Sebastian Relitz (Ed.)

MANEUVERING INCREASED VULNERABILITY AND POLARIZATION IN THE CAUCASUS

CORRIDORS PROCEEDINGS VOL. IV

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IMPRINT

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SEBASTIAN RELITZ – INTRODUCTION

MANEUVERING INCREASED VULNERABILITY AND POLARIZATION IN THE CAUCASUS

Tackling and transforming protracted conflicts in the Caucasus is a challenging and long-term process. For over three decades, committed and courageous actors in Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia and Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh/Azerbaijan have taken up this challenge, often in cooperation with international stakeholders. However, the tangible results on a larger scale are rather limited, as these conflicts have solidified perpetuating polarization and division between and within societies. An almost complete standstill in conflict management on the one hand and a return to large-scale violence as a means of conflict resolution are sobering results. These results, or precisely the lack of major positive outcomes, make it clear that there can be no simple "business as usual" in the field of conflict management. This does not mean turning away from efforts for peaceful conflict transformation. On the contrary, the prioritization of hard security considerations must go hand in hand with ambitious and context-specific peace efforts. Especially in times of war, insecurity and rearmament, it is essential to question established peacebuilding approaches and develop strategies to deal with new framework conditions and insecurities effectively.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the parameters for regional and international peace actors in the Caucasus have changed dramatically. The war and connected regional events have introduced additional vulnerabilities and deepened existing tensions that significantly impact human security, socio-political development, and individual conflict systems in the region. Unfortunately, the terrible war in Ukraine is also increasingly overshadowing the perception of unresolved territorial conflicts in the Caucasus. Parallels and path dependencies are identified that often only partially reflect local realities and historically evolved conflict structures. There is no doubt that Russia played and still plays a central role in the protracted conflicts in the Caucasus. However, it is essential not to forget the other conflict levels and actors. The local elites, stakeholders and societies are ultimately still the most affected, but also the ones with the greatest potential to work out sustainable peace solutions. Against this backdrop, it becomes crucial to analyze and understand the impact of these recent developments on the already troubled conflict transformation processes. Several trends can be identified which are directly related to the war and influence both the living conditions of the people in the Caucasus and the possibilities for conflict transformation.

INCREASED INSTABILITY, VULNERABILITY AND UNCERTAINTY

For many years, the Caucasus was characterized by relative stability despite unresolved conflicts. This situation changed in 2020 with the second Karabakh war and the Ukraine war acted as a catalyst to this development. Russia's relative weakness and its lack of success on the battlefield have varying regional impacts. The most obvious manifestations of the region's worsening instability are the military escalations initiated by Baku in 2022. In September 2022, the two countries experienced their largest escalation of cross-border violence since the end of the Second Karabakh War in 2020. On the night of September 12, Azerbaijan attacked positions within the territory of the Republic of Armenia, expanding the conflict beyond the boundaries of Nagorno Karabakh, over which both countries claim historical ownership. The ceasefire violation lasted two days and cost the lives of hundreds of servicemen, threatened civilians, and reignited concerns about the lasting power of the post-war ceasefire agreement. In December 2022, Azerbaijani eco-protestors, supported by the government of Azerbaijan, began a blockade of the primary road in between the Armenian-populated territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia. The ongoing blockade restricts movement of roughly 120,000 people in a territory with access to supplies for daily life and places another obstacle between the two countries and peaceful transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By using and threatening military action and engaging in coercive negotiating, the Azerbaijani government is attempting to force Armenia to make further and more rapid concessions in the peace process. This strategy is intended to capitalize on Russia's current preoccupation with the war in Ukraine. It is essential that both sides finally conduct serious peace negotiations. However, current negotiations are neither on an equal footing nor with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders but are central prerequisites for long-term and peaceful conflict transformation. Therefore, stakeholders from Karabakh and civil society actors from all sides must be meaningfully involved in the peace process. On the civil society level, dialogues and exchanges are already taking place, and we at CORRIDORS have also organized several of them, albeit largely decoupled from the official mediation strands. The challenge here is to ensure connectivity between the tracks and, thus, social participation in the mediation process, which is essential for sustainable peace. The war in 2020 and the escalation in 2022 destroyed a lot of the already limited trust in this space. Moreover, the scope for action for civil society actors in Azerbaijan is very limited and Armenian society, on the other hand, is particularly vulnerable and in shock. In this context, peacebuilding is also faced with the challenge of adequately addressing these limitations and vulnerabilities.

The situation remains stable in the conflicts around Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia, but here, too, the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine is leading to

increased insecurities on all sides. During the first few weeks in particular, many in Georgia feared that their country would be the next Russian target. The uncertainty was palpable in large parts of the population and led to an immense wave of solidarity and support for Ukraine and its resistance, especially in urban centers and among younger generations. This support was also evident in the hundreds of Georgian volunteers fighting on Ukraine's side against Russia. As Russian military capabilities visibly diminished, so did fears amongst the Georgian population. Although the asymmetries between Georgia and Russia are even greater than in the case of Ukraine, Russia's military capacities make an invasion of Georgia hardly realistic at present. However, there is still significant uncertainty as to how the war's further course will affect Georgia and its unresolved conflicts. Both a full annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as compensation for a Russian failure in Ukraine and significant military action because of a Russian success and/or regime change in Tbilisi are conceivable, if currently unlikely, scenarios. Increased insecurity can also be identified in Abkhazia, which is based on the weakening of Russia. Although relations with Moscow are not without conflict and characterized by extreme asymmetry, Russia is the only actor that guarantees the security of the Abkhazians. The withdrawal of substantial Russian military equipment and personnel from Abkhazia to support the faltering invasion of Ukraine is fueling insecurity and fears in Abkhazia. Many in Abkhazia and South Ossetia fear that a significant weakening of Russia could motivate Georgia to escalate the conflict militarily. Scattered demands by Georgian opposition and nationalist actors to open a second front against Russia and thus support Ukraine as well as militarily reintegrate Abkhazia have been heard very clearly in the region and have fueled historically grown fears towards Georgia. At the same time, current steps towards normalization of Georgian-Russian relations are also seen as an additional danger to already limited Georgian sovereignty.

INCREASED SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND POLITICAL VOLATILITY

Strong social polarization and open contradiction between government and opposition have long characterized the two recognized democracies in the region, Georgia and Armenia. In both countries, however, the situation has worsened in recent years. In Georgia, 2022 and 2023 highlight ongoing and increased political instability and polarization often connected with the Georgian relationship with both Russia and Europe. Rejected from their application for EU candidacy in fall of 2022, Georgia recommitted to addressing European feedback and undergoing the application process again in the future. However, in early 2023, Georgian Parliament set forth to pass a set of laws known colloquially as the foreign agent laws, which would place restrictions and regulations on media and foreign-funded organizations. The laws were seen widely in the international community as a move away from

democratic ideals, and would have pushed Georgia further away from their EU candidacy bid, if their passing were not halted following record-breaking public protests in Tbilisi in March. Protests also responded to the resumption of direct flights between Russia and Georgia and the Kremlin's decision to lift a visa ban on Georgian citizens in mid-May. These measures were denounced by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, opposition parties, and pro-European sections in the society as an unwanted sign of normalization between the two countries. All this further deepens the sharp internal political divide in Georgia, where tensions between the ruling Georgian Dream government and opposition members of the public and parliament continue. This stark contrast means that political debate is increasingly taking place outside elected institutions which weakens the democratic fabric of the country.

Likewise in Abkhazia, the political divide increased in 2022 and early 2023 significantly. The issues are not new and relate, on the one hand, to the region's poor economic and political situation. The situation was further aggravated by the reduction of Russian support for Abkhazia, and the opposition accused the government of mismanagement and political incompetence. On the other hand, the Abkhazian government is under intense pressure from Russia to make even more economic and political concessions. In particular, the issue of land acquisition for foreigners and the lease of critical infrastructure is fuelling widespread fears among the population, and a sell-out to Russian investors is feared. Widespread social protests, demonstrations, and calls for the resignation of the united opposition against the government were the result. Moreover, the political pressure on the civil-society sector is continuously increasing since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Abkhazian foreign ministry, in particular, has repeatedly harshly criticized the involvement of local and international NGOs and slandered their work. Coupled with the polarization of domestic and foreign policy, this has plunged the important work of Abkhazian civil society into an existential crisis. These key actors for a long-term solution to the conflict are still withstanding the pressure, but the framework conditions for civil society are getting progressively worse.

The division between the government and the opposition in Armenia is similarly deep, albeit for different reasons. The steadily increasing pressure of Azerbaijan on the Armenian government, by using and threatening military actions, and the lack of support from Moscow urges prime minister Pashinyan to engage in serious peace talks with Azerbaijan and to work on normalizing relations with Turkey. As a result of these coercive negotiations, a long unseen dynamic developed in the peace talks on the Brussels, Washington, and Moscow tracks. Although the Armenian side was already prepared to make far-reaching concessions, a final solution is not yet in sight.

This is also due to the maximum demands of the Baku government, making it difficult to find a workable compromise. Both the opposition and large parts of the Armenian population are putting pressure on the government in Yerevan not to abandon central Armenian interests. Even after the second Karabakh war, a majority of the Armenian population resists Turkish relations normalization, and feels very uneasy about making accommodations in peace talks with Azerbaijan. The consequences of many years of nationalist and maximalist debates are also evident here. Over the last three decades, the leaderships in Yerevan and Baku have failed to prepare their populations for peace. On the contrary, the unresolved conflict has been utilized for domestic political disputes and to consolidate their own power positions and regimes. For peace work, it is essential to intensify the internal dialogue in the individual societies about possible peace solutions and ways to build positive relations. This is particularly important in dynamic frameworks such as current Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. But also in deadlocked contexts such as Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia, internal dialogue is necessary to prevent a significant escalation of violence if the conflict becomes dynamic. Another 30 years cannot be wasted here.

CORRIDORS APPROACH: CONTRIBUTING TO PEACEBUILDING BY EMPOWERING AND CONNECTING YOUNG ACTORS

At CORRIDORS, we aim to contribute to peacebuilding in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe by tackling the root causes of conflict. Thereby, we support people from grassroots to policy levels and build mutual understanding through dialogue over the divide. We are convinced that transforming protracted conflicts cannot take place without the meaningful inclusions of diverse actors. Empowering and connecting these people to prepare their societies for peace and become agents of change is key. This applies particularly to young actors whose greater participation in the peacebuilding process is essential. The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 recognizes the important role of young people in promoting peace and security and while highlighting the need to involve and empower young people in peacebuilding efforts.

Several reasons can be identified for this:

- Young people are disproportionately affected by conflict. They may be forced to flee their homes, lose access to education, and experience trauma and violence. Involving young people in peacebuilding efforts ensures that their voices and needs are heard and that they are part of the solution.
- Young people bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to peacebuilding efforts. They are often adept at using modern technology to mobilize and organize, and they bring a fresh perspective and new ideas to innovate on complex issues.

- Young people are often at the forefront of social and political movements, and they have the potential to be powerful agents of change. Involving young people in peacebuilding efforts empowers them to take ownership of their communities and work towards a more peaceful and just future.
- Young people are the leaders of tomorrow and involving them in peacebuilding efforts is essential for building sustainable peace.

Greater involvement of young actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is particularly needed in the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus. The region's conflicts are characterized by shrinking spaces for dialogue and knowledge transfer across conflict lines, a limited understanding of the complex conflict structures and a need for new and innovative ideas to peacefully address them. After more than 30 years of unresolved conflict, there is a particular lack of young specialists in the field of civil society conflict transformation. A generational change is emerging here, as long-established activists are slowly having to step into the second row. Consequently, young actors throughout the Caucasus need to gain the knowledge and experience to constructively transform conflicts and support social change. The open and respectful dialogue and the warm atmosphere in the meetings will remain in our and the participants' hearts for a long time.

Our project **ADVANCING YOUNG PEACEBUILDER CAREERS** has been dedicated to this goal for three years. The project aims to build young peace actors' capacities and create new prospects for internationalization and professionalization. It forms a safe space for direct people-to-people exchange, dialogue, and practical cooperation over the divide. Moreover, the project aims to advance the understanding of protracted conflicts, facilitate research on related aspects, and strengthen local research capacities and networking in peace and conflict. In 2022, we were also able to support small pilot projects of our participants for the first time, which was an important extension of our previous efforts. During the project implementation, together with our partners from Civik Idea (Tbilisi) and the Youth and Community Action Club (Samakhbyur), we organized two workshops in Telavi and Tbilisi with young scholars, activists, and experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia. During these gatherings, international and local experts and scholars conducted trainings on how to develop research designs, how to get published and how to design peacebuilding interventions. Above all, the focus was on the exchange between the participants. Unfortunately, organizing such regional exchanges in the Caucasus remains difficult, and existing dynamics imply that it will not become easier. However, our project demonstrated how vital and mutually beneficial such exchanges can be. We thank everyone involved for their curiosity and good spirit.

The **CORRIDORS PROCEEDINGS VOL. IV** collects selected papers and short reports on the funded pilot projects of the participants. Thereby the edited volume is a contribution to promoting the voices of young civil society actors and researchers from all over the Caucasus. It contributes to diversifying conflict-related discourses and peacebuilding processes and strengthening the youth's voice and role. The publication also draws attention to largely neglected aspects and marginalized groups that are, however, essential for long-term conflict transformation. Reading the contributions can broaden the reader's understanding of the protracted and at the same time increasingly volatile conflict contexts and help **MANEUVERING INCREASED VULNERABILITY AND POLARIZATION IN THE CAUCASUS**.

To address the protracted conflicts in the Caucasus, it is essential to tackle also their deeper symptoms and effects. This is not only a central objective of CORRIDORS, but also an understanding that is shared by the wider peacebuilder community. In his contribution, **Paata Alaverdashvili** thus identifies a growing understanding of the crucial role that trauma and mental health play in establishing and maintaining peace. Trauma, whether the result of adversity, violence, displacement, or marginalization, can have long-term consequences for individuals and communities. It has a negative impact on their well-being and ability to engage in meaningful discussion. As a result, individual and communal trauma pose significant barriers to conflict transformation. Based on this assumption, which is supported by empirical evidence from Georgia and Armenia, Alaverdashvili is developing his "Guidelines for Trauma Sensitivity in Peacebuilding and Community Work". These recommendations are intended for practitioners from peacebuilding organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs) who work with communities in the aftermath of wars and armed conflicts to provide social, educational, and humanitarian support. It addresses the main effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities, as well as trauma-sensitive techniques to approach organizing and conducting activities with postwar community members. The guidelines are a crucial contribution to increase trauma literacy in the region, as it informs how trauma impacts individuals and communities, as well as how to establish safe and supportive healing environments that are conducive to peacebuilding and community work.

The following article also shows that the unresolved conflicts in the region have a major negative impact on the affected communities, even in the absence of large-scale war escalations. In their article "Post-war Truth: Human Rights Violations in Kapan, Armenia" authors **Liana Vahanyan**, **Ani Gabrielyan**, and **Tigran Avagyan** show this clearly for an area in Armenia's Syunik province. Following the second Karabakh war in 2020 and the subsequent military escalation between Azerbaijan and Armenia

in 2022, the Kapan Enlarged Region became a border region. The city of Kapan and 18 of the community's 38 villages are now directly on the border and are occasionally targets of direct military attacks. This ongoing conflict escalation has led in grave human rights violations. While many speak out about such issues during war times, few address the matter (particularly in peripheral regions) once the battle has de-escalated. This report explicitly addresses the subject of human rights breaches in the Kapan Enlarged Region, specifically focusing on the consequences of the 2020-2022 border escalation. It is based on findings from direct interaction with 100 people from Kapan and eighteen border villages, as well as external research reviewing articles and publications by human rights specialists. The authors identify significant and continuing human rights violations, and in particular violations of the rights to life, liberty, security, property, and freedom of movement. The report clearly shows the diverse negative consequences and insecurities for the local population and calls attention to the living conditions of peripheral and border communities in peace and border demarcation processes.

International peacekeepers often play a central role along disputed borders and between hostile conflict parties. This is also the case in the context of the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, but with the particularity that there are currently so-called Russian peacekeepers deployed. In his article "Russia's Peacekeeping Operation in Karabakh: Problems and Opportunities", **Azar Haziyev** analyses the mission and develops recommendations for the future of peacekeeping in the region. While the Russian-mediated Trilateral Statement on 10 November 2020 ended the second Karabakh war, multiple issues remained unresolved, and tensions remain high. Russian troops are active in monitoring the ceasefire regime and resolving disagreements between the conflict parties but have failed to prevent regular skirmishes around Karabakh and between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Moreover, the author argues that there is significant dissatisfaction with the work of the "Russian Peacekeeping Force" on the ground and mistrust on both sides regarding Russia's true agenda in the conflict. The lack of a clear mandate for the peacekeepers which are initially deployed until 2025 contributes to this uncertainty. Against this background, Azar develops recommendations regarding the composition, area, mandate, international authorization, and armament of any future peacekeeping operation in the region.

Russia also plays a decisive role in the other unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus. **David Matsaberidze** argues that given Russia's role in the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's security is linked to its foreign policy, which should push the country closer to Western institutions while protecting it from Russian Federation influences. In his contribution "Entanglements of Foreign Policy

and Security in Georgia (2004– 2022)", he examines the interrelationships between Georgia's foreign policy trajectory and national security by deconstructing important obstacles and adjustments in the country's security sector reform process. Following the August War of 2008, David identifies two opposing perceptions of Georgia's security threats that shape its foreign and security policy. First are the pro-Western elements urging for further transformation of security sector reform to confront problems posed by Russia, ranging from de-occupation of Georgian regions to possible Russian Federation military assault. Second are pro-Russian groups that call for separation from the West to normalize relations with Russia, and they explain this assertion by initiating a realistic foreign policy for Georgia in light of the current geopolitical reality. The author illustrates that Georgia's security sector reform is a subject of political elite preferences, which complicates the process of consolidation around codified security threats and foreign policy priorities.

Nona Kurdovanidze contribution titled "Pipeline Corridors and Security Challenges in Georgia" highlights a special aspect of security: energy security. This component of security has become particularly prominent in political and public discourse since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia aspired to become a transit hub for oil and gas from Azerbaijan to Western countries and was able to reduce its reliance on energy resources provided by Russia as a result of new opportunities. However, the author argues that Russia has continued to threaten Georgia's energy security and that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the need to reevaluate current models and strategies for ensuring energy security. Together with the war in Ukraine, recent escalations of violence between Azerbaijan and Armenia have shifted the regional and international security framework. However, Georgia's energy security policy has not yet adapted to those shifts. With her contribution, Nona aims analyze how recent regional and geopolitical developments impact Georgia's energy security and its pipeline and transit infrastructure in particular.

The last article in the edited volume provides insight into the two pilot projects funded by the project. Supporting pilot projects of young activists is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it promotes innovation and creativity. Young activists often bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to social and political issues. Supporting their pilot projects allows them to experiment with innovative approaches to addressing complex problems, which can lead to more effective solutions. Secondly, it empowers youth. Supporting pilot projects of young activists gives them the opportunity to take leadership roles and develop important skills such as project management, communication, and problem-solving. Thirdly, pilot projects allow us to test new approaches to long-standing issues or to engage new groups. Innovation does not

come from repeating the tried and tested or from avoiding risks. The two funded pilot projects were presented by the participants in our dialogue workshop in the summer of 2022 and further developed under mentoring. They reflect our approach to dialogue, which combines problem-finding dialogue with interest-driven cooperation across the divides. The first project is a regional project in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which was jointly developed and implemented by **Taia Tsiklauri**, **Naira Sardaryan**, and **Lala Safarli**. The "Better Caucasus – South Caucasian Civic Initiative" addressed common challenges of youth in rural areas of the three countries, like a lack of opportunities for self-development, a lack of employment and self-employment opportunities, and a lack of meaningful participation and communication. During the pilot project, the team organized three one-week training sessions to address youth challenges in the rural communities of Dusheti (Georgia), Arshaluys (Armenia), and Shamkir (Azerbaijan). The second pilot project "Youth on Politics" by **Diana Mlhamyan** also targeted young people. Diana identified apathetic moods and indifference towards political developments inside Armenia among young people as a socio-psychological response to both the Second Karabakh War and recent military escalations at the border with Azerbaijan. Her project's goal was to activate youth and provide a platform to them where they can discuss disputed issues amongst themselves. For this, she organized youth discussions with experts in Ijevan, Gyumri, and three in Yerevan with over 80 participants.

Finally, we again express our respect to the authors, activists, and all the other participants of the project for their openness and engagement despite the challenging conditions for such initiatives. Such young people can together create a better future for their societies and for the Caucasus as a whole. Finally, I would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for their generous funding of our project, **ADVANCING YOUNG PEACEBUILDER CAREERS III**, and this publication through its Civil Society Cooperation program. This publication is not only a product of practical cooperation between civil society stakeholders, it also seeks to facilitate an open exchange of knowledge and views. We do not always have to agree with what is stated, but we should at least recognize each other's perspectives to create a basis for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. In this spirit, I wish readers a stimulating and informative read.

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PAATA ALAVERDASHVILI

GUIDELINES FOR TRAUMA SENSITIVITY IN PEACEBUILDING AND COMMUNITY WORK

There is growing recognition of the critical role trauma and mental health play in building and sustaining peace. Trauma, whether caused by adversity, violence, displacement, or marginalisation can have significant long-term effects on individuals and communities. It negatively affects their wellbeing and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue. This can have negative effects on mental and physical health, lead to substance abuse and social isolation, and perpetuate cycles of violence and repression. Consequently, individual and collective trauma constitute critical obstacles for conflict transformation. These guidelines are intended for practitioners from peacebuilding organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs) who work with communities after wars and armed conflicts and try to support them with social, educational, and humanitarian activities. It describes main impacts of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities, and elaborates trauma-sensitive approaches to planning and implementing activities with members of post-war communities. Trauma literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to recognize, respond to, and support those who have experienced trauma. It involves providing knowledge on how trauma affects individuals and communities, and skills on how to create safe and supportive environments for healing that are conducive to peacebuilding and community work.

KEY WORDS: ***Trauma Sensitivity, Mental Health, Peacebuilding, Community Work, Georgia, Armenia***

INTRODUCTION

War is probably the oldest human-made disaster. Armed conflicts cause huge economic and infrastructural harm. Nevertheless, war's global psychological impact is often not adequately estimated. There are direct costs related to caring for soldiers, victims, and survivors of violence who suffer from war-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, we also need to consider the indirect burden and costs of unemployment, followed by mental health difficulties and related distress, increased domestic violence, psychosomatic diseases and related costs, poverty, and insufficient food supplies. Heavy destruction of the psychological systems that armed conflicts inflict on community members has the most long-lasting negative effect on society. Sometimes, such experiences become reasons for individual or social trauma.

After armed conflicts, many peacebuilding organizations and missions try to support the stabilization and transformation of society and contribute to peace in communities. They cooperate and engage with different local and international organizations and directly with community members. The abovementioned emotional and psychosocial injuries and traumas are invisible and often complicated to identify. Therefore, community workers and peacebuilding practitioners should have essential competencies in understanding the impacts of traumatic experiences and acting in a trauma-sensitive manner to apply the "do no harm" principle, which is a crucial one for community and peace work.

These guidelines are intended for practitioners from communities, peacebuilding organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), who work with communities after wars and armed conflicts and try to support them with social, educational, and humanitarian activities. This handbook describes the main aspects of the impacts of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. It also offers ways to be trauma-sensitive and the factors to consider when planning and implementing activities with members of post-war communities. The more trauma-sensitive the interventions are, the more meaningful and relevant they become. These guidelines also provide some ideas on how to be trauma-sensitive toward oneself as a peace and community practitioner to prevent burnout and being overwhelmed[1].

1 I express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who contributed to this project and work. This project and publication would not have been possible without the following individuals' participation in the workshop: Araksia Svajyan, Lusine Mnatsakanyan, Ani Yengibaryan, Irina Yaghubyan, Ninia Nandoshvili, Tinatin Tsereteli, Madona Keshikashvili, Ellada Rizaeva, Iveta Gogava, and Mariam Todua. The publication was only possible with the involvement of the project partners' representatives, namely Lilia Chikhladze, Naira Sardaryan, Tamta Chelidze, and Sebastian Relitz. Their commitment and support at each project stage have been crucial in achieving the results together. We also convey our gratitude to the Heinrich Boell Foundation Tbilisi Office – South Caucasus Region for supporting the initiative. Finally, we thank all individuals and organizations working for peace; directly or indirectly, they have shaped the approaches to this work. We all work together, and we hope this publication brings us one step closer to our visions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Traumatic Events and Trauma

We need to differentiate trauma from traumatic events when discussing psychological trauma. Trauma is not the event itself but the body's response to the event, and it becomes dysfunctional in the long term (Van der Kolk 2014). Trauma is a type of internal experience that cannot be processed and integrated into a psycho-somatic system but disorganizes and overwhelms that.

According to the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11), published by the World Health Organization (WHO), a traumatic event overwhelms a person's neuropsychological apparatus. Integrating, interiorizing, and accommodating it into the existing psycho-somatic system is too much to bear. Such events can damage the health, relationship, economic, and environmental aspects of life (WHO 2018). After experiencing traumatic events, people might consistently overcome the distress caused by the events or develop different traumatic reaction patterns. One of these patterns is widely known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When we talk about distress, we consider the type of stressful internal experience that is overwhelming psychologically, emotionally, and somatically. Most part of the population has resilience against traumatic experiences and can overcome them within 1–3 months. However, some people remain traumatized and require bio-psycho-social support (IASC 2007).

One of the main expressions of traumatization syndromes is PTSD, which can occur in cases where people are exposed to an event or a situation (lasting either for a short or a long period) of a highly threatening or horrific nature. Such events include but are not limited to natural or human-made disasters, combat, serious accidents, torture, sexual violence, terrorism, assault, and acute life-threatening illness (such as a heart attack). PTSD can also occur after witnessing the potential or actual injury or death of others in a sudden, unexpected, or violent manner and experiencing the sudden, unexpected, or violent death of a loved one (WHO 2018). PTSD is described in detail in the following chapters.

Importance of Safety

The human neuropsychological system has two main functions. The first is to drive and act to survive (find a safe place), and the second is to strive for a connection with other humans. The system (to be precise, the autonomic nervous system [ANS]) looks for context, choice, and connection to find safety. When one of these is missing, a sense of unease develops, and the ANS prepares the human physiology and mind for

protection (Dana 2020). When feeling unsafe, the mind (how people think) and the body (sensations, what people feel) automatically, without their conscious decision, concentrate on protection and less on connection, understanding, and compassion.

People operate with the stories about the self, the world, and the relationships created by the state of the ANS. When the ANS identifies the environment as safe, then people operate with the stories that others are friendly; people can relax, feel calm, confidently start an action, or reach out to others; it is safe to start a new connection, and so on. When the ANS identifies the context as insecure, then the dominant stories (consciously or unconsciously) are that others might be wishing people harm and life itself is unsafe. It is also related to the idea that the universe is unsupportive and unfriendly, that starting new relationships can bring pain or be harmful to people, and that they should always be ready to compete. When people feel safe, they have an ongoing sense of connection with and curiosity about others. In this state, neurobiology supports social connection, communication, and cooperation. This story is one of abundance (Dana 2020).

When people lose the feeling of safety, they move out of abundance into a mode of scarcity and protection. In that state, they move into a state where their system expects danger even in neutral contexts and attempt to be "better" and "stronger" than everyone else because this is the only way to survive. In such situations, the human system might interpret neutral phrases, gestures, and behaviors of others as dangerous and threatening.

For this reason, we might often notice suspicious attitudes and distancing from community members who have experienced serious traumatic events. This is because war traumas and violent conflict experiences have an adverse impact on community members' neuropsychological systems. First and foremost, their feeling of safety is threatened, and they continuously feel threats to their lives and economic and social insecurity. In such situations, they tend to lose trust in other humans, and their belief that the world is unfriendly emerges. There can be moments when community and peacebuilding practitioners feel distanced and isolated from traumatized people when working with them. In such situations, the practitioners should not take it personally but keep in mind that these people behave that way because their ANS is trying to protect them, and their decisions are often unconscious. Such a professional attitude will also protect the practitioners from feeling frustrated and overwhelmed.

Nature of Trauma

According to ICD-11, PTSD is a syndrome that develops after exposure to a highly threatening or horrific event or series of events, but it occurs only in a number of cases (WHO 2018). Potentially traumatic events can be categorized into three types – Trauma I type, Trauma II type, and medically caused trauma – as presented with examples in Table 1:

Table 1
Trauma Types according to WHO

	Trauma I type (singular / short term)	Trauma II type (multiple / long term)	Medically caused trauma
Accidental	**Traffic accident** **Short-term natural disasters (fire, hurricane, etc.)**	**Long-lasting catastrophes (earthquake, flood)** **Technical disaster (e. g. nuclear disaster in Chernobyl)**	**Life-threatening and life-limiting diseases**
Human-made	**Assault (sexual, criminal)** **Bank robbery** **Terrorist attack**	**Sexual / physical violence** **Torture** **Domestic violence** **Child abuse** **War** **Genocide** **Imprisonment**	**Treatment mistakes**

The following clusters of symptoms to characterize PTSD:

1. Re-experiencing the traumatic event or events in the present in the form of vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks, or nightmares, which are typically accompanied by intense and overwhelming emotions, such as fear or horror and overwhelming physical sensations or feelings of being overwhelmed or immersed in the same intense emotions experienced during the traumatic event
2. Avoidance of thoughts and memories of the event or events or avoidance of activities, situations, or people reminiscent of the event or events
3. Negative alterations in reactivity and arousal – persistent perceptions of heightened current threats, for example, as indicated by hypervigilance or enhanced startled reactions to stimuli, such as unexpected noises

All these symptoms represent dysfunctional coping of the human psyche with overwhelming and tragic, traumatic life events, which result in negative alterations in mood and cognition, emotional reactions such as shame and guilt, and changed perceptions and sense-making of the world and the self (WHO 2018). Although most human beings experience one or more traumatic events throughout their lifetimes, only 3 – 8 % of them develop PTSD (Koenen et al. 2017), which indicates the resilience of human beings and the existence of strong coping mechanisms to defend themselves against life's traumatic events.

Trauma Membrane

The "trauma membrane" as a term is a metaphor that is used in the mental health work field. Similar to any metaphor, trauma membrane has implications or overlapping, multilayered, implicit meanings (Martz and Lindy 2010). Trauma implies a wound. A membrane that forms on the surface of a wound implies a natural event in which coagulation forms a scab on a cut. Thus, the membrane covers a wound and forms its new outer edge. As a living biological membrane, the term also calls to mind the microscopic activity between a membrane and its outside surface. These meanings are consistent with the function of a semi-permeable membrane, which permits the entrance of certain items and extrudes others, as well as the biological activity on the surface that permits and governs this function. Each of these layers of meaning deserves some elaboration. It serves dual functions: 1) as a protective barrier that keeps noxious substances from contaminating or exacerbating the wound and 2) as a conserving edge covering that keeps healing substances inside. The membrane is thin, hardly visible, and, at least initially, easily broken. A biological membrane implies organic, natural functions that mark the body's edge, not artificial constructs inserted from the outside. When intact and functioning well, the membrane serves as a biological pump, carrying out a transport function in which noxious materials are expelled and healing elements are introduced (Martz and Lindy 2010).

As a psychological metaphor, the trauma membrane concept at an intrapsychic level reflects the fact that individuals may distance themselves or dissociate from or split off the traumatic memories until they are ready to face such memories. In integrating traumatic memories, individuals may respond to neutral events with types of reactions that do not match the stimuli. In such circumstances, the neutral events "function as if they were enzymes with a special molecular configuration. Such configurations tend to draw to them and fix traumatic memories and precipitate their being metabolized. The medium of a healthy trauma membrane offers hope for healing and is thus a way to facilitate recovery after a significant traumatic event disrupts individuals and communities. The formation of a trauma membrane can be

understood as "multicellular" in that it forms around groups of people and individual survivors" (Martz and Lindy 2010). As such, the trauma membrane might be open or closed to practitioners attempting to gain access to traumatized individuals; this access depends on a specific context, interpersonal relations, and how safe and secure the community members feel at the moment of the peacebuilding or another community project.

Therefore, if practitioners observe passivity, low level of participation in the acitivities, and even some skeptical attitudes in the community, they can also keep in mind the metaphor of the trauma membrane. Sometimes, the "trauma membrane" of the individuals or the whole group might be too sensitive, and specific activities or projects might not appear safe or comfortable. In such moments, a low level of participation and interest from community members should not be taken personally by the practitioners, but they must reflect on/rethink their work with self-compassion. The intentions might be good, but supportive interventions from practitioners might not always be fitting to the needs of soothing and healing the membrane of the community members at that moment.

CONFLICT-INDUCED TRAUMAS IN SOCIETY

Violent Conflicts as Traumatic Events

The Catastrophic Trauma Recovery (CTR) project of the Common Bond Institute (CBI) refers to psychological and emotional damage as the most long-lasting effects of war (CBI 2014). However, historically, these are the least addressed challenges in the rebuilding process of society and preventing future violence. The project contends that most of the supportive actions concentrate on the more tangible needs, such as food, shelter, and physical health, and underestimate the impact of deep psychological trauma on persons, families, and communities. Trauma becomes integrated as part of the psyche of a community, transmitting pain to future generations, where it becomes an unconscious reason or fuel for further violence (Volkan 2001).

It is essential to empower national democratic institutions, develop public services, and enhance an atmosphere of reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict contexts. However, such objectives must be adapted to the goals of reconstructing long-lasting peace. It is also crucial to pay proper attention to survivors' emotional and psychological needs. The failure of contemporary peace processes to result in sustainable peace may be attributed to the failure to address the bitterness, memories, and images associated with the conflict and mass violence. This points to the need for the survivors' participation in peace-building work, grassroots

peace work, and people-to-people activities – an area that she argues is plagued by limited academic research (Wanja Gitau 2017).

Psychological trauma inflicted by armed conflicts can be characterized by decreased interest or participation in meaningful activities, feeling disconnected from others in the community, isolation, a sense of hopelessness for the future, and despondency. These lead to the neglect of personal and professional responsibilities and may render the survivors of conflict-inflicted trauma unable to engage in meaningful peacebuilding activities. The community's social order may be eroded, and its ability to care for its vulnerable people, for instance, through community self-support, can be weakened. Besides that, social cohesion can diminish as individuals withdraw from society, preoccupied with their own traumatic experiences, resulting in disharmony and the possibility of recurring violence (Wanja Gitau 2017).

When people are traumatized from having been enveloped by deep-seated pain, hurt, frustration, and disappointment, withdrawn from social and public life, no amount of peace talks or agreements can rebuild their community and mend shattered relationships. Fuertes also advocates integrating trauma healing in the peacebuilding processes and further underscores the need to listen to the survivors' voices. He recommends conducting studies on war-induced traumas – which he calls "warviews" – and how these views influence survivors' coping mechanisms (Fuertes 2004, 491-501).

Practitioners with basic trauma competencies are well aware of the tendencies of isolation of traumatized community members and fragmentation of communities after war experiences. That can help them to plan and implement various peacebuilding and community cohesion projects in a meaningful and sustainable way. Furthermore, such interventions can have better ethical quality in terms of "do no harm" principle.

Collective and Social Traumas

Psychological trauma affects society on various levels: individual, family, community, and societal. Societal or collective trauma is a compilation of psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affects the whole society and is transmitted to subsequent generations. The collective memory of trauma is passed on to the next generations, far from those who personally relived it; thus, it creates the collective identity concerning this trauma (Hirschberger 2018). Similar to the case of individual trauma, collective trauma shatters human beings' sense-making about the world and the self and sense-making as a group. As a result of collective trauma, bonds connecting

the members of society are damaged, and essential parts of the self and one's identity are lost. However, collective trauma is still a catalyst for making sense of traumatic experiences. These meaning structures ultimately contribute to group identification and cohesion and provide a sense of history and destiny.

Making sense of the traumatic event is different for victims and perpetrators. Victims are eager to remember the trauma for several reasons:

- Survival – Victims are vigilant and cautious toward the perpetrators and are mindful of the potential threat from them.
- Alterations in cognitions – A creation of the posttraumatic worldview – vigilance towards not only the perpetrators (who may be dead) but generalized to the whole outer world, considered as an enemy or posing a potential threat.
- Sense of identity – a memory of trauma gives a sense of affiliation with a concrete group of people, providing a safe space in contrast to feelings of isolation; existential loneliness gives a sense of self-continuity within the social group.

Peacebuilding and community practitioners need to keep these details in mind. While working with such victim groups, they might face certain opinions, beliefs, and behaviors from the group that is not relevant, efficient, or logical from the practitioners' side. In such situations, the practitioners should not try to confront those opinions or beliefs and change them purposefully. However, they should be aware that such positions and beliefs are necessary for the self-defense system of those groups. The practitioners can find safe and ethical types of educational activities where members of those groups can have a safe space for reflection and awareness.

For their part, perpetrators are ambiguous about remembering the trauma; however, they still make an effort to make meaning of it:

- ignorance and denial of trauma – totally avoiding any responsibility or using the victim-blaming approach;
- reconstructing the trauma – manipulating the historical facts or analysis of these facts or selectively recalling the historical facts, especially in cases when the nation is involved in both roles of victims and perpetrators;
- closing the door to trauma or burying the trauma – which is an effective method, in case their victims agree with it and this is a step toward reconciliation, and

- recognizing their responsibility for the traumatic events – raising awareness of their committed mistakes through education of children and introducing transitional justice.

Community's Chosen Trauma

After a society experiences a traumatic event, the survivors seek to restore their identities on personal and communal levels because such events cause significant damage to the self-perception of the community. Traumatic events can also cause shame, for example, disbelief that such events could happen to the survivors, which also disrupts self-identity and community pride. Volkan (2001) introduces the concept of "chosen trauma," which can become one possible component of the newly emerged identity in traumatized communities. By chosen trauma, he means the shared representation of a massive trauma that the group's ancestors suffered at the hand of an enemy. During that past event, the group may have suffered loss, pain and shame, humiliation and helplessness, and may have been unable to mourn its losses and regain its land or prestige (Volkan 2001). This chosen trauma, as part of the group identity, is reactivated when a community regresses socially and economically amid losses of general trust and safety.

Chosen trauma can be characterized by transgenerational transmission. When one generation cannot deal with its trauma-related pain and shame and when the losses of people and land have not been appropriately mourned, the chosen trauma is often "deposited" to the next generation through different sources. This can occur through history textbooks in schools, university commemorations of the traumatic event, and the creation of various historical narratives. The unconscious intention is that the next generation should receive the chosen trauma to reverse the humiliation and mourn less (Volkan 2001).

Trauma in the Armenian Context

The past three decades have witnessed challenges in most parts of the world. The Armenian society has experienced the following events: the tragedy of the Spitak earthquake, the victorious spirit of independence of the state, the first Karabakh war, the confusion during the "dark and cold" post-Soviet years, the subsequent immigration, the "frozen" uncertainty over the Nagorno Karabakh (NK) conflict for around 30 years, with continuous incidents and casualties at the borders, the excitement at the Velvet Revolution, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, and the latest – the second Karabakh war. In this section, we focus on the first and

the second Karabakh wars, which have had significant negative impacts on the population's societal fabric and mental health.

The abovementioned events have contributed to constructing the identity of victimhood in the Armenian community. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the first Karabakh war in the early 1990s have shifted to glorifying the Armenians' self-perception since their victorious spirit has become a significant part of building their state and shaping the Armenian identity. In contrast, the second Karabakh war has been tragic in all its senses, expressions, and consequences. The new war has not only added traumatic experiences and pain but has awakened the old ones, which have seemed long forgotten. These include thousands of victims who lost significant territories, thousands of displaced families, unclear post-war borders, and threats to not only Artsakh[2] but now to Armenian sovereign territories. All these events have deepened and worsened the concept of victimhood, characterized by self-criticism and self-blaming. We can witness them by reviewing a huge amount of statements revealing the concept of guilt in the social discourse (e.g., "we are all guilty," "we should have been doing it differently for years," etc.). Similarly, the post-war traumatic state, the feeling of defeat, and the Armenian identity in crisis have led to the fragmentation of the Armenian society and polarization between the two sociopolitical poles, blaming each other for their defeat. We also observe public anomie and the narrowing of social responsibility.

On the societal and individual levels, a negative impact is prolonged with the procrastination in peace processes. Individuals and the community carry feelings of insecurity, and in their psychological state, they expect possible threats repeatedly, which is an enormous burden. The state and local/international organizations have initiated various psychological support programs for war veterans and victims' families. The Armenian Psychiatric Association has initiated psychological support programs in more than 23 hospitals across Armenia. Its representatives emphasize that these psychological problems must be treated in a timely manner to prevent further complications of mental disorders.

NGO-related programs are mainly directed at supporting displaced families and the families of the victims. However, in this field, the main psychosocial activities have been initiated for war veterans, and women represent only a small group. Post-traumatic psychological support has been intensively provided during and for a short period after the war. As one of the most vulnerable conflict-affected groups, women have not been appropriately addressed regarding psychological support. The causes

2 A georgrapical toponym used in Armenia for indicating Nagorno Karabakh

and side effects of war are immense, and most of them are challenging, especially for women. Here are some of the most critical ones:

- Around 90,000 people fled their homes, while most of the men stayed back in NK, and women took the whole responsibility of displacement, including living and sometimes even giving birth in bunkers and raising their children there (Ghazaryan 2020). The article written by Gayane Ghazaryan (2020) accurately describes all the stages of displacement and transition to shelters in Yerevan. In September 2022, there were around 7,600 displaced individuals in the same challenging situation.
- Many conflict-affected women face psychological trauma and simultaneously experience poverty in sustaining their families, their children, and the elderly. However, many women are incapable of doing so because the patriarchal culture discourages them from building a career or even obtaining an education. To make matters worse, the destroyed infrastructure in many post-war communities makes it particularly difficult for women who lack education or professional resumes to provide for their families financially.
- The loss of a child can be one of the worst traumatic experiences for a mother; when not healed, it can turn into a lifelong trauma such as prolonged grief, self-harm, and mood disorder. The public rituals of praises of and tributes to the lost heroes leave little space for private healthy grief outside of nationalist narratives of sacrifice. Moreover, women whose relatives are missing (or their deaths are unconfirmed) are left in legal and emotional limbo.
- Women can become victims of domestic violence. When domestic violence is acknowledged as violence, some women argue that the experience of war makes individuals more violent. This applies to men who have served on the frontlines and men and women who have stayed in conflict-affected communities. In some cases, women even justify the "trauma-caused" violence to themselves.

Trauma in the Georgian Context

In the aftermath of Georgian independence in 1990, the new government in Tbilisi sought to distance itself from its Soviet legacy by aspiring for a western-like political model. In doing so, state-building efforts quickly transformed Georgia into an over-centralized regime based on legislation that caused dissatisfaction among and protests from ethnic minorities. Separatist movements in the regions of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali and Abkhazia opposed the newly implemented political model from the central government in the country. Increased tensions from both sides led to armed

civil conflict in Tskhinvali in 1991–1992, 2004, and 2008, and in Abkhazia from 1992 to 1993 (Cárdenas 2019).

The abovementioned experiences have placed a substantial emotional burden on the Georgian community. Around 350,000 people were displaced from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and neither a crisis support infrastructure nor any related strategy existed during that period, beginning in the 1990s. International organizations alone provided internally displaced persons (IDPs) with humanitarian aid, as a local NGO sector capable of providing psychosocial assistance had not yet been sufficiently developed. The interventions mainly aimed at providing medical assistance to war-affected populations. For this reason, mental health services and research were postponed to later years. Therefore, IDPs and other groups were not researched in that period. Accordingly, we lack data concerning the prevalence of PTSD and other trauma-related conditions among communities of IDPs from the Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region from 1991 to 1993 (Javakhishvili and Makhashvili 2009).

The Georgian Centre for Medical and Psycho-social Rehabilitation of the victims of torture (GCRT), in cooperation with a medical group (International Medical Corps), carried out a rapid assessment of the mental health and psychosocial welfare of war-affected people in 2008. The questionnaire results revealed that war-affected people were under substantial stress, manifested in their feelings of hopelessness and incapability. Aggression and increased alcohol consumption were observed among men; children expressed a variety of fears and regressive behavior. Overall, the survey participants exhibited a pronounced level of anxiety, with approximately 80% suffering from sleep disorders and about 60% experiencing hopelessness (Javakhishvili and Makhashvili2009).

This study's results suggest that after armed conflicts, long-term psycho-emotional damage and pain can occur, as in the case of Georgian communities, and that a natural self-healing process does not always take place. This study showed that trauma-related psycho-emotional symptoms intensified seven months after the war among IDP Georgian communities (Javakhishvili and Makhashvili 2009). Unfortunately, we do not have data on how the wars in the early 1990s and 2008 affected communities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region, but individual and collective trauma is likely to be present there as well.

Torture Survivors of Violent Conflicts

Unfortunately, war and armed conflicts have victims who have experienced organized torture and direct violence. Torture in the community encourages the development of some kind of repressive ecology, a state of generalized insecurity, terror, lack of confidence, and rupture of social relations (Keane et al. 2007). Various forms of violence may be perceived as having similar repressive purposes. For example, ethnic violence or ethnic cleansing is one way of influencing a community, and selective torture of individuals is another.

Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person or a group. Often, suffering is inflicted by instigating a public official or another person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering from inherent lawful sanctions or those incidental to them.

Torture is intentional and systematic. Torture-type pressures on people may persist over long periods, even for their entire lifetimes. The effects can therefore be fundamental and persistent. In some parts of the world, adult torture survivors describe discrimination and violence going back as far as they can recall. Elsewhere, people who have previously lived under conditions of freedom may be subjected to violence and torture as regimes change. There are likely significant differences in how people react to these two conditions (Keane et al. 2007).

One group of people who are likely to know what is happening in a country comprises health professionals. Survivors of torture often have both physical and psychological health problems. When working with communities that have experienced such torture events, it is recommended that peacebuilding and community practitioners consult physical and mental health specialists to check if their activities are sensitive enough for a particular, concrete community context.

Often, it is a challenge to engage war victims in the activities as there is a tendency for them to become isolated. People who experience torture, humiliation, and maltreatment in the violent conflict context might generate highly negative self-descriptions. These can be "I am weak," "I am unlovable," "I did not do enough to avoid it," or "I cannot do anything right" in an attempt to explain the abuse (Keane et al. 2007). In both cases, language has the power to generate intense emotions that are very distressing, which frequently results in attempts to avoid emotions and control automatic self-talk. At such moments, avoidance and numbing are common maladaptive coping strategies among trauma survivors and are known to be related to poorer social outcomes in the future.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PEACE AND COMMUNITY WORK

In the previous chapter, we have mentioned various impacts and dynamics that adverse experiences cause to the person and community. Other elements require attention and awareness related to traumatic experiences in armed conflict contexts. Awareness of the elements of the feeling of shame, avoidance behavior, and constructing victim identity can be beneficial when working with vulnerable groups.

Shame is a painful emotion that people often feel after traumatic life events. In war and armed conflict, trauma survivors may experience shame in response to their behaviors or powerlessness to protect against violence (Van Vliet 2010). They often feel guilty that they did not better protect themselves or their beloved ones. Shame can also result from injuries and disabilities caused by conflict. If left unresolved, shame can interfere with recovery from trauma and prevent people from accessing vital sources of social support.

Avoidance is a common defensive strategy for coping with shame. It can be highly adaptive to go through an emotionally heavy period in the short term. As part of a trauma membrane that creates a buffer for shame and traumatic memories. Here avoidance may help reduce emotional arousal and allow the trauma survivor to consolidate resources. Practitioners working with trauma survivors should be aware of the possible presence of shame, and understanding the protective functions of avoidance is essential. In such moments, even only compassionate witnessing from the practitioners can be sufficient without active attempts to prove to the person that there is no reason for them to be ashamed and avoid (Van Vliet 2010).

We also observe community members taking victim identities to cope with the burden of traumatic events. There is a well-known tendency of humans to get into the role of victim in order to get care and attention and avoid responsibility for self and external events (Karpman 2014). That role can be soothing and support survivors of trauma for a short period, but staying in that identity for a more extended period might harm the personal development and capability of the person and groups. Practitioners should be aware that although trauma survivors need support, they still have capacities and social networks that enable them to contribute to their families and to be active in social, religious, and political life (IASC 2007). Practitioners can support survivors in vitalizing and using their existing resources. Practitioners should be attentive that their ways of support do not keep the survivors as passive help-receivers permanently but encourage their participation and initiative.

Post-traumatic Growth

Overcoming individual and collective trauma can also have a further empowering effect. Post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive change due to the struggle with highly challenging life crises (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). The development resulting from traumatic growth surpasses the moral/dignified development level that the person had attained before the traumatic event. Individuals who have undergone post-traumatic growth are not only survivors but enlightened persons with more extensive wisdom than they had before the traumatic event.

Traumatic growth is reflected in changed priorities and increased appreciation for life, more meaningful interpersonal relationships with close ones, and an increased sense of personal strength. This time, there is a gained insight that if the persons survived the traumatic event, they are powerful enough to struggle with other challenges. They recognize new possibilities of their paths in life, make meaning of the traumatic event, try to become lobbyists or educators to raise other people's awareness of such an event, and finally, have more prosperous existential and spiritual lives, a culture of repentance, forgiveness, a belief in universal justice, and religious beliefs.

Various research studies reveal concrete personal traits that are highly correlated with the post-traumatic growth of individuals. These include optimism, openness to experience (both positive and negative), extraversion, skills in coping with anxiety and negative thoughts, and skills in reframing and re-evaluating traumatic events in terms of gains (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

Recommendations for Trauma-Sensitive work

We sometimes observe peace and community cohesion work, tackling symptoms of the deep and complex dynamics in the Georgian and Armenian societies but digging less into the roots of these symptoms. Applying a trauma-informed approach broadens the practitioners' focus beyond the presenting problem(s) to a deeper understanding of what is happening to an individual or a group. The knowledge gained can help explain deficiencies in education, participation, employment, health, and social functioning, as well as complex symptoms and behaviors that present barriers to community peace. Trauma-informed practitioners understand how armed-conflict experiences as traumatic events contribute to psychological changes that can influence self-perceptions, interactions, participation, and opinions on the life and the world of community members after the wars and armed conflicts. Deeper awareness enables those practitioners to make sense of the connections between past experiences of the community and

current life circumstances and to carry out trauma-sensitive interventions. When taking a trauma-informed approach, organizations and practitioners can design and develop more effective, meaningful, and relevant interventions for local communities.

In this chapter, we present some critical elements that will help practitioners be more trauma-informed and act in a trauma-sensitive way, including the following:

- **Making community projects participatory** – While planning the projects for the community, it is helpful to engage the community representatives in the planning process. It is a general advantage in community work, although communities that have experienced traumatic events are characterized by less engagement in community projects and activities. It creates better ownership of the processes and activities and a feeling of familiarity and safety among the community members. Engaging the community members improves the relevance and meaningfulness of local activities. Being trauma-sensitive also means being participatory. For this reason, peace and community organizations need to make an effort to improve relevant trauma competencies.
- **Providing safe space** – Forms of interventions and physical environment, and a way of practitioners' presence should provide safety for the community members. We have already mentioned the global importance of safety for human psychological well-being. When conducting activities with vulnerable groups after war experiences, practitioners need to ensure that venue where participants come for activities (workshops, meetings, consultations, etc.) is neutral and safe and is not associated with past events connected to violent experiences. When the youth or adult groups are invited to outdoor activities during the project, practitioners should ensure that they do not visit any places that are too sensitive and related to the actual traumatic event that can trigger intensive emotions in the group members.
- **Language and content be non-judgemental** – Practitioners should try to use non-judgemental language and avoid evaluative words. As we already mentioned, a feeling of safety is critical for human well-being, and that feeling gets disrupter during the trauma. A traumatized system of a person perceives a judgemental language as highly threatening and devastating. Furthermore, using too positively evaluative language might make the survivors feel suspicious and overwhelmed. Therefore, practitioners should try to use language that is non-judgmental language and fits a non-violent communication style. Those include qualities of honesty, authenticity, and compassion.

- **Keeping space free of over-stimulation** – The confined physical space and technical aspects also play an essential role. For example, when community workers conduct activities with children from IDP and refugee families, they should avoid having loud music, intensive lighting, fireworks, and doing activities that involve shouting, screaming, and talking loudly, even though they intend to have fun. It's important for children from survivor families to have joy and fun, though such activities need to be implemented without too intensive sensory stimulation. Such details might trigger memories, emotions, and sensations related to traumatic experiences of war and violence.
- **Support to build new connections and relationships** – The practitioners can reasonably contribute to the community in a trauma-sensitive way when planning interventions to support building new social connections and relationships. Those, specifically, reinforce systems of adaptation that include the re-establishment of safety and security and the restoration of interpersonal bonds. In that way, practitioners can create a context that allows survivors to develop new roles and identities and find their place in the changing world through conflicts.
- **Preventing instrumentalizing trauma** – We mentioned the importance of engagement and hearing the stories of community members in peace processes. However, there is a risk that violent factions exploit the same narratives of pain and suffering among the affected populations to promote aggression. That occurs when stories are selectively chosen and emphasize certain aspects of the traumatic event while omitting others when relating the experiences. That becomes a tool for influencing the collective understanding of the event. In this way, dominant or victim groups exploit the trauma stories to provoke and justify violence to gain more power and control over other groups. Therefore, when practitioners work on such stories and content, they should ensure that external actors can not manipulate that information.
- **Trauma competence in a team** – The CSO in Armenia and Georgia, working with the community members affected by the war(s), could try to have a mental health specialist in the team to enhance their competence in the mental health field and make their work more holistic. This specialist can be engaged in the core steps of project planning and implementation so that their work can become trauma-sensitive and better implement the "do no harm" principle. If the organization does not have the capacity for an extra employee, as an alternative, one of the team members can get training in trauma education.

- **Keep in touch with professional organizations** – When the CSOs plan interventions for the war-affected community members or groups, it can be helpful if they consult the representatives of professional organizations involved in mental health and trauma work from the beginning. These can be the Psychiatric Association of Armenia and the Global Initiative for Psychiatry – Tbilisi office. These organizations have relevant competencies and experiences that can qualitatively contribute to trauma-sensitive interventions.
- **Contacts for emergency support** – Practitioners should have an emergency contact at the nearest mental health support institution when conducting activities with groups from war-affected parts of the community in remote areas in Georgia and Armenia. There is a risk that participants develop intensive emotional conditions during educational or other group activities. Therefore, practitioners should have the contact information of first-aid psychological or even medical support providers.
- **Cultural Sensitivity** – Being culturally and socially sensitive in the Armenian and Georgian contexts contributes to trauma sensitivity and the use of that type of language while disseminating information about the project on social or other types of media. This approach makes the project / activity / program appear safer for trauma-affected community members and can increase the chances of their participation.
- **Not everyone gets traumatized** – One of the core principles of trauma sensitivity is not assuming that everyone from war-affected communities is traumatized. Often, there might be a tendency among the support provider organizations in the communities to consider most of the communities as being traumatized after armed conflicts. Such an attitude poses a risk, which might contribute to developing a trauma identity of the community members who are not traumatized. It might happen because of the expected financial or material aid that humanitarian or social support organizations might provide. In the long term, it contributes to developing the victim identity that implies a constant expectation of receiving support and help from outsiders, becoming dependent on international aid, and weakening their capacity to deal with daily challenges by themselves. In the long term, it jeopardizes the support system even for those who need it and even overwhelms the local staff members of the international donor organizations.
- **Asset/resource-based community development approach** – Before planning the interventions, international and local organizations conduct community need assessments. This is important, but considering more elements is needed. Actors involved should also assess the community's assets – personal, relational, social, cultural, and material resources and strengths that the community carries and owns – everything that has helped its members survive the troubles and hardships until now and historically. Practitioners must ensure that community members are conscious of those resources of their own resiliency and perceive them as something that has helped their community to survive, despite going through many difficulties and challenges.
- **Gender sensitivity component** – In different cultures, representatives of different gender have varying characteristics of support-seeking behavior when encountering mental health difficulties because this topic might be an object of taboo or stigma in their communities. Practitioners must be aware of this aspect to properly understand when and in which form men and women request mental health support when needed. It will help practitioners identify the need for support and react promptly.
- **Preventing secondary traumatization** – Peace and community practitioners should also be trauma-sensitive toward themselves. There is a risk for the practitioners to acquire secondary trauma (ST) while doing peacebuilding and community cohesion work. ST is characterized by frequent irritability, mood swings, frequent emotional outbursts, sleep problems, concentration problems, self-destruction, and addiction. ST is a form of distress experienced indirectly by hearing details of or witnessing the results of a traumatic experience by another person. Although it may be impossible to prevent contact with traumatized individuals and their stories when working in the community, minimizing the short- and long-term emotional consequences of such experiences is possible. For this reason, practitioners can try to practice self-care activities, set emotional boundaries, refresh their work environment, and engage in outdoor activities.

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POST-WAR TRUTH: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN KAPAN, ARMENIA *

After the recent Armenia–Azerbaijan–Nagorno Karabakh conflict escalations, the Kapan Enlarged Region in Syunik Province, Armenia became a bordering region. The city of Kapan and eighteen of the thirty-eight villages in the community are now on the country's border and sometimes become targets for direct military attacks. These continuous conflict escalations have resulted in fundamental human rights violations. While people speak out about such problems during a war, not many address the issue after conflict de-escalation. This paper directly addresses the issue of human rights violations in the Kapan Enlarged Region, especially the aftereffects of the 2020– 2022 escalations on the borders. The research project involves direct interaction with a hundred people from the city of Kapan and eighteen villages on the border as well as external research examining articles and publications by human rights experts. We visited the villages and found people of different age groups and genders to respond to our questions regarding human rights violations in the region. We thoroughly analysed the interview results and conducted a comparative analysis, examining other sources. We also seek to understand the involvement of international human rights organisations in this matter and use our research findings to develop solutions that can help increase their activities. The results show that the human rights of the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region, such as the rights to life, liberty, security, property, freedom of movement, health and well-being, are constantly violated. The aftermath of the war is quite negative, and steps need to be taken immediately. International organisations should use their influence over the region and act to address the issue of human rights violations in rural areas.

KEY WORDS: ***human rights, bordering regions, social justice, conflict escalation***

* Aftermath of the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan Conflict Escalations in 2020– 2022

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

Despite the extensive number of articles on the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict, little is talked about the human rights violations in the border regions of these countries. Nevertheless, these problems persist. This research aims to raise awareness of the issue at an international level and encourage international organisations to act towards solving the problem and restoring human rights. Our findings shed light on the effects of the war on people's social lives and aim to provide strategies for establishing justice.

INTRODUCTION

Syunik is the southern province of Armenia, bordering Iran and Azerbaijan. It also borders Nagorno Karabakh, which has been the centre of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan for decades. This region constantly faces danger and becomes a direct target for attacks when the above-mentioned conflict escalates. The region suffering most is the Kapan Enlarged Region, specifically the city of Kapan and thirty-eight neighbouring villages. Eighteen of these villages, along with Kapan City, became border regions after the war in 2020, as some previous buffer regions were ceded to Azerbaijan. Moreover, several Azerbaijani troops are currently deployed in the sovereign territories of Armenia. These continuous conflict escalations result in unavoidable states of panic and in fundamental human rights violations.

At present, several groups of Azerbaijani forces near Syunik Airport in Kapan have the power to control roads leading to Kapan City and endanger the well-being of the community. Many roads are now inaccessible to residents. People thus get to Kapan City or the capital, Yerevan, by other routes, which are in terrible condition. For example, the road from Kapan City to Tshakaten Village is now controlled by Azerbaijani forces, and this village, as well as the villages of Shikahogh, Srashen, Tsav, Nerkin Hand and Shishkert, suffer from this. Even if not a single shot is fired, their deployment violates the right to safety and free movement (Tatoyan 29.11.2021).

The problems do not end there. It is dangerous for the recently built airport to be exploited because Azerbaijani troops can attack planes. The impossibility of using pastures and cultivating land, barriers to water access and many more issues are a great trouble for the residents of this region. Because of the possibility of unexpected attacks, schools are unsafe in the region, and many children have been deprived of their right to education. People are forced to leave their homes. Villages within the country's sovereign territory practically turn into buffer zones as the

opposing side approaches. Moreover, these events have significantly affected people's mental health and are a massive obstacle to the region's development.

Those living in Kapan and the eighteen border villages suffer the consequences of conflict escalations the most. These are mainly adults or older adults, as many take their children to safer locations, such as the capital city of Yerevan. Most Kapan Enlarged Community residents have become accustomed to the worrisome situation. In many villages, residents are constantly on watch and in charge of protecting the village borders. They even keep weapons and are in direct communication with Armenian troops in the region.

Human rights are basic rights and freedoms belonging to every person in the world. These rights are universal, and "inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status" (OHCHR). Whenever these freedoms are taken away from people because of someone else's actions, universal inherited rights are violated. According to the requirements of the European Court, a violation of human rights does not necessarily involve a victim. However, the situation in Syunik is quite serious, and this issue needs to be addressed more seriously.

Many of the people in the Kapan Enlarged Region do not know about their rights or realise that these are being violated. They do not know what a buffer zone is, while their villages gradually become buffer regions. All these people know is that their situation is terrible, yet they continue living in the same place, trying to repair both the physical and mental damage caused by war. People should not be forced to live under these conditions. Nevertheless, as soon as the war deescalates, the world is silent. People do not speak up about such issues in Amenia or Azerbaijan; however, these problems will not be solved by themselves.

Hence, this research project aims to raise awareness about human rights violations in border regions resulting from war, especially those in the Kapan Enlarged Region. We aim to find the most effective ways to protect the human rights of the citizens of Kapan, prevent violations in the future, as well as increase the involvement of influential international organisations.

Most scholarly articles address this issue from a historical/technical perspective and do not address practical details such as the ones mentioned above. This paper can be considered a credible source that people can trust and reference within the scope of their academic and professional activities.

BACKGROUND

While the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict has been ongoing for decades, the main interest of the conflict has been the territory of Nagorno Karabakh. The borders between these territories have never been peaceful. Despite numerous ceasefire agreements over the years, the conflict has escalated many times. The most severe escalation was the four-day war in April 2016, resulting in hundreds of victims – dead and injured soldiers and civilians.

On September 27, 2020, a forty-four-day full-scale war was unleashed by Azerbaijan. This was the most severe and violent escalation of the past few years. The war had dire effects, with approximately 8,000 killed soldiers and civilians overall and a trilateral ceasefire agreement obliging Armenia to cede significant territories to Azerbaijan and deploying Russian peacekeepers along the borders.

As Azerbaijan took authority of the Jabrayil, Zangilan, Kubatlu and Fizuli districts, the city of Kapan in Syunik Province, Armenia, as well as the villages of Davit Bek, Kaghnut, Uzhanis, Yeghvard, Khndrants, Agarak, Vardavank, Bargushat, Syunik, Sznak, Ditsmayri, Gomaran, Geghanush, Tshakaten, Shikahogh, Srashen and Nerkin Hand became border regions. Since the ceasefire agreement, this community has become a direct target for Azerbaijani armed forces and has suffered most of the consequences of their violent attacks. As Jam News mentioned:

> *"Now they actually live next to the posts of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces under the constant supervision of the military and cannot move freely. In addition, these villages have lost pastures, which is why their inhabitants are forced to abandon livestock breeding, which was the main source of their income. But the biggest issue is people's safety. Residents of all border villages are talking about the need to create a security zone around their settlements."* (Mkrtchyan 2022)

Before the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, people living in Syunik Province had safe routes. The things that were frightening for people driving were the winding roads, the weather during the winter and some unpaved roads and landslides. The National Security Service of Armenia had neutralised landslides threatening the Kapan–Yerevan highway by employing EMS workers. Furthermore, the municipality of Kapan had repaired the roads connecting the surrounding villages, making it easier to travel. There were no external threats to the civilians of this region while travelling.

Hetk wrote that the Kapan airport, named Syunik, was supposed to be opened in June 2020. In the initial stage, three weekly flights were planned for Yerevan–Kapan–Yerevan, with a plane, operated by Atlantis Armenian Airlines, which could carry nineteen passengers (Sarukhanyan 2020). However, the airport never started operations, as in September the situation on the borders intensified and a safety issue arose.

Currently, the plane is parked in "Zvartnots," the main international airport of Armenia. Azerbaijani armed forces are deployed near Syunik Airport, and it is no longer safe to use air travel. Recent conflict escalations have blocked air and land routes, depriving people of their right to freedom of movement.

As for employment, people living in Syunik work primarily in industrial, agricultural, farming or construction fields. Syunik Province has the lowest unemployment rate in Armenia. However, after the recent aggressions on the border, this has become a problem, as most people no longer have access to their lands, and their workplaces have become more dangerous.

The education level in Syunik Province is also very high. There are forty public schools as well as Kapan branches of higher education institutions, colleges, the "Kapan Child Care and Protection Boarding Institution" SNOC, the Kapan branch of the Yerevan Medical-Psycho-Pedagogical Evaluation Center, Kapan Special Educational Complex No. 3 and so on. Many extracurricular and preschool centres also operate in the community (Communities Association Armenia, n.d.).

As such, different organisations have decided to help. Today, the entire Kapan Enlarged Region is served by "Kapan Medical Center" CJSC. They provide mental and psychological support, but also physical support, to the residents of the region. Its director said in response to an enquiry by Hetk that before the coronavirus outbreak, the Medical Center organised the work of the ambulance service with one and a half brigades. One brigade was intended for the population of the city of Kapan (37,102 people, according to the Ministry of Health), and half a brigade (driver + nurse) was intended for remote calls to villages included in the enlarged community (according to the Ministry of Health, 1,726 people benefited from long-distance calls) (Martirosyan 2022). However, after the conflict escalations, this has been challenging to organise. As Azerbaijani armed forces currently block roads to villages, many people cannot receive proper medical care, despite the attempts of such organisations.

The 2020– 2022 escalations on the borders have changed the situation regarding all the aspects mentioned above. The eighteen villages in the Kapan Enlarged Community that have become border regions have undergone numerous negative changes, resulting in human rights violations.

RESEARCH METHODS

To fully understand the picture in the region, we conducted research, specifically on the topic of human rights. We visited the city of Kapan and eighteen villages in the Kapan Enlarged Community that have become border areas: Davit Bek, Kaghnut, Uzhanis, Yeghvard, Khndrants, Agarak, Vardavank, Bargushat, Syunik, Sznak, Ditsmayri, Gomaran, Geghanush, Tshakaten, Shikahogh, Srashen and Nerkin Hand. We interviewed a hundred residents of this community and asked them questions comparing their quality of life before and since the war.

- A total of a hundred participants, aged eighteen years and above, participated as interviewees and answered specially prepared questions. The respondents were selected at random to keep the gender and age ratios relatively equal. Fifty-seven of the respondents were women, and forty-three were men. On average, twenty people belonged to each age group (18– 30, 31– 40, 41– 50, 51– 60 and 61 and older); five people participated from each small village, and seventeen from the city of Kapan. All participants provided informed consent that their responses be used for this research.

Our questionnaire consisted of fourteen multiple-choice and twelve open-ended questions (twenty-six questions overall), meant to provide the respondents with the freedom necessary to provide us with any details we could have missed. We aimed to extract qualitative data with the help of these questions and thus attempted to make the questions diverse and with as few limitations as possible.

The topics were based on issues in the Kapan Enlarged Community that we noticed in our past research and in external sources, such as news articles. These topics included safety, freedom of movement, employment, children's right to education, people's mental health and the involvement of international organisations, which are talked about very often. While we were open to new discoveries, these points helped us provide our respondents with some direction.

The interviews were conducted in Armenian and translated into English by a professional translator.

Besides the prepared questionnaire, we examined external sources to conduct a comparative analysis and reach relevant, unbiased results. Those sources included news articles, statements and publications by Arman Tatoyan, the former Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, and needs assessment research in the Kapan Enlarged Region conducted by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) "Youth Opportunities Club" in 2021.

Even though we sought to make this research as objective and accurate as possible, obstacles and limitations hindered our mission. First, the latest escalations on the borders have made many leave their place of residence. As many of our respondents mentioned, the Kapan Enlarged Community villages are becoming ageing villages as young people are leaving. Finding an equal number of respondents from different age groups was challenging in every region.

Moreover, some did not want to participate in the survey. The main reason was a lack of trust and fear that the information provided to us would somehow reach the "enemy" and become a potential threat to their communities. Others gave vague answers to our open-ended questions, either because there were so many problems with human rights that they could not begin to list them or because they did not want to provide too much information so as not to put their community in greater danger.

The number of interviewees was not as significant as we would have liked. As the overall population of the region is about 40,000, our sample size may seem too small to draw conclusions. The recent conflict escalations in September made it hard for us to reach the Kapan Enlarged Region as it was quite dangerous. After the military attacks, people there were in distress, and interviewing them was not ethical in the least. This slowed our research. Even after taking some time, many people refused to take the time to answer our questions, which is why we had to rely significantly on external sources as well. Future examinations are encouraged to choose a larger sample size for more reliable results.

Finally, finding external sources was not easy, just as we had expected. Not many talk about the region, and whenever they address it, they address the conflict from an historical/political perspective. We could not find much information about the human rights violations in the region besides Armenia's Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan's extensive research and publications.

DISCUSSION

As Kapan City and eighteen of the thirty-eight villages in the enlarged community have become border regions, most aspects of people's everyday lives have undergone negative changes. While Kapan Enlarged Community residents have always tried to be cautious, the conflict escalations from 2020 to 2022 have made their jobs more difficult. Eighty-four percent of our interviewees said they felt unsafe in their communities. A man from Yeghvard Village stated explicitly: *"The traces of shelling are still on the buildings. Now we do not sleep peacefully; we do not work. The soldiers are protecting our village, and so are we, but the enemy can draw new borders at any moment."* More than ninety percent of our questionnaire respondents expressed concerns about "the enemy being too close – only a few kilometres away." Many also mentioned that the Azerbaijani troops have continued attacking, even after the ceasefire agreement. Often, these shootings are directed towards villages in the Kapan Enlarged Community. These attacks have resulted in victims being injured and a mass state of panic in the community.

According to an AD HOC Public Report by the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, people living in the villages of Tshakaten, Nerkin Hand, Shikahogh, Yeghvard, Agarak and Uzhanis have been complaining about regular shootings directed at the villages since 2020. The shootings occur both at night and during the day when people are working on their lands with their families. The Azerbaijani troops were less than one kilometre away from some villages and were visible to the naked eye (Republic of Armenia Human Rights Defender 2021).

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person." The residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region are deprived of their human right to live. Ninety-five percent of our questionnaire respondents stated that their right to live was only slightly ensured or not ensured at all. This statistic is a severe problem for the Kapan Enlarged Community, Syunik Province, and the Republic of Armenia. Because of such critical safety problems, people are forced to leave their homes. For instance, at the beginning of March 2022, Azerbaijani armed forces advanced in the direction of the village of Nerkin Hand and took a position. Currently, Azerbaijani troops are about two kilometres from the village. In September 2022, the village was evacuated because of the violent Azerbaijani attacks. As the Village Head mentioned to the reporters of 7or.am, *"The shootings gradually approach the village, based on the safety of the population, we have decided to carry out an evacuation. They are too close"* (7or.am 2022).

On September 13, 2022, Azerbaijani armed forces began another large-scale attack targeting the sovereign territories of Armenia. One of those territories was, of course, the Kapan Enlarged Region. As Arman Tatoyan has mentioned:

> *"Peaceful communities of Syunik are under attack from Azerbaijani positions unlawfully (criminal by nature) located on the Syunik Kapan–Tshakaten road, in the vicinity of villages, in the Sev (Black) Lake area.*
>
> *I have always said that Azerbaijani armed locations in the vicinity of Armenian villages or on the roads are criminal, which is already a real threat to people's lives and security, threat to our communities, our entire country."* (13.09.2022)

Since May 2021, Azerbaijani armed forces have entirely blocked many roads in Syunik Province. These roads mostly connect the city of Kapan to the villages in the enlarged community.

In August 2021, the Human Rights Defender led a delegation to Syunik Province, aiming to understand the severity of the situation. The delegation was using civilian cars as a means of transportation, and after they stopped for one or two minutes on the road between Shurnukh and Davit Bek, Azerbaijani soldiers took out their rifles and aimed at the cars. *"Hence, the in-person experience of the Defender had proved that itself presence of the Azerbaijani servicemen on the roads between communities of Syunik is a violation of the right to life; right to free movement, and other vital rights of the RA civilian population"* (Republic of Armenia Human Rights Defender 2021).

As one of our respondents from the village of Tshakaten mentioned, *"Eight kilometres of the road leading to Tshakaten Village are under the enemy's control."* We obtained similar responses from interviewees from the majority of villages in the region. A man from Srashen Village mentioned that *"it is no longer safe to drive, we use an alternative road, which makes driving 100 to 120 kilometres longer, and in emergencies, for example, emergency vehicles cannot fulfil their duties."* A woman from the village of Shikahogh stated, *"The road to the village is not safe; we do not drive at all in the evenings."*

The main roads leading to Agarak, Tsav, Nerkin Hand, Tshakaten, Davit Bek, Uzhanis and Geghanush are almost entirely blocked and controlled by Azerbaijani armed forces. People are forced to find new, alternative ways to travel from one place to another, which takes them much more time and money. These alternative roads are in an awful state, need repair, and do not have any security guarantees, as they are also under direct Azerbaijani deployment.

The former Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan posted a photograph online showing the road connecting the city of Kapan with the nearby villages. He wrote:

> *"This is the unlawful Azerbaijani armed deployment on Kapan-Tshakaten main road; because of the so-called customs and border unlawful control installed in November 2021, the main road has been completely blocked.*
>
> *This road is of strategic, vital significance for the whole Kapan community in terms of security. It connects the city of Kapan with the villages Tshakaten, Srashen, Shikahogh, Nerkin Hand, Tsav and Shishkert. The Kapan "Syunik" airport is in the immediate vicinity of this road."* (09.03.2022)

Image 1
The Azerbaijani Armed Forces Deployment on Kapan-Chakaten Main Road.

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state," the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region, especially those in the eighteen border villages, do not have this luxury. The presence of Azerbaijani armed forces in the sovereign territories of Armenia is a threat to the residents of border communities and has no legal basis. People even have to "refrain from using (walking or traveling) the roads even for their vital needs (for example, going to or returning from a medical facility) in the evening hours, for the sake of their safety and for the safety of their families," as the AD HOC Public Report by the Human

Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia reads. The free movement of civilians and the residents of the surrounding villages is severely hampered.

The air routes to the Kapan Enlarged Region are closed as well. As mentioned above, Syunik Airport, which was to start operating in 2020, is now closed, and it is unclear when it will open. Several Azerbaijani forces are deployed near the airport and monitoring the roads connecting Kapan City with the nearby villages. Attempting to operate the airport would be too dangerous.

Like in many other rural areas in Armenia and neighbouring countries, agriculture was the primary way of earning money in the eighteen border villages in the Kapan Enlarged Region. Nevertheless, after the recent conflict escalations, agriculture has become extremely dangerous and, in some cases, impossible. As a man from Yeghvard Village mentioned, *"Being close to the enemy, losing pastures [are a threat to our community]. We cannot calmly engage in agriculture or farming anymore."* Another man from the village of Khndrants stated: *"We have lost some pastures, and we do not know how and who carried out the demarcation."* These problems are a severe threat to the community's economy as well. People lose their jobs and their primary way of making a living. Even those who have not lost their lands agree that often it is too dangerous for them to work, as the "enemy" can attack at any moment.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Moreover, everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection."

The right to work of the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region is violated. They are suffering damage to their households' economic situations and must spend much more money and energy to find alternative job opportunities. The process becomes more complex as they travel to another village or to the city of Kapan for work; they thus still have to put their lives in danger every day.

Arman Tatoyan mentioned in one of his publications:

> *"In particular, the bread factory in Tsav village, which used to sell its bread (lavash) both in neighboring villages and in Kapan city, had to reduce its production by 50%; as a result, there issues have occurred with employees' salaries. In another case, problems with fish farming have occurred.*
>
> *That is, both economic and labor rights have been violated, and people are suffering serious economic losses as a result of the Azerbaijani unlawful acts."* (2021)

Many residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region are also deprived of their right to own property. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads, "everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property." However, as of 2021, overall, eleven houses with certificates on registration of the right to property were under the direct control of Azerbaijani armed servicemen. An AD HOC Public Report by the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia stated that in some cases, citizens' lands have been divided into two parts: "Armenian" and "Azerbaijani." Similar cases are apparent in many regions of Syunik Province. "In particular, in Kapan community a total of 52.35 ha of private property (Davit Bek village – 33.28 ha, Syunik village – 0.89 ha, etc.) cannot be used by its owners, since currently it is considered a territory of Azerbaijan based on the respective maps," reads a public report. Most of the time, these lands cannot be used since they are under the direct line of fire of Azerbaijani armed forces (Republic of Armenia Human Rights Defender 2021).

Another problem that arose after the 2020– 2022 Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict escalations is that people are leaving their communities. People are taking their children to a safer place; young people are leaving the villages and moving to the capital city, Yerevan. Our respondents stated that they had to evacuate their children, as the villages were too dangerous. One of the interviewees mentioned: *"I have a small child, and I am afraid that my daughter, growing up here, will regularly see war and fear for her and my relatives' lives."*

Fifteen percent of our respondents mentioned that there are no underage people in their community. A woman from the village of Uzhanis mentioned that *"the village is an aging village. There are only nineteen houses here, mostly inhabited by elderly people."* The reason for this was not only the safety of children but also the problems with education. Most of the schools have closed or switched to remote education in the best case. These institutions could not continue operating safely. *"The village is on the border, and we can see the positions of Azerbaijanis when looking from any window of the school,"* mentioned a woman from the village of Nerkin Hand. Children also could not attend their extracurricular classes because of dangerous roads that were unavailable most of the time.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> *"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control… Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit… Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."*

The residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region, especially the children of the community, have been deprived of these rights for years now, and little has been done to prevent this.

However, the effects of the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict escalations are not only material. These events have also significantly affected the mental health of the residents of the whole country, especially the Kapan Enlarged Region. People here are now in a state of paranoia and panic. They do not feel safe, stop making plans for the future, and are simply afraid. *"I live with fear in my heart. I cannot rest even after locking the gate of my house,"* mentions a woman from the village of Uzhanis and many other people living in the region.

The conflicts continuously harm people's mental health and physically injure them. "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family," and since "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease," according to the World Health Organization, and the human rights of the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region are violated.

The recent aggression in September 2022 has created an overall state of panic in the enlarged region. They have resulted in *"tension among residents and a feeling of uncertainty,"* according to one of our respondents. As our interviewees state, people *"dream and plan the future less"*; they are only waiting in uncertainty to hear new information about the borders.

While thirty-three percent of our respondents asserted that no one does anything to improve the mental health of the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region, the other sixty-seven percent stated that steps are being taken towards solving that issue. However, as ninety percent of our respondents stated, most of these steps are taken by society, specific individuals, or volunteers. Only twenty percent of the interviewees mentioned that mental and psychological support is officially provided by international or social organisations.

Two organisations provide mental health and social-psychological support services in the Syunik region. The most active one is the Syunik regional branch of the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), which regularly conducts practical courses and involves schoolchildren in their activities. In response to the escalation of the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict in 2022, the Red Cross Syunik Regional Branch has been "increasing the level of preparedness for emergencies in border school communities, expanding access to education in educational institutions along the international border with Azerbaijan through the joint efforts of all stakeholders to ensure a safe, educational environment [and enhancing] resilience skills in educational communities to address risks in conflict and post-conflict environments and ensuring access to education for students from border communities and children displaced by the Karabakh conflict" (Redcross.am). Their main aim is to contribute to the recovery of the mental health of persons affected by the conflict by providing group or individual psychological services.

The Armenian Red Cross Society is the most active international organisation in the region. Besides providing psychological services, they have included hundreds of first- to sixth-grade students and secondary schools in several villages in educational activities. They have also established training centres, where they organise training sessions for regional volunteers of the ARCS, including local teachers. They have implemented daily training, extracurricular groups, social and cultural events, and thematic discussions aimed at forming abilities and worldviews. About 2,000 students in all classes of twelve schools in eleven communities living near the danger and about 1,000 residents were informed about the risks arising from weapons and instructed on safe behaviour. Approximately 2,000 people received 68,000 AMD in cash support, totalling 140,692,000 AMD. Moreover, 11,997 humanitarian aid packages have been provided, including hygiene, household, stationery and food products.

Other organisations are involved as well. One is the World Intellectual Property Organization, which is implementing several activities regarding human rights and

helping all people become involved in society. However, this organisation works primarily with educational institutions.

The UN has also shown some activity in the region. Within the framework of cooperation between the UN Office and Armenia, the UN Office is implementing projects with young people, including different programmes regarding youth involvement in society. The UN Human Rights Chief warned of *"possible war crimes, including reported execution of captured Armenians, and use of cluster munitions"* and called for *"humanitarian access on the ground for the UN and others in all areas affected"* (Delegation of the European Union to Armenia 2021). The UN Resident Coordinator has visited children injured in Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. UN Armenia has stated on its social media: *"The UN in Armenia stands ready, should the situation require and it is called upon, to provide humanitarian support to those who have had to leave their homes or are otherwise affected"* (2020).

The European Union (EU) and its member states have also provided humanitarian assistance to address the immediate needs of the civilian residents affected by the conflict. The EU has "asked all actors for calm and to avoid any rhetoric or actions that could lead to further escalation" several times, stating that "political differences must be resolved peacefully and in strict adherence to the principles and processes of parliamentary democracy" (European External Action Service 2021). The EU has also provided humanitarian support – financially and in other ways. They have attempted to address the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict while staying as neutral as possible.

Additionally, the EU has expressed readiness to "provide expertise and help on border delimitation and demarcation, as well as to support much-needed confidence-building measures, in order to move towards sustainable peace and prosperity for the South Caucasus" (Delegation of the European Union to Armenia 2020).

The Council of Europe has not remained silent either. Council of Europe President Charles Michel stressed the need to prepare populations for peace and the paramount role public rhetoric plays. On May 24, 2022, *"he welcomed Yerevan and Baku's leadership and stated intentions to engage in good faith in ensuring a conducive atmosphere for the continuation of the talks and expressed the EU's readiness to step up its support to confidence-building measures"* (European Union in Armenia 2022).

The Commissioner for Human Rights has addressed the conflict as well. She observed that *"access to the conflict-affected territories remains very limited for organisations providing humanitarian relief, as well as for human rights monitoring missions and that obstacles are increasingly being placed on such missions"* (Commissioner for Human Rights 2021). The Commissioner has called the issue of access to all areas affected by the conflict a matter of priority that needed to be solved immediately.

Finally, the EU hosted and opened the third meeting of the Armenia and Azerbaijan border commissions in Brussels. During this trilateral meeting, agreements were reached between European Council President Michel, President Ilham Aliyev, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. *"The EU commends the constructive atmosphere in which the meeting was conducted, and the willingness of the parties to continue working on addressing border-related issues, as well as to improve the security situation"* (European External Action Service 2022).

Although many influential organisations have been active in the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict and urged everyone to establish peace and stop military aggressions, most have stayed neutral. Rarely do these organisations ever point out who the aggressor is in a situation, which is understandable yet does not significantly contribute to conflict resolution.

Moreover, just as the Commissioner for Human Rights mentioned, these organisations have not addressed human rights as much as they should. The conflict was addressed directly, yet the aftermath has remained unresolved. Post-war problems remain in the border regions, including the mass human rights violations mentioned in this research.

CONCLUSION

Our research results matched our expectations. The human rights of the residents of the Kapan Enlarged Region are, in fact, violated. People are deprived of their rights to life, liberty, security, education, freedom of movement, adequate living conditions, health and well-being, and so on. All these human rights violations resulted from the Armenia–Nagorno Karabakh–Azerbaijan conflict escalation, when eighteen of thirty-eight villages became border regions.

These issues are rarely addressed, but the dire effects of the conflict remain. Thus, to minimise human rights violations, here we consider several strategies that could be implemented in the region.

First, the most influential international organisations, such as the EU, UN or ECHR, need to send international observers who will report on the situation in the Kapan Enlarged Region. The presence of Russian peacekeepers at the borders clearly does not significantly affect the issue as Azerbaijani military forces continue to behave aggressively towards Armenian civilians. Although on October 20, 2022, monitoring experts deployed on the Armenian side of the international border with Azerbaijan by EU began operations, it will be beneficial to specifically direct some of them to the Kapan Enlarged Region, as this can prevent Azerbaijani troop invasions into the sovereign territories of Armenia.

There are also specific international NGOs, such as the Nonviolent Peaceforce and Peace Brigades International, that provide physical, unarmed protection to civilians caught in violent conflicts and subsequent crises. These organisations have different programme locations in Asian, African and South American countries, where they attempt to restore the human rights of people affected by conflict escalations. These organisations can significantly contribute to solutions to the above-mentioned problems in the Kapan Enlarged Region. This can be achieved with the help of the current RA Human Rights Defender Kristinne Grigoryan, as such organisations usually investigate the possibility of a new field project following the direct request of local human rights defenders. The presence of influential international organisations will make both parties in the conflict refrain from violent action.

Arman Tatoyan also mentioned that a safety zone should be created around Syunik Province. As Tatoyan stated:

1. *There should be no soldiers of the Azerbaijani armed forces or border guard troops near the communities of Syunik region or on the roads between these communities.*
2. *There should be no Azerbaijani signs and flags on the roads between the communities of the Syunik region.*
3. *They should be removed by 10 kilometers from the places where they are today.*
4. *The officers of the RA armed forces or the RA border guard troops, who are the guarantors of the life, property and other vital rights of the RA residents, should be stationed directly in front of the positions of the Azerbaijani officers.*
5. *The security zone should be fully accessible to RA residents in order to restore their disrupted normal life in the border settlements.* (Syuniacyerkir.am 2021)

A buffer zone needs to be created. After the conflict escalations, the previous buffer zone was ceded to Azerbaijan, and currently, the village Nerkin Hand is being evacuated and gradually becoming a new buffer zone. This is unacceptable, and to save the village from destruction, there needs to be a new buffer zone.

To establish a buffer zone, demarcation and delimitation are needed. The Armenia–Azerbaijan borders need to be strictly marked. The Azerbaijani military should not be allowed to deploy armed forces in the sovereign territory of Armenia, just as they should not be allowed to control roads or villages not belonging to Azerbaijan. Demarcation and delimitation will help prevent such incidents in the future, as there will be no justification for Azerbaijani troops to invade Armenian territories.

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AZAR HAZIYEV

EVALUATING RUSSIA'S PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN KARABAKH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

While two years have passed since the signing of the 10 November 2020 Trilateral Statement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to end hostilities in Karabakh, the region still experiences uncertainty and rising tensions. The delimitation and demarcation of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the opening of communications, the future of Armenians in Karabakh, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, the return of detainees, the fate of missing people, the clearance of landmines and the future of peacekeeping missions are some of the issues that raise concern. Continuing its presence in the region since 2020, the Russian Peacekeeping Force has become an active topic of conflict-related discussions. Daily tasks of the peacekeepers vary from escorting military columns to observing adherence to the ceasefire regime, to solving disputes, to humanitarian demining. The lack of a clear mandate for the peacekeepers has brought a lot of questions to ongoing debates, and the number of questions is rising with time as we approach 2025, the initially agreed end date of the peacekeeping mission. This article intends to evaluate the functioning of the Russian Peacekeeping Force in Karabakh and discuss its problems. In addition, the article will provide policy recommendations concerning the future of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh.

KEY WORDS: ***Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh, peacekeepers***

INTRODUCTION

Though the year 2022 saw the deadliest clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan along the state borders, hopes for peace still prevail. In light of Russia's continuing invasion of Ukraine, EU-mediated peace talks between the two Caucasus nations represent an alternative path to Russia-dominated talks. The statements following the recent peace talks in Prague on the side-lines of the first gathering of the European Political Community gave rise to hopes for peace as both sides expressed their willingness to sign a peace deal by the end of 2022. The process received significant backing from the United States, while Russia openly expressed its dissatisfaction with growing Western engagement.

Although the discussion points of the EU- and Russian-mediated peace talks are not open to the public, experts note a significant difference between the approaches. The future of Karabakh Armenians could potentially be considered a major point of disagreement. It is assumed that the Western-backed peace process considers the solution to the issue in the context of minority rights without harming Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the region. In comparison, the Russian approach also considers the security and rights of the Armenians of Karabakh an important issue, but it avoids mentioning Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh. Russia's main concern about a potential EU-facilitated Armenia–Azerbaijan peace deal is related to the future of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh, which has remained Russia's main influence tool over both countries for the past two years. It is believed that a potential Armenia–Azerbaijan deal reached with the facilitation and mediation of the EU would result in the removal of Russian peacekeepers from Karabakh.

While the issue of the future of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh is significant, public discussions in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies on this matter are missing. In Azerbaijan, the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh is perceived as a threat to the sovereignty and independence of the country, although alternatives to the Russian peacekeepers are often ignored. In Armenia, the issue does not receive significant attention despite existing dissatisfaction with the functioning of the Russian peacekeeping mission. Considering the importance of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh for achieving sustainable peace, the issue requires more attention than ever as the sides are close to signing a peace deal. In this regard, this article aims to foster discussions around the future of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh. To do so, the article provides an overview and assessment of the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh. The first part discusses the history of peacekeeping operations and sheds a light on Russia's engagement in peacekeeping. The focus then shifts in the second part to the case of Karabakh by providing an overview of the negotiations on the issue of peacekeepers. The third part primarily delivers an overview of the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh, and the fourth part discusses existing problems of the operation based on existing literature. The geopolitics of the peacekeeping mission, the lack of a clear mandate and international authorisation, problems related to personnel and armament, and the lack of peacebuilding activities are the major problems highlighted in this context. In the fifth and final part, a set of recommendations is provided to establish a more sustainable and genuine peacekeeping mission in Karabakh to reach a negative peace as a short-term goal. The recommendations are mainly related to the composition, area, mandate and international authorisation and armament of the peacekeeping mission.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS AND RUSSIA AS A PEACEKEEPING ACTOR

Peacekeeping operations continue to be a crucial tool for the management and transformation of armed conflicts, as well as the protection of civilians. There is no agreed definition of peacekeeping, and the first conducted peacekeeping operation is also unclear. It is believed that the traces of modern peacekeeping date back to the early 1920s when delimitation commissions were established to redraw parts of the European borders following the First World War (Goulding 1993: 452). Nowadays, the idea of peacekeeping is mostly associated with the UN as it has started to conduct major peacekeeping operations within today's understanding of peacekeeping.

Considered a leading peacekeeping actor, the UN as a peacekeeper emerged as a product of the Cold War. The first UN peacekeeping mission was established in 1948 in the Middle East to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours after relevant authorisation from the Security Council (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.a). Though consisting of military servicemen, the first UN peacekeeping mission was unarmed, and its task was limited to monitoring the ceasefire. As the following years experienced more UN peacekeeping deployments in various conflict zones, the missions started to include armed servicemen as well. After the Second Arab-Israeli War in 1956, the UN peacekeeping mission deployed along the separation line of the Israeli and Egyptian forces in the Sinai Peninsula became the first armed UN mission. In parallel with the increasing number of peace operations, the military capabilities of the peacekeeping forces also increased. In this regard, it is worth making a reference to the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo, which included over 20,000 personnel. The mission had to assume extra responsibilities beyond traditional peacekeeping tasks, such as conducting offensive military operations to restore the territorial integrity of Congo (United Nations n.d.b).

The number of peacekeeping missions sharply increased after the end of the Cold War. Between 1988 and 2010, fifty operations were conducted by the UN in various conflict zones (Caplan, n.d.). Focussing on the evolution of peacekeeping missions, significant changes in this context are observable. In addition to an increase in the size and quantity of the operations, the peacekeeping missions went through a transformation from solely monitoring the ceasefire to multidimensional missions tasked with a wide range of activities. Modern missions are engaged in the facilitation of political processes via dialogue and reconciliation, protection of the civilian population, assisting states in disarmament and demilitarisation, guaranteeing the protection of human rights, restoration of the rule of law and even organising elections (United Nations 2008: 6).

In parallel with growing attention to peacekeeping, international norms and standards have been established to guide the conduct of the missions. Also known as the capstone doctrine, the United Nations' "Peace Operations: Principles and Guidelines" is the highest level of the current doctrine framework for United Nations peacekeeping. The document sets three basic principles necessary for conducting peacekeeping operations: consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate (United Nations 2008: 31).

Another interesting trend in the context of peacekeeping operations is the increasing involvement of regional organisations. The EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Organisation of American States are considered the major regional organisations engaged in peacekeeping (ZIF Berlin n.d.).

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute draws attention to the rise of single states as new peacekeeping actors. While peace operations are believed to be a Western idea, the past three decades have seen increased attention from emerging powers such as Brazil, Turkey, Russia, China, India, South Africa and Indonesia in this regard (SIPRI n.d.).

As an emerging power, Russia has been engaged in a number of peace operations in recent decades. Adopted on 23 June 1995, Federal Law No. 93-FZ On Procedures for Deploying Civil and Military Personnel for Activities Related to the Maintenance or Restoration of the International Peace and Security established a legal framework for the participation of the Russian military and civilian personnel in peace operations (Jafarli 2021).

The geography of Russia's peacekeeping activities has been wide and includes regions such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Angola, Chad, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Western Sahara, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti and Liberia, where they have been deployed as a part of international peacekeeping missions (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, n.d.). In addition, Russia has peacekeeping experience in some of the former Soviet countries that Russia considers its "near abroad'. The list includes Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

In South Ossetia (Georgia), a joint Russian-Georgian-Ossetian peacekeeping force was established in 1992 to carry out peacekeeping operations. It is worth mentioning that the Ossetian unit of the peacekeeping force consisted of soldiers from the Russian Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia instead of South Ossetia, which led to Russia's dominance over the actions of the peacekeeping mission. In fact, the joint peacekeeping mission served to freeze the situation and failed to organise humanitarian activities such as the return of displaced people and the reconstruction of the region. The peacekeeping mission ceased its work following the August War in 2008 (Jafarli 2021). The personnel and equipment of the mission were transferred to the newly established Russian military base in South Ossetia.

In Abkhazia, another Georgian breakaway region, CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces were deployed in 1994 following the war to carry out peacekeeping in accordance with the decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State. The personnel of the peacekeeping mission consisted entirely of Russian soldiers. The mission was supported by some fifty UN observers (German 2006). As in the case of South Ossetia, the peacekeepers mainly observed the ceasefire while humanitarian activities were widely ignored. Following the August War in 2008, the peacekeeping mission was terminated at the CIS summit in Bishkek, while a new Russian base in Abkhazia was established on the basis of the facilities of the peacekeeping force (Socor 2008). It should be noted that the presence of Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is considered illegitimate by Georgia, and there is international consensus on this matter.

Transnistria (Moldova) has been another destination of Russia's near abroad peacekeeping. Following its defeat in the Transnistria War, Moldova was forced to sign an agreement in 1992 on the resolution of the conflict, and a trilateral peacekeeping mission was established in Transnistria. The personnel of the peacekeeping mission consisted of three parties: Moldovans, Transnistrians and Russians. It should be noted that Russia had a higher number of units and control over the activities of the mission. In addition to the peacekeepers, the troops of the Soviet-era 14th Guards Army, which participated in the Transnistrian War, stayed in Moldova after the war while a new Russian Troop Task Force was established on the basis of the 14th Army. As of today, the Moldovan government insists on the removal of Russian troops from the territory of Moldova and suggests the establishment of international peacekeeping (Jafarli 2021). In addition, the UN also calls for the removal of Russian troops from Moldova, though these calls are ignored by Russia (United Nations 2018).

Apart from being deployed in the post-Soviet conflict zones, Russian soldiers have been involved in peacekeeping activities to restore civil order, as was the case for Tajikistan. Following the breakout of the civil war, CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces were deployed in Tajikistan by the decision of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of the CIS. The peacekeepers, which mainly consisted of Russian servicemen, were responsible for protecting humanitarian convoys and strategic installations, as well as securing the border with neighbouring Afghanistan (Goryayev 2001). The peacekeeping force was terminated in 2000 by the decision of the Council of Heads of States of the CIS (CIS Legislation 2000).

Kazakhstan is the last destination of the Russian peacekeepers, where they were deployed as part of the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces following the mass protests that began over the increasing fuel protests. The Forces also included units from Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As in previous joint peacekeeping operations in former Soviet countries, Russia contributed the highest number of soldiers and had overall control over the operation (Kucera 2022). The CSTO forces left the country after the end of the protests. It is worth noting that the operation in Kazakhstan was the first joint CSTO peacekeeping mission in the history of the organisation.

BACKGROUND OF THE PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN KARABAKH

Focussing on the case of Karabakh, it should be noted that the deployment of peacekeepers has been on the table since the early phase of the conflict. While the peacekeeping operation was proposed to the conflicting sides several times during the First Karabakh War, the Ceasefire Agreement of 1994, which put an end to the war, paved the way to negotiations concerning the deployment of peacekeepers along the line of contact. Following the ceasefire, Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev initiated a proposal to the conflicting sides concerning a peacekeeping operation in the conflict zone; however, it was rejected by Azerbaijan (De Waal 2021: 10). The proposal concerned the peacekeeping forces of the CIS, which was assumed to mainly consist of the units of the Russian Armed Forces (Shiriyev 2016: 462). During later negotiations, Armenia and Azerbaijan reached a "gentlemen's agreement" on the question of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh, which excluded the possibility of the deployment of peacekeepers from neighbouring countries, as well as from the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. While it has never been made official, it is assumed that the informal agreement was reached at the Budapest Summit in 1994 (Shiriyev 2016: 447).

During the long-running negotiation process, the peacekeeping operation in Karabakh remained one of the core elements of the conflict resolution proposals. In 1995, the OSCE High Level Planning Group was tasked with preparing technical recommendations for the peace operation in Karabakh. Although the question of the peace operation was later agreed to be discussed by the conflicting sides during the negotiation process, the initial plan was the deployment of the multinational OSCE peacekeeping force. The deployment of peacekeepers in the conflict zone remained a topic of discussion in the following years. As an example, the 1997 step-by-step proposal for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict included the deployment of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone, as well as the return of the occupied territories to the control of Azerbaijan and the determination of the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh in the future (CIVILNET 2021).

Presented to the conflict parties by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in 2007, the Basic Principles (also known as the Madrid Principles) for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also included "international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation" (OSCE 2009). According to the Principles, "selection of troops for the peacekeeping force shall be done by the parties by mutual consent. Each party has the right to veto the other's choice" (Shiriyev 2016: 463).

In the context of the peace operation in Karabakh, the proposal prepared by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (known as the Lavrov Plan) slightly differed from the previously proposed options as it suggested the deployment of the peacekeeping force of the Russian Federation along the Lachin Corridor connecting Armenia to the former administrative border of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (CIVILNET 2021).

While the peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan deadlocked afterwards, the question of peace operations became popular during the Second Karabakh War. In addition to Russia's expression of its readiness to deploy peacekeepers to the conflict zone, the United States raised the question of Scandinavian peacekeepers, though it remained merely a proposal (Ghazanchyan 2020).

In accordance with the 10 November 2020 Trilateral Ceasefire Statement that ended the Second Karabakh War, Russian peacekeepers were deployed to Karabakh. Article 3 of the Statement states that "The peacemaking forces of the Russian Federation, namely, 1,960 troops armed with firearms, 90 armored vehicles, and 380 motor vehicles and units of special equipment, shall be deployed along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along Lachin Corridor". Article 4 of the Statement further clarifies the details of the peacekeeping operation in Karabakh:

"The peacemaking forces of the Russian Federation shall be deployed concurrently with the withdrawal of the Armenian troops. The peacemaking forces of the Russian Federation will be deployed for five years, a term to be automatically extended for subsequent five-year terms unless either Party notifies about its intention to terminate this clause six months before the expiration of the current term". Article 5 notes that "For more efficient monitoring of the Parties' fulfillment of the agreements, a peacemaking center shall be established to oversee the ceasefire" (Putin 2020a).

Before discussing the functioning of the peacekeeping mission, it is important to think about why the deployment of Russian peacekeepers was possible in 2020 when similar attempts over the past 25 years failed. Potentially, one could explain the change in the attitudes of Armenia and Azerbaijan toward Russian peacekeepers with changing realities on the ground. For Azerbaijan, the return of the occupied regions around the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was a primary condition for any peace proposal that included a peacekeeping operation. For Armenia, the return of occupied territories to Azerbaijan was perceived as a factor jeopardising the security of the Armenians of Karabakh. The creation of new settlements for Syrian and Lebanese Armenians in the districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the incorporation of these territories into "Artsakh" in 2017, signalled Armenia's intention to keep surrounding regions under occupation. In this regard, what made the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh in 2020 possible was Azerbaijan's regaining control over territories in and around Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh. Though the deployment of Russian peacekeepers met serious dissatisfaction in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the decision had some benefits for both countries. For Azerbaijan, the return of the rest of the occupied territories surrounding the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast without fights was a significant win. From the perspective of Armenia, the peacekeeping mission guaranteed continuing Armenian presence in the region. Focussing on Russia, one can claim that it came out as the ultimate winner of the deal by achieving its long-term strategic goal of deploying troops in Karabakh. In addition, Russia avoided the involvement of foreign troops in the peace operation that it had opposed for so long. All the aforementioned factors contributed to the establishment of a Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh in 2020.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN KARABAKH

Within a few hours of the ceasefire, the first columns of the Russian Peacekeeping Contingent entered Karabakh via the territory of Armenia and established the first

checkpoints along the Lachin Corridor linking Armenia to the de facto Armenian-controlled part of the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast.

According to the Russian Defence Ministry, the Peacekeeping Force mainly consists of the units of the 15th Separate Motorised Rifle Brigade (Peacekeeping) of the Central Military District. The military command of the Peacekeeping Force was established in the city of Khankendi/Stepanakert (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2020a). Major General Rustam Muradov was appointed as the first commander of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh. The mission is now headed by Major General Andrei Volkov.

According to the visual infographics shared by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation in January 2021, the area of the peace operation is divided into two parts: North and South. Peacekeepers have set up twenty-seven military posts, and eleven of them are located along the road connecting Armenia to the de-facto Armenian-controlled part of Karabakh (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2021).

According to the Trilateral Statement, the number of Russian peacekeepers deployed in Karabakh is 1,960, and the total number of the personnel, including emergency servicemen, is estimated to be around 4,000 people (Crisis Group 2021: 1). The servicemen of the Peacekeeping Force consist of contact soldiers, and the majority of the personnel participated in the Russian military intervention in Syria (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2020b).

In addition to personnel, ninety armoured vehicles and 380 motor vehicles, mainly consisting of BTR-82A, "Tigr" and "Typhoons", are in charge of the Russian Peacekeeping Force (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2020b). Moreover, eight MI-8 and MI-24 helicopters are involved in the peacekeeping operation to organise air monitoring of the ceasefire and to deliver material and technical equipment and personnel of the peacekeeping force (Ministry of Defence of Russian Federation 2020c). It should be noted that the peacekeepers are not entitled to possess helicopters according to the 10 November 2020 Trilateral Statement.

The actual size of the territory under the responsibility zone of the Russian Peacekeeping Force is unknown as it is not specified in the Statement. It is assumed that peacekeepers exercise control over an area of around 3,170 km² left from the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, though their physical presence is much less than that (Sputnik Armenia, 2020). The current length of the line of contact separating the Azerbaijani-controlled part of Karabakh from the territory under the responsibility zone of the Russian Peacekeeping Force is more than 500 km.

In addition to the Russian Peacekeeping Force, the Joint Russian-Turkish Monitoring Centre has been established to monitor the ceasefire regime. Article 5 of the Trilateral Ceasefire Statement provides the legal basis for the establishment of the Centre. On 11 November 2020, the Defence Ministers of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding, and the Centre began operation on 30 January 2021. The Joint Monitoring Centre is located in the Agdam region of Azerbaijan at a distance of around twenty km from the current line of contact. The Centre's personnel consists of up to sixty servicemen from both sides, and their responsibility is limited to the observation of the ceasefire (Goble 2021). Monitoring work is carried out through the use of unmanned aerial vehicles and visual observation. According to a Crisis Group interview with an Azerbaijani official, Russian servicemen in the Centre inform the Defence Ministries of Azerbaijan and Armenia in case of any development, while Turkish servicemen only inform the Azerbaijani side (Crisis Group 2021: 9).

On 13 November 2020, the Interdepartmental Humanitarian Response Centre was established in the city of Khankendi/Stepanakert in Karabakh by a decree of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. As part of the Centre, five additional centres have been established: the Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides, the Centre for Transport Support, the Centre for Medical Support and the Centre for Trade and Household Support (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2020d). The functions of the Centre include the coordination of the activities of Russian state bodies and public organisations to provide humanitarian assistance and facilitation of the resolution of humanitarian issues, including the return of displaced people. Moreover, it aims to assist the state bodies of Armenia and Azerbaijan in their efforts to rebuild civilian infrastructure affected by the war and contribute to the organisation of interactions of state bodies with international humanitarian organisations. The centre consists of the representatives of respective Russian state bodies, including the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergency Situations and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation and other related bodies. The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation is responsible for the activities of the Centre (Putin 2020b).

The work of the Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh is diverse and includes security and humanitarian affairs. From the perspective of security, the main task of the peacekeepers is to ensure adherence to the ceasefire regime. They exercise control

over the entrance and exit to the Armenian-populated territory under their zone of responsibility and ensure the safety of civilian vehicles, the movement of residents and the transportation of food and various goods.

Peacekeepers conduct patrols on a daily basis in different parts of the area under their responsibility zone, though they do not have a permanent presence along the entire line of contact. Since the establishment of the ceasefire regime, specialists of the engineering units of the Russian peacekeeping contingent have also been involved in the clearance of soil from mines and explosive objects. It should be noted that these activities are limited to the territory under the responsibility zone of the peacekeeping force and do not include the formerly occupied territories (now under Azerbaijani control), which are heavily contaminated with landmines.

Focussing on the work of peacekeepers from a humanitarian perspective, it should be mentioned that Russia's peacekeeping activity in Karabakh significantly differs from its experience in other post-Soviet conflict zones. While Russia's previous peacekeeping operations lacked humanitarian elements, the operation in Karabakh includes a wide range of humanitarian actions. Since the early days of the ceasefire, Russian peacekeeping forces have been involved in the return of displaced Armenians to Karabakh, the exchange of prisoners of war and the search for missing servicemen. Other humanitarian activities of the peacekeeping forces include the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical services, contributing to reconstruction works, securing pilgrims to religious sites, ensuring the safety of agricultural work and even retrieving cattle that have gone missing. Furthermore, until the construction of new roads to the cities of Kalbajar and Shusha, Russian peacekeepers ensure the safety of Azerbaijani convoys via the Shusha-Krasny Bazaar and Sugovushan/Madagiz-Kalbajar routes (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2022). Russian peacekeepers are also involved in the mediation of talks between sides on a number of issues, including gas and water supplies. The recent collaboration between Azerbaijani and Armenian experts concerning the use of the Sarsang reservoir was achieved with the mediation of Russian peacekeepers.

PROBLEMS WITH THE RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION IN KARABAKH

Though Russian peacekeepers continue to secure the ceasefire and provide humanitarian actions, the problems of the mission should not be disregarded. These problems are mainly related to Russia's geopolitical interests behind its peacekeeping, a lack of mandate and international authorisation, a lack of peacebuilding efforts and concerns related to personnel and armament of the mission.

Geopolitics behind Peacekeeping

Focussing on the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh, it is worth referring to former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who framed the peace operations conducted by great powers in their so-called areas of strategic interest as "sphere-of-influence peacekeeping" (Mihalka 1996: 27). While Russia's peacekeeping operation in Karabakh differs from its previous experience in other post-Soviet conflict zones, the interest behind it remains unchanged and constitutes a relevant example of sphere-of-influence peacekeeping. Russia's monopoly over peacekeeping operations in the post-Soviet states continues to be a crucial element of its sphere-of-influence rebuilding efforts, and Karabakh is no exception (Socor 2020). Having gained a military presence, Russia intends to further insert its influence in Armenia and Azerbaijan by pivoting between sides and continuing its regional hegemony in the post-Soviet states, which it considers its near abroad. Thanks to the peacekeeping mission, Russia now has stronger leverage over both countries and enjoys its position as the main mediator in resolving remaining disputes. Apart from being the security guarantor of the local Armenian population in Karabakh, Russian peacekeepers also act as the guarantors of Russia's hegemonic interests and are ready to be instrumentalised if Russia feels its interests are threatened.

Lack of Mandate

Assessing the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh, one can argue that the lack of a clear mandate is a major missing element. The details of the peacekeeping mission are given in a few sentences in the 10 November 2020 Trilateral Statement, which leaves the door open to questions. It is still unclear how peacekeepers will react in case of a significant military escalation as the Statement does not regulate this matter. Are they limited to the observation of the ceasefire, or do they have a right to intervene? Should peacekeepers disarm the Artsakh Defence Army? Are they entitled to organise military drills? These are some of the questions that arise in the debates concerning the rights and duties of the peacekeepers. While the lack of a mandate for the peace operation leaves these questions unanswered, it should also be mentioned that this does not limit the functioning of the peacekeeping mission on daily basis. However, one can argue that the lack of a mandate can turn into a vital challenge in case of the renewal of fights, and hence it needs to be addressed.

Analysing the statements from Russia and Armenia, it may appear that the signing of a separate document to clarify the mandate of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh has been on the table, though no agreement was reached. According to

a Crisis Group interview with an Armenian official, Russia proposed a draft version of a document concerning the mandate of the peacekeepers in December 2020. Azerbaijan refused to sign the document as it demanded the organisation of passport control at the entrance to the Lachin Corridor (Crisis Group 2021: 13). According to the Russian newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Azerbaijan had three major proposals that it insisted on including in the document: Azerbaijani control over the Lachin Corridor, participation in the management of the Armenian-inhabited part of Karabakh and the dissolution of the Artsakh Defence Army (Roks 2021).

As a result of these negotiations, Russia created a new draft proposal in February 2021. However, the proposal was rejected by Azerbaijan, which demanded the inclusion of a phrase in the document that the peacekeeping mission is deployed in the territory of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan intends to sign the mandate of peacekeepers bilaterally with Russia and refuse the signature of Armenia as the mission is deployed in the territory of Azerbaijan (Crisis Group 2021: 13).

Focussing on the question of why Azerbaijan is reluctant to sign an agreement on the mandate of peacekeepers in Karabakh, other explanations are also possible. One explanation is that Azerbaijan wants to use its veto right on the prolongation of the Russian peacekeeping mission in 2025, and thus it is avoiding signing any other document that could be misinterpreted by Russia afterwards. Another explanation could be Azerbaijan's reluctance to possibly stronger Russian control over the Armenian-inhabited part of Karabakh. It is believed that by officially gaining a wide range of rights and responsibilities, Russian peacekeepers will exercise stronger control over the region, which Azerbaijan does not favour. Another approach proposes that by not clarifying the mandate of the peacekeeping mission, Azerbaijan wants to hold a space to declare the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh illegitimate in emergency cases.

Lack of International Authorisation

Another major problem of the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh is the lack of international authorisation. According to the international norms and standards set for peace operations, the deployment of peacekeepers requires authorisation from the UN or a relevant international organisation. No such authorisation was given for the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh. However, this should not be understood as a lack of legitimacy for the peace operation as all sides gave consent for it. The deployment of peacekeepers was based on the consent of the parties expressed in the form of a political statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. Following the deployment

of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh, the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a statement noting that *"The Secretary-General welcomes the agreement on a humanitarian ceasefire announced yesterday in Moscow by the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. He commends the Russian Federation for its mediation efforts"* (United Nations 2020). Moreover, in a phone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Guterres discussed *"the opportunities of the UN system in assisting to solve humanitarian problems in the region in cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian peacekeepers"* (Harutyunyan 2020).

To sum up, what is missing in the Russian peacekeeping operation is its international status under the law. While there is an international consensus that Russian soldiers in Karabakh are peacekeepers, they are not treated as international peacekeepers under international law (Amashov 2022). It should also be noted that Russia did not seek UN Security Council approval for its peacekeeping operation in Karabakh. According to a Russian state official, Russia does not consider international endorsement crucial for the work of peacekeepers. Furthermore, it has not experienced any pressure from other actors to receive UN Security Council approval (Crisis Group 2021: 14)

Lack of Peacebuilding Efforts

Comparing the peace operations conducted by Russia and the UN, the lack of another crucial element in the case of the former's peacebuilding efforts becomes clear. Russian peacekeeping missions have traditionally ignored peacebuilding efforts, and there has been no significant change to this policy in Karabakh. Although the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides was established as part of the Interdepartmental Humanitarian Response Centre in Karabakh, the Centre has not reportedly conducted any peacebuilding activities. It is worth mentioning that there has been a strong need for peacebuilding activities between sides since the end of the Second Karabakh War to build confidence and promote peaceful coexistence and dialogue. In this regard, the lack of such efforts in the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh is a significant loss for both Armenia and Azerbaijan on the way to peace.

Concerns Related to Personnel and Armament

The lack of monitoring tools over the number of personnel and armament constitutes another dimension of concern in the context of the peacekeeping operation. While the expected number of peacekeepers is 1,960 according to the Ceasefire Statement, the actual number of personnel for the whole mission is

assumed to be around 4,000, including the peacekeepers, military police units, emergency officers, sappers, volunteers, specialists, and personnel of other bodies working in the Interdepartmental Humanitarian Response Centre. Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is believed that some of the Russian peacekeepers were sent to Ukraine. Crisis Group (2022: 6) notes that as of April 2022, Russia had around 1,600 peacekeepers in Karabakh, fewer than the agreed number in the Trilateral Statement. The total number of personnel of the peacekeeping mission is considered appropriate considering the size of the area and the humanitarian needs. However, the lack of monitoring tools over the deployment of troops and the possibility of deploying more troops as servicemen of the Centre is a significant source of concern for the host country (Azerbaijan), considering Russia's previous peacekeeping experiences. The appointment of high-ranking generals as the commander and deputy commander of the peacekeeping force is considered disproportionate compared to the size of the mission and further supports the idea that Russia has bigger ambitions than monitoring the ceasefire and providing humanitarian activities (Socor 2020).

In addition, similar concerns exist in the context of the armament-related limitations of the peacekeeping mission. The Russian peacekeeping mission possesses eight helicopters and an unidentified number of drones in its inventory, although the Ceasefire Statement does not entitle them to these. In addition, BTR-80 and BTR-82 armoured personnel carriers belonging to the peacekeeping mission are equipped with turret-mounted 14.5-mm heavy machine guns (BTR-80) and thirty-mm automatic cannons (BTR-82A), which are considered light weapons. In this regard, it is worth noting that the peacekeepers are allowed to be equipped with only small arms according to the Ceasefire Statement (Rácz 2021: 6). Furthermore, some media outlets close to the Azerbaijani government recently accused Russian peacekeepers of illegal transfer of weapons via the corridor connecting Armenia to the part of Karabakh under the responsibility zone of the Russian peacekeeping mission. The list of weapons included anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines, automatic small arms, easel machine guns, sniper rifles, 122-mm mortars, "Fagot" anti-tank guided missiles, "Kornet" anti-tank guided missiles, grenade launchers, portable communications devices and ammunition. According to the reports, the weapons were transferred from the Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia (Caliber 2022). While such news raises serious concerns related to the intentions of the peacekeepers, the lack of monitoring tools over the armament of the peacekeeping mission does not allow the confirmation or denial of these claims.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF PEACEKEEPING IN KARABAKH

While September 2022 saw the deadliest clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the Second Karabakh War along the internationally recognised borders, the situation in Karabakh is relatively stable. However, the risk of escalation is rising as 2025, the expiry date of the current term of the Russian peacekeeping operation, approaches. As the Ceasefire Statement notes, the current term of deployment of the peacekeeping mission can be terminated if any party uses its veto right on the automatic extension of the term. In this regard, the future of the peacekeeping operation in Karabakh remains unclear as it is too early to determine whether any side, most likely Azerbaijan, will oppose the extension of the operation.

Despite the uncertainties around the future of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh, the need for peacekeeping operations is definite. Since the declaration of the ceasefire, the situation in Karabakh escalated a number of times, resulting in casualties. The peace process is accompanied by a lack of political trust between parties, while strong antagonism towards the "other" continues to exist in both societies. Though two years have passed since the signing of the Trilateral Statement, Armenia and Azerbaijan are trapped in talks concerning the opening of communications. Direct communication between the societies remains limited to a group of activists who occasionally meet in Georgian or other European cities through EU-funded peacebuilding projects (De Waal 2021).

As mentioned in previous chapters, peacekeeping operations continue to be an effective tool for the management and transformation of armed conflicts. From this perspective, taking into account the aforementioned factors, one can argue that the idea of peacekeeping in Karabakh is still relevant as there is a need to manage the situation, solve remaining issues and transform the conflict. This article provides recommendations on the future of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh, in particular its composition, mandate, longevity, area, size and armament. It is important to note that the given recommendations do not aim to improve existing Russian peacekeeping operations in Karabakh but rather to introduce elements of relatively more ideal peacekeeping for Karabakh as an alternative to the Russian peacekeeping mission. The reasoning behind proposing an alternative stems from the existing problems of the Russian peacekeeping mission, and the idea aims to establish a more sustainable and genuine peacekeeping mission in Karabakh to reach a negative peace as a short-term goal. The following recommendations are proposed.

Composition

The composition of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh has stood at the heart of discussions concerning the future of the mission. Throughout the conflict, experts have offered a long list of countries and organisations that could carry out the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh. UN, CIS, Russian, Turkish, French, United States, Kazakhstani and Scandinavian peacekeepers are among the most referred to for a peacekeeping operation. While Russia currently conducts the peacekeeping mission, it is far from ideal considering Russia's geopolitical interests in the region, the existing problems of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh and its previous engagement in peacekeeping operations. Thus, regardless of whether the term of the Russian peacekeeping operation will be extended, it is crucial to think about alternatives as there is still a need for a peacekeeping operation.

Departing from the three principles of peacekeeping set by the UN, the deployment of a civilian mission of the EU in Karabakh is considered a more relevant option in this article in case the Russian peacekeeping mission is terminated. Thinking about a possible EU mission in Karabakh, several crucial factors may be noted to support the proposal. First, the EU is an impartial actor that has maintained neutrality. The mediation efforts of the EU are appreciated by both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and it has a positive image as an external actor. Second, the EU is not a geopolitical actor, which lends to the idea that it has a genuine desire to achieve sustainable peace rather than pursue sphere-of-influence peacekeeping. Third, the EU is an experienced peacekeeping actor with eleven civilian missions and seven military operations to its name (EEAS n.d.). It is worth noting that it has already gained experience in South Caucasus with the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and recently sent a group of experts to the Armenian side of the international border with Azerbaijan to monitor the ceasefire. In addition, a potential EU civilian mission in Karabakh is expected to actively engage in peacebuilding activities to build confidence and promote peaceful coexistence. The increasing number of EU-funded peacebuilding projects for Armenians and Azerbaijanis, as well as the experience of the EU missions, support the aforementioned idea. Last but not least, the economic power of the EU is another crucial factor considering the strong need for the reconstruction and revival of the region in the post-conflict era. To conclude, the deployment of an EU civilian mission in Karabakh could meet the expectations and needs of the parties and ensure the secure environment necessary for achieving sustainable peace.

Area

The area of the peacekeeping mission should include the remaining part of the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast currently inhabited by Armenians. The control of the road connecting Armenia to the Armenian-inhabited part of Karabakh needs to be clarified via negotiations.

Although the Trilateral Statement calls for the return of all internally displaced persons and refugees to their initial locations, the current areal division of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh does not support this idea. Thus, to facilitate the return of all internally displaced persons, the peacekeeping zone can be divided into two parts: Armenian-inhabited and Azerbaijani-inhabited parts. It should be noted that the return of the Azerbaijani internally displaced persons to the responsibility zone of the peacekeeping mission should be carried out in parallel with the return of Armenian internally displaced persons to the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast under Azerbaijani control.

Mandate: The mandate of the peacekeeping mission should be clarified before the deployment of troops. The tasks, responsibilities and rules of engagement of the peacekeeping mission should be carefully included in the mandate. The sides should refrain from including clauses that can be misinterpreted. The mandate should make a note of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country (Azerbaijan). Apart from monitoring the ceasefire, the peacekeeping mission should organise confidence-building measures for the Armenian and Azerbaijani inhabitants of the region to promote peaceful coexistence and dialogue.

International Authorisation

The deployment of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh should be authorised by the UN or other relevant international bodies. This will allow the mission to be treated as international peacekeeping under international law.

Armament

As usual for EU civilian missions, the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh is not expected to possess armament. To achieve negative peace, demilitarisation of the region is crucial. In this regard, it is recommended to abolish the Artsakh Defence Army and removal of its weaponry from the region. To provide a sense of security, local police forces can be established by Armenians living in the responsibility zone

of peacekeepers (Ahmadzada 2022). To contribute to the security environment, it is recommended that Azerbaijan provide international security guarantees for local Armenians.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The past two years after the end of the Second Karabakh War saw a rise of deadly escalations along the border area of Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as in Karabakh. While sides haven't signed a peace deal yet, uncertainties are rising in parallel over a number of issues that became a hot topic of discussion. These include the delimitation and demarcation of the interstate border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the opening of communications, the future of Armenians in Karabakh, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, the return of detainees, the fate of missing people, the clearance of landmines and the future of peacekeeping mission.

Since the moment of their deployment, Russian peacekeepers became a popular topic of debate in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite all disagreements between sides over a number of issues, the dissatisfaction with the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh is one of the few points that the sides have in common. In this sense, this article focused on the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh and aimed at evaluating the functioning of the mission. The evaluation of the peacekeeping operation is considered significant for two major reasons. Firstly, this will help us to understand the actual problems of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh and allow us to propose relevant recommendations for the future of the mission. Secondly, this serves to foster discussions around the topic considering the existing dissatisfaction with the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh and the lack of constructive discussion around the issue.

Aiming that, the article provided a brief history of peacekeeping operations and Russia's experience in peacekeeping in the first part. Following this, the article shed a light on the negotiations concerning the issue of peacekeepers in Karabakh. This was followed by an overview of the Russian peacekeeping operation in Karabakh. The problems of the Russian peacekeeping operation were discussed in the fourth part. In this regard, the article highlighted a number of core problems. These include geopolitical interests behind the peacekeeping mission, the lack of a clear mandate and international authorization, problems related to personnel and armament, and the lack of peacebuilding activities. The last part of the article proposed a set of recommendations to establish a more sustainable and genuine peacekeeping mission in Karabakh. The recommendations include the change of the Russian Peacekeeping Force and propose EU Civilian Mission as a more ideal alternative. In addition, the

article mentions the importance of a legal mandate for future peacekeeping mission which clearly defines the tasks, responsibilities, and rules of engagement of the peacekeeping mission. It is important to highlight that a mandate for a potential peacekeeping mission in Karabakh should make a note of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country (Azerbaijan). Furthermore, the article underlined the necessity of international authorization from the UN or a relevant international organization that will potentially contribute to the functioning of the mission. Other recommendations included the enlargement of the access area of the peacekeeping mission to make the return of all displaced people possible. Last but not least, the article proposed the total abolishment of the Artsakh Defence Army and international security guarantees by Azerbaijan to support the functioning of the peacekeeping mission in Karabakh.

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ENTANGLEMENTS OF FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY IN GEORGIA (2004– 2022)

This paper presents an analysis of the interrelations between the foreign policy course and the national security of Georgia through the deconstruction of key difficulties and shifts in the country's security sector reform process. Considering the role of Russia in the Civil War of Georgia and in the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's security was attached to its foreign policy, which should bring the country close to Western institutions and secure it from influences stemming from the Russian Federation. Security sector reform became the central tenet of the country's security after the August War of 2008. The problems of security sector reform stem from the different perceptions of security threats posed to Georgia by various political-societal actors. Pro-Western forces argue the need for further transformation of the security sector reform in a way to address challenges stemming from Russia – from de-occupation of the Georgian territories to possible renewed military aggression from the side of the Russian Federation. However, pro-Russian forces argue for detachment from the West to normalise relations with Russia and justify this claim through the argument of launching a realistic foreign policy for Georgia under the existing geopolitical reality. Thus, Georgia's security will be ensured only through a balanced politics between Russia and the West, a circumstance that leaves Georgia's security sector reform as a subject of political elites' preferences and complicates the process of consolidation around codified security threats and foreign policy priorities. This paper demonstrates this change through an analysis of the interconnections between foreign policy and security in Georgia's contemporary politics. The study employs the discourse historical approach and the method of process tracing in its causal inference line to reconstruct the transforming foreign policy of Georgia and applies securitisation theory to define the boundaries between politics and security.

KEY WORDS: ***Georgia, Foreign Policy, Security Sector Reform, Securitisation, Conflict, Russia***

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the interrelations between the foreign policy course and the national security of Georgia through the deconstruction of key difficulties and

shifts in the country's security sector reform process, which was introduced on par with Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy course. Since the declaration of its independence on April 9, 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia's foreign policy choices have been made under severe challenges posed to a country's statehood and security. Following the civil war of Winter 1991 – 1992 and the secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1992 – 1994, the government of Georgia embarked on a rocky ground for state building. Considering the role of Russia in the Civil War of Georgia (Devdariani 2005: 203-269) and its "unsuccessful mediation" in the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there have been several violations of the Russian brokered ceasefire agreements from the side of the separatist forces and renewed military clashes between the belligerent sides with territorial advancement by the Abkhazian militaries in the Abkhazian AR until 1994. Thus, Georgia's security was attached to its pro-Western foreign policy, which should bring the country close to Western institutions (the EU and NATO), distance it from Moscow, and secure it against the influences stemming from the Russian Federation.

During the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze (1995 – 2003), security-seeking foreign policy was aimed at pragmatic balancing between Russia and the West. Georgia even became a member of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1993, during the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili (2004 – 2013), and rapprochement to the Western structures was considered a chance for gaining the county's security from the Russian encroachments and returning Georgia back into the European family of nations. Through the security sector reform process, this change was reflected in both foreign policy and the security arrangements of the country. The Georgian Dream government, becoming the ruling party in 2012, with its policy of normalisation of relations with the Russian Federation, brought some disturbances in the coordinated foreign policy and security sector reform of Georgia, which led the country towards the Euro-Atlantic structures, and paved the way towards the pro-Russian incline.

Georgia's geopolitical location in the South Caucasus, attracting Russia's and the EU/US/Western, as well as NATO's interests in the region, necessitates bridging Georgia's foreign policy and security strategies, which should be coordinated via the security sector reform process. The study concentrates on the post-Rose Revolution (2003) period, when Georgia's security perceptions and security strategy became ideologically backed up and driven by the idea of Georgia's eventual membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures and became intertwined with its foreign policy course with an outright aspiration towards the West/Europe. The pro-Russian and pro-Western foreign policy discourses of the country have been attached to its security

perceptions. Therefore, Georgia's security sector reform became linked with domestic and foreign sources of instability and security challenges, both hard and soft, as well as internal (conflict with Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and external (presence of Russian troops) threats. Security sector reform was also influenced by the two simultaneous transitions: transition related to a post-Civil War and subsequent developments in 1992 – 1994, and political, social, and economic transitions from Soviet-time authoritarianism to Western-style democracy (Simons 2012: 274).

In Georgia's security-seeking foreign policy, images of the North (Russia) and the West (US and EU) have been constantly replacing each other and determined by the securitising political discourse of the country, which was influenced by the modes and aspirations of the political elites. Since the early 1990s, pro-Western and pro-Russian foreign policy discourses have been structured and popularised to devise Georgia's national security, and have been strongly influenced by realpolitik. Preferences of political elites, their mode of rhetoric, and foreign policy aspirations have determined the style and nature of Georgia's security sector reform at different times, which significantly influenced democratisation (primarily during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency) and the institution-building and modernisation process (mainly during Saakashvili's presidency) of the country. The non-ended project of Georgia's democratic consolidation brings security sector reform to the centre of politics.

In the case of Georgia, the foreign policy formation and security sector reform processes are influenced by the rhetoric of the political actors in office who present certain issues – the Western enlargement in post-Soviet space (the pro-Russian political and societal actors) and actions of Orthodox Russia, driven according to the orthodox geopolitical imperatives (the pro-Western political and societal actors) – as "threats to the existence" of Georgia. They point to the need either for the neutrality of the country or to make a choice in favour of the lesser evil, that is, Russia (the pro-Russian camp), or argue for a firm adherence to the Euro-Atlantic aspiration (the pro-Western camp). The latter option is presented as desirable for the successful preservation of Georgia's statehood and its future democratic development. Therefore, it could be claimed that securitisation explains the preconditions and the mode of behaviour of the political elites, who choose either the West or Russia as their preferred ally in their foreign policy options and security provisions.

The first part of this paper sets the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the research, mainly drawing on the securitisation theory of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (Buzan et al. 1998) and referring to the chronological qualitative case study

and content analysis of various documents (the National Security Council (NSC) documents and policy papers), reflecting on watershed events in Georgia's foreign policy formation process. This is followed by setting the links between national security and realpolitik. The second part of the paper highlights the key drivers and challenges of security sector reform in Georgia and uncovers the dangers of reversals from a pro-Western to a Russian-oriented foreign policy. The last section presents the main connections between the pro-Western course of the country and the security sector reform process. The concluding section summarises the main findings of the research.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The study seeks to uncover how securitisation as a discourse creation defines Georgia's foreign policy formation process and, correspondingly, how the security sector reform process is managed according to the foreign policy imperatives of political elites. The different securitisation discourses of Georgia's foreign policy course set by the political elites, either pro-Western or pro-Russian (see above), are the main challenges that cause drifts and reversals in the foreign policymaking and security sector reform processes of the country since it gained its independence in the early 1990s. The securitisation theory claims that any country's policy line is shaped in or through securitising discourse (Buzan 1998: 98) created by elites with particular foreign and domestic purposes. The discourse is created through a speech act that enables the formulation of a particular topic in a way that draws the attention of a nation. Stressing particular threats posed to a state or nation is already an act of securitisation (Erikson and Noreen 2002: 8). Securitising actors are mainly political elites – leaders, lobbyists, or governmental agencies (Buzan, Waever and Wilde 1998: 40) – who mobilise masses through the act of securitisation and make them supportive of their judgments, thus legitimising their desired policy line (Erikson and Noreen 2002: 10).

By Georgia's security-seeking foreign policy, I mean a one in which a small state (Georgia) bandwagon with great power (US / EU) in exchange for securing protection from another great power competitor (Russia). Such a policy is problematic in the sense offered by Buzan, who argues that "finding a policy which mixes elements of a national security strategy with elements of an international security one is optimal, but that it is not without difficulty" (Erikson and Noreen 2002: 7). The combination of perceptual and political elements in Georgia's foreign policy has further complicated its security policy – and explains why its national security policy hardly works on multiple levels (the national security perception of Georgia

vs. international security). This line of deconstruction of the case fits with the claim of the Copenhagen School that there are no objective threats (although Russia could be counted as such – D.M.), and anyone who classifies an issue as a security problem makes a political rather than an analytical decision.

The problem in the case of Georgia in terms of securitisation – that is, naming a particular actor as a threat – stems from the fact that there is no general consensus among the population of Georgia about who is the country's number one enemy. Thus, different political elites could securitise both Russia and the West as enemies of Georgia and still gain support from a particular, although different, segment of a society. Therefore, "[t]he analyst should not observe threats, but to determine how, by whom, under what circumstances, and with what consequences some issues are classified as existential threats but not others to determine how threats and appropriate responses […] how the 'objects' of security are constructed and what are the possibilities for transformation of 'security dilemmas'." (Diskaya 2013).

The study relies on a content analysis of various documents (Georgia's national security concepts, featured online articles, policy documents, etc.) to deconstruct the process of gradual (trans)formation of Georgia's foreign policy as its main lines and directions are formed and voiced by the leading political figures. The course of Georgia's foreign policy has been set by the securitising rhetoric of political elites in office, and it has been changing according to the mode of their rhetoric (anti / pro-Russian vs. anti / pro-Western) and actually to their change in office. After highlighting general factors influencing the foreign policy formation process of the country, I will identify the main trends in the post-2003 period that determined the course of Georgia's foreign policy between the West and Russia. The chosen approach juxtaposes the actions of various political leaders of the country as elites set the foreign policy narratives. To substantiate the case study, I also draw on official declarations, expert opinions, and policy documents.

The research will be a chronological qualitative case study/content analysis of various documents that reflect watershed events in Georgia's foreign policy formation process. To understand 25 – 30 years of post-Soviet independence, the study employs the discourse historical approach, a method of "systemic collection and analysis of that information, which is related to particular past events and enables to explain present developments for prediction of the future" (Connaway and Powell 2010: 79). The method of process tracing, in its causal inference line (Bennet 2010: 210), is used to reconstruct Georgia's transforming foreign policy. The case study analysis uncovers the geostrategic and geopolitical realities employed by political elites as constraints on Georgia's foreign policy choices. A range of internal (positioning of the

elites and their opponents) and external (mainly challenges stemming from Russia) circumstances have undermined the country's pro-Western drive at different times and have provided receptive grounds for the pro-Russian incline. The reflection on securitising discourse formation and transformation in Georgia, which enables us to reflect on interconnections between national security and realpolitik, provides answers to the formation of Georgia's security-seeking foreign policy and its fluctuations between the pro-Western drive and the pro-Russian incline, which, in itself, influence the process of the security sector reform in Georgia. This study examines NSC documents, various policy papers, and expert opinions to reflect on the transformation of the security sector reform process and foreign policy course reversals in Georgia.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND REALPOLITIK

Georgia's foreign policy aspirations are reflected in its NSC and strategic documents, and are intertwined with the country's external and internal security challenges. The country's NSC, approved in 2005, did not list Russia as a threat to Georgia however mentioned that the "presence of Russian military bases in the country violated Georgia's sovereignty and undermined (Georgia's) economic and social stability" (Civil Georgia 2005). This aspect, securitised by the NSC, had been addressed by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Istanbul Declaration of 1999 (Istanbul Document 1999), which obliged Russia to withdraw its military bases located in different parts of Georgia, including those in secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This obligation has never been fully implemented. The current NSC, approved by the parliament on December 23, 2011 (Civil Georgia 2011), which replaced the 2005 version, rests on the premise that the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008 significantly worsened Georgia's security environment and securitises Russia's neglect and constant violation of Georgia's sovereignty, its choice of democracy, and independent domestic and foreign policies.

In 2009, immediately after the August War of 2008, under the supervision of the Georgian National Security Council, the process of revising the NSC of Georgia was undertaken for a unified governmental approach and to institutionalise the security policy of the country. After the Russian–Georgian August War of 2008, the National Security Council was tasked with managing all crises related to national security at the highest political level. A permanent interagency committee for the coordination of the drafting process of the national security strategy was established (Majer 2013: 37). The process included the development of a package of conceptual and strategic documents in three phases: devising the fundamental strategic documents, setting agency-specific strategies, and drafting the national security strategy of Georgia

(Majer 2013: 41). The analysis will not go in depth in these three segments; rather, it will highlight some avenues that testify to the attachment of the security sector reform to the pro-Western foreign policy course of the country.

The pro-Western integration of the country, which, in itself, is the policy outcome of securitising discourse, as pro-Western policymakers securitise the threat from Russia and argue for Euro-Atlantic integration, became an important aspect of preserving the country's sovereignty. The new version of the NSC (2011) highlights the high risk of renewed military aggression from Russia and seeks to broaden integration processes into Euro-Atlantic structures. This is seen as consolidating the country's democracy, strengthening democratic institutions, and improving defence capabilities so as to improve national security. It is also expected to guarantee peace and stability in the entire Caucasus region and to ensure Russia's security on its southern borders. After 2008, normal relations with Russia were sought, but at the same time, Russia was codified by the NSC as the main source of "threat" for Georgia (NSC of Georgia 2016).

A sharply expressed pro-Western-oriented security sector reform, driven by Georgia's intentional rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic structures, was launched after the Rose Revolution of 2003. This should decrease Georgia's political and economic dependence on the Russian Federation through modernisation and democratisation, which would lead to an increased Western presence in Georgia and to the country's eventual membership in the EU/NATO structures. With ups and downs in the political process of the country, the security sector reform has become a subject of constant revision, whereas its foreign policy for the moment is somewhere in between the pro-Western drive and the pro-Russian incline.

Various public opinion polls conducted in Georgia in 2010-2021 demonstrate that the popularity of the West (EU and NATO) has decreased, whereas support towards the policy of normalisation of relations and rapprochement with Russia has increased (CRRC-Georgia 2010; CRRC-Georgia 2013; CRRC-Georgia 2015; CRRC-Georgia 2016). This has determined some tides in security sector reform, which aims to address internal challenges and external threats simultaneously. Therefore, directing the security sector reform and pro-Western drive simultaneously and on par with each other became problematic to some extent. The problem is further complicated by changes in political elites, pressing issues of internal politics (economic problems, managing relations with conflicting regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and foreign policy visions (achieving membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures and normalisation of relations with Russia, juxtaposing the Association Agreement with the European Union and possible relations with the Eurasian Economic Union), with

the security perceptions tied to them differently conceptualised. This factor undermines the coherence of the security sector reform process in Georgia.

Securitisation discourse imposes constraints on the ideational/value-based foreign policy choice. It also necessitates seeking a balance between the two alternatives of Georgia's foreign policy: pro-Western and pro-Russian. In 2012, after the October parliamentary elections and under the promise of the normalisation of relations with Russia, the Georgian Dream government came to power, and relations with Russia more or less stabilised, mainly on the rhetorical level. Georgia signed an association agreement with the EU despite the unhappiness of some EU members and of the largest political groups in the European Parliament. Similarly, despite the qualms of some US senators, Georgia's relationship with the United States remained solid (MacFarlane 2015: 1). However, the qualified success of Georgian foreign policy after 2012, mainly in terms of the maintenance of the pro-Western course, was largely the product of exogenous circumstances, particularly Russia's undermining of the EU's Eastern Partnership process and its increasing use of force to secure compliance with what it considers to be its neighbourhood. These Russian actions made the EU more receptive to closer association with Georgia (MacFarlane 2015: 18), primarily to save the Eastern Partnership 3 (EaP3) format (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova). Under these circumstances, on 27 June 2014, Georgia secured the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU, which should bring it closer to the EU and contribute to its distancing from Russia, at least lessening its economic dependence on Moscow.

However, the internal political situation in Georgia a gradual emergence of openly pro-Russian political-societal groups and the political party, the Union of Patriots (securing seats in parliament after the parliamentary elections of 2016) weakened the government's capacity to monopolise the foreign policy discourse. Consequently, Russia's foreign policy gradually evolved in a more assertive direction in the South Caucasus, gaining foothold in the Armenian–Azerbaijanian conflict and securing further pressure points on the government of Georgia through the policy of creeping annexation across the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs) of the conflict zones of Georgia, particularly in the Tskhinvali Region. Russia is currently constrained by its intervention in Ukraine, which lasted longer than expected. In addition, regional developments, such as an exacerbation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (e. g. the Four Day War or April War of 2016 or developments in 2020– 2022), could also refocus Russian military policy on the South Caucasus (MacFarlane 2015: 19). There is no evidence that Western partners would meaningfully support Georgia in the case of direct Russian pressure. In short, Georgia has been an accidental beneficiary of events outside its control (MacFarlane 2015: 19-20).

KEY DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN GEORGIA

Security sector reform, apart from its military– political scope, includes all segments necessary for the democratic development of a state and society. The objective of reforming the security sector is different in democratic countries compared to countries in democratic transition. The latter group encounters more problems when it tries to introduce the modern mechanisms of transparency, accountability, and democratic participation, and these problems are also more serious. A fundamental problem stems from the flaws of political culture and a lack of expertise (Darchiashvili 2008: 14). In the case of Georgia, a range of problems provide constraints to the security sector reform process:

1. With any change in the government, there have been expectations that the security sector reform will change its general priorities (Simons 2012: 288). This is primarily due to the fact that in Georgia, each new government comes into office with the declaration of the total denial of the legacy of its predecessor, with the expected reversals in foreign policy strategy towards the neighbours.
2. Politics plays a critical role in both the delivery and receipt of security sector reform, although it is strongly concentrated on internal and external security guarantees (Simons 2012: 288). The governments of Shevardnadze (his second government most likely) and Saakashvili took office with clear Western support, whereas this does not hold true for the government of Ivanishvili, who signalled that the main aim of the Georgian Dream's politics would be the disappearance of Georgia as a "bone of contention" between Russia and the West.
3. The need for consistency and political support for the security sector reform programmes, as well as the residual cultural gap between a development-oriented and a security-oriented community, is an almost constant problem (Simons 2012: 288). Whereas Saakashvili's government was aimed at establishing a security-oriented community, reinforced by the ideological backbone concentrated on the country's Westernisation, Ivanishvili's government sought a more pragmatic approach to balancing the pro-Western-driven security-seeking foreign policy and policy of normalisation of relations with the Russian Federation.

A list of strategic documents devoted to security was adopted since the Rose Revolution of 2003, followed by intensified communication with NATO and EU bodies contributing to the progress in this area that was required to promote the culture of strategic thinking and to manage and reform the security sector. The nature of this communication was determined by the strategic documents that were developed together with representatives of the aforementioned institutions: NATO's Individual

Strategic Action Plan (IPAP) and the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan (ENP AP). These documents were adopted in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Their implementation is supposed to bring the country's security sector and the entire political system closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures (Darchiashvili 2008). Therefore, in the case of Georgia, there is a need to devise an integrated system of planning and political commitment in the process of developing a security sector reform programme. As for the implementation phase, all stakeholders need to be included, not only the 'winners', and this aspect needs to be understood as a long-term commitment by all stakeholders in the process (Simons 2012: 288).

The changes introduced to the security sector reform with the emergence of the new Georgian Dream government prove this statement: there were some processes, which were mainly implemented in internal affairs, not in the external affairs of the country, short of normalisation of relations with Russia. The general priorities in terms of external affairs have not changed much so far (keeping the policy towards and securing AA and DCFTA). However, in terms of its internal dynamics, some notable changes occurred in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), that is, the separation of the State Security Agency as an independent institution, which led to the duplication of some duties and responsibilities between different agencies overseeing the security sector reform. This was a reversal from the reforms in the security sector reform process implemented after the Rose Revolution of 2003. In the post-Rose Revolution period, advancement in the security sector reform process became one of the main goals of the new regime, and as a result of the introduced reforms and changes in the security sector, the state gained a qualitatively Western-type security system instead of the post-Soviet one. Changes in the security sector reform were initiated in several stages:

Stage 1: The reforms were carried out at the Ministry of Defence; the position of the Minister of Defence was staffed by a civilian, and accordingly, the functions of the Minister of Defence and Joint Staff were split. This change was in line with NATO standards and requirements.

Stage 2: The next wave of reform was connected with the military aggression of Russia against Georgia (2008), which significantly changed the security environment, not only in the country but also in the entire region. The NSC of Georgia, which defines national interests and values and elaborates on the basic directions of security policy, explicitly stresses that the occupation of the Georgian territories and the threat of new aggression from the Russian Federation are the main challenges for the country. De-occupation of occupied territories, restoration of territorial integrity,

strengthening state sovereignty, and development of defence and security systems were defined as the main priorities of Georgia's security policy (Majer 2013: 48-49). Therefore, security sector reform concentrated more on defence and security affairs, partly at the expense of democratic institution building and advancement of the country's democratisation process.

The security sector reform mainly succeeded in increasing the administrative capabilities of the state, which was maintained as a legacy of Saakashvili's government by the government of Ivanishvili. The functioning state – based on effective state institutions – became the necessary prerequisites for societal transformation and democratic rule. Increased state administrative capabilities weakened participatory institutions, which caused a remarkable setback to Georgia's democracy and certainly damaged the democratisation process in the country (Aprasidze 2016: 114-115; 116). The most detrimental elements that prevent a continuous transition to democracy are clientelism and widespread corruption. The lack of a national security strategy and a precise concept for security sector reform in Georgia are probably the most fundamental obstacles to any effective reform. It is not a lack of expertise or experience but the absence of politics that prevents the implementation of a national security strategy. The new Georgian Dream government should have moved away from reliance on external support to drive reform and clarify for internal and external audiences its vision of Georgia's future, its interpretation of the main security threats, and how to respond to these in a publicly debated security concept (Fluri and Cole 2005).

In reality, the security sector reform process is overshadowed by the general clash between the pro-Western and pro-Russian groups' foreign policy priorities. In addition, the security sector reform process was found in a trap of two simultaneous transitions – democratisation and modernisation – when the acceleration of modernisation negatively reverberated in the process of democratisation. Georgia opted for quick modernisation and applied a reform package without consultations with relevant stakeholders (mostly during the presidency of Saakashvili), and in most instances, these reforms were imposed from the top down. As a result, the country gradually became qualified as a hybrid regime and fell into the 'grey zone' on its way to democratisation. This trend has been reinforced by the mode of widely termed "informal governance" emerging in the face of Bidzina Ivanishvili. Across this period, the securitisation discourse was neither undemocratic nor anti-democratic (it started with the US-backed democracy promotion policy, designating Georgia as the "beacon of democracy"). Instead, the process of modernisation overshadowed the process of democratisation – democratic reforms, including security sector reform

– a result of the rhetoric of political elites', who efficiently securitised the challenges posed to Georgia's internal and external stabilities. However, the democratic control of the government – either from the side of the electorate or in terms of the parliamentary oversight of the law enforcement bodies – has never been implemented properly and efficiently.

Certain dilemmas in the course of reform have led to dangerous deviations from the democratic practice of the security sector's operation: (1) Legitimate attempts to change the inefficient mechanisms for the settlement of a country's territorial conflicts heighten tension in the conflict zone. (2) The reform of the security sector requires speed, mobilisation of resources and implementation of unpopular measures, which leads to inflexibility in decision making and crudeness of procedures (Darchiashvili 2008).

DANGERS OF FOREIGN POLICY REVERSAL

Challenges to the security sector reform in Georgia are related to and strongly influenced by reversals in the foreign policy course of the country, which in turn is conditioned by changes in political elites and their foreign (and domestic) policy preferences. The redistribution of power and responsibility on security provisions or on foreign policy affairs between different branches of the government, representing different political parties, as it occurred after the parliamentary election of 2012 in Georgia, further complicated the coordination of the security sector reform process among different stakeholders. At different times, the branches of executive and legislature became controlled by different political groups (e.g. the Georgian Dream vs. the United National Movement after the parliamentary elections of October, 2012). This coincided with statements of the Georgian Dream politicians regarding the necessity to balance Georgia's Russia/EEU and EU/NATO aspirations, which caused some suspicions regarding the coherence of the security sector reform. This signals the incoherence of Georgia's security sector reform process and proves that, similar to the foreign policy course, it is highly dependent on the fluctuations and changes in the strategies of political elites and their cycling, which come with different domestic and foreign policy priorities.

The 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community has predicted that Georgia might abandon its Euro-Atlantic integration, along with its democratic reforms, and turn towards Russia (Lebanidze 2016: 4). The symptoms of deepening multidimensional social and political crises became apparent. The political and social malaise has been breeding Euro-scepticism and disenchantment with the West. Meanwhile, pro-Russian forces have been openly contesting the foreign policy

line Georgia has been pursuing to date and has called for a turn towards Russia (Falkowski 2016: 5-6). Georgia's security sector reform process is therefore influenced by four main factors: the failure of Western actors to sufficiently empower the democratic reform coalition in Georgia, Russian-supported anti-reformist forces, the current fatigue in the process of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, and the overall lack of a democratic political culture among the ruling elites (both current and previous), which have caused the danger of a drift in Georgia's foreign policy (Lebanidze 2016: 3). The synergy between the pro-Western foreign policy course and the security sector reform process, as sustained by the United National Movement, was no longer maintained and continued by the Georgian Dream.

The deconstruction of Georgia's foreign policy formation process through securitisation theory highlights some of its shortcomings. It uncovers how political elites, through securitising foreign policy choices, "created a kind of momentum necessary for the adoption of additional and emergency measures", which demonstrates a "transition from the politicised to the securitised end of the spectrum and vice versa" (Emmers 2013: 136). This helps to define the boundaries between politics and security, for which there is a need for the Copenhagen School of Security, and "it becomes possible to overcome vision of securitisation, as an extreme version of politicisation and to avoid overlap along the spectrum of depoliticised, politicised, and securitised issues" (Emmers 2013: 137). The constraints imposed on the Georgian political elites in making foreign policy choices prove that the "five sectors offered by Buzan – political, military, economic, societal (and environmental) – do not operate in isolation from each other and all are woven together in a strong web of linkage" (Stone 2009: 4).

Georgia has been facing multiple challenges, and political threats represent a constant concern for the country; thus, it is necessary "to distinguish between intentional political threats and those that arise structurally from the impact of foreign alternatives on the legitimacy of states" (Stone 2009: 5), as this defines the country's security vision. Diverse threats posed to Georgia and securitised by different political elites have complicated Georgia's security-seeking foreign policy, as it became problematic "to find a policy which mixes elements of a national security strategy with elements of an international security" (Stone 2009: 7). Since 2012, Georgia's political transition has brought to power leadership with little or no foreign policy experience. The Georgian Dream government has no clear strategy for normalising relations with Russia or attaining NATO and EU membership. The relative success of Georgian Dream's foreign policy has largely been a product of exogenous circumstances that have encouraged the West and Russia to look more favourably at the country (MacFarlane 2015: 1). After 2012, the West gradually became demythologised in Georgia, and people have become "disenchanted with its policy, which many of them regard as political ingratitude" (Falkowski 2016: 44). In this shift, although still imminent, realpolitik imposes constraints on Georgia's ideational/value-based foreign policy choices. It also necessitates seeking a balance between the two alternatives of Georgia's foreign policy – pro-Western and pro-Russian.

The policies of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's party, Georgian Dream (GD), are often described by its political opponents as the antithesis of the previous policies of the governments under Mikheil Saakashvili. Besides the uncertainty about Ivanishvili's will to continue the Euro-Atlantic integration process, there are other factions of the GD-led coalition that support neutrality or even oppose NATO membership in Georgia. To some extent, the policy of further NATO integration is at variance with the other priorities of the government: the improvement of relations with Russia. In this context, some of the Georgian prime minister's statements show a lack of consistency. In particular, the speech given in Yerevan on 18 January 2013 in which the PM of Georgia presented Armenia as a "model" for Georgia as a country that has good relations with both NATO and Russia. Georgia's neighbour, Armenia, is Russia's closest partner in the region. Most importantly, Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Thus, it cannot serve as a model for Georgia, as long as membership in NATO remains a goal of the government in Tbilisi. An analysis of Prime Minister Ivanishvili's statements may display his intent to redefine Georgian foreign policy, if not on a global level, then at least on a regional level (Zasztowt 2013: 5).

In terms of domestic politics, the decrease of pro-Western rhetoric by the Georgian Dream activated some influential pro-Russian intellectual and political groups (the Soviet-era intelligentsia, first-generation politicians of post-Soviet independent Georgia, and a young generation of pro-Russian and Eurasianist NGOs). This securitises certain liberal (Western) values on the grounds of endangering Georgia's national culture and identity, thus undermining the pro-Western discourse. The pro-Russian voices on the part of some Georgian Dream coalition members also became louder in parliament. Pro-Russian sentiments have been fuelled by the appearance of anti-liberal and pro-Russian domestic actors in mass media, society, and the clergy, portraying the West as a decadent and hedonistic civilisation that contradicts the traditional values of Georgian culture. This contributes to the emergence of new anti-liberal and anti-Western discourses in the country, which are harmonious with Russian anti-Western propaganda based on securing orthodox Christianity. The postponement of NATO and EU membership for an undetermined period of time puts pressure on pro-Western political parties and contributes to the increased popularity of Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. Meanwhile, the image of Russia as

an enemy of Georgia has been gradually disappearing from the political speeches of the Georgian Dream coalition members (actually, it has never been codified as such by the Georgian Dream party members, short of a glum consent from their side on the issue while raised publicly by journalists in their questions), and, consequently, the discourse is changed in favour of normalisation of relations with Russia.

Unlike during the government of Saakashvili, Russia is no longer codified as the enemy of Georgia, whereas the idea of decoupling economics from politics in Georgia's relations with the Russian Federation has gradually gained ground among Georgian society. This shift in tendency was reflected in public opinion polls conducted in 2012– 2016. From 2012 to 2015, the number of those who support EU membership has tripled, from eleven to thirty-one percent; the influence of Russia has increased by seventeen percent, while that of the EU has decreased by twelve percent (Lebanidze 2016: 2). As this tendency is further sharpened by the absence of effective integration with the West, a portion of society has started to regard confrontation with Russia as political adventurism, for which Georgia paid more than it gained. This might lead Georgia to the path of slow de-Europeanisation, sliding deeper into political malaise, social apathy, and internal fragmentation (Falkowski 2016: 45-48), which might lead to the change in the priorities of the security sector reform. Evidently, this has already affected the mode and nature of security sector reform.

The inter-agency coordination regarding the containment of the Russian propaganda influence in Georgia has been weakened. Similarly, the mass influx of Russian citizens into Georgia, with long-term settlement plans, especially since February 2022 (with the start of the second Russian-Ukrainian War after the clashes of 2014– 2015), has not been securitised and codified as a threat to Georgia. Quite the opposite, the representatives of the government of Georgia interpret the fact as the rise of tourism in Georgia, which would contribute to the economic development of the country. There is a mismatch in the security sector reform in terms of the structures, institutions, and personnel responsible for the management, provision, and oversight of security in a country. There is no improvement in security sector governance (SSG), as there is no multi-stakeholder oversight by which a security sector is internally and externally governed.

Since 2012, pro-Russian forces have gradually become active on the Georgian political scene, which previously either hid themselves or were put under inconvenient circumstances by the government. During the United National Movement's rule, the pro-Russian option was marginal and barely noticeable, and the pro-Russian community was fragmented, internally divided, and ridden with conflicts, whereas under the rule of the Georgian Dream, it became an audible voice in Georgia's political life

(Falkowski 2016: 33-44). In 2012– 2015, the pro-Russian messages became particularly active in online media, TV, and radio programmes, circulating through various analytical programmes that locate Georgia's challenges and opportunities in the content of ongoing regional and international political processes (see: Dzvelishvili and Kupreishvili 2015) and denounce non-reliable, pro-Western foreign policy courses of the government.

After the Georgian Dream came to power, popular expectations of managing Georgia's foreign relations, both with the West and Russia, turned in their favour. This became possible due to two interrelated factors:

1. The Georgian Dream coalition maintained the pro-Western drive, and declarations regarding Georgia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures were still voiced loudly after 2012.
2. The situation became ripe for the increasing popularity of Georgian Dream's promises regarding balancing Russia and the West, bringing the country close to the West while simultaneously re-establishing political-economic relations with Russia. The latter was bound up with the long-term hope of restoring the territorial integrity of the country through dialogue with Moscow.

This new reality brought some of its (negative) consequences: in spite of a wide political and public consensus in the country regarding NATO membership, which was confirmed by the results of a 2008 plebiscite (seventy-seven per cent supporting Georgia's membership), support for Euro-Atlantic integration fell after elections of 2012– 2013. As a result, by 2016, suspicions appeared regarding the country's pro-Western policy and the sense of a need to find a balance between Russia and the West increased (CRRC-Georgia 2010; CRRC-Georgia 2013; CRRC-Georgia 2016). Russian agents of influence could thus capitalise on the part of the electorate that supports the normalisation policy with Russia. Although this scenario does not seem realistic presently, it might become a serious concern for political leadership in the future. The biggest challenge remains to convert the exercise of power from an arbitrary personal choice into mansions of institutional legality, anchoring state officials' deeds to the principles and purposes the constitution assigns to them, thus making Georgia far more solid and certainly safer for its citizens (Lorusso 2016). In addition, a great number of new Russian migrants who opt for permanent residence in Georgia are another challenge that needs proper reflection in the security sector reform process of the country. There is no proper coordination between a wide range of national, regional, and international actors who oversee the security sector reform process.

PRO-WESTERN COURSE AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Georgia's pro-Western aspirations and security sector reform, through the introduction of democratic standards of governance, has remained among the priority goals for the NATO integration policy agenda of Georgia. Reforms in the security sector mainly refer to building the defence institution and the security policy development process, as well as strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring their political oversight (Atlantic Council of Georgia 2015). Prioritisation of the security sector should have been determined by its critical test during the Russian–Georgian War of 2008. Most external threats to Georgia come from the Russian Federation, given that Georgia's determination to join the European and Euro-Atlantic structures – mainly NATO – is seen as unacceptable by Russia. The 2008 war proved the need for close cooperation among various security sector institutions (Majer 2013: 37). As the main threats to Georgia's way towards integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures come from Russia, all efforts of the security sector reform are directed to convince Georgia's Western partners that Georgia is committed to solving the existing territorial problems only through peaceful means. The European and Euro-Atlantic course of Georgian foreign policy serves the sustainable democratic development and security of Georgia, and it is not directed against any other country. This is the main problem considered unfavourably by Western partners, as it puts the pro-Western orientation of the country under serious strain. The Russian–Georgian War of 2008 was considered an unintended strategic consequence of the US democracy promotion project in Georgia, following the Rose Revolution of 2003 (Driscoll and Hidalgo 2014).

Today, the main directions of Georgia's security policy are structured around the domestic and foreign policy challenges of Georgia. These challenges include:

- De-occupation of the occupied territories and settlement of relations with the Russian Federation;
- Development of state institutions, reinforcement of democratic procedures, and democracy in general;
- Implementation of policy of inclusion;
- Development of Georgia's defence and security systems;
- Becoming a member of NATO and being integrated into the European Union (Majer 2013: 49).

Georgian security and threat perception are still strongly determined by the presence of the Russian troops in the Georgian territory, which has a decreasing impact on the actual reforms of the military. The military is no longer considered the primary tool of restoration of territorial integrity – the main lesson learned during the August War of 2008 (Ondrejcsák, Górka-Winter, Rácz and Střítecký 2013: 5). The security sector reform became the central benchmark through which integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures should be achieved, and from a long-term perspective, the country's territorial integrity restored. The above-mentioned circumstances, that is, the presence of Russian militaries in the territories of Georgia, have imposed some constraints on Georgia's security sector reform, and it has been considered a case of moderate success.

The security sector reform has been facing a range of problems, especially in the three areas that need awareness and solutions by the Georgian authorities:

- Local context: territorial fragmentation, lack of developed state of economy and established and experienced civil services;
- Incoherent funding and forward planning, as well as modernisation, driven successfully in the short- to medium-term;
- A lack of supply of personnel with an adequate number of dedicated, relevantly trained officials (Atlantic Council of Georgia 2015: 283-284).
- The security sector reform process has been further complicated by some pressing challenges:
- Apparent lack of trust by members of the public in state institutions, which influences legitimacy and trust in the state in providing public security;
- Economic decline and unsatisfied public expectations;
- Domestic insecurity: a wedge between the government and the people (Atlantic Council of Georgia 2015: 286).

Currently, in the case of Georgia, the security sector reform policies should contribute to state-building and peace-building processes under conditions of existing (ethnic) conflicts in the territory of Georgia. State building should be understood as the task of building a functioning and durable state capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood. This includes providing security from external threats and maintaining internal order: state-building with a focus on strengthening key state institutions, whereas nation building refers to a broader process of developing a shared sense of political community that is capable of binding together the population of a given state. Whereas the state has a central role in the state-building task, nation building also requires the mobilisation of a range of non-state stakeholders. Thus, state building comprises the practical task of

establishing or strengthening state institutions, whereas nation building is more concerned with the character of relations between citizens and their state (Dinnen 2007).

State building is the task of building functioning and durable states capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood. It includes providing security from external threats and maintaining internal order, raising, and collecting taxes, delivering essential services such as health and education, the provision of transport and communications infrastructure, and the prudent management of the economy. State building, with a focus on strengthening key state institutions, has long been a focus of international development assistance. Nation-building and state-building processes at a policy level are expected to lead recovery processes towards democratisation and participatory state institutions (Ghimire 2016: 2). Clearly, the conflicts in the territory of Georgia pose a serious threat to the state building and peace building processes, which could be mitigated through:

- Advancing political solutions to conflict through mediation, advisory, and technical support to the signatory parties of peace agreements on the implementation of the security sector reform provisions;
- Strengthening national ownership and the capacity to design and implement national security policies and strategies to enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and accountability of security institutions contributing to the restoration and extension of state authority;
- Promoting the coherence and effectiveness of international assistance to the security sector through coordination of partners, mobilisation of resources, and advisory support regarding national development and peacebuilding plans (Security Sector Reform – United Nations Peacekeeping).

State building is the task of building functioning and durable states capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood. The latter include providing security from external threats and maintaining internal order, raising, and collecting taxes, delivering essential services such as health and education, the provision of transport and communications infrastructure, and the prudent management of the economy. State building, with a focus on strengthening key state institutions, has long been a focus of international development assistance.

At present, some negative and positive aspects of the security sector reform in Georgia are apparent. The positive aspects include signs of recovery after the 2008 War and 2010 Global Economic Crisis, good progress in reforming the justice system,

improvements in the conduct of elections, constitutional reform, although controversial at some point, reforms in trade and business, regional development, and the reduction of administrative corruption. Nevertheless, negative aspects could not be neglected, as it adversely affects the democratisation process of the country; problems related to the security sector reform process include, but are not confined to, political, and media pluralism; continued (mainly elitist, not mass) corruption; concerns over freedom of association, employment, and social policies; Georgia's strong dependence on "external official financing" (Simons 2012: 287). Thus, the main problems for Georgia's security sector reform come not from security forces (military, police, intelligence services, border control, etc.), which have been more or less successfully reformed and meet EU–NATO standards, but from the sphere of democratic oversight of these institutions and their sustainable development in general (Simons 2012: 273).

Georgia has changed the perception of security and state interests' multiple times since the Rose Revolution, as well as after the emergence of the Georgian Dream as the ruling party of Georgia. These were the two radical shifts in relations with the Russian Federation. The first was from the United National Movement, which primarily sought rapprochement and later followed the policy of overt denial in favour of securing Western political and military assistance. This proved unrealistic with the Russian–Georgian August War of 2008. The second shift was with the Western partners, particularly from the Georgian Dream stakeholders, who pretended to maintain the pro-Western foreign policy course. However, they have been gradually undermining it with the suspension of the construction of Anaklia Deep Sea Port on the Black Sea shores and the dumping of Charles Michel's agreement between the Georgian Dream and the opposition parties, titled "A Way Ahead for Georgia", which, through electoral reform, should have contributed to further democratisation of Georgia. Following the Rose Revolution, the country's security and its provisions were determined in strong connection with its pro-Western foreign policy aspirations, although with the emergence of the Georgian Dream into power, flirting with Russia has started, which has not caused much protest in the population of Georgia so far. Meanwhile, the task of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) has been defined in accordance with the democratic state: the building of democratic institutions was promoted, and the establishment of parliamentary oversight over the security sector was attempted. This was implemented in the spirit of bringing Georgia closer to the Western/NATO military structures. To put it into a scheme, the Soviet security model – the security of a sovereign + regime security = state security – has transformed into the democratic model – citizen security + security of the society = state security (Ondrejcsák, Górka-Winter, Rácz and Střítecký 2013: 50-51). The reforms in the miliary structures – that is, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs

– were continued under the label of de-politicization of structures as they used to be during the rule of the United National Movement, as claimed by the Georgian Dream. Nevertheless, transparency and accountability remain the major deficiencies of security sector reform in Georgia, and these problems, without proper parliamentary oversight, which is barely present currently, can hardly be overcome.

CONCLUSION

Post-Rose Revolution Georgia has witnessed some radical or minor transformations or its attempts in foreign policy and security provisions across the change of the ruling political parties in the office. The Rose Revolution government of Mikheil Saakashvili tried to follow the line of securitisation of Georgia's foreign policy, which should disassociate it from the Russian Federation and bring it closer to Western political and security structures, such as the EU and NATO. Correspondingly, the security sector reform process was aimed at institutional transformation of the civil and military sectors in a way that would bring the country closer to Western structures. In this respect, Russia was securitised as the N1 enemy for Georgia, and the foreign policy and the security sector reform were synchronized to modernise and democratise the country, which was a necessary precondition for Georgia's eventual membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The heightened process of modernisation brought the military security structures in line with Western standards, although the crucial aspects of the security sector reform, such as parliamentary oversight over the security structures, have been lagging far behind the modernisation and contributed to the process of failed democratisation, making Georgia a hybrid regime, qualitatively similar to widely known dictablandas and democraduras. This process has negatively affected both the pro-Western foreign policy course and the security sector reform process, which has gradually undermined the monopolised pro-Western political discourse in the country.

The security sector reform became the central tenet of the country's security after the August War of 2008 and its defeat by the Russian Federation. One of the main problems of the security sector reform stems from the different perceptions of security threats posed to Georgia's foreign policy priorities, emerging from various political actors. Pro-Western forces argue the need for further reform of the security sector reform to address challenges stemming from Russia, from de-occupation of the Georgian territories to possible renewed military aggression from the side of the Russian Federation. By contrast, pro-Russian forces argue for detachment from the West to normalise relations with Russia, justifying this claim through the argument of launching a realistic foreign policy under the existing geopolitical reality in Georgia. For these groups, Georgia's security will be ensured only through a balanced

politics between Russia and the West. This bifurcation of politics and the non-determined policy of the ruling Georgian Dream government, both in terms of foreign policy and security sector reform, makes it hard to consolidate domestic and foreign politics, leaving it amenable to Russian encroachments.

Georgia's security sector reform is a subject of political elites' preferences, which complicates the process of consolidation around codified security threats and the foreign policy priorities of the country. This becomes evident with any change in the government, which signifies a possible change in the security sector reform through dubious statements regarding Georgia's foreign policy and security provisions. The long-term vision of foreign policy directions and aspirations should determine the coherence of the security sector reform, although Georgia still has to pass through some challenges to this end. Deepening democracy through the empowerment of institutions, which will increase the accountability of politicians and the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight over security structures, might speed up this process in the short or medium term.

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NONA KURDOVANIDZE

PIPELINE CORRIDORS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN GEORGIA

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia became a corridor for the transit of oil and gas from Azerbaijan to the West. New opportunities have allowed Georgia to reduce its dependence on Russian energy resources. However, Russia has continued to threaten Georgia's energy security. Among the various factors affecting energy security, geopolitical events are particularly significant. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made it clear that existing energy security models and approaches need to be reviewed. The purpose of this research is to study, in the wake of geopolitical events, the energy security architecture of Georgia, the challenges facing the security of Georgia's pipeline routes and the measures the state must take in response to them. It should be noted that despite the changes in the region in recent years, such as the active phase of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Georgia's strategic documents have not been revised accordingly. The existing documents are outdated and do not respond to geopolitical challenges both in the region and throughout the world. Therefore, although Georgia has recognised the significance of the current ongoing events for the region, there is no consistent policy for responding to them.

KEY WORDS: ***energy security, transit corridor, oil and gas pipelines, safety, security***

INTRODUCTION

Energy security is a component of national security. It is the task of any state to have secure, uninterrupted access to energy resources. However, in achieving this task, complex issues must be resolved, especially in countries that are energy consumers and do not have enough energy resources to meet their needs. In short, ES requires the continuous and safe consumption of energy resources. The European Commission defines ES as "the ability to ensure that future essential energy needs can be met, both by means of adequate domestic resources worked under economically acceptable conditions or maintained as strategic reserves, and by calling upon accessible and stable external sources supplemented where appropriate by strategic stocks" (European Commission 2000). Among the numerous factors

that affect ES, geopolitical events are particularly important. Energy resources can become a political tool to influence the supplier country, which affects both the consumer and the transit country. This has been demonstrated by resource-rich Russia, which continues to politicise its energy capabilities. On 24 February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine called into question the existing energy security models of countries that are dependent on Russian energy resources, particularly those in the European Union, which are significantly dependent on Russian gas (Udasin 2022). In response to the dramatically changed geopolitical situation, on 29 June 2022, the European Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation (EU) 2022/1032 amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1938 on measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and Regulation (EC) No 715/2009 on conditions for access to the Natural Gas Transmission Networks:

> *The impact of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine has shown that the existing security of supply rules are not adapted to sudden major changes in the geopolitical situation, in which supply shortages and price peaks can result not only from the failure of infrastructure or extreme weather conditions but also from intentional major events and from longer-lasting or sudden supply disruptions. It is therefore necessary to address the sudden increase in risks resulting from the current changes in the geopolitical situation, including the diversification of the European Union's energy supplies.* (EU 2022/1032)

According to the new rules, storage capacities are to be used appropriately in the EU "in a spirit of solidarity". Energy saving and energy efficiency have been determined at the EU level as the main pillars for strengthening the security of the gas supply (EU 2022/1032). However, Russia's war on Ukraine has forced the European Union to look for alternatives to Russian gas imports. In July 2022, the European Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with Azerbaijan to double importation of Azeri natural gas to at least twenty billion cubic metres a year by 2027 (Aljazeera 2022).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions addressed in this article are particularly relevant because important energy pipelines pass through Georgia, through which alternatives to Russian resources are supplied to EU countries. Therefore, the security of transit corridors is an important cornerstone of energy security. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: In the wake of geopolitical events, what is Georgia's energy security architecture?

RQ2: What challenges are faced by Georgia's energy routes?

RQ3: What measures has the state taken in response to these challenges?

THEORY AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this section is to provide the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research. In this research, the critical geopolitical perspective is used to examine and analyse the security of Georgia's energy transit routes. I chose this theoretical framework because transit security is linked to both geography and geopolitics. Critical geopolitics uses political geography to focus on critical readings of and engagement with hegemonic geopolitical discourses, which are vital parts of critical geopolitical analyses (Toal 1996). Furthermore, discourse is an important concept in critical geopolitics. Therefore, I apply the methodological framework of discourse analysis, a broad term that encompasses a wide array of methods and methodologies used across many disciplines. The term "discourse" refers to all forms of conversations and texts, such as interviews, written texts, and other sources. Because discourse analysis includes all kinds of verbal and textual material, it provides a good opportunity to describe reality.

For the purpose of this research, the methodological process was conducted in two phases: a preparatory phase and an analytical phase. In the preparatory phase, I selected the data sources, methods and instruments to formulate the research questions. In this research, I examine the ways in which Georgia's official documents and governing elite approach and explain pipeline security in a geopolitical context. Hence, two types of data sources were considered: texts and individuals. The data were collected in both interviews and texts that allowed for the generation of evidence. I selected interviewees based on the public roles they played during the process (e.g., prime minister and minister). The textual sources included a broad range of sources, such as legal acts, comments, academic articles and reports. In the second phase, I analysed the data collected from relevant legal acts, official statements, and interviews.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW GEORGIA BECAME A PIPELINE CORRIDOR

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia's regaining of independence, Georgia's energy sector faced collapse. Since 1992, energy resource-rich Azerbaijan has been developing its own fields through the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR). The year 1994 was a turning point in the development of Azerbaijani

resources. On 20 September 1994, the then President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, signed a contract for the development of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli oil fields, which was called the Contract of the Century (Komakhia 2017). During the period of Aliyev's rule, an oil strategy was developed to attract foreign investment, with the aim of making Azerbaijan the main oil-exporting country in the region, as well as a strategically important exporter of natural gas to neighbouring countries and, in the long term, to Europe (Komakhia 2017). At that time, Azerbaijan's energy policy came to the attention of international actors, and in 1995, it attracted the interest of the United States (US). As a result, the US federal government supported the construction of a pipeline from Baku to Supsa (Komakhia 2017).

In 1998, the issue concerning a route for the exportation of large reserves of oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field entered an active phase, which was finally resolved by the agreement to pass a pipeline through Georgia. However, Georgia's favourable geographical location was not the only factor that played a positive role in solving this issue. In resolving this issue, geopolitical concerns were particularly important in the decision. In particular, the new route could mitigate the West's dependence on Russian energy resources. The huge potential of the new pipelines for bringing Caspian energy to the world market by bypassing Russia was a key factor in the deal. Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, both geopolitical factors and its favourable geographical location allowed Georgia to perform the function of a transit pipeline corridor, which it successfully implemented. Accordingly, transit pipelines have played an important role in Georgia's energy security architecture.

PIPELINES IN GEORGIA

Currently, three regional energy routes pass through Georgia: the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. The Baku-Sufsa pipeline, which transports oil from the capital of Azerbaijan to the village of Supsa in Georgia, was the first energy transit project in Georgia. The pipeline begins at the Sangachal terminal near Baku and travels through Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Supsa terminal on the Georgian coast of the Black Sea. The length of this pipeline is 829 km. Construction began following the ratification of the intergovernmental agreement between Azerbaijan and Georgia in April 1996, and it was completed in November 1998. This pipeline has been in operation since February 1999. On 17 April 1999, the Supsa terminal was inaugurated. During the first six months of 2022, the Sangachal terminal exported seven million barrels of oil through the Western Route Export Pipeline (WREP) (BP Azerbaijan https://www.bp.com/en_az/azerbaijan/home/who-we-are/operationsprojects/pipelines/wrep.html).

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline was the first oil transportation route between the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas. The oil pipeline went into full operation in 2006. The Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline carries oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Deepwater Gunashli (ACG) field rom Shah Deniz across Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. It links the Sangachal terminal on the shores of the Caspian Sea to the Ceyhan marine terminal on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. The pipeline is buried along its entire length of 1,768 km: 443 km in Azerbaijan; 249 km in Georgia; and 1,076 km in Turkey. The Azerbaijan and Georgia sections of the pipeline are operated by British Petroleum (BP) on behalf of its shareholders in Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Co., while the Turkish section is operated by BOTAS International Limited (BIL). On 12 December 2021, BTC reached a significant milestone by transporting 500 million tonnes of oil from the Sangachal terminal near Baku across Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to Ceyhan. Since the 1,768-km-long BTC pipeline became operational in June 2006 until the end of the second quarter of 2022, it transported 3.87 billion barrels (more than 516 million tonnes) of crude oil that was loaded on 5,087 tankers and sent to world markets (BP Azerbaijan https://www.bp.com/en_az/azerbaijan/home/who-we-are/operationsprojects/pipelines/wrep.html).

The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline (i.e., the Shah Deniz pipeline) originates in the Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan and passes through Georgia to Erzurum, Turkey. The South Caucasus pipeline (SCP) was built to export Shah Deniz gas from Azerbaijan to Georgia and Turkey. The pipeline begins at the Sangachal terminal near Baku. It follows the route of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey, where it is linked to the Turkish gas distribution system. The pipeline has been operational since late 2006, transporting gas to Azerbaijan and Georgia, and beginning in July 2007, to Turkey from Shah Deniz Stage 1. The pipeline is 691 km in length, with 443 km in Azerbaijan and 248 km in Georgia. The SCP has been operational since late 2006, transporting Shah Deniz gas to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The expanded section of the pipeline commenced commercial deliveries to Turkey in June 2018 and to Europe in December 2020. During the first half of 2022, the daily average export throughput of the SCP was 56.9 million cubic metres of gas per day (BP Azerbaijan https://www.bp.com/en_az/azerbaijan/home/who-we-are/operationsprojects/pipelines/wrep.html).

THE PLACE OF ENERGY SECURITY IN GEORGIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

Publicly available documents that concern issues of the national security of Georgia are scarce. There are only two normative acts in this regard, which I will review below.

The first document is the Resolution adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2011, which approved the Concept of National Security of Georgia (hereinafter, the Security Concept). The document updated the National Security Document that was adopted in 2005. The Security Concept follows a declarative line and emphasises that it is in Georgia's national interest to ensure the provision of energy security. Thus, Georgia's priority has been to continue the diversification of energy sources and transportation routes. It is equally important to promote the maximum utilisation of domestic resources as well as the further modernisation and development of the energy system and integration into the regional energy infrastructure. Increasing Georgia's energy potential has had a positive impact on the country's security and economic development, as well as on the well-being of its citizens. The Resolution also addresses the importance of Georgia's performance of the transit function and its strengthening. At the concept level, Georgia has expressed its readiness to be more actively involved in international energy, transport and communication projects.

According to the Resolution, energy corridors are part of the energy security policy. It contains the following declaratory note:

> *[Georgia] recognises the role that is assigned to the country in the process of supplying energy resources from the Caspian Sea and Central Asian regions to the rest of the world through alternative routes. The Black Sea ports of Georgia, the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline are already operational projects of strategic importance. The Government of Georgia is committed to ensuring its effective functioning and the development of prospective projects.* (Concept of National Security of Georgia 2011)

Another document that defines the state strategy in the field of energy was approved by the Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia in 2015. The Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the main directions of state policy in the field of energy of Georgia emphasises that "Georgia is an important transit country". As a corridor connecting Europe and Asia, it has the potential to increase its role in the implementation of East–West and North–South transit projects. The effective use of geopolitical locations will contribute to the improvement of the country's energy security and economic development.

To improve the country's energy security, it is important to diversify sources of oil, natural gas and electricity supply, as well as effective utilisation of local energy resources and, if necessary, the creation of minimum strategic reserves of oil and/or oil

products. Of the small reserves of natural gas, oil and coal in Georgia, a certain amount is currently being obtained, although a significant part of these primary resources is still unexploited. Thus, it is necessary to maximise the detection and rational utilisation of existing stocks and potential resources and to satisfy the current demand for electricity in Georgia in order to create its own energy resources by gradually replacing imported energy carriers.

Both documents contained significant shortcomings in terms of energy security. First, it should be noted that neither document includes a definition of energy security. Therefore, it is difficult to determine what Georgia means by the term energy security. Another weakness of these documents is their content, which does not specify tasks or their implementation. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate Georgia's energy security strategy based on them. It should also be noted that despite the changes in the region in recent years, which include the active phase of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the strategic documents of Georgia have not changed, which clearly indicates that they are outdated and do not respond to the current geopolitical challenges in the region and throughout the world.

RUSSIA'S ARSENAL

Russia often uses its own energy resources as a weapon to pursue its own interests against consumer and transit countries. Russia uses different tactics in its energy "arsenal". Based on historical examples, some are the following: reduction of gas supply; interruption of oil supply; damage to infrastructure to disrupt supply; and increased gas prices.

From 2004– 2006, Russia used the tariff increase method to increase political pressure on Georgia. During this period, the price of 1,000 cubic metres of gas increased from USD 50 to USD 235 (Kvaratskhelia et al. 2022). In 2006, as a result of damage caused by the simultaneous sabotage of two independent branches of the main pipeline in Russian territory, the gas supply to Georgia was interrupted for almost two weeks (Kvaratskhelia et al. 2022).

The geopolitical crisis after Russia's invasion of Ukraine raised the question of what impact it would have on Georgia's energy security in the short and long terms. To answer this question, I first assessed the degree to which Georgia depends on Russian energy resources. Georgia has various energy ties with Russia, such as the following: electricity imports, including imports from the occupied Abkhazia region; synchronous operation with Russia's electric power grid; transit of Russian electricity

to Turkey through Georgia; natural gas imports for local consumers; natural gas transit to Armenia through Georgia; import of petroleum products; and the presence of Russian capital in Georgia's energy sector.

Most of Georgia's electricity demand is met by domestic hydropower (up to 70%) and thermal power plants (more than 20%). Electricity imports from Russia peaked in 2021 (1.245 TWh), reaching 9.1% of gross domestic consumption. A large part of Russian electricity imports go to occupied Abkhazia (Kvaratskhelia et al. 2022).

After the South Caucasus pipeline (SCP) became operational, Azerbaijan became the main supplier of gas for Georgia. Connection with Russia is limited to the North–South Main Gas Pipeline, which transits natural gas from Russia to Armenia. Based on an agreement with Gazprom Export, Georgia imports Russian gas through the same pipeline. In 2021, 15% of the gas consumed in Georgia was imported from Russia (Kvaratskhelia et al. 2022).

The petroleum product market in Georgia is diversified, with imports coming from several countries. From 2016– 2020, the average annual growth in imports was 12%. A significant portion of petroleum products (17% in 2021) are imported from Russia (Kvaratskhelia et al. 2022). Because Georgia is minimally dependent on Russian energy resources at this stage, it is unlikely that its energy security will face challenges in terms of supply disruptions. However, a question has arisen regarding Georgia's protection of its transit infrastructure and whether there are potential threats in this regard.

PIPELINE SAFETY IN GEORGIA

Pipeline infrastructure is critical for the transportation of oil and natural gas. Therefore, its safety and security are for energy security. The analysis of the literature identified two main categories of security threats: theft and sabotage. Both theft and sabotage can have severe results, such as physical damage to pipelines, interruption of energy supply, loss of oil and gas, environmental pollution, and negative effects on socioeconomic and political stability (Chen et al. 2021) To ensure the safe functioning of the transit infrastructure, it is crucial to establish multilateral cooperation formats between the producing, consuming and transit infrastructure countries.

In the context of transit pipeline security in Georgia, it is important to consider previous experiences. In 2008, two incidents occurred on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. On August 5, there was a malfunction in the early warning system on the

Turkish section of the pipeline, which caused an increase in pressure inside the oil pipeline and, eventually, an explosion of the pipeline itself. As a result of the explosion, the oil supply was interrupted for three weeks. The incident was blamed on a cyberattack by Russian special services. Based on interviews with American intelligence officers, Bloomberg reported that the explosion was triggered remotely and its organisers were connected with Russia (Robertson and Riley 2014). In the same year, on August 7, when the war with Russia was being conducted in Georgian territory, Russian military planes dropped several explosive devices near the transit oil pipeline. If the target was the oil pipeline, then this operation was unsuccessful, and Georgia escaped an explosion. However, it is possible that the goal was not to blow up the pipeline but to send a message to Georgia to demonstrate its vulnerability to Russian military aggression.

To ensure the protection of strategic pipelines, a special department was created in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. The tasks of the department are to protect and ensure the safety of the Western export pipeline (i.e., the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, including the Supsa oil terminal), as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the South Caucasian gas pipeline and their infrastructure facilities (hereinafter, the facility to be protected). For this purpose, relevant complex measures have been taken, including the following: counter-terrorist and counter-intelligence; participation in public security and law and order protection measures; implementation of preventive measures to eliminate and prevent crime and other violations; identification and prevention of administrative violations within the scope of competence; performance of functions and tasks defined by the Law of Georgia "On Police" and other normative acts within the scope of competence (the regulations of the Department of Strategic Pipelines Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia 2016). The department is accountable to the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Deputy Minister of Curatorship (if any) (the regulations of the Department of Strategic Pipelines Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia 2016). The head of the department is the director, who submits a report on the department's activities to the minister and the curator deputy minister (if any) every year or upon request (the regulations of the Department of Strategic Pipelines Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia 2016). Activity reports are not made public, so the issues that the department addresses each year and whether threats have increased recently remain unknown. Regarding the department's activities, information is available in public sources about joint exercises that are held annually in all three countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey) on a rotational basis. For example, in 2022, employees of the Department of Strategic Pipeline Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia participated in the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey command and staff exercise "ETERNITY 2022", which was held in the Republic of Turkey. The training scenario was based on a peacekeeping operation that involved the protection of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline during a crisis situation. The training was successfully conducted and positively evaluated by the participating parties (Ministry of Internal affairs of Georgia https://police.ge/en/shinagan-saqmeta-saministros-tanamshromlebma-monatsileoba-miighes-saertashoriso-stsavlebashi-%C2%A0/15536).

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS BY GEORGIA IN THE CONTEXT OF ENERGY SECURITY CHALLENGES AFTER RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE

In addition to the fact that the official documents did not reflect the changes that would respond to the new challenges, it was interesting to note the manner in which the Georgian authorities articulated the latest threats. However, the official interviews and statements on this issue are limited, and they did not allow for comprehensive data collection. Nevertheless, some information was found in open sources.

On February 25, the second day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Prime Minister of Georgia said, *"Georgia is not in any danger"* (Gharibashvili 2022). In a statement on 10 March 2022, Juansher Burchuladze, the Minister of Defence of Georgia, stated that work on the Security Doctrine would be completed shortly. According to Burchuladze,

> *[The] challenge is the same as it was classically; the threat is the same, it is just a war in the region … Now, the classification of threats has not changed; the intensity has changed. We see risks and threats from where we used to see them; just it is intensified. Accordingly, the intensity will increase on our side. The threats that we have written in the documents have not changed. The intensity changed. Accordingly, we, on our part, are also working on strengthening the intensity – both with partners and with our internal resources. In theory, the threat could be complex, but at this point, we do not see any specific threat in this regard. We are working intensively to prevent the development of the trend of threats* (Burchuladze 2022).

> *In October 2022, in Prague, within the framework of the first summit of the European political union, the Prime Minister of Georgia met with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. During the meeting, the parties talked about Russia's aggression in Ukraine and its impact on Georgia, the region, and the world in general. The government's official website notes*

> *that the prime minister paid particular attention to the efforts of the European Union to establish peace in the South Caucasus and Georgia's readiness to contribute to this work. During the meeting, the parties discussed further rapprochement and infrastructural communication between Georgia and the European Union in the transport, energy and digital spheres* (Government of Georgia 2022).

In October 2022, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, met with the Minister of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Parviz Shahbazov. The official statement released by the Government of Georgia confirmed that the strategic partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan, including in the fields of transport and energy, was discussed at the meeting. It was noted at the meeting that Georgia was ready to deepen regional ties in the direction of energy security through close cooperation with Azerbaijan (Government of Georgia 2022).

Based on the results of the data analysis, although Georgia has recognised the importance of the current ongoing events in the region, it has not developed a consistent policy to respond to them.

SUMMARY

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 called into question the existing energy security models of countries that are dependent on Russian energy resources. In particular, countries in the European Union are significantly dependent on Russian gas. The geopolitical crisis caused by Russia's invasion raised the question of the impacts of geopolitical uncertainty on Georgia's energy security in the short and long terms. Moreover, history has shown that Russia often uses its own energy resources as a weapon to pursue its own interests against consumer and transit countries. However, because Georgia is minimally dependent on Russian energy resources at present, it is unlikely that the country's energy security will face supply disruptions. This does not rule out the fact that Georgia's energy security is under potential threat from Russia, especially because pipelines from Azerbaijan to Europe pass through Georgia, bypassing Russia. Based the analysis of data collected from publicly available documents, it is possible that Georgia's policy contains significant shortcomings in terms of energy security.

At the legislative and policy levels, Georgia has not clearly defined energy security; therefore, it is difficult to determine its meaning in the context of this country. Another weakness of policy documents is their general content, which does not specify the objectives, tasks or the manner of their implementation. As a result, it

is difficult to evaluate Georgia's energy security strategy based on them. It should also be noted that despite the changes in the region in recent years (i.e., the active phase of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's invasion of Ukraine), Georgia's existing strategic documents have not changed, despite the fact that they are outdated and do not respond to the geopolitical challenges in the region and throughout the world. On one hand, Georgia has recognised the importance of the current ongoing events for the region; however, no consistent policy has been developed to respond to them.

To ensure the safe functioning of the transit infrastructure, it is crucial to have multilateral cooperation between producing, consuming and transit countries. Open sources have confirmed that certain formats of cooperation exist between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Furthermore, to ensure the protection of strategic pipelines, a special department was created in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. However, its activity reports are not made public, so the issues this department addresses each year and whether threats have increased recently remain unknown.

This research has demonstrated that although Georgia has recognised the importance of current ongoing events in the region, it has not developed a consistent policy to respond to them. In general, the development of these events indicates the importance of the issue. Therefore, it is vital to continue studying pipeline security in Georgia.

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REPORT ON PILOT PROJECTS FROM YOUNG PEACEBUILDERS SUPPORTED BY CORRIDORS

At CORRIDORS, we contribute to peacebuilding in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe by tackling the root causes of conflict. Thereby, we support people from the grassroots to the policy level and build mutual understanding through dialogue over the divide. We are convinced that, transforming protracted conflicts cannot take place without the meaningful inclusions of diverse actors. Empowering and connecting these people to become agents of change and prepare their societies for peace is key. This applies particularly to young actors whose greater participation in the peacebuilding process is essential. The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 recognizes the important role of young people in promoting peace and security and highlights the need to involve and empower young people in peacebuilding efforts.

Several reasons can be identified for this:

- Young people are disproportionately affected by conflict. They may be forced to flee their homes, lose access to education, and experience trauma and violence. Involving young people in peacebuilding efforts ensures that their voices and needs are heard and that they are part of the solution.
- Young people bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to peacebuilding efforts. They are often adept at using modern technology to mobilize and organize, and they bring a fresh perspective and new ideas to innovate on complex issues.
- Young people are often at the forefront of social and political movements, and they have the potential to be powerful agents of change. Involving young people in peacebuilding efforts empowers them to take ownership of their communities and work towards a more peaceful and just future.
- Young people are the leaders of tomorrow and involving them in peacebuilding efforts is essential for building sustainable peace.

Greater involvement of young actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is particularly needed in the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus. The regions conflicts are characterised by shrinking spaces for dialogue and knowledge transfer across conflict lines, a limited understanding of the complex conflict structures and a need for new and innovative ideas to peacefully address them. After more than 30 years of unresolved conflict, there is a particular lack of young specialists in the field of civil society conflict transformation. A generational change is emerging here, as long-established activists are slowly having to step into the second row. Consequently, young actors throughout the Caucasus need to gain the knowledge and experience to constructively transform conflicts and support social change.

Our project **ADVANCING YOUNG PEACEBUILDER CAREERS** has been dedicated to this goal for three years. In 2022, we were able to support small pilot projects of our participants for the first time, which was an important extension of our previous efforts. Supporting pilot projects of young activists is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it promotes innovation and creativity. Young activists often bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to social and political issues. Supporting their pilot projects allows them to experiment with innovative approaches to addressing complex problems, which can lead to more effective solutions. Secondly, it empowers youth. Supporting pilot projects of young activists gives them the opportunity to take leadership roles and develop important skills such as project management, communication, and problem-solving. This can increase their self-confidence and help them become agents of positive change in their communities. Thirdly, pilot projects allow to test new approaches to long-standing issues or to engage new groups. Innovation does not come from repeating the tried and tested or from avoiding risks. Supporting pilot projects of young activists can help to break the cycle of inaction and create momentum for change, as they can serve as a testing ground for larger initiatives. Lessons learned from these projects can inform future interventions and thus contribute to sustainable change.

The two funded pilot projects were presented by the participants in our dialogue workshop in summer 2022 and further developed under mentoring. They reflect our approach to dialogue, which combines problem-finding dialogue with interest-driven cooperation across the divides. With this approach, we build safe spaces in heavily polarized conflicts and facilitate meaningful, diverse, and impactful dialogues. Above all, we follow a human-centric approach to support individual actors in developing their human and professional potential to contribute to peacebuilding processes. We are therefore very pleased to provide a brief overview of the funded pilot projects, their results and important lessons learned.

PILOT PROJECT I:
BETTER CAUCASUS – SOUTH CAUCASIAN CIVIC INITIATIVE

BY TAIA TSIKLAURI, NAIRA SARDARYAN, LALA SAFARLI

The challenges young people face, including inclusion, empowerment, and social and economic development, are similar in all countries in South Caucasus. With minor variations and country-specific peculiarities, these challenges generally fit the following categories: a lack of opportunities for self-development, a lack of employment and self-employment opportunities, and a lack of meaningful participation and communication. These obstacles exacerbate the social and economic inclusion risk, especially for rural youths, who are deprived of most career self-development options due to the absence of infrastructure in rural areas. As a result, these young people often are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). NEET youth faces several challenges and are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities, such as:

- **Lack of access to education and training opportunities:** NEET youth may lack access to formal education or vocational training that could provide them with the necessary skills to enter the workforce.
- **Limited job opportunities:** NEET youth may face significant barriers in finding employment due to a lack of work experience, qualifications, and social networks.
- **Financial insecurity:** NEET youth often have limited financial resources, leading to social exclusion, limited opportunities for personal growth, and a lack of motivation to pursue education or employment.
- **Mental health issues:** NEET youth are at increased risk of developing mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, which can be exacerbated by social isolation and lack of purpose.
- **Limited social support:** NEET youth may lack positive role models and support networks, contributing to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and disengagement.

To address these challenges, NEET youth may require tailored support programs that combine education and training opportunities with social and emotional support. As we are three friends representing all three South Caucasian states – Naira Sardaryan from Armenia, Lala Safarli from Azerbaijan and Taia Tsiklauri from Georgia – we started a joint project focused on rural youth empowerment. The Better Caucasus initiative is a pilot project, which was developed based on the finding that youth in our communities is facing similar challenges. As part of this pilot project, we have mobilized young people (16 – 30 years) in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to participate in one-week trainings sessions addressing the most pressing youth challenges.

TRAINING SESSIONS IN ARMENIA

In Armenia, we engaged rural youths in the village Arshaluys, which is part of the enlarged Khoy community. The village is one of the most active in the region and has a large group of engaged young people who are focused on change and initiating new community and youth-related projects. Over the past 10 years, these active youths have organized various events, such as festivals, quests, volunteer environmental activities around the village, charity projects, trainings and capacity-building activities for young people and women. On a local level, there have been many cooperation attempts with the authorities; some succeeded while some did not. Consequently, we decided to include the community development project's topic into the program and extend the skills of the participants through community problem analysis, project design and cooperation with the local authorities in the implementation. Moreover, there is always a big need for career orientation among younger school-age participants in addition to employment and labor market analysis for students and recent graduates. Hence, in the planning phase we sought to deliver a training with all of these needs considered. During this phase, when disseminating information about the training, we received a request from Ejmiatsin State college to conduct the same sessions for their students. Our team accepted, and we decided to split the training dates: two days at the college and two days in the community. For the college, we only focused on employability, whereas the community training included career orientation as well.

Stakeholders' and partners' engagement: Initially, we engaged local authorities, groups and educational institutions in the project. Geghakert Youth Center was among the first to respond and provided the community center for the implementation of the project. The center was established by the community head and renovated with the support of local donors to serve the needs of 17 rural communities. We also had smooth cooperation with the Ejmaitsin State College, which was looking for more projects for their students, as a main part of their daily activities is providing career orientation and support to graduating students. During the project we had three volunteers from the Arshaluys and Geghakert villages for the community session and two volunteers from the college who helped to organize

the meetings and logistics. The Arshaluys student union actively supported the dissemination of the information. For the project to impact the other members of the community as well, we decided to order the food from a local cook.

Trainings and trainers: For the community development project component, we hosted Karen Ayvazyan, who is an experienced local and international trainer in the Council of Europe trainers pool. A session on trafficking was delivered by Hasmik Hakobyan, a trainer and expert from the Democracy Today NGO, who has been working with victims of trafficking for around 30 years. The sessions on job interviews and career orientation were conducted by RTISD staff members Naira Sardaryan and Seda Girgoryan. At the college, we centered more on career orientation and the issues that college students may face when searching for a job. Thus, we invited an expert in human resources (HR), Ani Harutyunyan, to share the HR perspective on job seeking and hiring as well as another expert, Sona Shakhkian, to discuss CV and writing techniques. Seda Grigoryan, an HR professional, conducted a session about interviews, and Naira Sardaryan delivered a training on the impact of bullying in educational institutions. The latter topic was requested by the management of the college due to the increase in the number of cases of bullying among students. The same session on trafficking was delivered at the college. In total, we managed to engage 40 young people in the trainings.

TRAINING SESSIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

In Azerbaijan, the training sessions took place in the Shamkir Youth House on weekends in October 2022. Shamkir is located in the north-west of Azerbaijan and has little over 40.000 inhabitants. The first seminar was conducted on October 16. After a brief introduction phase, the participants' level of information and understanding about public speaking was determined. The sociometric methodology was applied, where the participants had to move to the left side if they agreed with the statements and to the right side if they disagreed. Some examples of the statements are as follows: "Communication skills are essential for everyone" and "Body language is the important part of communication." Apart from choosing a side, the participants were asked to explain their decisions, and this triggered a constructive dialogue between the participants. Then, the trainer instructed the participants on how to improve their communication skills. At the end of the session, the participants evaluated the session using Dixit cards.

The second and third seminars were held on the October 22 and 23, respectively. Asiman Gojayev conducted the sessions. The topic was "From idea to a project." The participants were taught how to develop an idea into a project. The 5E (ehtimal:

reality, enerji: resources, ehtiyac: need, effect: effect, esq: motivation) method was used. The participants discussed some project ideas and checked them using the 5E method. The following step was devoted to defining the existing problems and analyzing their root causes. The "problem tree" methodology was applied for this purpose. The whole group was divided into mini-groups according to their preferences, and each group made a problem tree for a chosen specific problem. Afterwards, each group presented their findings, answered the questions from the audience and added some recommendations to their problem trees.

The fourth meeting was held on October 29. This session was about how to write an effective social project. The participants were informed about SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). The project proposal template was introduced to the participants, and they were taught about problem analysis, project goals, activity planning, budgeting, etc. Then, they prepared their small-scale project proposals in groups. In the last session, the groups presented their project proposals and gave feedback and suggestions to each other. The participants received certificates at the end of the meeting.

In total, we were able to train eight young people from Shamkir and surrounding villages. Moreover, the participants developed the idea to organize additional short seminars in schools of surrounding villages. Subsequently, we went to four schools in rural areas and conducted seminars with participants of the project. The sessions were designed based on the ages and interests of the students. This enabled the participants of our training to apply what they had learned immediately and the project to reach a larger group of rural youth.

TRAINING SESSIONS IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, we conducted five-day trainings in Dusheti, on the premises of the Center of Culture of Dusheti Municipality. The trainings took place on October 17– 21 during the afternoon. Training topics were chosen according to the needs of local youths, which we determined with the help of the local youth advisory council members through discussion prior to the start of our project. The first day included self-presentation, self-development and a practical session on peer-to-peer interviewing. These sessions helped the participants to learn more, about each other and allowed us to check their presentation skills. The second day focused on career development issues and how to succeed in professional life by preparing a strong resume and motivation letter, when required, and the importance of being confident. We closed the day with a role-play, to practice interview processes and to apply self-presentation skills. For the third day of trainings, we chose career

planning and development as topics along with networking, which is one of the most useful tools for being an active citizen and professional. On the fourth day of the sessions, we spoke about educational and volunteering opportunities for Georgian youths locally and in Europe. We discussed the importance of volunteering and experiencing cultural and language diversity through various exchange programs. An exciting part of our training involved discussions about social entrepreneurship as part of community development. We had a guest speaker (online), Keti Molashvili, one of the founders of "Knowledge Café", a social enterprise in the Kakheti region that is highly successful and supportive of local youths and elderly people. The participants had the chance to discuss local challenges and ideas with Keti and get some advice from their elder colleague.

The final day was devoted to project proposal writing and how to conduct local initiatives. The participants had to identify problems/challenges in their communities and brainstorm ideas to tackle them. During group work, they developed several ideas for local initiatives, which they presented before the final remarks and received feedback. A representative of the Meyer's Youth Advisory Council also attended the sessions, which gave the participants an opportunity to present and discuss their ideas with the official directly. During the exchange, we discussed how the g with the local administration could provide support for the local youths and their specific initiatives. As a practical outcome of the sessions, the local Youth Advisory Council representative agreed to include these ideas in their plan for the following year's activities. Participants in the trainings were also invited and accepted as volunteers by the council, to work on their activities as well as on new initiatives. Even though only 5 of the original 10 participants from Dusheti as well as from the villages of the municipality, were able to take part in the whole training actively, it was still a great success in terms of social and political inclusion and activation of youth.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FURTHER IDEAS

While the sessions were successful in every case overall, there were some challenges that we encountered and will consider in future activities. The first was finding participants and correctly targeting the dissemination of the information about the project. We contacted local officials and administration. However, we did not approach schools/colleges directly, which might have allowed us to reach bigger audiences and spread useful information and experiences among more people. Second, finding a compatible time for all the participants was challenging, as they were not only school or university students but also young people working locally or in other nearby towns/cities with other responsibilities. Finally, before we could

explain our initiative and the scope of the project, we encountered trust issues with local officials and organizations, which were unsure about the purpose of our visits or approach to local challenges. Fortunately, this was a mild obstacle, and we got gained their trust and support after sharing the project objectives and planning.

As mentioned above, the training sessions were a pilot project for our Better Caucasus initiative. As planned, we helped young people from all three South Caucasian countries develop skills and knowledge, supporting their active participation and local community development. Hopefully, the project will proceed as planned, and Component 2 will involve all the participants of Component 1 in working together to review regional challenges and develop solutions. Component 3 of the project will build on the first two components, focusing more on analysis and solutions to youth poverty and the vulnerability challenges by developing a practical handbook on professional orientation, career development and financial sustainability for NEET youths in South Caucasus.

PILOT PROJECT II: YOUTH ON POLITICS

BY DIANA MLHAMYAN

After the second Karabakh– Azerbaijani war of 2020, Armenian society faced serious problems. 90,000 IDPs were transferred to Armenia after the war, around 4,000 soldiers have died from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and after all of this, the relations are still unsettled. Twice after 2020 in May 2021 and September 2022, military clashes happened again, but this time between the Armenian– Azerbaijani forces on the territory of Armenia, and after both clashes, a part of the Azerbaijani forces continues to remain on the territory of Armenia. This situation has a severe socio-psychological impact on the population of Armenia, especially on the youth who will be targeted in the case of military operations. At present, apathetic moods and indifference towards everything that is happening inside the country and at the border are very noticeable among young people. But a small part of young people in regions and in the capital Yerevan remain interested in this newly created reality, which forces decisions to be made regarding the stabilization of the relations.

After the second Karabakh war, another critical issue came into the discussions, except for Armenia– Azerbaijani relations. The normalization process in Armenian– Turkish relations, which, unlike previous times, now seems to be in the practical stage become one of the main discussed topics. The issue of understanding how Armenians, and especially the youth, think about the stabilization of these relations and how they evaluate this process becomes essential again. It should be noted that the youth is also not oriented in this matter; they have legitimate fears, which we have tried to understand within the framework of the project.

In such conditions, when there are serious problems that the country face, which determine the future of our state, it is crucial to have such platforms that will enable young people be part of the conversation. Youth in Armenia needs spaces to raise a number of issues that they would not want to raise in another places, or to discuss issues that will determine their future. With the Youth on Politics project, we aimed to create these safe platforms for youth discussions. Within the project, young people from different marzes / regions had the opportunity to discuss topics related to Armenia and its internal and external challenges.

STARTING POINT AND THEORY OF CHANGE OF THE PROJECT

The project's goal was to provide a platform to young people and encourage discussions among them on disputed issues, which they would not discuss in other circumstances. We believe such discussions can bring young people out of apathetic moods and encourage them to take the initiative in starting their own discussions. Moreover, these discussions can connect young people from different circles and maybe initiate cooperation between them in the future, creating a snowflake effect.

Before starting the project, we had a rough idea of what young people think about the things happening around Armenia. In addition, it has become clear to us that a considerable part of young people have apathetic moods, and do not intend to take part in the decision-making process. To address this situation, we organized five youth discussions, three of them in the capital and two in the regions. We wanted to understand better whether the youth in Yerevan and in other marzes have different views on the events. Moreover, we wanted to encourage different youth groups to take an active part in the decision-making process in the future. During the events, we have had politicians and young experts as guest speakers to provide input that can help young people to start a discussion on specific issues.

IMPLEMENTATION

Before starting the meetings, we made a list of guests that we were going to invite to conduct the discussions and answer the questions of the young people. Within the framework of the project, we were able to host:

- **Edmon Marukyan**
  (Ambassador at large)
- **Styopa Safaryan**
  (former President of the Public Council, former member of Parliament)
- **Tatul Hakobyan**
  (journalist)
- **Artur Adamyan**
  (representative of the RA National Assembly's External Relations Department)
- **Yuri Movsesyan**
  (student of YSU International Relations faculty)

The guest of the first discussion in Yerevan was Edmon Marukyan, Ambassador at large of RA. In total, 20 young people participated in the discussion, which mainly related to the signing of the Armenian–Azerbaijani peace treaty, Armenian–Russian relations, and the Karabakh conflict in general. The second meeting took place in Ijevan, with Artur Adamyan as the guest speaker and 23 participants. During the discussion, several of the participants considered the stabilization of Armenian–Turkish relations and the opening of communications as a necessity. However, they also stressed that this would be possible only after eliminating the atmosphere of hatred and with mutual trust. A sentiment which was also expressed regarding Armenian–Azerbaijani relations. During the following discussion in Yerevan (with Styopa Safaryan and 14 participants), a very active debate centered around Nagorno Karabakh. After Mr. Safaryan outlined the interests of the involved conflict parties, the young people were highly involved and expanded the discussion on the future status of Karabakh as well. The fourth meeting was organized in Gyumri, with Yuri Movsesyan and Artur Adamyan. Considering that Gyumri directly borders the Republic of Turkey, the main topic discussed was the opening of the border with Turkey and its possible economic and security challenges. Like in Ijevan, the young people were full of doubts about the process. The 18 participants raised the expectation that young people should be more involved in the process of stabilizing relations and that it should be a two-way process. The series of meetings ended in Yerevan, where eight young people had a conversation with Tatul Hakobyan on the development of relations between Armenia and its neighbors.

At the end of each discussion, all participants were invited to participate in an essay contest on topics related to then events. The topics were:

- Post-war Armenia. How to communicate with neighbors?
- How do I see the regulation of Nagorno Karabakh conflict?
- What is my vision of peace and war?
- Economic interdependence. Is it possible to cooperate with Azerbaijan?
- Armenian–Turkish relations. Is the opening of the border a new opportunity or a new danger?

We also suggest that participants could choose other topics on related questions. At the end of the essay contest, we had three winners, each receiving 100 Euros as a scholarship for educational expenses.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT AND FURTHER IDEAS

The Youth on Politics project was a platform for many young people to discuss a number of topics that, under other circumstances young people would not be able to discuss. The discussions were also unique in the sense that young people had an opportunity to directly ask questions to politicians responsible for the field and political processes. Since the opinions of young people are vital in the relations to be built between Armenia and its neighbors, more youth inclusion in social and political discourses is needed. The main thing I learned during the project was that there are topics in which a vast part of society is not yet ready to participate. However, given the right setting significant parts of the younger generation are interested to join these difficult discussions. Therefore, similar discussions can be organized in other marzes as well, to understand a broader spectrum of what young people think about conflict resolution and normalization questions.

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