, it shows the need for specific interventions that would replace these narratives in the perceptions and

²⁷ Needs of Ethnic Minorities, Public Broadcaster and Pandemic: Available here: <https://bit.ly/3kZqJhe>

²⁸ Georgians allege Azerbaijan interfering in their local elections <https://eurasianet.org/georgians-allege-azerbaijan-interfering-in-their-local-elections>

²⁹ Mammadli, K. Chachibaia K. "Dmanisi Conflict - ethnic derivatives of everyday conflict" https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/%E1%83%93%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1 %E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%95%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%9C%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98_1629904540.pdf

³⁰ Vakhtang Gomelauri on the confrontation in Dmanisi - this topic should not turn into an ethnic strife - it is the enmity of the country saying that this is an ethnic issue , <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/656284-vaxtang-gomelauri-dmanisshi-dapirispirebaze-es-tema-ar-unda-gadaizardos-etnikur-dapirispirebashi-kveqnis-mtrobaa-vinc-izaxis-rom-es-aris-etnikuri-tema/>

³¹ According to the residents of Kesalo, the priest does not allow them to cultivate their lands <https://reginfo.ge/people/item/20807-qesalos-mzxovreblebi-azxadeben.-rom-mgvdeli-mat-mixebis-damushavebis-uplebas-ar-awlevs>

lives of Georgian citizens. In the current reality, it is necessary to get acquainted with these narratives and analyze them.

The vision of the state of Azerbaijan

In the Azerbaijani narrative, Nagorno-Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan. In an interview with Turkish television in 1989, an Azerbaijani woman called Karabakh "the crown of Azerbaijani lands."³² This spirit is shared by the vast majority of the population of Azerbaijan. According to the Azerbaijanis, one of the khanates created by the Turkic-speaking peoples, the Karabakh khanate, has existed in these areas since the middle of the 18th century. The name of the region, according to the Azerbaijanis, comes from their language, which means Black Garden.³³ In the Azerbaijani narrative, the settlement of the Armenian people in Karabakh is associated with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It is believed that during the Soviet era, there was a special settlement of Armenians in Karabakh. However, they also acknowledge that the Armenian people have always lived in Karabakh. It should be noted that the main point in this narrative is who ruled Karabakh and not which ethnic groups lived in these territories.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918 and that of the Transcaucasian Sejm, the independent republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia were formed. The conflict between the two countries over Karabakh starts during this period. In 1920, the First Republic of Azerbaijan established control over Karabakh, and after the Soviet occupation in 1921, as a result of trilateral negotiations, by the decision of the Bolsheviks, Karabakh remained part of the Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.³⁴

Relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Karabakh were stable during Soviet rule. Relations have been strained since February 1988, when, as a result of perestroika (transformation) policies, the leadership of the Karabakh Autonomous Region decided to secede from the Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan and unite with Armenia, which Moscow refused.³⁵ In parallel with the collapse of the Soviet Union, demonstrations and rallies began in the Azerbaijani capital demanding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

February 26, 1992, is the most difficult day in the memory of Azerbaijanis in connection with Karabakh. On that day, in the war, in the small town of Khojalo, 613 civilians were killed, including 63 children, 103 women, and 70 elderly people. In the official narrative of Azerbaijan, this event is

³² Day 32. What is happening in Azerbaijan? Available in Azerbaijani:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rNyZSkRsVw&t=294s>

³³ Karabakh: Etymology, territory and borders. Available in Azerbaijani:

<https://www.trt.net.tr/azerbaycan/proqram/2016/04/04/qarabag-etimologiyasi-razisi-v-s-rh-dl-ri-464452>

³⁴ The document on the foundation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, Available in Russian:

https://cdn.discordapp.com/attachments/710567602661097564/733706215992852530/Screenshot_20200420-212610.jpg

³⁵ Karabakh Movement 88: A Chronology of Events on the Road to Independence. Available in English:

<https://www.evnreport.com/politics/karabakh-movement-88-a-chronology-of-events-on-the-road-to-independence>

known as the "Khojaly Genocide".³⁶ As a result of the First Karabakh War, the number of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, the Karabakh region, and seven additional occupied areas (Fizuli, Lachin, Kelbajer, Aghdam, Jebrail, Gubadli, and Zengiler) exceeded one million.³⁷

The first war in Karabakh ended in 1994 with the defeat of Azerbaijan, and in May with the involvement of Russia, the parties signed a ceasefire agreement, in which, in addition to the territories of the Karabakh Autonomous Region, 7 additional regions of Azerbaijan were transferred to the de facto control of Armenia.³⁸ In the following period, the ceasefire agreement was repeatedly violated by both parties.

Defeated in 1994, Azerbaijan begins to mobilize forces and think about the return of the territories. It should be noted that even in the most active phase of the negotiations for the settlement of the conflict (1994-2011) the country did not pursue a real peace policy and create a resolution discourse, conversely, the aggressive rhetoric of marking Armenians as enemies and dehumanizing them was noticeable. In the following years, persons working towards peacebuilding were actively persecuted by the state of Azerbaijan. It did not take responsibility for the violence committed by the Azerbaijani side and focused on proving the guilt of the opposing side.³⁹

In 2004, during a three-month NATO training in Hungary, an Azeri soldier, Ramil Safarov, killed an Armenian soldier with an ax. Safarov told the court that his actions were motivated by hatred towards Armenia and Armenians and the Karabakh war. Hungary found Safarov guilty and sentenced him to life in prison. Nevertheless, in 2012, when Hungary extradited Safarov to Azerbaijan, the President of Azerbaijan pardoned Safarov and gave him a heroic welcome at the airport.⁴⁰

It should be noted that in the period from 2009 to 2018, the amount spent by Azerbaijan on the development of defense capabilities was estimated at \$ 24 billion. In recent years, both Azerbaijan and Armenia have been among the most militarized nations in terms of per capita population. At the same time, military spending was not the only indicator of preparation for the "future victory." It must be said that war and militarism were the leading narratives in the media, in secondary education, in academia, cinematography, and other fields of art.⁴¹

Although Azerbaijan has always been nihilistic about international negotiations (especially the Minsk Group), in various negotiations it has actively raised the issue of conflict resolution and the de-occupation of the seven districts around Karabakh, which was reinforced by UN resolutions and various negotiations. The 2009 document, known as the Madrid Principles, was a partial victory in the peace

³⁶ Information about Khojaly Genocide. Available in English: <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/pages/163/>

³⁷ Erməni Təcavüzü. Available in Azerbaijani: <https://asan.gov.az/az/useful/armenian-aggression>

³⁸ The Bishkek Protocol. Available in Russian: <http://vn.kazimirov.ru/doc9.htm>

³⁹ The road to the Second Karabakh War: the role of ethno-centric narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Available in English: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23761199.2021.1932068>

⁴⁰ Relatives of Armenian axed to death by Azeri officer call for justice, Available in English: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/may/25/relatives-armenian-axed-death-by-azeri-officer-call-justice-ramil-safarov>

⁴¹ The road to the Second Karabakh War: the role of ethno-centric narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Available in English: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23761199.2021.1932068>

process for both Azerbaijan and Armenia. The agreement could not be implemented and in the following years, the Armenian side even started talking about annulling the Madrid agreement.⁴²

The narrative of Azerbaijan changed substantially during the Armenian Velvet Revolution and the Prime Minister of Nikol Pashinyan. It is true that the governments before Pashinyan's were not distinguished by their democracy and almost all the leaders were considered a so-called "Karabakh clan". Pashinyan was the first leader to talk about the unification of Armenia and Karabakh.⁴³ In one of his interviews, he said, "Karabakh is Armenia. Period."⁴⁴ This particularly irritated the Azerbaijani side. "Karabakh is Azerbaijan. Exclamation point," Aliyev told Pashinyan at a conference in Sochi.⁴⁵ In wartime interviews, the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, always emphasized three issues: 1. It is impossible to resolve this conflict through international negotiations; 2. Azerbaijan protects itself from aggressor and occupier; 3. Pashinyan violated all diplomatic norms and standards by dancing in the territory of Karabakh and making statements. Consequently, Azerbaijan has every right to defend itself and retake the occupied territories by military means.⁴⁶

It should be noted that in the Azerbaijani narrative before the war, there were strong opinions about Russia's special role. According to Azerbaijani public opinion, in 1994 Azerbaijan lost the war, not to Armenia but to Russian forces, and this conflict would not be resolved until Russia desired.⁴⁷ However, during and after the Second Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani side began to emphasize its strength. At the same time, Aliyev's statements expressed the position that Azerbaijan also took responsibility for the protection of the rights and security of the Karabakh Armenians.⁴⁸ However, after the end of the war, a "Military Trophy Park" was opened in Baku upon the initiative of President Ilham Aliyev, where, in addition to the enemy's military equipment, the helmets, and personal belongings of fallen Armenian soldiers were also exhibited. In the park, you will also find humiliating models of several Armenian soldiers. The park is represented in the Azerbaijani narrative as emphasizing the country's strength and the goal of restoring justice.⁴⁹

⁴² Time to get rid of Madrid Principles. Available in English: <https://armenianweekly.com/2016/08/10/time-to-get-rid-of-the-madrid-principles/>

⁴³ Pashinyan stiffens Armenia's Posture toward Karabakh. Available in English: <https://jamestown.org/program/pashinyan-stiffens-armenias-posture-toward-karabakh/>

⁴⁴ Pashinyan Calls for Unification between Armenia and Karabakh. Available in English: <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh>

⁴⁵ Qarabağ Azərbaycandır! NİDA! İlham Əliyevdən ermənistanın baş nazirinə şillə kimi cavab. Available in Russian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjpnE7XiDYs>

⁴⁶ Interview with Ilham Aliyev. Available in English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awoRddkU444>

⁴⁷ Dağlık Karabağ'da Rusya faktörü, Available in Azerbaijani: <https://www.dw.com/tr/da%C4%9Fl%C4%B1k-karaba%C4%9Fda-rusya-fakt%C3%B6r%C3%BC/a-37789487>

⁴⁸ Azeri President says Armenians can have "cultural Autonomy". Available in English: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/22/azeri-president-says-armenians-can-have-cultural-autonomy>

⁴⁹ Prezident İlham Əliyev Bakıda Hərbi Qənimətlər Parkının açılışında iştirak edib+VİDEO <http://khatai-ih.gov.az/news/2281.html>

Armenian view

In the Armenian narrative, Karabakh (Artsakh) is an integral part of Armenia, which historically belongs to the Armenians. It is widely believed in Armenia that during the reign of King Tigran II of Armenia, from the 4th century BC, Karabakh was one of the fifteen provinces of Greater Armenia until the historic end of the Greater Armenia state.⁵⁰

The modern Armenian narrative about Karabakh is linked to the forced deportation and mass murder of Armenians by the Ottomans during World War I. Armenians call this tragic fact "Mets Eghern" (Great Massacre), which in the official Armenian narrative is called the "Armenian Genocide". The common narrative in Armenia, cemented by the tragic events of 1915, is that they are a nation that was and still is surrounded by enemies,

Between 1917 and 1918, the number of Armenian refugees in the provinces of Yerevan increased. This was the IDP population from the Ottoman Empire. Against the background of all this, as a result of the collapse of the Russian Empire, three states were created in Transcaucasia - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It should be noted that in the Armenian narrative, even the existence of the Azerbaijani state in the Caucasus is questionable. In their view, until 1918 there was no political-administrative unit of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus. And the newly formed Republic of Azerbaijan took its name from the province of Iran on the right bank of the Araks River. Consequently, the control of any territory by Azerbaijan as a state in the Transcaucasus is considered by Armenia as illegitimate from the very beginning.⁵¹

By the decision of the IX Congress of Karabakh Armenians held in April 1920, Nagorno-Karabakh was to join Armenia. On June 12, 1921, the Armenian government agreed to this decision.⁵² Eventually, however, by Moscow's decision, Karabakh was declared part of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, which, according to the Armenian narrative, temporarily froze the issue instead of resolving the conflict. Armenians pay special attention to the composition of the population of Karabakh and note that according to the first census of the USSR in 1926, the population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was 125,300, of which 111,694 were Armenians and 12,592 Turks.⁵³

During the Soviet period, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was frozen. It was renewed again in 1988 when the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh demanded independence. According to the Armenian narrative, clashes between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan took place because of their support of Karabakh's independence, and Armenians were brutally beaten in Azerbaijani cities: Sumgait, Baku, and Kirovabad.⁵⁴ On February 20, 1988, the Council of People's

⁵⁰ History of Armenia. Available in Armenian: <http://www.historyofarmenia-am.armin.am/images/menus/61/artsaxi%20patm.pdf>

⁵¹ Document published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh Document available in English, Armenian and Russian, <http://www.nkr.am/hy/azerbaijan-karabakh-conflict-history>

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ The population of Artsakh from 1823-2020, Available in Armenian: <https://bit.ly/3xbXjPw>

⁵⁴ Available in Armenian, Russian and English

Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Republic petitioned the Supreme Councils of Azerbaijan and Armenia to hand over Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia. In the already weakened Soviet Union, resolving this conflict became impossible. The first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, Karen Demirchyan, resigned in 1988 with the last words at a rally on the Karabakh issue: "It is not that I carry Karabakh (Artsakh) in my pocket, and I am not giving it to you, what do you want from me?".⁵⁵ In December of the same year, Levon Ter-Petrosyan became one of the leaders of the General National Movement of Armenia, and in 1991, the first President of Armenia.

The 1992-1994 full-scale war in Karabakh ended with the victory of Armenia. The popularity of Robert Kocharyan, one of the leaders of the Artsakh movement in Armenia and the first president of Nagorno-Karabakh, was growing. He later led the strongest opposition group, the Karabakh wing. At a press conference in September 1997 and in an extensive article published in November of the same year entitled "War or Peace?" It's time for seriousness. "Ter-Petrosyan sought to convince the Armenian public that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be resolved "progressively, in stages. " Ter-Petrosyan advocated negotiations on the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination and sought to convince the representatives of the Armenian political elite on the issue.⁵⁶ On February 3, 1998, Ter-Petrosyan was forced to resign as Armenian Prime Minister Robert Kocharian and Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan advocated a more radical approach to resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In Armenia, Ter-Petrosyan was not forgiven for trying to surrender to Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, Ter-Petrosyan is, to this day, true to his position.

Ter-Petrosyan's peace efforts were finally crushed by an armed attack on the Armenian parliament on October 27, 1999, when a group of five gunmen led by Nairi Hunanyan opened fire on members of the National Assembly. Among them was the Prime Minister of the country Vazgen Sargsyan and the Speaker of the Parliament, Karen Demirchyan.⁵⁷ It is still unknown to the Armenian public who was the organizer of the terrorist attack. According to the widespread opinion among the population of Armenia, it was the so-called Karabakh wing, led by Robert Kocharyan, that carried out the attack to seize power.⁵⁸

After Ter-Petrosyan's relatively soft and conciliatory stance, Robert Kocharyan, the hero of the first Karabakh war in Armenia and the face of a victorious political leader, came to power in 1998. Kocharian continued to co-operate with the OSCE Minsk Group, but he called for a "package" agreement on Karabakh. At the end of 1998, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs presented a new proposal for resolving the conflict. It was called the "Common State", with which Karabakh remained part of Azerbaijan, although Azerbaijan and Karabakh were united by treaty.⁵⁹ Yerevan accepted the offer on certain conditions, Stephanakert demanded more conditions, and Baku categorically rejected the plan.

⁵⁵ <http://publications.yasu.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/D.-Juhakian.pdf> - Available in Armenian

⁵⁶ <https://www.aniarc.am/2017/11/01/war-or-peace-ter-petrosyan-1997/> - Available in Russian

⁵⁷ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/2202375.html>

⁵⁸ <https://www.gfsis.org/files/my-world/20/3.pdf>

⁵⁹ Minsk Group Proposal (Common State Deal). Available in English: <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/f2c2f3/pdf>

The Armenian government of 1999-2017 is often referred to as the rule of the Kocharyan-Sargsyan "Karabakh clan." Peaceful resolution of the conflict during this period was quite unpromising, as the war rhetoric and hostile propaganda of the leaders constantly strained the situation. In addition, activists who spoke of peacebuilding, compromise, and reconciliation became victims of violence.⁶⁰ Armenia's militaristic stance was also reinforced by military cooperation with Russia, which was especially strong during Kocharyan's rule. At that time, Moscow was able to exert great influence on Armenia. Armenia was well aware that a loss of Russian goodwill, along with many other losses, would lead to a forfeiture of influence over Karabakh. Consequently, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the indirect support of Armenia by Russia in this conflict were important factors in shaping Armenia's attitude towards Russia.

It should be noted that Kocharyan's government also had serious challenges. The development of the country's economy was substantially halted during this period. Both nepotism and corruption hindered the development of Armenia, as well as the permanent blockade of the country. The situation in Armenia worsened due to the four-day war in April 2016, after which the slogan spread by the Armenian nationalists: "The strongest army in the South Caucasus" was deconstructed. At the same time, the constitutional changes, which allowed Serzh Sargsyan to stay in power, became the basis for a large-scale protest movement.⁶¹

As a result of the "Velvet Revolution" of 2018, Nikol Pashinyan's team came to power. It is noteworthy that during his rule, the degree of democratization in the country increased, corruption decreased, and economic growth rates soared. Cautious statements about rapprochement with the West and a desire to improve relations with neighbors were evident. It should also be noted that by acting against Russian-related businesses and by downplaying the positions of Karabakh Armenian politicians, Pashinyan has irritated Russia.

Pashinyan's initial positions in relations with Azerbaijan were interesting. In an interview with one of the TV stations, Prime Minister Pashinyan said that he hoped that the revolutionary and democratic changes in Armenia would also find its way to Azerbaijan. He added that it would be much easier for him to reach a peace agreement with the democratically elected Azerbaijani government.⁶² His relatively democratic and humanistic approaches were soon criticized in Armenia. Opinions were once again circulating in Armenia that in order to maximize the protection of Karabakh, it was necessary for the heroes of the Karabakh war to be in power, which in the subsequent period substantially altered Pashinyan's public position.

During a visit to Nagorno-Karabakh in August 2019, Pashinyan said, "Artsakh (Karabakh) is Armenia. Period." During his visit to the United States, Armenian Defense Minister David Tonoyan said at a meeting with the Armenian Diaspora: "As Minister of Defense, I say that we have replaced the current

⁶⁰ They Kicked Vanyan out of Gyumri beating him up and Throwing egg at his car. Available in English: <https://www.aravot-en.am/2012/04/12/157360/>

⁶¹ Political Transition and Conflicts in South Caucasus. Available in Armenian: <https://bit.ly/3l5BjU5>

⁶² Available in Armenian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHcHa-AW0Jw>

dimension of “territories for peace” with the following dimension – “new war, new territories.”⁶³ The rigid positions of the Pashinyan government and the respective military doctrine have irritated Azerbaijan.

It should be noted that the reason for such bold statements by the Armenian political elite was the factor of Russian support. In the Armenian narrative, Russia has always been the guarantor of "peace" in Artsakh. Many in Armenia today think that Russia has not fulfilled the alliance agreement and left Armenia completely alone in the fight against the alliance of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

On September 27, 2020, military clashes began. During the war, in one of his parliamentary speeches, Pashinyan said, "We can stop the war if we hand over 7 districts of Karabakh and the city of Shusha to Azerbaijan." This was followed by speeches by members of both the ruling party and the opposition. They stated: "We have nothing to return and we must fight to the end." Eventually, the situation changed very quickly and on November 9 a ceasefire agreement was signed. This ended the 44-day war.⁶⁴ Under the agreement, the state of Azerbaijan retained all the territories it held during the Second Karabakh War. Armenia, in turn, would leave the surrounding areas of Karabakh in the coming weeks. The role of peacekeeper in Karabakh was given to Russia to protect the Armenian settlements in Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor, which connects Karabakh and its capital, Stepanakert, with Armenia. Along with Russia, Turkey also received the status of a peacekeeper in Karabakh.⁶⁵

The Second Karabakh War substantially harmed Armenia. As a result of the war, Armenia lost about 4,000 soldiers in a month and a half.⁶⁶ In addition, the number of IDPs from the Autonomous Republic of Karabakh and the surrounding 7 districts has exceeded 40,000. In addition to human, material, and financial losses, Armenia lost "the feeling of invincibility" that was formed as a result of the first war in Karabakh.⁶⁷

The defeat of Karabakh in the Second World War was followed by mass protests in Armenia. Supporters of Kocharyan and Sargsyan became more active. Protesters stormed Pashinyan's house and stormed the government administration building. Pashinyan was accused of treason. The society was divided into two - supporters and opponents of Pashinyan. Ultimately, in the early elections in June, in which the parties of former presidents Kocharyan, Sargsyan, and Ter-Petrosyan also took part, the victory went to Nikol Pashinyan's party "My Step", with 54% of the votes.

Although the second war is over, the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to the south is still a charged zone. Moreover, in November 2021, one year after the end of the Second Karabakh War, clashes resumed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries named the provocative actions of the other country

⁶³ Available in Armenian: https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31067737.html?fbclid=IwAR3t_EMS4fgYo7HSaibjZ6N0XA9EbV-WhYmUiNckj29FqrpmFhRWmOQofhc

⁶⁴ Extraordinary sitting of Parliament on September 27, 2020. The video is available in Armenian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMrxBU5guT0>

⁶⁵ Armenian, Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54882564>

⁶⁶ Armenian: Wounds Unhealed One Year after the War <https://www.equaltimes.org/armenia-wounds-unhealed-one-year?lang=en#.YfubGepBxPY>

⁶⁷ Armenia still Grieving <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/24/armenia-azerbaijan-war-nagorno-karabakh-aftermath/>

as the basis of the confrontation. Fortunately, the clashes between the parties soon ended.⁶⁸ In the aftermath of the second Karabakh war, it is still unknown whether the parties will be able to build a lasting peace. As in 1994, in 2020 the parties only signed a ceasefire agreement, instead of a peace agreement. It should also be noted that the situation in Armenia in 2020 is very similar to the reality in Azerbaijan in 1994.⁶⁹

Georgia's position on the second Karabakh war

The position of the Georgian state during the second Karabakh war has traditionally been the same as at other stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict - neutral, restrained, and peaceful. The Georgian Foreign Ministry issued an official statement on September 27, shortly after the clashes began, calling on the parties to de-escalate, negotiate and avoid a larger-scale war.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the Georgian public, political space has not been empty of supportive positions on both sides of the conflict. On September 28, ethnic Armenians, citizens of Georgia, collected certain items to be sent to Karabakh, some of which were not allowed to cross the border. This caused dissatisfaction among the population and led to the blocking of the Georgian-Turkish road in Javakheti.⁷¹ The protest of the citizens was exacerbated by the spread of disinformation through the Internet, according to which Georgia was allowing the passage of weapons from Turkey to Azerbaijan.⁷² The Georgian government had to make explanations. Irakli Sesiashvili, chairman of the Georgian parliament's defense and security committee, has said that Georgia has no plans to pass military cargo from either side during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁷³

At the same time, ethnic Azeri members of parliament from the two largest Georgian political parties, the Georgian Dream and the National Movement made statements in support of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,⁷⁴ which were condemned by the Armenian ambassador to Georgia.⁷⁵ At the same time, ethnic Armenian MP Enzel Mkoyan, a member of the Patriots Alliance and MP candidate Samvel Petrosyan, as well as MP from the United National Movement, Melik Raisyan, made statements against Azerbaijan and in support of de facto Karabakh.⁷⁶ The response of the former

⁶⁸ Armenian Announces Ceasefire After Azerbaijan Border Clashes <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/16/armenia-azerbaijan-say-clashes-erupt-at-border>

⁶⁹ Confidence and catastrophe: Armenia and the second Karabakh War <https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/confidence-and-catastrophe-armenia-and-the-second-nagorno-karabakh-war/>

⁷⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs responds to the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/370885>

⁷¹ Why they blocked the road to Kartsakhi customs - explanations of the locals. Available here: <https://sknews.ge/ka/old/29535>

⁷² Misinformation about Georgia's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the Armenian and Azerbaijani media. Available here: https://idfi.ge/ge/disinformation-karabakh_conflict

⁷³ Georgia will not become a country of military transit - Sesiashvili. Available here: <https://jam-news.net/ge/sakartvelo-armiscems-romelime-kvekanas-sakutari-teritoriis-samxedro-tranzitistvis-gamokenebis-uflebas/>

⁷⁴ Georgian ethnic Azerbaijani MPs support Baku in the Karabakh conflict. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/371312>

⁷⁵ Post of the Embassy of Armenia in Georgia on the official Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/ArmEmbGeorgia/posts/1834139136728687>

⁷⁶ Some deputies expressed support for the parties to the Karabakh conflict. Available here: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/485562/>

President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has provoked strong negative reactions among the ethnic Armenians living in Georgia,⁷⁷ who also held a rally to protest Saakashvili's statement.⁷⁸

In parallel with the responses of various politicians and the public outcry over them, the official position of the Georgian government remained neutral. On September 30, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, offered a meeting with the parties to the conflict in Tbilisi.⁷⁹ The proposal of the Georgian government does not seem to have the potential to be implemented in practice. According to the statement of the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Georgia, in the early stages of the conflict, Azerbaijan had specific interests, which had to be completed before the talks could be conducted.⁸⁰ On October 3, the Georgian National Security Council stated that since the beginning of the conflict, Georgia has restricted passing military cargo by land and air from Georgia to Armenia as well as Azerbaijan, and both countries have been informed of this. Georgia continued to carry only civilian cargo and would continue to fulfill all international obligations in this regard.⁸¹

Despite the public explanations of the Georgian side, misinformation was often spread during the war; Georgia has been accused of supporting either side in the conflict. For example, there were reports of Syrian fighters passing through Georgia to engage in war, which was immediately denied by Tbilisi.⁸² The Armenian embassy denied reports that Georgia was not carrying humanitarian aid to Yerevan.⁸³ The statement from the Armenian side that Georgia has become a victim of disinformation was not made only at the embassy level. This issue was also discussed by the head of the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, who urged not to follow the disinformation against Georgia on the Internet.⁸⁴

Azerbaijan also expressed satisfaction with Georgia's position. It is true that the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, voiced suspicion that weapons were brought to Armenia by civilian planes,⁸⁵ however, he did not accuse Georgia of that. Conversely, he called the Georgian-Azerbaijani relations "excellent"

⁷⁷ Mikheil Saakashvili - Nagorno Karabakh is the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan and nothing will change that. Available here: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/620553-mixeil-saakashvili-mtiani-qarabagi-carmoadgens-azerbajjanis-suverenul-teritorias-da-amas-araperi-shecvlis/>

⁷⁸ Армяне Тбилиси проводят акцию протеста. Available here: https://jnews.ge/?p=58965&fbclid=IwAR3wRf1TPAavv1fb1X98Ca7kTvxMpvI44ExhAde5pTscM4RrW5PFH_aYOj0

⁷⁹ Gakharia: We are ready to host the representatives of Azerbaijan and Armenia for dialogue. Available here: <https://jam-news.net/ge/gakharia-mzad-vart-vumaspindzlot-konfliqtis-mxareebos-warmomadgenelta-molaparakebas/>

⁸⁰ The Ambassador of Azerbaijan will not agree to Tbilisi offer - if Armenia agrees to withdraw its forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, whether we are ready for negotiations, if not – then not.. Available here: <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/621912-azerbajjanis-elchi-tbilisis-shetavazebaze-tu-somxeti-tanaxma-ikneba-azerbajjanis-teritoriidan-gaiqvanos-tavisi-zalebi-molaparakebistvis-mzad-vart-tu-ara-ar-davtanxmdebit>

⁸¹ Georgian National Security Council on the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/372916>

⁸² Tbilisi calls the information about the passage of Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan disinformation. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/373080>

⁸³ Embassy of Armenia: It is disinformation that Georgia is not providing humanitarian aid to Yerevan. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/373641>

⁸⁴ According to an Armenian official, Georgia has become a target of disinformation. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/374136>

⁸⁵ Aliyev: Weapons are illegally imported into Armenia by civilian planes. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/375859>

and described the peaceful coexistence of the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in some Georgian villages as exemplary for Karabakh.⁸⁶

Even after the end of the war, Georgia expressed its readiness to promote peace with both sides. Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia conducted talks with both Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev,⁸⁷ The President of Georgia welcomed the end of the war.⁸⁸ The agreement between the parties to the conflict was welcomed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; the Ministry's willingness of the Georgian side to contribute to the establishment of lasting peace.⁸⁹ In June 2021, Georgia's involvement in neutralizing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reflected in the facilitation of the process of Azerbaijan's release of Armenian prisoners of war and in return the provision of information on mined territories by Armenia to Azerbaijan.⁹⁰ In early September of the same year, during a joint press conference with the President of Armenia, who visited Georgia, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, stressed the need for regional peace, adding that peace, stability, and prosperity unite all three countries in the region.⁹¹ Before his official visit to Azerbaijan in late September, Gharibashvili said he intended to continue the mediation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁹²

Ultimately, it can be said that Georgia has managed to maintain neutrality with the two opposing states and avoid military or political threats arising from the conflict.⁹³ This is confirmed by the officially and publicly expressed gratitude of the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides to Georgia as a neighbor and partner state with neutral and peaceful positions. The situation was not so simple and the expressions of the support of both neighboring states were evident in the country. Unfortunately, in certain cases, politicians from different parties, including the ruling party, took part in these processes and tried to gain electoral support in the pre-election period by speculating on this conflict.⁹⁴ This circumstance once again reveals the problem of political integration of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in Georgia, but it is even more unfortunate that politicians not only did not try to change this situation but on the contrary, they adapted and used ethnic Azeri or ethnic Armenian ties, which nurture emotional attitude towards the Karabakh war, for their narrow party interests.

⁸⁶ Ilham Aliyev: Azerbaijan-Georgia relations are "excellent". Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/377297>

⁸⁷ Giorgi Gakharia talked to Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan by phone. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/381934>

⁸⁸ Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili's post on her official Twitter page about the end of the Karabakh war. Available here: https://twitter.com/Zourabichvili_S/status/1326105187572985858

⁸⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia responds to the Karabakh agreement. Available here: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/497284/>

⁹⁰ Through Georgian-US mediation, Azerbaijan has released 15 Armenian citizens detained during the conflict. Available here: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/427277>

⁹¹ Gharibashvili: Karabakh war was a difficult challenge, I believe it will be transformed into a new opportunity , <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31449972.html>

⁹² Gharibashvili says he will continue mediation between Baku and Yerevan , <https://netgazeti.ge/news/565613/>

⁹³ Samadbegishvili Sandro, the interim end of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a landmark event for the Caucasus region. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3BOZZWH>

⁹⁴ Karabakh war in Marneuli pre-election agitation. Available here: <https://www.marneulifm.ge/ka/marneuli/article/38171-yarabaghis-omi-marneulis-tsinasaarchevno-agitaciashi>

Attitudes of Azerbaijanis and Armenians living in Georgia

Attitudes of Georgia's Azerbaijanis

Ethnic Azerbaijani Georgian citizens were actively observing the Second Karabakh War. There were active discussions on this topic within the community and the majority of the population was dominated by mainly pro-Azerbaijani positions. In-depth interviews conducted in the Azerbaijani community of Georgia and observations of the ongoing discussions on social networks revealed that the agenda of the Azerbaijani community in Georgia was mainly busy with the Second Karabakh War. All respondents stated that they actively monitored the war and sought information about the events in Karabakh almost every day. According to one of the young respondents:

At first, I thought this was another political move by Ilham Aliyev so that there would be no protests. I thought what was happening so far would be repeated during the Second Karabakh War, I thought we could not get anything back, but later I saw that there was progress. After that, I decided to actively follow what was happening, and how many martyrs or wounded we had (interview with a young activist, 23 years old).

At the same time, there was a strong belief that Azerbaijan was on the side of the truth in this war and it was necessary to continue the war until the end. According to one of the respondents:

There were many discussions, discussions were active. This issue was interesting for everyone. At first, the basic premise was that everything would stop. It was said that Russia and the West would not allow it, but most wanted Azerbaijan to go all the way. However, previous experiences have given us the perception that the situation would halt. There was a loser complex with regard to the Armenians, so everyone was interested in the issue. The Azerbaijanis in Georgia could not control all of this, but they wanted to see the end result (Interview with a religious leader, 44).

A local journalist mentioned during the interview:

No matter which house you entered, no matter where you went, everyone was talking about it. Therefore, as a media, we are actively writing about it (interview with a local media representative, 28 years old).

Indeed, observations of news coverage by local media outlets during the war period show that during the war, they actively disseminated news about the Second Karabakh War almost every day. During this period, local media reported daily on the progress of the war, the advance of the Azerbaijani military in Karabakh, and the public speeches of the President of Azerbaijan. It should be noted that the main topic of discussion on social networks and Facebook groups was the Second Karabakh War. During the war, videos of the war were widely circulated in open and closed groups of Georgian Azerbaijanis, as well as videos of Azerbaijani soldiers from Georgia (who left Georgia in the 1990s), where they greeted ethnic Azeris living in Georgia and shared with them the information about the

advance of Azerbaijan in the war. At the same time, Georgian Azeris expressed their support for the soldiers in similar posts, via the comments section.⁹⁵

It should be noted that 15 soldiers from Georgia were killed in the Second Karabakh War. This factor especially strengthened the interest and drive of Georgian Azerbaijanis toward this war. The Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Georgia, Faik Guliyev, said in an interview that they would do everything possible to immortalize the memory of the 15 soldiers killed in the Second Karabakh War.⁹⁶ The work of the Embassy of Azerbaijan was particularly interesting and active during this period. Among the meetings held by the Embassy of Azerbaijan is the meeting of the Ambassador with a 10-year-old girl from the village of Zemo Sarali in Marneuli Municipality, who sent 45 GEL to the Azerbaijani Armed Forces.⁹⁷

During the war, the media actively reported on the clashes between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Noteworthy is the case of Sadakhlo, where a physical confrontation took place between members of ethnic groups.⁹⁸ However, when talking about physical confrontations between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia, members of the Georgian Azerbaijani community denied the cases of confrontations between ethnic groups in Georgia:

I have not heard such a story. There may have been a small controversy, but I have not heard of a story that would have been sensational. (Interview with 35-year-old female activist)

In some cases, we came across another narrative. Ethnic Azeri respondents stated that they did not want confrontation in Georgia and that the minor incidents were based only on the provocative actions of the other side:

"There were two developments on this issue, one was in Sadakhlo: an ethnic Armenian showed his middle finger to an Azerbaijani and he did not restrain himself and there was a confrontation. As far as I know, our people were selling things in Samtskhe-Javakheti and there was a confrontation between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. So trade stopped during this period. It is good that we live far from each other and that is partly why there were no major confrontations"(interview with activist, 33).

At the same time, the Azerbaijanis of Georgia stated that they did not consider the Armenians as enemies. However, in their view, Armenians serve the interests of other neighboring states.

I will say on behalf of my people that our enemy is not Armenians, the main enemies are Iran and Russia. Armenia was also created by Russia. I am generally against Russia (interview with a young activist, 28).

⁹⁵ Public Group of ethnic Azerbaijanis: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/288392011270699/posts/3257508467692357>

⁹⁶ The memory of the fallen soldiers from Georgia will be immortalized: <https://www.marneulifm.ge/ka/component/content/article/121-news/45744-gurcistan-esilli-qarabag-sehidlerinin-xatiresi-ebedilesdirilecek>

⁹⁷ Faik Guliyev met a 10-year-old girl supporting the Azerbaijani Armed Forces , <https://interpress.ge/read/18304>

⁹⁸ Confrontation between local Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Sadakhlo , <https://24news.ge/read/id/33710>

A significant proportion of Azerbaijanis surveyed expressed support for Azerbaijan in various ways during the war, be it participation in a support rally or the organization of humanitarian aid to Azerbaijan. According to one of the respondents, a list was created of people who wanted to move to Azerbaijan and get involved in the war. However, they remained in Georgia due to the closed borders and the lack of need for such support for Azerbaijan.

Humanitarian aid was organized here, cattle were sent from Jurmughanlo, we collected money (the account was opened) and bought various products from Lilo market, such as raincoats, canned food, blankets, and shovels, cigarettes, clothes. And we sent everything to Azerbaijan. The embassy helped us send the trailer across the border. A list of 370 people who wanted to go to war was also ready. But they did not let us go, they told us we could send anything, other than manpower (Interview with a young man, 28 years old).

It should be noted that during the Second Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani community of Georgia held four demonstrations in Marneuli Municipality and one demonstration in Gardabani Municipality.⁹⁹ According to one of the organizers of the rallies and demonstrations:

The main goal of our first rally was: 'Freedom to Karabakh first, then peace.' The aim and slogan of the second rally were "Karabakh is Azerbaijan", and the aim of further rallies was to "stop terrorism in Ganja." Armenians also staged rallies and provocations, but we did not do so. Our main goal was to voice the truth of the Azerbaijani people - Interview with one of the rally organizers, 30 years old.

The Azerbaijanis of Georgia justified their support for Azerbaijan with arguments of de-occupation of Georgia and return of territories.

We also know that the territories of Georgia are also occupied, therefore, just as Azerbaijan regained the territories, we also want to return our territories hand in hand (Head of the NGO, 35 years old).

At the same time, the arguments of standing on the side of truth were heard.

We expressed moral support for Azerbaijan. Not because it was Azerbaijan and our people, but because we were on the side of truth. We said that not only the territories of Azerbaijan but also the territories of Georgia are occupied and its de-occupation and liberation must take place (Interview with a religious leader, 44 years old).

The Azerbaijani community of Georgia positively assessed Georgia's neutral position towards the second war in Karabakh. A significant part of the respondents stated that they consider Georgia as their homeland, although the current events in Azerbaijan are critically important to them. According to one of the participants:

⁹⁹ Another demonstration in support of Azerbaijan was held in Georgia , <https://report.az/qarabag/gurcustanda-azerbaycana-novbeti-destek-aksiyasi-kecirilib/>

In my opinion, Georgia's neutral position was right and fair. I fully agree with this position. Georgia did not help Armenia or Azerbaijan. The borders were closed. As far as I know, the Armenians wanted to go from Javakheti to Karabakh. The Azerbaijanis did not want that. Aliyev also said that Georgian citizens were among the dead and captives. This meant that the Armenians had left from here in this war. But I approve of Georgia's position (interview with activist, 33).

There were also more critical views, according to which Georgia should have stood on the side of "truth" and internationally recognized norms.

Georgia did not support anyone, but it is internationally recognized that Karabakh is the territory of Azerbaijan. In my opinion, Georgia's position should have been on the side of truth, on the side of international standards, within the recognized borders. Georgia should have been against the occupation (Interview with a religious leader, 44).

Moreover, one of the respondents stated that in his opinion, Georgia supported Azerbaijan, but had to play a neutral role.

Georgia's position, of course, was on the side of Azerbaijan, but it had to show that it was neutral. Georgia was obliged because Georgia's Abkhazia and Samachablo are also occupied. That is why, in the case of Karabakh's return, Georgia could take back Abkhazia as well. As a citizen of Georgia, I am ready to go to war in Abkhazia. My father and my older brother were in the 2008 war. If necessary, we will die for Georgia. We are such people too. Do you know 300 Aragveli? There were 100 Borchalos among them (interview with a young activist, 28 years old).

Some of the respondents stated that despite the official position of Georgia, there were cases when politicians representing the Georgian government and the opposition openly expressed their support for one country or the other, which they said was unacceptable in the national interests of the country. Other party leaders have not commented on the actions of their fellow politicians and have not condemned the statements made by their party members.

I think Georgia had the right position because both countries are our neighbors. Neutrality is right. However, this neutrality was not fully maintained in Georgia. In Javakheti, candidates were canceling their election campaigns because of the war. But was the war in Armenia and the elections - in Georgia. This is incomprehensible to me. But the Azeri candidates continued to run for office. Maybe it was because Azerbaijan was winning in this war and therefore they were freer in their actions. Also, the party leaders from the ethnic minorities openly expressed their position and violated neutrality. That was a big problem. "- Interview with the head of the local media, 38).

When talking about life lessons and experiences, respondents focus on the challenges of civic integration policy and the failure to learn lessons. Most of the respondents assess the situation in this regard from the perspective of Georgia.

"At the level of Georgian citizens, we have seen that we must continue to work on civic integration. We also need to change the existing integration policy"(interview with a civil activist, 33).

Speaking of experiences separately should be mentioned the feeling of experiencing the transition of Azerbaijan from a defeated and oppressed state to a victorious state. According to one of the survey participants:

"We got rid of the loser complex. We are now in the position of a victorious people. This is a great lesson. Others saw us as oppressed people, we are not the people of the same country, but with the victory of Azerbaijan, we are already considered the victorious people. It turns out that as people we can do things together. We should not give in to the aura of victory and we should not make a mistake. We need to find out who we are and what we want." - Interview with Religious Leader, 44.

According to the second respondent:

After all these years, we have regained the lost dignity. For me, the land is dignity. Until now, I was ashamed when I said I was Azerbaijani. I used to be ashamed because our land was taken from us (Interview with a young activist, 28 years old).

Speaking about the effects of the war, one of the respondents mentioned several factors:

"Whether we like it or not, this war has affected these peoples. These countries are Georgia's neighbors. We are also neighbors in Georgia. When there is a war in a neighboring country, you have no guarantee that this war will not spillover here. War is a tragedy. Therefore, both these peoples and Georgia were actively observing this war. We, as people, cared because one was a losing side, and the other - a winner. We were also interested in international standards"(Interview with a religious leader, 44).

Speaking about the future, Georgian Azerbaijanis emphasize the responsibility of leaders. Most of the discussion is about the responsibility of Azerbaijan as a victorious state. According to the respondents, possible confrontations and animosities should be avoided in the future, and politicians from both sides will be responsible for this, as both rhetoric and discourses will have a significant impact on peacebuilding.

Both countries have just come out of the war and therefore tensions can be high on both sides. Consequently, the political elite must move to messages of peace. Rhetoric needs to change. In this case, this all is more of the responsibility of the winning people. Because Armenians will live on the territory of Azerbaijan. Politically, the difference must be made between the attitude toward the Armenian state and the citizen of Azerbaijan of Armenian ethnicity. A

distinction must be made between Armenians living in Armenia and Azerbaijan. You cannot describe all Armenians as enemies. In general rhetoric, the victorious side should no longer use war language. If you want peace, of course. - Interview with Religious Leader, 44.

The majority of respondents reject the consideration of Georgia as an exemplary country in the process of peacebuilding in Karabakh. At the same time, there are people who think that the relations between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia are exemplary and that these relations may be useful in the peace-building process in Karabakh.

"Maybe this is not an ideal relationship. But we do not have in-depth problems either. There is trade too. As a model, the President of Azerbaijan also talked about the fact that Georgia can become a model. There are no big problems" (interview with a young man, 28 years old).

One year after the end of the second Karabakh war, the Azerbaijani community of Georgia has returned to the old reality. At the same time, this issue is still part of the public discussion. In November 2021, the Azerbaijani-language media organization 24news.ge released a documentary about 22 deceased soldiers of Georgian origin.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi hosted a dinner in memory of the fallen soldiers, where ethnic Azerbaijani members of the Parliament of Georgia also delivered speeches.¹⁰¹

Attitudes of Armenians of Georgia

Ethnically Armenian Georgian citizens actively observed the second Karabakh war; There were active discussions on this topic within the community and the majority of the population was dominated by mainly pro-Armenian positions. In-depth interviews and observations of the Armenian community in Georgia revealed that the interests of the Armenian community in Georgia were fully enthralled by the Second Karabakh War. All respondents stated that they actively monitored the war and sought information about the events in Karabakh almost every day. According to one of the young respondents:

During the war, it was the most topical issue among the youth in the village, in every family and among my relatives. Every day, every minute there was an active discussion on this topic, talking about the course of the war. Several young people from my village who lived in Armenia participated in the war and their relatives were more actively interested in the course of the war, always calling relatives in Armenia. During that period, men and women, as well as the children, learned the names of military equipment and weapons, etc (Interview with a young activist, 22 years old).

¹⁰⁰ Gürcüstan əsilli Birinci və İkinci Qarabağ müharibəsi şəhidləri haqqında sənədli film (VİDEO) <https://24news.ge/read/id/61382>

¹⁰¹ Tbilisidə Gürcüstan əsilli Birinci və İkinci Qarabağ müharibəsi şəhidlərinin xatirəsi anılıb (FOTO-VİDEO) <https://24news.ge/read/id/61338>

Kinship with the Armenian population further intensified the interest of the Armenian community in Georgia in the Karabakh war, and their position was clearly defined by the support of Armenia. One of the respondents, whose relatives fought in Karabakh, shared their attitude toward the war:

Of course, it was a very important issue for everyone. It was more important to me and my family because two members of my family were directly involved in the war. It was a very tense period, both cousins of mine were on the front lines of hostilities throughout the war and we prayed for them every day. Thank God the war is over and my brothers are home. There was a daily discussion on the ground, the villagers were always asking about my relatives, and because they were on the front line, they were interested in the situation in Karabakh (interview with a 24-year-old student).

Against the background of such close ties with the Armenian military fighting in Karabakh, the discussion of the Karabakh war in the Armenian community of Georgia also revealed concerns and worries about the devastating consequences of war and peace.

I was in a very difficult mental state, especially while watching TV when the names of the deceased were published. They were all the young children, 18, 19, 20-year-olds, and it made me sad, because I also have children of that age, and I thought - why, for what, so many young people sacrificed their lives for a few square kilometers of land (Interview with the self-employed, 45 years old).

During the war, local media actively covered the news of the Second Karabakh War on a daily basis. This news related to the course of the war, as well as the advance of the Armenian military in Karabakh, the heroism, as well as the public speeches of the Prime Minister of Armenia and the Ministry of Defense.¹⁰²

Interviews with the Armenian community in Georgia revealed that the Karabakh war was an important issue for them, not only because of concerns about their relatives and their fate but also because of the influence of nationalistic sentiments. Several respondents referred to Armenia as their homeland and sought this explanation:

What is happening in Armenia is very painful for me. As a citizen of Georgia, I can say that what is happening in Armenia is not secondary. No, Armenia is very important to me, Armenia has a special place in my life, although I study and live in Georgia, my homeland is Armenia ... We are interested because it is our homeland. Due to historical events, we live in Georgia, but our homeland is Armenia. As local Azerbaijanis, for the same reason, they are interested in what is happening in Azerbaijan, we have the same reason. These were our historic areas and of course, we should be interested. The national interest plays a big role in this issue (Interview with a teacher, 27 years old).

¹⁰² ParvanaTv's on war. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZIR-Ip8Plg&t=22s>; „ParvanaTv” on war heroism. Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACefxS5_3dU&t=11s, <https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=1030797291059191>

Another respondent explained the same issue:

I have two countries, Georgia and Armenia, but I am a citizen only of Georgia. There is a feeling of two homelands. Our homeland is Georgia. We were born here, but as Armenians, Armenia is our state. Both countries are important, these both are our countries (Interview with a local media representative, 28).

Thanks to such a national spirit, many Armenian citizens of Georgia had a desire to participate directly in the Karabakh war,¹⁰³ which was also confirmed by our respondents. However, due to the closure of the borders, they were unable to take part in the war. In this regard, in support of Armenia and the Armenian nation, the Armenian community sent humanitarian cargo, which was allowed by the Georgian authorities. As it can be observed from the interviews, people from all over Javakheti participated in sending the cargo. It was mentioned in the interviews that the clergy of the Georgian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church also played an important role in collecting the cargo to be sent to Armenia.¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that from the day of the start of hostilities in Karabakh, on September 28, at the initiative of the youth of Akhalkalaki, a page was created on Facebook called "Javakheti Fund,"¹⁰⁵ where they regularly submitted information about monetary donations.¹⁰⁶ After the end of the war, the organizers of the above-mentioned fund opened offices in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda and provided financial assistance to the residents of Javakheti who took part in the war. In the case of deceased soldiers, they also provided financial assistance to their family members. The "Javakheti Foundation" charity campaign was and is being carried out with the following slogan "Javakheti stands with Armenia".

The Armenian community of Georgia also held several rallies. Respondents discuss this in different ways. Some said it was a peaceful rally, with peace slogans, while others said they avoided appearing at the rally because of their profession and place of employment. Based on the information spread by specific media, we can say that the spirit of these actions was more pro-Armenian¹⁰⁷ than pacifist in general.

¹⁰³ Добровольцы из Ниноцминды готовы отправиться в Карабах / Видео. Available here: <https://nor.ge/?p=155231>

¹⁰⁴ "Parvana Tv's" on organizing humanitarian aid. Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_IGpG9z-3A&t=103s

¹⁰⁵ Available here: <https://www.facebook.com/%D5%8B%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%A1%D5%AD%D6%84-%D5%B0%D5%AB%D5%B4%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%A4%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%B4-Foundation-of-Javakheti-106225987913694/>

¹⁰⁶ For example: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=335093548360269&id=106225987913694 , <https://jnews.ge/am/?p=48651>

¹⁰⁷ You can see the materials about the demonstration: "How did the aggravation of the situation in Karabakh affect Javakheti, where ethnic Armenians live?" - Available here: <https://jam-news.net/ge/saqartvelo-javakheti-saakashvili-somkheti-azerbajjani-yarabaghi/>; "No to War" - Rally in Support of Armenia Was Held in Akhalkalaki" , Available here: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/468964/>; "A rally in support of Nagorno Karabakh was held in Akhalkalaki" - Available here: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/%E1%83%90%E1%83%AF%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%A5%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%90%E1%83%A5%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%97%E1%83%98%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98-%E1%83%A7%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%91%E1%83%90%E1%83%A6%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%AF%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%93%E1%83%90%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%AD>

Despite supporting the Armenian state, a large part of the Armenian community respondents was cautious when assessing their relations with the Azerbaijanis living in Georgia. Most of them mentioned that their relations with the Azerbaijanis of Georgia were strained or deteriorated as a result of the ongoing processes on social networks, but as people living in one state, they needed to maintain peaceful communication with each other:

I can recall one fact in this regard. Exactly during the war, ethnic Azeris came to our village to sell goods. At that time I also spoke to the Azerbaijanis. We had the same opinion that we had nothing to do with this conflict, we live here, we are economically dependent on each other and we have no place to live anywhere else. We were of the same opinion on this issue that we live in Georgia and the war does not concern us (Interview with a farmer / self-employed, 38 years old).

As it turned out, the Karabakh war did not have a significant negative impact on economic activity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, citizens of Georgia. Also, the Armenian community could not recall the ethnic confrontations that took place on the grounds of this war. However, they themselves explained this by the fact that ethnic Azeris do not actually live in Javakheti, and they maintained a normal, continuing relationship with Georgian citizens – Azerbaijanis, who would come for business. According to them, social networks were the main dimension of confrontation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities. During the war, ethnic Armenian youth from Georgia shared information about the events of the war with the words "#հաղթելու ենք" ("We will win").¹⁰⁸

I was very aggressive and hostile towards Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan. Relationships became very tense after my post on Facebook, which was followed by a verbal confrontation in the form of comments and messages, mainly with ethnic Azeris living in Georgia. In a word, we were in a very tense situation. Many people spoke more aggressively about this issue in the village, recalled one of our respondents (interview with a 23-year-old student).

By the Armenian community of Georgia, Georgia's neutral stance on the second Karabakh war was viewed largely positively. According to the respondents, they understand that Georgia, whose economy depends on Azerbaijan, could not openly support Armenia and the only logical position for Georgia was neutrality in this conflict:

In my opinion, Georgia's position was right, because both countries are neighboring states, and neutrality was the right position for further cooperation. Yes, initially in our community there was an opinion that Armenians are Christians and Georgia is obliged to help Armenia, but I think it is a wrong position and neutrality was right. Georgia thought about its interests, about

<https://www.mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/mshvidobiani-aktsiis-sheakheb-peisbukshi-video-manipulatsiurad-vrtseldeba>

"Video about the peaceful protest is being disseminated as a manipulation on Facebook" – Available here:

<https://www.mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/mshvidobiani-aktsiis-sheakheb-peisbukshi-video-manipulatsiurad-vrtseldeba>

¹⁰⁸ For example: <https://www.facebook.com/Abajyanroza/posts/702337377046137>

the development of its economy. Georgia's economy depends on Azerbaijan and that is why it has chosen a position of neutrality (Interview with a teacher, 29 years old).

At the same time, the assessment of Georgia's position revealed that the Armenian community was greatly influenced by the misinformation spread during the war about Georgia passing military assistance from Turkey to Azerbaijan. In this context, some of the respondents mentioned that officially Georgia's position was neutral, but its actions spoke the opposite:

Georgia had a neutral position, officially declared neutrality, and offered its assistance to both sides in resolving the conflict through negotiations. There were many conspiracies that Georgia does not maintain neutrality, as there were many pictures and videos of how Turkish military equipment was sent to Azerbaijan via Georgia. Therefore, in my opinion, neutrality was the right decision, but unfortunately, neutrality was not observed (interview with a local, 54 years old).

Respondents considered Turkish influence as one of the reasons for "pseudo-neutrality", as they coined the term. In their opinion, due to the existing transport and economic ties, Georgia could not resist the influence of Azerbaijan and Turkey. According to the Armenian community in Georgia, Turkey is a party to the conflict, which has supported Azerbaijan both diplomatically and militarily in the Second Karabakh War.

When talking about life lessons, experiences, and the future, respondents mainly focus on the importance of peace, the actions of neighboring states, and the responsibilities of leaders; Not only the current leader of Armenia Pashinyan but also his predecessors:

The war is over and now they are preparing for a new war. There will be no solution as long as Putin is alive - wait for the next order. Sargsyan and Kocharyan have left such a legacy that there is no other way (meaning Russia). They sold all of Armenia to Russia. Armenian metallurgical plants and ores are in the hands of Russian oligarchs. What one Pashinyan should do. Pashinyan must act after winning the elections. Sargsyan and Kocharyan's place is in prison (interview with a village activist, 54).

However, the leading narrative in the interviews was that there is no alternative to peace and its importance:

War is the most dangerous thing in the world and the lesson of all this can be to think about peace and resolve all issues through peaceful negotiations alone ... The solution is one - constant development and thinking about peace instead of war. It is very important for the Caucasus countries to start thinking about the population of the Caucasus because the Caucasus occupies a very important place in terms of location and is the link between East and West in all respects. Conflicts are designed to erase and weaken precisely this union so that there are constant conflicts for instability in the Caucasus region. The solution is to think about stability (interview with 35-year-old activist).

With regard to the future of Karabakh and the Caucasus in general, the Armenian community of Georgia mentioned the elections in Armenia. For some of the respondents, Pashinyan's rule was acceptable and they expected positive changes for Armenia, while for some, it would be better for Armenia to have a government with a "strong hand" that would prevent such a severe defeat and capitulation of the country. However, the respondents were unanimous in their assessments of the state of Azerbaijan. In their view, this is a militaristic, aggressor state and they do not expect in the future that Azerbaijan will reconsider its approaches and show peace initiatives.

The interviews also negatively assessed the role of neighboring countries in the Caucasus region: Russia and Turkey in the Karabakh war and in determining the future of the Caucasus.

"

Not only Georgia, but all countries should think about their actions and why Russia, Turkey, and Israel sell arms to Azerbaijan and Armenia. They should not buy weapons from them, Russia and Turkey are murderous states (interview with a 24-year-old activist).

When talking about the future, the respondents focused on cooperation between the countries in the Caucasus, strengthening economic ties, and caring for common stability. It seems that the notion was generated in parallel with the Karabakh war that Georgia, where ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani citizens live together peacefully, might be a model for a peaceful future in the Caucasus. However, members of the Armenian community we interviewed are skeptical:

I do not think so, the situation is different here. Georgian ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians are not aggressive towards each other. There is no territorial conflict here, so I think Georgia can not be an example in this case. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis live in Georgia, they are Georgian citizens, and they have nothing to divide, in many cases, they are friends with each other and live together. This is not the case in Armenia and Azerbaijan, for obvious reasons (interview with a young man, 29).

Respondents consistently emphasized and logically highlighted the differences that exist between the coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia and the situation in Karabakh:

What is happening in Georgia is a good example, but it will not work in Karabakh, because there Azerbaijani lives in Baku so Armenia is his enemy, while the same thing happens in Armenia. They are left alone with each other and therefore this example does not serve. Armenians perceive the state of Azerbaijan as an enemy, and not Azerbaijanis living here (Interview with a schoolteacher, 64).

Another respondent also justified why Georgia could not be used as an example:

We live as minorities in Georgia and prefer a more tolerant lifestyle and do not want conflict. Azerbaijanis and Armenians live in their own countries and are not in the minority. The interests are different and this hostile attitude is deepening day by day between these two states, so it is impossible for us to be an example (Interview with a teacher, 64 years old).

It is obvious that the Karabakh war had a strong emotional impact on Georgia's Armenian community. Many Georgian citizens, Armenians, seem to see the defeat of Armenia in the Second Karabakh War as their defeat. This is exacerbated by Turkey's declared support for Azerbaijan in the conflict, which is perceived as particularly traumatic given the difficult past of Armenian-Turkish relations, including for Armenians living in Georgia. Against the background of the lost war and the political crisis in Armenia, Georgian citizens found it difficult to speak of any positive future for Karabakh and the Caucasus. Against this background, maintaining peace and stability in the region was most important for them as citizens of Georgia.

After the end of the second Karabakh war, the discussions about the war in the Armenian community of Georgia did not stop. The Javakheti Youth Foundation has started collecting pictures and lists of soldiers killed in the war (18 soldiers) who were originally from Georgia in the yard of the Akhalkalaki Church.¹⁰⁹ According to locals, several Georgian citizens who fought in the Second Karabakh War returned to their villages after the end of the war and continue their everyday life.

Attitudes of the population living in mixed villages

The Azerbaijani and Armenian communities are the most numerous ethnic groups in Georgia after the Georgians. However, as already mentioned, the majority of the population lives far from each other, respectively, in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The exception in this regard is Marneuli municipality, where there are mixed villages where ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together. Such are the villages of Marneuli municipality: Khojorni and Tsopi. In the village of Tsopi, the majority of the population are Azerbaijanis, and in Khojorn, the majority are Armenians.^{110 111} It is noteworthy that while working on the document, interviews with the population of these villages were also conducted during the field visits.

Based on the interviews, it can be seen that the villagers live together peacefully. The rural population actively cooperates with each other in the process of solving daily problems. Acknowledgment of each other religious and other types of holidays is also common. A rural public school is a space shared by both communities. It must be said that during the war, the school teachers decided to refrain from discussing the issue of war in the school.

In addition, in villages where ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis coexist peacefully, the war has partially strained relations. One such villager, an ethnic Azerbaijani, says that discussions about the war in the

¹⁰⁹ The list of soldiers killed in Nagorno-Karabakh is updated daily in Akhalkalaki , <https://tv9news.ge/ka/component/content/article/77-2016-12-24-11-50-07/23249-mthian-yarabaghshi-gardacvlili-jariskacebis-sias-akhalqalaqshi-yoveldgghiurad-anakhleben>

¹¹⁰ Marneuli municipality, village Tsopi

<https://ka.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E1%83%AE%E1%83%9D%E1%83%AF%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9C%E1%83%98>

¹¹¹ Marneuli Municipality, village Khojorni

<https://ka.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E1%83%AC%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A4%E1%83%98>

village were under the rug. Moreover, on the day of the end of the war, the Azerbaijan population celebrated the victory of Azerbaijan in the war, which caused dissatisfaction among the local Armenians.

We celebrated the day of taking Karabakh. We made a ritual offering and set off fireworks, organized a feast in the center of the village, where we hung the flags of Azerbaijan and Georgia, and played loud music in the cars. All this irritated our neighbors. We even said that anyone who does not like it can stay in the house. There was no tension or confrontation.
(Interview with a mixed-village resident, 28)

Residents of these villages claim that there is no tension in the village. Moreover, often at weddings and celebrations the village forgets ethnic lines, unites and creates experiences of sharing and friendship. Speaking of the effects of the Second Karabakh War, it is clear that communities living in these villages do not want to disrupt this practice of peace and coexistence. One of the respondents states that "what is happening there should stay there and we should not spill over here."

During visits to mixed villages, it appeared that, neither during nor after the conflict, did the state take positive steps to avoid possible ethnic strife in these villages. And, even in times of war, maintaining peace and tranquility was the result of the prudence, rationality, and wisdom of both communities. However, it is obvious that the active work of state and public organizations would further strengthen this peaceful coexistence.

Summary and recommendations

The general assessment of the political, social, and economic implications and consequences of the Second Karabakh War is still difficult and requires in-depth study and analysis. However, we can say that the lives of ethnic groups living in Georgia, both during the war and in the post-war period, have changed to some extent. It must be said that during the war the interests and feelings of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of Georgia were actively involved and related to the issues of the war. Even the pre-election period of 2020 was no exception in this regard. Support from local communities was largely moral and humanitarian in relation to neighboring countries involved in the war, although there was a high interest in participating in military actions, which the Georgian authorities did not allow by taking appropriate actions.

If we evaluate the effects of the war on the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities living in Georgia, we will get the following picture: When discussing the effects of the war on the Azerbaijani community in Georgia, it is necessary to emphasize three issues:

1. The Azerbaijani community of Georgia mostly shared the narratives of the Azerbaijani state media, was characterized by pro-Azerbaijani sentiments, and supported Azerbaijan financially and morally (financial transfers, rallies, demonstrations, etc.);

2. The Azerbaijani community of Georgia positively assessed the neutral position of the Georgian state and believed that this neutrality was in fact the support of the Azerbaijani state;
3. The victory of the Azerbaijani state in the second Karabakh war significantly increased the self-confidence and ethnic pride in the Azerbaijani community of Georgia.

Speaking about the effects of the war on the Armenian community of Georgia, it should be noted that:

1. The Armenian community of Georgia mostly shared the narratives of the Armenian state media, was characterized by pro-Armenian sentiments, and supported Armenia financially and morally (financial transfers, rallies, demonstrations, etc.);
2. The Armenian community of Georgia assessed the neutral position of the Georgian state as partially positive, although they believed that this neutrality actually meant leaving Armenia all alone;
3. The defeat in the war in Armenia further strengthened the attachment of ethnic Armenians of Georgia with the state of Armenia and contributed to the perception of victimization of the Armenian people.

To summarize, the Second Karabakh War temporarily strained relations between Georgia's ethnic Azeris and Armenians. During the war, there were frequent confrontations on social networks. The fact of physical confrontation was also observed. Unfortunately, we also have to mention that several years of friendship between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians had ended with the war.

Strengthening the emotional ties of ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians during the war with neighboring countries, on the one hand, is related to the dominant historical and political notions that consider Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Georgia in relation to neighboring countries; On the other hand, is linked to the historically established emotional framework related to conflict, failure, and victimization. It has been cultivated for years by the militaristic propaganda of the states involved in the war, and the understanding and easing of this is not provided by the Georgian government with the relevant information and educational policy to its citizens.

Even 30 years after Georgia's independence, creating a fair political, social and cultural environment for non-dominant ethnic groups and fully recognizing and participating in public life remains problematic, which clearly weakens their ties and attachment to Georgia's political and cultural space. Moreover, in political rhetoric, Georgian Azerbaijanis and Armenians are often represented as a diaspora whose historical homeland is Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively. The political instrumentalization of the state of war by ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian politicians during the elections and the introduction and dissemination of official positions of the conflicting states to our citizens were sharply problematic. These political views are fundamentally erroneous and problematic because, in addition to replicating the matrix of Soviet national policy and unjustifiably distancing and hierarchizing the peoples living in Georgia, it runs counter to the idea of citizenship as well as the modern state and complicate inclusive and equitable democratic society construction.

Despite weak integration as well as historically established (and reproduced) war-related traumas, it is important that Georgian Armenians and Azeris maintain peace in Georgia and realize their different

mission and power configuration in Georgia. It is noteworthy to highlight the unique coexistence that exists between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in several villages in the Kvemo Kartli region. Despite some emotional tensions, the communities living in these areas have shown strong resilience to the conflict and have maintained peace on the ground.

The extent to which peaceful coexistence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in mixed villages and the existence of shared cultural and social spaces can have a positive role model for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is difficult to say because of fundamentally different historical and political contexts. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the Georgian authorities are not making additional efforts to further strengthen peace and cooperation in these villages and to make a popular representation of this experience. Moreover, the people living in these villages have basic challenges in terms of social infrastructure and at the same time, have a high sense of abandonment.

Thus, despite the peace at the micro-level and the prudence expressed by our citizens, the weakness of integration and the associated political alienation, crisis of confidence, and social isolation are macro factors that undermine our citizens' resilience to conflict. It is clear that this historically established reality requires the radical strengthening of the multi-layered integration process by the Georgian state and the implementation of complex reforms in this regard. It is essential that integration policies take into account the social risks associated with the Karabakh conflict, as well as the strengthening of trust, cooperation, and ties between Georgian Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and the special encouragement of the state to cultivate ideas of peace.

Below are general recommendations, and calls for action for various relevant actors.

The Government of Georgia

- Prioritize civic integration policies and cultivate inter-ethnic solidarity, both between the dominant group and non-dominant ethnic groups, as well as among non-dominant ethnic groups;
- Strengthen work on peace policy, including in connection with regional conflicts, which may have a positive impact on local communities and problems;
- Encourage rhetoric of peace, solidarity, and equality, including through information campaigns.

Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality

- The Action Plan of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration should pay significant attention to the issues of conflict prevention and building trust, dialogue, and cooperation among ethnic groups;
- In order to set positive examples, study the social practice of the settlements of Georgia where Georgian citizens, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis live together and have daily experience of crossing paths and sharing;
- Develop a peace-oriented information campaign on conflict resolution and work on relevant topics through active information and education programs;

- Establish advisory councils and other platforms at the local and central level to support inter-ethnic and religious dialogue or cooperation.

Ministry of Internal Affairs

- Increase the knowledge and sensitivity of the personnel on conflict management and transformation issues across diverse ethnic and religious communities;
- Encourage community-oriented policing approaches and work to build trust within minority communities;
- Intensify effective prevention policies for conflicts, tensions, and hate crimes in diverse communities.

Ministry of Education and Science

- Work on the production of Armenian and Azerbaijani language textbooks (language and literature) in Georgia, based on indigenous ideas;
- Increase the representation of non-dominant ethnic groups in school textbooks and emphasize the historical and peaceful coexistence of these groups in Georgia;
- Escalate peace discourse and sensitivity in education policy;
- Reinforce education services (including Georgian language teaching services, teacher contingents, teaching resources, libraries) for non-dominant ethnic groups in relevant schools/sectors;
- Introduce special positive practices in support of peace in villages where different ethnic groups coexist.

Local governments (where ethnic groups coexist)

- Implement a policy focused on the real social needs of local communities;
- Develop and implement multicultural, inclusive policies and programs in ethnically or religiously diverse municipalities;
- Establish inter-ethnic and inter-religious councils, where different groups will be able to engage in dialogue, cooperation, and engage in common social or cultural practices;
- Reduce and insure risks that may escalate from everyday issues (pastures, water, land, etc.) to conflicts with ethnic connotations.

Public and donor organizations

- Intensify the work in the regions, especially in diverse regions, and bring the objectives/content of the programs and projects closer in line with real local needs, concerns, and interests;
- Enhance programs aimed at peacebuilding and conflict-oriented positive transformation in conflict areas with ethnic connotations, and prioritize this agenda.

Media organizations

- Scale-up systematic coverage of the social, cultural, and political challenges of ethnically diverse regions, including promoting the visibility of ethnic minority communities and representatives;
- Bolster educational and political programs based on peace, equality, inclusion, and democracy, as well as promote these ideas in other ways.