



## **Armenian Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly**

### **Promotion of conflict transformation through peace education in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context: view from Armenia**

Policy Paper

**Hayk Toroyan**, is a graduate of Central European University's Nationalism Studies program (Budapest, Hungary); defended his Master's Thesis titled “Challenges and opportunities for peacemaking in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”. Mr. Toroyan also holds a BA and MA degrees in International Relations from Yerevan State University.

As part of the GPPAC South Caucasus Dialogue Programme 2022, the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN) continues to develop and present Policy Papers intended for both peace organizations, government agencies, and the wider audience. In the light of the War and consequent developments in Ukraine in 2022, the Policy Papers are mainly devoted to this topic in both a regional and national context. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation.

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## Introduction

In September 2020 Azerbaijani attack started the second Nagorno-Karabakh war. The 44-day war resulted in Azerbaijan gaining control over surrounding regions of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and the region of Hadrut and the city of Shushi(a). On November 9<sup>th</sup> a statement was signed between the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia to end the hostilities.<sup>1</sup>

After the November 9<sup>th</sup> statement the political messaging in both countries has changed. While on the Armenian side the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called for the opening of an era of regional peace<sup>2</sup>, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev insisted that the conflict is solved<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the statements by the countries' leaders the military about the peace era of the end of the conflict, the military escalations did not stop in the following 2 years. The biggest escalation took place on September 13-14<sup>th</sup> of 2022.<sup>4</sup> On these days the Azerbaijani forces attacked the sovereign territory of Armenia including shelling of civilian infrastructure and occupation of around 75 square kilometers of Armenian territory. As a result of the escalation more than 300 soldiers were killed and more than 600 were wounded from both sides. Despite the high number of casualties and the attack on the sovereign territory of Armenia, the most shocking and horrific things were the mutilation and torture of Armenian female soldiers<sup>5</sup> and execution of Armenian POWs by the Azeri special forces<sup>6</sup>. The videos sparked outrage in the Armenian society and calls for revenge and revanchism.

After the military offensive from the Azerbaijani side and a US mediated ceasefire both sides decided to meet first on the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in New York and Geneva and then on the level of the leaders in Prague. After the meeting of Foreign Ministers<sup>7</sup> on October 2<sup>nd</sup> both sides announced that the work on the possible draft of the peace treaty between two countries was launched. While the peace treaty seems like a good idea it has a potential to fail as many other attempts to establish peace between the countries did before. One of the main

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation

<https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/>

<sup>2</sup> Agenda of opening peace era in the region was the core of the discussion between the Prime Ministers of Armenia, Georgia: Joint statement of Nikol Pashinyan and Irakli Garibashvili

<https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2021/09/08/Nikol-Pashinyan-Irakli-Gharibashvili/>

<sup>3</sup> President Aliyev: Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Has Been Resolved: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-has-been-resolved-2021-5-11-49/>

<sup>4</sup> Azerbaijan launches wide-ranging attacks against Armenia

<https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-launches-wide-ranging-attacks-against-armenia>

<sup>5</sup> Footage appears to show desecration of female Armenian soldier

<https://oc-media.org/footage-appears-to-show-desecration-of-female-armenian-soldier/>

<sup>6</sup> Video Shows Execution Of Armenian Soldiers

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32062004.html>

<sup>7</sup> Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Geneva

[https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2022/10/02/fms\\_armenia\\_azerbaijan\\_geneva/11665](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2022/10/02/fms_armenia_azerbaijan_geneva/11665)

obstacles of achieving peace in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the long-standing rivalry between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. The rivalry that evolved into hatred was mostly fed in through the state propaganda, media, and education system. To understand the roots and consequences of the conflict we need to briefly look into the history of it.

## **The history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union many conflicts emerged in the former USSR. One of those conflicts is the conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh. Nagorno Karabakh was an autonomous region within the territory of Azerbaijani SSR with ethnic Armenians as the majority of the population.<sup>8</sup> When it was evident that the Soviet Union is collapsing on September 2, 1991 Nagorno Karabakh declared its independence in accordance with the law regulating the “Procedure for Decisions about Union Republics leaving the USSR” adopted on 3 April 1990, the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of which authorized the initiation of own procedure of independence for the autonomous regions within a territory of a constituent Republic in case the latter decides to secede from the Union.<sup>9</sup>

The conflict transformed into a full-scale war between Azerbaijan and local Armenian forces supported by the Republic of Armenia. After 3 years of exhausting fighting, a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1994 in Bishkek, leaving Nagorno Karabakh and surrounding territories under the control of Armenian forces. A negotiation process started to solve the issue with peaceful measures. Since 1992 the OSCE (CSCE at the time) Minsk Group was established to mediate peace and promote peaceful solution of the conflict. The three co-chairs of the Minsk Group US, Russia and France (representing EU) tried to negotiate peace for over 25 years. After the signature of the Bishkek protocols constant violations of ceasefire agreement on the border continued taking lives of at least 50 soldiers and civilians every year. The negotiation process stagnated, and presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan rarely met to discuss a way out of this situation. OSCE Minsk group has been ineffective in mediation process.

Over the years the societies were isolated from one another and had almost no contacts on with each other. Moreover, constant propagandistic tools used through media and education system fed into the narrative of ethnic incompatibility a term coined by the second President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan. The hatred propaganda started to manifest itself in different places and circumstances with the most controversial being the pardoning of Ramil Safarov. In 2004 during a NATO organized language courses in Hungary an Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov beheaded an Armenian officer Gurgen Margaryan with an axe, while the latter was sleeping. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in Hungary, but after spending around eight years in Hungarian jail, he was extradited to Azerbaijan to serve his sentence there. However, that was not something Azerbaijani government did. Instead, the murderer was pardoned by Azerbaijani president, granted a promotion to the rank of major, given an apartment and his salary for the last eight

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<sup>8</sup> 1989 Soviet Union Population census

[http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng89\\_reg1.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng89_reg1.php)

<sup>9</sup> “Закон о порядке решения вопросов, связанных с выходом союзной республики из СССР.”

<https://constitutions.ru/?p=2973>

years.<sup>10</sup> This triggered a huge reaction in Armenian society. Armenia broke its diplomatic ties with Hungary. International community, including, US, Russia, EU, NATO condemned this act.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to isolated incidents such as this there were propagandistic and media tools used on both sides to spread the hatred towards each other such as animated series “Killdim” from the Armenian side and “HyeReality” from the Azerbaijani side both targeted to dehumanize the other.

Moreover, educational systems and professionals also contributed to the multiplication of hatred. Most of the academic work written in both countries are targeted at showing how right and just one side is compared to the other. Even in lower levels of education the term “enemy” and dehumanization techniques are used by most of the teachers. Before the 2020 war several videos appeared in social media showing Azeri teachers in pre-school teaching students about Armenians being an “enemy”. A tendency which might become a trend in Armenia after the 2020 war since the roles in the conflict has been reversed.

The current negotiations process which ideally should establish peace not only between the countries but also societies have a risk of falling apart due to resistance from the society. Even if the peace treaty is signed as a result of the current negotiation process it would not transform the conflict and the relations between the societies would remain on the level of hatred. If the hatred and antagonism is not dealt with minor geopolitical shakes, power change or any significant political event can spark another conflict and another war.

To avoid the abovementioned scenario and to break the cycle of violence and conflict the paper suggests implementing few policies. Armenian and Azerbaijani societies are considered as patriarchal, where “men work” and “women stay at home and raise children”. Unfortunately, it still remains the reality to some extent. Women are the ones responsible for the upbringing of the society and not only in the families but also in schools. According to the World Bank over 92 percent of primary and secondary school teachers in Azerbaijan<sup>12</sup> and over 88 percent in Armenia<sup>13</sup> are females. Moreover, women played massive role in the peacebuilding and peacemaking efforts in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

## **The role of women as peacebuilders in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**

In 1993, the chairwomen of the National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assemblies of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Arzu Abdullayeva and Anahit Bayandur, won the Olaf Palme Peace Prize

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<sup>10</sup> “The Axe Murderer Who Became a Facebook Hero - Al Jazeera English.”

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2012/9/5/the-axe-murderer-who-became-a-facebook-hero>

<sup>11</sup> “Pardoning of Azeri Axe Murderer Raises Tensions in the Caucasus | Simon Tisdall | Comment is Free | The Guardian.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/sep/06/azeri-axe-murderer-caucasus>

<sup>12</sup> Percentage of female school teachers in Azerbaijan

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TCHR.FE.ZS?locations=AZ>

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.TCHR.FE?locations=AZ>

<sup>13</sup> Percentage of female school teacher in Armenia

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.TCHR.FE.ZS?locations=AM>

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TCHR.FE.ZS?locations=AM>

for their outstanding activities towards the establishment of peace in the region by the power of grassroots diplomacy.

A striking feature of NGOs in the former Soviet states is the considerable number of women involved. Women from Armenia and Azerbaijan have been working together through NGOs as well as transnational advocacy networks to promote peacebuilding and conflict resolution. An example of women's NGOs' collaborative efforts is the Transcaucasus Women's Dialogue, which was established in 1994 under the aegis of the National Peace Foundation in Washington, DC. From 1997-99, the Transcaucasus Women's Dialogue organised various projects involving the environment, democratic rights and education, including a three-year summer school at Tbilisi State University. Another women's regional initiative was the 'Working Together – Networking Women in the Caucasus' programme (1997 – 2002) sponsored by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE) with funding from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State. 'Working Together' was a programme for women leaders in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to promote greater cross-border networking. Through a range of training, civic education, NGO development and cross-border networking activities, the IDEE programmes attempted to enhance the leadership abilities and capacity of women leaders and their NGOs, and to advance women's participation in public life.

Furthermore, the role of women in peacebuilding was actively promoted by UNIFEM's Regional Project Women for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the Southern Caucasus, which was implemented for over almost six years (2001-06). Based in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and targeting the three conflicts in the region, this project mainly focused on mobilizing the women's movement and youth in these countries about the concepts of peace and conflict resolution. National coalitions and networks in each country –the Peace Coalition in Armenia, Coalition 1325 and the National Network of IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Women in Azerbaijan, and the Unity of Women for Peace Network in Georgia, as well as the Regional Coalition "Women for Peace"– were established by the support of UNIFEM. Working through the "women for peace" networks and coalitions, UNIFEM has supported the joint creation –across conflict zones– of core knowledge products on gender, peace-building, and non-violent conflict resolution. Using a "people to people" strategy, these tools have been developed through regional cooperation by civil society. For example, in 2006, the Regional Coalition developed a training manual on "Gender and Peace Education" to be used by organizations who are working with youth in the three countries and beyond. Advocating for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes around the world, The Women Waging Peace Network unites well over 1,000 women leaders from 40 conflict areas around the world, ranging from Sudan to Sri Lanka, Colombia to Bosnia, and the Middle East to Azerbaijan and Armenia.<sup>23</sup> However, only 100 women leaders from ten conflict areas (Azerbaijan and Armenia, Boston's urban neighborhoods, Colombia, Cyprus, India and Pakistan, Israeli and Palestine, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Sudan, and the post-Yugoslav region) participated in the official launch of this global initiative within the framework of the first two-week Women Waging Peace colloquium held at Harvard University in December 1999, with 11 women taking part from Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Unfortunately, all these efforts were annulled by the 2020 war and the peacebuilding and peacemaking efforts are starting to shape up again taking into consideration the new reality.

## Conclusions and Policy recommendations

After the Velvet revolution in Armenia in 2018 and before the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 the Foreign Ministers of Armenia met in Paris and agreed to “prepare populations of both countries for peace”.<sup>14</sup> While it was perceived as a significant agreement between sides nothing substantial has been done towards that goal.

The paper recommends preparing populations for peace by implementing several policies aimed at reduction of hatred propaganda and antagonism between the sides of the conflict.

- Firstly, in order to prepare populations for peace steps must be taken to change the methods of education in the primary and secondary schools. While educational institutions are not easily approachable or accessible in both countries work can be done with teachers outside of the schools and institutions. Taking into consideration the high number of female teachers in primary and secondary school of Armenia and Azerbaijan and high number of female peacebuilders in both societies the paper suggests implementing an exchange of views between the two groups. A dialogue format that will reconvene these actors together to bring alternative and unseen part of the history of the conflict and might help the teachers to shape a more complete picture of the conflict and its peaceful resolution.
- Secondly, capacity building workshops on peace education can be implemented by the female peacebuilders with the participation of female teachers. Training of trainers in the fields of human rights, democracy studies, conflict resolution, critical thinking, negotiation skills, listening abilities, empathy and many others that will help the new generation to look wider at problems and to try to find non-violent solutions to them are among many topics that can be taught to the teachers. Improving teachers’ capacities in these areas and giving the necessary skills to them to carry on and implement those sorts of trainings in classes will change the overwhelming narrative of hatred and ethnic rivalry between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- Thirdly, considering that many women lost their husbands and children due to the wars, ceasefire violations, military escalations psychological work specifically aiming at trauma healing should be implemented with this segment of the population. Firstly, this needs to be done to prevent potential “spoilers” of peacemaking process. Secondly, the relatives of the diseased have major respect in their communities due to the losses they gave to the wars and are always heard on the grassroots level. Thus, successful trauma healing and subsequent cooperation and inclusion of these women in peacebuilding activities can create significant and valuable peace advocates in their societies.

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<sup>14</sup> Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to “prepare populations for peace”  
<https://eurasianet.org/armenia-and-azerbaijan-agree-to-prepare-populations-for-peace>

## About the Author:

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Since 2010 Hayk is working with CMI (Crisis Management Initiative) – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. From 2016 he acts as CMI’s Regional Coordinator in the South Caucasus. Previously Hayk worked at the Armenian UN Association, the OSCE Office in Yerevan as well as in the sphere of media and advertisement. Hayk also worked at the Jinishian Memorial Foundation, facilitating and implementing debate trainings in schools in all regions of Armenia. Hayk is regularly providing workshops and lectures for students in Armenia and from Eastern Europe on conflict analysis and conflict resolution.