

**The Caucasus  
&  
Globalization**

**Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies**

**Vol. 1 (2), 2007**

**Ethnic Myths and Perceptions as Hurdle to Conflict Resolution:  
Armenian-Azerbaijani Case<sup>1</sup>**

Farid Shafiyev<sup>2</sup>

*Abstract*

*In a quest for conflict settlement, parties concerned and mediators focus on political and economical formulae which will address major concerns such as territorial arrangements, power sharing agreements, allocation of resources and so forth. But in the case of ethnic conflicts myths and prejudices created both before conflict and during conflict impede the settlement process along with the very reasons for the conflict - territorial disputes or minority problems. The essay explores the influence of myths and perception on the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. It illustrates the perspectives of the two sides of the conflict on the history of Nagorno-Karabakh and past events as related to the conflict. The author gives theoretical background of linkages between ethnic identity, myths, and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. He concludes that in the case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, without addressing problems created by myths, prejudices and misperceptions it will not be possible to reach a sustainable peace. Therefore, incrementally*

---

<sup>1</sup> **The opinions expressed in the article are those of the author alone**

<sup>2</sup> Counselor of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Canada. MA in History and Law from Baku State University, and MPA from Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. In diplomatic service since 1996. Served previously in Azerbaijan's Mission to the UN in New York. Headed the Section of International Security Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*solving problems through greater interaction between two ethnic groups within given territorial framework is only possible option for complete and durable settlement.*

## INTRODUCTION

In a quest for conflict settlement, parties concerned and mediators focus on political and economical formulae which will address major concerns such as territorial arrangements, power sharing agreements, allocation of resources and so forth. But in the case of ethnic conflicts myths and prejudices created both before conflict and during conflict impede the settlement process along with the very reasons for the conflict - territorial disputes or minority problems. There is a large volume of academic writings about the social and psychological factors of conflicts. Mediators pay more attention to these factors in reconciliation efforts. However, in some cases these problems should be addressed at an early stage of the conflict resolution process before moving to the final settlement of territorial and power sharing arrangements. In the case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, without addressing problems created by myths, prejudices and misperceptions it will not be possible to reach a sustainable peace. Therefore, incrementally solving problems through greater interaction between two ethnic groups within given territorial framework is only possible option for complete and durable settlement.

## HISTORY AND MEDIATION

The contemporary phase of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan began in February 1988. On February 13, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh staged a first demonstration demanding the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Region) from Azerbaijan to Armenia. On February 20, 1988, Armenian deputies to the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh voted to unify that region with Armenia. On February 24, two young Azerbaijanis, killed in

the settlement of Askeran in Nagorno-Karabakh during the stand-off between Armenian and Azerbaijani demonstrators, became the first victims of the conflict. On February 26-28 anti-Armenian riots in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgayit left 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis dead. After that the Soviet authorities took the situation under control until November-December 1988. In November information about an Armenian plan to build an industrial factory in Tophana – a territory in Nagorno-Karabakh, precious with its rich nature, sparked a series of demonstrations in Baku – capital of Azerbaijan. As tension was rising, more than 200 000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia. Then, the Soviet authorities again took the situation under control and imposed curfew. A new turn of violence broke out in January 1990 when Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia attacked Armenian residents in Baku and forced them to leave Azerbaijan. Along with this, the opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan was to about to overthrow the communist authorities. Moscow sent troops into Azerbaijan on January 20 killing 132 civilians and soon restored its full control in Azerbaijan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 full-scale armed hostilities began between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Better-prepared Armenian forces defeated the Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh, who were entangled in internal fight for power, and then occupied seven regions outside. On February 25-26 1992, Armenian armed forces razed the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly to the ground killing 613 Azerbaijanis. Armenians claim that this event occurred due to the conspiracy of the Azerbaijani opposition. In May 1992 Armenian armed forces captured Shusha – an Azerbaijani populated and strategically located city in Nagorno-Karabakh – this was a big blow to the Azerbaijanis. After short advancement of Azerbaijanis in summer 1992, Armenian armed operation was successful in 1993, and Armenia occupied seven regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 1993 the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions – 822, 853, 874 and 884 demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. In May 1994 Russia brokered

a cease-fire agreement in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Despite frequent violations on the line of contact Azerbaijan and Armenia adhered to the cease-fire agreement.

This is a brief history of the conflict, with highlight of major events; in between, many others - each is interpreted differently and emotionally by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and linked to the personal tragedies of refugees, displaced persons and families of killed and wounded. Overall, experts estimates that the conflict has claimed the lives of 30 000 people.

There are about 220 000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and more than 700 000 internally displaced persons (IDP) in Azerbaijan, and 300 000 Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan.<sup>3</sup> These figures are also subject to disputes: Armenia estimates its refugees from Azerbaijan total as many as 400 000 and put the number of Azerbaijani IDPs down to 500 000.

Mediation efforts are being undertaken under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chaired by France, Russia and the US. Despite a number of proposals put forward, the sides of the conflict have not reached any agreement on a peace plan.

The main hurdle involves the opposite demands for territorial arrangement – Armenia wants Nagorno-Karabakh to become independent and rejects any deal on autonomous status for the region, Azerbaijan wants to preserve its territorial integrity and similarly declines any proposal which might lead to independence of its region. Legal experts argue on the clash of two irreconcilable principles of international law – territorial integrity vs. self-determination. The middle line in the light of extreme

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) "2003 Statistical Yearbook", 304,000 Armenians were displaced from Azerbaijan to Armenia and 894,737 Azerbaijanis from Armenia, occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions to Azerbaijan (<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics/opendoc.htm?tbl=STATISTICS&id=42aff7e84>).

positions is hard to achieve, though from time to time the sides of the conflict have manifested some flexibility. In 1997 the Armenian president Ter-Petrosian was about to agree on a Minsk Group proposal on stage-by-stage settlement and the president of Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted a joint statement in October 1997 in Strasbourg. However, as a result of this policy Ter-Petrosian was ousted from power in February 1998. The second time the parties have manifested flexibility in November 1999, but after the shootings in the Armenian parliament, when the speaker of the parliament and the prime minister were killed, the negotiation process was broken. Mediators believe that a third chance occurred during the negotiations in Key-West, USA in April 2001 but no agreement was reached there either. The recent talks between Armenian president Kocharian and Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev in Rambouillet, France in February 2006 was also met with big hope but failed to produce any positive results. However, the parties agreed to continue peaceful negotiations in a search of a final solution.

#### DANGEROUS TRIANGLE: ETHNIC IDENTITY, MYTHS AND CONFLICT

Legal questions surrounding the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh are believed to be the main hurdle to the conflict resolution. Historical grievances – namely, the perceived grievances distorted by myths (as I show below, Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived for centuries peacefully) play equally important roles, as the two nations depict each other in monstrous images. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is one of the bloodiest and cruelest conflicts in the world, not in terms of numbers of killed, but by intensity and occurrence of ethnic cleansing. The memory of past quarrels was exacerbated by the acts of mass killings and tortures during the conflict between the two countries. Azerbaijanis see themselves as the aggrieved party in the conflict, with some 20 percent of their country occupied by Armenian forces and one million refugees and IDPs. Armenians consider Azerbaijanis as Turks (they call them

“Turks” in Armenian language), whom they blame for mass killings in 1915 during the First World War.

Historians and experts from both sides give different interpretation of the history of the two peoples and the conflict itself. Foreign academics and observers are caught in the war of propaganda and sometimes fall under it, some intentionally favor one of the sides, some unintentionally, some are confused by the opposing versions, though pro-Armenian writings are dominating due to the strong lobby and long presence of Armenian communities in the Western countries. The conflict created a whole tale of myths; ethnic identity became the matter of obsession, pride and hatred.

Ethnic identity has a pivotal role in the conflict. Despite a volume of research on the notion of ethnicity, there is no conventional agreement on its exact term.

“The difficulty in defining ethnicity is that it is a dynamic concept encompassing both subjective and objective elements. It is the mixture of perception and external contextual reality which provides it with meaning. In political theory, "ethnicity" describes a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity, composed of people who are aware, perhaps only latently, of having common origins and interests. Thus, an ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people but a self-conscious collection of people united, or closely related, by shared experiences and a common history.”<sup>4</sup>

Dell Hymes points to subjective factors such as perception, belonging, self-identification.<sup>5</sup> In a place like the Caucasus the notion of nation and ethnicity is highly emotional and contentious. Valeri Tishkov writes:

“Because of the multi-ethnic composition of almost all major areas of the former Soviet Union (the only exception is Armenia after the exodus of the Azeris from this territory), practically all kinds of conflicts and clashes - social or political (from young men's fights in local discotheques to collisions at the highest levels of power) - easily acquire an ethnic manifestation and flavour, making these conflicts and contradictions deeper, more complex, and extremely hard to resolve.”<sup>6</sup>

---

4 Rupesinghe, K. Governance and conflict resolution in multi-ethnic societies. In K. Rupesinghe and V. Tishkov, ed., Ethnicity and power in the contemporary world. New-York: United Nations University Press, 1996. (Here and after this book is quoted from online edition at <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu12ee/uu12ee00.htm#Contents> )

<sup>5</sup> Hymes, D. Linguistic Problems in Defining the Concept of Tribe. In J. Helm, ed., Essays on the Problem of "Tribe". Washington DC: Washington University Press, 1968

<sup>6</sup> Tishkov, V. Ethnic conflicts in the context of social science theories. In K. Rupesinghe and V. Tishkov, ed., Ethnicity and power in the contemporary world. New-York: United Nations University Press, 1996

Stuart Kaufman stresses in his internationally award winning book “Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War”<sup>7</sup> that people didn't identify themselves as Serbs or Croats because there was no sense of national identity before the twentieth century. But myths justify the hostility and fears of group extinction and lie at the root of hostilities, and politicians play on these to get support. Kaufman denounces the idea that the real cause of the conflicts in former USSR and Yugoslavia lies in historical grievances. Yet it can be ethnic hatred which is falsely perceived to be a prolongation of historical animosities. He mentions other factors – the role of political elites, economic problems and security vulnerability. But the real cause, in his opinion, is "symbolic politics" of conflicts. Kaufman argues that existing perceptions about neighboring ethnic groups provoke violence, and once violence breaks out those perceptions justify themselves.

“If you read Armenian history it sounds as though Turks have been slaughtering Armenians for hundreds of years,” Kaufman said. That myth has been used to justify Armenian hostilities in Turkic-speaking Azerbaijan. “You need to change the way history is taught so it doesn't reinforce hostile myths.”<sup>8</sup> Charles King in *Foreign Affairs* article “The Myths of Ethnic Warfare” argues that the ethnic wars were caused by “entrepreneurs who benefit from the violence, arms supplied by foreign powers, charismatic leadership, and plenty of bored young men” rather than by ethnic myths. Though, he agrees that “in some cases, the cultural myths that Kaufman identifies as essential to violence are long-standing - as between Armenians and Azerbaijani "Turks," for example. But in plenty of others the myths were manufactured in relatively short order, and usually after violence had already started”.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that the first clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis occurred in the beginning of the twentieth century, in earlier history we hardly find animosity between Turks and Armenians. Many

---

<sup>7</sup> Kaufman, S. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Blackford, L.B. UK Teacher Wins Award for Ideas on Peace. In *Herald-Leader Education Writer*, 4 December 2002.

<sup>9</sup> King, Ch. *The Myth of Ethnic Warfare*. In *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001, pp. 165-170.

historical myths have been manufactured by a group of jingoists and then successfully exploited by public leaders, especially when Armenian scholars and dissidents began the Karabakh campaign in 1987-1988.

Myth creation and heroic behavior has a multiplying effect and gets imitated in a chainlike way within the masses. That mimetic pattern of behavior in conflict, described by René Girard<sup>10</sup>, prevents any attempt to uncover the truth which incrementally falls under many layers of tales and stereotypes. The question of land exacerbates rivalry between groups. Where the question of land causes the conflict, it reinforces the myths. Land becomes crucial to identity – it interacts with all other categories implicated in ethnonationalism<sup>11</sup>, bearing the symbol of ancestral graveyards (even you are new settlers) and religious rituals, and the source of incomes (even if territory is barren).

“The territory is considered not only as a source of subsistence, especially under contemporary conditions, where the market economy effectively fails to recognize ethnic and political boundaries. The struggle of Armenians and Azeris for Karabakh, the Japanese desire for the return of northern territories, or the feelings of Russians towards the Crimea, spring from symbolic rather than pragmatic interests. But these symbolic interests are not mere irrational mystifications; they can acquire a real strength.”<sup>12</sup>

For two main reasons of ethnic or interstate conflicts – land and minority discrimination, initial sources of discontent get wrapped in mantles of perceptions, sometimes distorted ones. Valery Tishkov points:

“Probably, the aspects of behavioural psychology and socio-psychological mechanisms play a more significant role in ethnic conflicts than traditional interpretations have suggested. We have enough evidence to prove that groups with diminished status and who are subject to discrimination in dominated environments quite often express fears for their own existence, even when objective demographic, political, or cultural conditions would normally not lead to such conclusions. This "reaction of concern" comes from the exaggerated feeling of danger and leads to "extreme actions in response to rather moderate dangers" (Horowitz, 1985).<sup>13</sup> [I]n Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, the social status of the Armenians in the enclave was higher than that of the Azeris inside and outside the territory (Yamskov, 1991).”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Girard, R. *The Girard Reader*. In James Williams, ed., New-York: Crossroad, 2000

<sup>11</sup> Redekop, V.N. *From Violence to Blessing. How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict Can Open Paths to Reconciliation*. Ottawa: Novalis, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Tishkov, *Ethnic conflicts*.

<sup>13</sup> Horowitz, D. *Ethnic groups in conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p.383

<sup>14</sup> Yamskov, A. *Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*. In *Theory and Society*, Vol. 20, № 5, 1991, pp. 631-660.

In January 2003 Armenian president Robert Kocharian made a remark about “the ethnic incompatibility of Azerbaijani and Armenian people” during his election campaign. He implied longstanding enmity between the two peoples. This statement was condemned by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Walter Schwimmer, who stressed that “recalling dark pages of European history will never be a good electoral strategy”.<sup>15</sup> On the other side, warmonger rhetoric and bellicose statements are frequently heard in Azerbaijan.

But, were Turks and Armenians “ethnically incompatible” in the eighteen, sixteen or fifteen centuries? History proves they were not. Here are a few examples. A medieval Armenian chronicler, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, wrote about the leadership of one of the first Turkic Seljuk sultans of the XI century, Melik Shah, who freed the Armenian priesthood from having to pay taxes, that “he tamed the universe, not by violence, but through love and peace.”<sup>16</sup> Shah Ismail Hatai, leader of Turkic tribe kizilbash and founder of Safavids dynasty, which ruled over Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Iran in the XVI-XVIII centuries, gave Armenian traders the exclusive rights over silk. There is a popular folk music in Azerbaijan entitled “Asli ve Kerim” about the love between a Turkic man and an Armenian woman. Sayat Nova, famous Armenian poet, wrote also in Turkic language.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays, it is futile to presents these or other facts to the public in either country, as scholars competing in writing the history of “the most ancient tribes” in the Caucasus as well as “most brutal and wild ones”, and emotions, hurt by the conflict and losses inflicted, overshadows scientific discourses. Ideology sustains and exacerbates ethnic animosity and the notion of supremacy of one ethnic group over the other. People acquired the phenomenon of “selective memory” when one violent

---

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe Press Information, 30 January 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *Istoriya Armeniyi*. Moscow, 1991, p.89.

<sup>17</sup> There is a number of examples can be drawn from Azerbaijani historian Suleyman Mamedov’s PhD dissertation “Friendship between Azerbaijani and Armenian people” written in 1985. Year earlier, in 1984, Armenian writer Zori Balayan wrote notorious book “Hearth” replete with anti-Turkic sentiments. The author is considered in Azerbaijan as a main propagate of Armenian nationalist movement in Karabakh. Ironically, Balayan as surname has Turkic origin: “Bala” – son.

act committed by opposite side becomes the subject of hatred while one's own deed gets overlooked. Events, which contradict the common perception, are moved in "blind spot" of collective memory.

Tom de Waal in his book "Black Garden" presented many examples of friendly interactions between the ethnic groups before and during the conflict.<sup>18</sup> He concludes that the two nations lived in harmony before the conflict which was launched by group of nationalists (many of them from the diaspora, who never lived in Nagorno-Karabakh) and further orchestrated by outside powers. "Blood-and-soil" nationalism, the creator of the "hate narratives" is a modern phenomenon. De Waal further points that the conflict cannot be considered only in the framework of political or socioeconomic problems. History and identity - or, rather misguided and dangerous ideas of history and identity - played a more important role. He writes: "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict makes sense only if we acknowledge that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were driven to act by passionately held ideas about history, identity, and rights."<sup>19</sup>

Stuart Kaufman makes similar conclusion. Neither economic problems (Armenians rejected a package of economic benefits offered by the Soviet authorities in the beginning of the conflict) nor insecurity (the USSR was stable country) caused violence and subsequent war. "Prejudice, fear, and a hostile myth-symbol complex can create a contest for dominance and interethnic security dilemma".<sup>20</sup> Armenian ethnic identity with the highlight of its ancient history and myths of genocide collided with Azerbaijani one focused on its territory and statehood. "What made the situation so fiendishly hard to manage was not existence of ethnic minorities, or even the tragic history of the two groups, but the way of historical myths and hostile attitudes led them to insist on mutually exclusive political goals".<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> de Waal, T. Black Garden Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> de Waal, Black Garden, p.272

<sup>20</sup> Kaufman, Modern Hatred, pp. 82-83.

<sup>21</sup> Kaufman, Modern Hatred, p. 206.

## ARMENIAN AND AZERBAIJANI PERCEPTIONS ON THE CONFLICT

In this chapter I illustrate how the Azerbaijani and Armenians perceives the history of Nagorno-Karabakh and past events. I present a table with two versions supported by various researches and findings from the two sides.<sup>22</sup>

ARMENIAN VERSION	AZERBAIJANI VERSION
<b>Ancient History of Karabakh</b>	
Karabakh or Artsakh was a part of Great Armenia and Armenians long ago lived in that territory. Great Armenia embraced a large portion of the Caucasus, Turkey and Iran.	Karabakh was a part of Caucasian Albania from the very beginning of its existence, i.e. 4 <sup>th</sup> century BC to 8 <sup>th</sup> century AD.
<b>Medieval History of Karabakh</b>	
Throughout the Middle Ages Armenians lived in Karabakh and formed several small feudal <i>melicates</i> (principalities). Caucasian Albanians had no presence in Karabakh. Armenians Karabakh fought against Arabs and Turkic Seljuks and managed to preserve semi-independence.	Karabakh was populated and ruled by Caucasian Albanians who were gradually armenized after the Arabs conquest in the 7 <sup>th</sup> century AD. This process was accelerated after the subordination of Albanian Catholicate to Armenian Ecmiadzin in 1836.-
<b>Establishment of Karabakh Khanate</b>	
A certain Panah-Ali was able to capture the main fortresses of Karabakh and proclaim him-self Khan. Then his son Ibrahim took advantage of the continuous strife between the Armenians meliks and gradually subdued the whole of Karabakh.	Karabakh Khanate was founded in 1747 as an independent khanate, the founder of which was Azerbaijani Turk Panah Ali khan from the clan of Javanshir (1693-1761).

<sup>22</sup> I will omit numerous references below; interpretations can be drawn from many Azerbaijani and Armenian websites in Internet, official statements, and books.

<b>Russian Conquest of the South Caucasus, including Karabakh</b> <i>(As a result of Russian-Persian wars in the beginning of the XIX century Azerbaijan was divided between Russia and Iran, and Russia took control over the South Caucasus)</i>	
The settlement of Armenians has no major implications for demographic composition of Karabakh. As far as Azerbaijani Turks are concerned, they are relatively new settlers in the Caucasus (after XIII c.). They appeared in Nagorno-Karabakh only in the last third of the eighteenth century and never constituted more than 3 to 4 per cent of the population, right up to the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan in 1921. The ethnic classification “Azerbaijanis” appeared only in the 1930s. Prior to this, they were referred to as “Caucasian Tatars” or “Turks” in Russian sources.	Azerbaijanis believe that all problems and tragedies befallen on them started with Russian conquest. The Russian tsar ordered to settle Armenians from Iran and Ottoman Empire on the Caucasus and Azerbaijani lands in particular. This policy was reflected in letters of a renowned Russian diplomat and poet Alexander Griboyedov. In accordance with Russian census in the beginning of the XX century Azerbaijanis constituted 43 % of population of Yerevan – Armenian capital. Armenians installed a memorial in NK in 1978, celebrating 150 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of their settlement there. A relevant inscription on the memorial was destroyed in the beginning of the conflict.
<b>Karabakh in 1918-1920</b> <i>(After the collapse of Russian Empire in 1917 three new republics – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia emerged in the South Caucasus)</i>	
Nagorno-Karabakh fought for its unification with Armenia and in 1919 the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh signed agreement with Azerbaijani authorities in which the parties agreed that the question of Nagorno-Karabakh must be resolved at the Paris Peace Conference. Armenians temporarily agreed to subordination to Azerbaijani authorities until the Paris Conference.	Nagorno-Karabakh was a part of Azerbaijan in 1918-1920, and Armenians launched a war trying to capture it as well as other Azerbaijani regions. In 1919 the National Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh recognized the supreme power of Azerbaijan. On 12 January 1920 at the Paris Peace Conference the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers de-facto recognized the independence of Azerbaijan.
<b>March 1918 Event</b>	
Armenians were under threat in Baku and any killing occurred due to mutual offensives.	In March 1918 Armenian nationalist groups killed thousands of Azerbaijanis in Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan under the banner of Bolshevism.
<b>Nagorno-Karabakh and the League of Nations</b>	
The League of Nations refused to recognize Azerbaijan because of its territorial claims to the Armenian populated Eastern Caucasus, including in particular Nagorny Karabakh, as well as the lack of efficient state control over its supposed territory and inability to ground the legitimacy of the frontiers of this territory.	In April 1920 Azerbaijan was captured by the Soviet Red Army. In time of the submission of the Azerbaijani application to the League of Nations in November 1920 Azerbaijan had ceased to exist as independent entity. The League of Nations also refused to recognize Armenia as a state with distinct borders and declined its application in December 1920 (in November Armenia was also conquered by the Red Army)
<b>Question of Nagorno-Karabakh after the Sovietization of the Caucasus in 1921-1923</b>	
After the arrival of communism in the South Caucasus in 1921 Stalin gave Nagorno-Karabakh	The 5 July 1921 decision “to retain” (and definitely not “to transfer”) Nagorno-Karabakh

to Azerbaijan. This decision was designed to appease Turkey and its leader Ataturk, as well. Azerbaijan also got Nakhichevan.	within Azerbaijan was not taken by Stalin himself, but rather by a collegial body, the Caucasus Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, which was made up of only two Azerbaijanis, several Armenians as well as representatives of other nationalities. At the same time, a big chunk of Azerbaijani lands – namely Zangezur was transferred to Armenia.
<b>Nagorno-Karabakh during the Soviet period</b>	
Nagorno-Karabakh suffered from discrimination throughout the Soviet period and its population shrank while Azerbaijani population was rose.	The economic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was better than the Azerbaijani average. While Armenians had autonomy in Azerbaijan, thousands of Azerbaijanis in Armenia (in Zangezur particularly) had no status at all.
<b>Beginning of the Conflict in 1988</b>	
Armenians began peaceful demonstrations and petitioned Moscow on the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Azerbaijanis responded with violence.	Two young Azerbaijanis, killed on February 24, 1988, were the first victims of the conflict. Armenians were well prepared and armed before the start of the conflict.
<b>Sumgayit</b>	
Violence in Sumgayit was a response of the Azerbaijanis to the Armenian petition and displayed the attitude of Azerbaijanis towards the Armenians. After the Sumgayit event the Armenians felt unsecured from the rule of the Azerbaijanis.	It was grass root violence caused by the influx of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia. At the same time several days before the events several Armenian and other television stations had already arrived in Azerbaijan in order to report on the “forthcoming” pogroms, whereas many well-to-do Armenian families residing in Sumgayit had left the city well in advance of the events. The three-time convicted felon Armenian Eduard Grigoryan himself murdered five Armenians in Sumgayit.
<b>Exodus of Armenian and Azerbaijani populations</b>	
About 300,000 Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan in 1988-1991. Expulsion was accompanied by murders in Baku and Ganja.	About 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia. Expulsion was accompanied by murders in Gugark and other settlements.
<b>Armenian Earthquakes in 1988</b>	
Armenians never recalls an accident with a plane carrying Azerbaijani rescue team. Instead they claim that Azerbaijanis tried to get advantage of the situation created in the aftermath of the earthquakes.	Azerbaijan sent a rescue team, and a plane carrying the team crashed nearby Yerevan. Armenians navigators intentionally misled plane crew.
<b>Operation “Ring”</b>	
In April 1991, the special Azerbaijani and Soviet police detachment forces began the so-called "Ring" operation and ousted Armenians from Chaykend and other villages on Azerbaijani territories.	Armenians band groups terrorized local Azerbaijani population and made raids within Azerbaijan in which 54 people were killed. In response, law-enforcement agencies carried out special operation to gain control in Chaykend and other adjacent districts.

<b>Dissolution of the USSR and Nagorno-Karabakh</b>	
Nagorno-Karabakh held a referendum in 1991 and declared its independence. This region had a right to secession in accordance with a Soviet law of March 1991 on the procedure of secession of Soviet republics which stipulated that if a Soviet republic is to secede from Moscow, its autonomous republics and regions may choose to secede from that republic.	Referendum was illegal, as conditions involved armed conflict and the absence of the Azerbaijani population of NK. Azerbaijan attained independence after the dissolution of the USSR and Azerbaijan has never used the procedure contained in a Soviet law of March 1991 on secession of Soviet Republics. Therefore, reference to that law is irrelevant. UN Security Council in its relevant resolutions reconfirmed sovereignty of Azerbaijan over NK.
<b>Armed Hostilities in 1992-1993</b>	
Armenians was forced to create a buffer/security zone to secure its population from Azerbaijani armed forces.	Armenians began ethnic cleansing Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh and then in seven regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh, taking advantage of internal instability in Azerbaijan.
<b>Fall of Shusha</b>	
Shusha was a strategically important city from where Azerbaijani armed forces bombed the surrounding areas and towns.	While Azerbaijani and Armenians leaders negotiated peaceful solution in Tehran under the auspices of Iranian president, Armenian armed forces stormed Shusha and captured it.
<b>Fall of Khojaly</b>	
The Khojaly event was a conspiracy by the Azerbaijani opposition to overthrow Azerbaijani president Ayaz Mutallibov (1990-1992). Armenians left a corridor to allow Azerbaijani population flee from Khojaly. In support of their argument Armenians quote former Azerbaijani president Mutallibov: “the shooting of the Khojaly was obviously organized by someone to take control in Azerbaijan”.	It was genocide committed in order to intimidate Azerbaijanis. They quote the executive director of Human Rights Watch who stated in her letter to Armenian Foreign Minsiter: “we place direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with Karabakh Armenian forces. Indeed, neither our report nor that of Memorial includes any evidence to support the argument that Azerbaijani forces obstructed the flight of, or fired on Azeri civilians”.
<b>Armenian Terrorism</b>	
Acts, committed by individual Armenians should not be linked to the Armenian government. Azerbaijanis also exploded gas pipelines in Georgia that supplied Armenia.	In 1988-1995 Armenian terrorists committed a number of acts in Azerbaijan, particularly in the mass public transport network resulting in death or injuries to 2000 people. Armenia supported terrorism at the state level.
<b>Use of Mercenaries</b>	
Azerbaijan invited Afghan mujahiddeens to fight against Armenians.	Armenia used Armenian terrorists from the Middle East, Lebanon and Syria particularly.
<b>Russian Support and Involvement</b>	
Armenia won military campaigns in 1992-1993 because its forces were well trained and united.	Russia supplied Armenia heavily with arms and ammunitions and supported it politically. In 1997 Russian MP Lev Rokhlin revealed that one billion dollars worth of Russian arms had been transferred to Armenia.
<b>Blockade</b>	

Azerbaijan imposed a blockade on Armenia. Armenia has a limited access to global routes and suffers economically from it.	Armenia blockaded Azerbaijan's enclave Nakhichevan. Armenia has access through Iran and Georgia.
<b>Destruction of Cultural Heritage</b>	
Azerbaijanis destroy Armenian cemeteries and churches on its territory, these include an old Armenian cemetery in Julfa, Nakhichevan.	Armenians destroyed and pillaged numerous Azerbaijani museums, mosques, and cemeteries on the occupied territories.
<b>Armenian Settlement in Occupied Regions</b>	
New Armenian settlers in NK are refugees from Azerbaijan.	Armenia conducts a policy of mass settlements in occupied Azerbaijani territories in order to change demographic situation in the region.

As we see, the two sides have opposite perspectives on past events. There were few attempts to bring both sides together and try to find middle version. Some sort of psychological sessions, that allow parties to express their anger and emotions and then explore common denominations, have been made by some international NGOs.<sup>23</sup>

Attempts to combine divergent views have previously been made. Several years ago British Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan sponsored two websites where Azerbaijani and Armenian experts offered their visions of the history of the conflict and their proposal for economic interactions. In January 2006 London-based Conciliation Resources' Accord Programme (again a British initiative) with combined efforts of four other organizations issued a publication entitled "The Limits of Leadership: Elites and Societies in the Nagorny Karabakh Peace Process"<sup>24</sup> which represents the ideas and perspectives of the two sides of the conflict and international experts.

Thus far, the historians and experts from both sides continue launching offensives on each other. Azerbaijan is full of military rhetoric propagating the use of force for liberation of the occupied

---

<sup>23</sup> For information on non-governmental initiatives see: Avaz Hasanov and Armine Ishkanian. "Bridging divides: civil society peacebuilding initiatives". In L. Broers, ed., The Limits of Leadership: Elites and Societies in the Nagorny Karabakh Peace Process. Accord, 17, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Online version at: <http://www.c-r.org/accord/nk/accord17/index.shtml>

territories. Armenia and its strong diaspora continue to employ ideology to undermine Azerbaijan's ethnicity and statehood.

## OVERCOMING HATRED WITH RIGHT PEACEBUILDING FORMULA

Mediators and experts believe that 2006 represents a good opportunity for conflict resolution since there are no elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan. This fact itself merely acknowledges that, when one is trying to achieve a peace deal, it is easier to deal with leaders rather than with two countries' societies that have been poisoned with hatred. Efforts to reach out to civil society in Armenia and Azerbaijan are limited and have not yet been successful. Interestingly, no significant attempt has been made to engage historians and scholars - those who actually write a history of the countries and the conflict.

Geopolitical agendas and the interests of regional powers also play great role in the conflict resolution process. OSCE mediators (France, Russia, and the US) are basically working on a combination of two approaches – phased and packaged resolutions centred on the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. And here geopolitics and international perceptions matter.

OSCE mediators themselves recently suggested that it would be better to put off a question of the status to a later stage and start resolving the other issues – return of refugees, opening of communications, etc. International organizations – Council of Europe and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in their relevant reports proposed autonomy formulas, referring to European experiences.

But the West, as a whole, tends to recommend self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh through a referendum in exchange of the return of occupied Azerbaijani territories outside NK back to Baku's

control. Western experts mentioned above, such as de Waal and Charles King support this idea, though standing for “step-by-step” approach to conflict resolution.

The West implies support for eventual self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh, while at the same time rejecting of separatist aspirations in other parts of the former USSR –Transdnestria in Moldova, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Is it an accident that many Western experts sympathize with Christian populations in Darfur, Nagorno-Karabakh but rebuff Turkic Cypriots? Kosovo with mixed Christian-Muslim Albanians is a special case, which entails a non-religious dimension in the view of Western media. However, any standard newspaper article in the West describes the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict “as between Muslim populated Azerbaijan and Christian Armenians Nagorno-Karabakh enclave”. The West itself suffers from misperception that conflicts, such as that over Nagorno-Karabakh, have religious connotations. That situation only adds to grievances in Azerbaijan and in some other countries, where populations suspect the impartiality of Western experts and media. (But this article is not about civilizational Christian-Muslim stand-off).

Certainly, a question arises - if such extreme hatred is embedded in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies wouldn't separation be the easiest and best solution? History proves the opposite – only cooperative formulae aimed at interaction can ensure durable peace, no matter how painfully this process can advance. Europe after two bloody wars settled its territorial disputes based on an autonomy formula, which was strengthened by the umbrella of political and economic union. New EU members Romania and Hungary were also required to resolve their disputes within established borders based on local self-governance. One of the most brutal post-Cold War conflicts in Europe in Bosnia was settled on the basis of the preservation of the multiethnic structure of the state. Despite the problems and still bitter recollections, Bosnia gradually recovers.

The separation of Nagorno-Karabakh will legitimize the result of military achievements. Besides, its corrupt moral aspect, that formula will imply the possibility of resolution of this and other disputes by military means in the future. Moreover, it will not ensure security for Azerbaijani refugees from Shusha and other settlements within Nagorno-Karabakh. But preservation of NK in Azerbaijan with broad autonomy will force Azerbaijan to secure its Armenian population in order, in its turn, to provide security for Karabakhi Azerbaijanis under local authority of Karabakhi Armenians.

Now, it might be impossible to imagine peaceful co-existence of Azerbaijanis and Armenians. But after interethnic clashes in 1905-1920 the two ethnic groups lived peacefully under the Soviet regime. Armenian-Azerbaijani intermarriages were a widespread phenomenon. Of course, they were forced to live under authoritarian rule. However, nowadays, such structures as the EU can give better incentives.

If we take separation formula as means of resolution of interethnic problems then we will have homogenization of states in several decades ahead. Could we imagine Europe built upon ethnic lines? Then why should we recommend it for other parts of the world? After decolonization numerous emerged states in Africa were not resolution of the problems; creation of new ones will not be either. Still a myth is developing that the creation of new states will solve the problems that people have experienced with the current state arrangements. Economic hardships, the lack of democracy and good governance definitely have an impact on ethnic tensions, thus fragmenting the international community. But ethnic myths and prejudices stab at the heart of globalization.

The UN Secretary-General in its report “Agenda for peace” of 1992 clearly stated “[i]f every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become ever more difficult to achieve.”<sup>25</sup> In Karabakh

---

<sup>25</sup> UN Secretary-General Report “Agenda for Peace”, 1992. UN Document A/47/277 - S/24111, paragraph 17.

we are dealing with an ethnic group which has already obtained independent international identity – the state of Armenia. And on many occasions Armenian officials and separatists in NK acknowledge that a final goal is unification of Armenia and NK.

In mediating the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict, while searching for best power sharing formula, international organizations and NGOs should redouble their efforts to reach out to civil societies (no matter how weak they tend to be in the South Caucasus) as well as media and academic circles. Kaufman suggests that peacebuilding programs must be aimed at eliminating stereotypes, prejudices and ethnic-symbol type propaganda. Unless you make these efforts a central part of the strategy to making peace, the strategy won't work.<sup>26</sup>

Diaspora, particularly, in Western countries continue to play a destructive and extremist role instead of facilitating the peace. Communities' members should be also involved in peacebuilding initiatives. Unfortunately, local politicians, particularly in Western countries, preoccupied with constituency support, only add tension to the conflict, appeasing the radical slogans of some diaspora organizations.

Once trust and interaction between two nations start, the final solution will come much easier. A step-by-step approach would promote the overcoming of ethnic hatred, the softening of myths and the elimination of prejudices. Azerbaijani and Armenians bound together in regional framework, territorial borders and local administrative arrangement will reach peace sooner rather than remain divided, clashing over a piece of land. The solution lies in co-existence and cooperation both between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as between the Karabakhi Armenians and the Karabakhi Azerbaijanis.

---

<sup>26</sup> Kaufman, *Modern Hatred*, pp. 42-43.