

# The Nationalist Discourse in Armenia

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# FOREWORD

In this paper, we present the results of a study implemented by the Caucasus Institute from December 2010 to April 2011, with support from the South Caucasus Bureau of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Think Tank Fund of Open Society Foundations.

The study is the first phase of a project aimed at identifying and assessing ideological trends prevailing in the Armenian society.

The objective of this study was to identify how nationalism is reflected in the Armenian mass media and beyond, in the public discourse at large, and to outline the system of the representations of oneself and the outside world fomented by nationalism.

The main method of research was content analysis, chiefly of the media but also of websites of several nationalistic organizations and publications printed in Armenia.

The study was implemented by the CI team of young researchers, including Ani Harutyunyan, Johnny Melikyan and Luiza Ayvazyan, led by Hrant Mikaelyan who is also the author of this Policy Brief. The supervisor of the research project is Alexander Iskandaryan.

The English translation was made by Aghassi Harutyunyan and edited by Nina Iskandaryan.

# METHODOLOGY

The study involved collecting and analyzing representations of oneself and of the outside world, common to the nationalist discourse in Armenia. The principal research method was content-analysis of online media. During content-analysis, we were looking for statements pertaining to the following three categories:

1. *Auto-stereotypes*: exclusive characteristics of one's own ethnic group or country (in this case, Armenians and Armenia);
2. *Perceptions of the other*: other ethnic groups and nations negative descriptions;
3. *Ethnic and national phobias*: perceptions of issues that threaten the existence or identity of the Armenians or Armenia.

Since radical groups exist in every society, we chose not to study them. In different countries, such groups are active in the underground or supported by the government; in some societies, their views are shared by the majority, and in some they are all but ignored. Our goal was to analyze the form of nationalism that has permeated Armenian society.

We only monitored mainstream mass media because we were, first and foremost, interested in the level of nationalism which is dispersed throughout the society and not necessarily perceived by its ordinary members. We wanted to see how much nationalism an inexperienced reader encounters in mass media, and to assess the potential for the increase or decrease of that quantity.

In addition to current statements and narratives, we identified the basic components of the ideological construction of the Armenian nationalism. Our objective was to reproduce that construct, since building that construct can enable us to forecast - rather easily - the nationalist reaction to this or that current event.

For our analysis, we selected 10 Armenian online mass media based on online ratings by Alexa and Circle.am. We then sorted them by visits from Armenia. Circle.am keeps a full count of visitors, thereby creating a representative picture; however, not all popular Armenian media have signed up for that rating. To make up for the missing links, we used Alexa's rating. Even though it is not sufficiently representative, it takes full account of all the websites visited by those Armenian users who have installed an Alexa meter.

We analyzed all articles published in 10 mass media outlets from 13 to 31 December, 2010 (in total, more than 6000 articles); we also analyzed interviews published by those media from November 2010 to until March 2011. In the course of the study, we identified the presence of hate speech, intolerance, phobias or preferences that were based on an "us-them" dichotomy. We identified both ethnic stereotypes and those pertaining to particular countries, because, as we shall see below, countries often represent personalized ethnic groups in the Armenian media discourse.

Throughout the text of this paper, we quote excerpts from articles (mostly from statements made by newsmakers) as illustrative material.

We selected the following media for our study (listed in a random order):

- PanArmenian.net
- A1plus.am
- Armtoday.info
- Panorama.am
- Tert.am

- News.am
- Aravot.am
- Armtimes.com
- (“Haykakan Zhamanak” newspaper)
- Regnum.ru – Armenian edition
- Lragir.am

In addition, we studied the websites of nationalist organizations and some books published in Armenia. However, in this policy brief, we only used quotes from the ten media that we monitored. We did not specify the names of the authors of any of the statements, removing them from the headlines, too, and limiting ourselves to indicating their social status.

The study was qualitative, not quantitative; therefore, we do not aspire to representativeness. Narratives change over time, they get emphasized and de-emphasized, and this study only reflects those narratives that we identified in mainstream Armenian mass media in late 2010 – early 2011.

Based on our data, we have selected the most prominent narratives that we identified within the nationalist discourse in the media: these narratives concern the images of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia, “the International community”<sup>1</sup>, Armenia itself and perceived threats to it.

Since the image of Turkey is central to this construct, we find it most logical to start from it.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, whenever the International community was mentioned in the media, it meant “the West.”

# TURKEY

Turkey, and everything connected with it, is a central theme in the Armenian nationalist discourse.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the representations of Turkey and the statements about it are negative. In 2009 and at the beginning of 2010 we carried out study on the perception of Turkey and Turks in the Armenian media<sup>2</sup>. And, even though the primary goal of the project was the study of political narratives (in relation to the Armenian-Turkish protocols), a large part of the narratives we identified was of nationalist nature. Thus, we have the opportunity to compare the actual representations of Turkey a year ago, when the Armenian-Turkish process was still in progress, and today, when it has stalled.

As noted in the 2009-2010 study, there are three simplistic images of Turkey in the mass consciousness of the Armenian population, i.e. *“Historical Turkey”*, *“Geopolitical Turkey”* and *“Turkey as a Developed Economy”*. This time, it appears, the description of Turkey was somewhat less emotional and more rational: the interest to the present day of that country that emerged as a result of the normalization process gradually made the picture more realistic and balanced.

However, since in the human dimension there are still virtually no contacts among Armenians

and Turks, the image of Turkey in Armenia is still heavily mythologized and is often not the image of real Turkey but the Turkey, which this or that person finds psychologically more comfortable to deal with. Thus, in a number of cases, we are not dealing with the image of Turkey, but with the inversion of the image of Armenia.

The image of the “historical Turkey” contains horrific pictures of the past, such as genocide, deportations, massacres, famine and war, and, later, the destruction of the first Armenian republic; hence that image is sharply negative. The image of the “Geopolitical Turkey” is often associated with the exaggeration of Turkey’s importance on the global and regional arena and phobias about how that can and will be used against Armenia. The image of the “Economic Turkey” is also very interesting; however, it is not associated either with the expression of nationalist sentiments or the opposition to them, and therefore in the framework of the present study, we were not interested in that image.

Although in qualitative terms little has changed in the past year, from the quantitative perspective these changes are obvious. After a flurry of publications on the topic of Turkey and its relations with Armenia saw the light of the day after the official start of the so-called “football diplomacy” and after each new advance in the negotiation process, the activity started to fade away.

This was noted already in the previous report and was observed during the pilot monitoring of the press for nationalist displays that we conducted in the spring of 2010. At the time of the present study, in December 2010, the number of references to Turkey was rather small and represented common background information; perhaps it was even less noticeable than usually: the society has apparently got tired of the Turkish topic and has instead focused on domestic political and economic problems.

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<sup>2</sup> “Armenia and the Armenians, Turkey and the Turks in Armenian Media”, CI Policy Briefs, # 2, April 2010.  
URL: [[http://www.c-i.am/?page\\_id=1130](http://www.c-i.am/?page_id=1130)]

In the nationalist segment, pushed backed in the past year from mainstream media to less popular publications, Turkey continues to be perceived as a force endowed with supernatural powers, and, therefore, capable of inflicting great harm on Armenia.

### ***Turks are the enemies and antipodes of Armenians***

The 'thesis' that "a Turk remains a Turk", dominant in the Armenian society for the past hundred years, is key to the Armenian nationalist narrative. During this study we came across this thesis only twice, i.e. much more infrequently than in the pilot monitoring of the spring 2010 and even more so compared to late 2009. Interestingly, one of those statements belongs to an official, while the other came from an expert from the Diaspora:

*“... Present-day Turkey is different from the Ottoman Empire in name and personalities of its leaders only.”*

**Regnum-Armenia** / *Ottoman Empire changed only its name and rulers, but not its regime, says an expert* / Author: an expert from the Diaspora. Dec. 15. 2010

This approach warns Armenians against any contact with Turks and teaches us not to trust them, because "A Turk remains a Turk" both in the vertical, i.e. the temporal, and, horizontal, i.e. the spatial, dimension. In other words, even the Turk who seems peaceful should not be trusted.

Almost all stories involving Turkey, with the exception of news reports, touched upon the topic of the Armenian identity. In all likelihood, this may be explained by the fact that the Armenian identity developed over the past decades under the influence of fear and the expectation of aggressive actions from Turkey. Today, virtually every action taken by Turkey is perceived by Armenians as an identity threat, and, sometimes even, an existential one.

In addition - and this is very important - the image of a "Turk" is used as an antipode to the image of an Armenian. Both their personal qualities and interests are placed at the opposite ends of the spectrum: what is good for a Turk is bad for an Armenian - and vice versa. For example, in one of the articles, the reporter says that the parents give the name of Ani to their daughter "to spite the Turks" (News.am, Dec. 15, 2010).

### ***Turkey has no right to exist***

In the Armenian nationalist discourse, Turkey is very often perceived as an illegitimate formation, a kind of "historical mistake", a disaster that struck the Armenian people and the other peoples of the region. In such representations, Turkey is not only alien to the region, but also harmful: for instance, one expert believes that present-day Turkey aims to spread and impose Islamism in the region (PanArmenian.net, Jan. 31, 2011).

Hence, the virtually complete denial of Turkey, its culture, reality and its rights to any political action. For example:

*“...Turkish and Azerbaijani carpet-making is a composite art, created at the expense of appropriating the cultures of the peoples living in the lands occupied by them.”*

**Panorama.am** / *For Azerbaijanis, the Armenian carpet is a "myth", but ignoring the facts on their side is a reality* / Author: an ethnologist. Dec. 28. 2010

For this author, it is not important how the reality of the contemporary Turkish or Azerbaijani carpet-making evolved; the process of intercultural borrowing and the interpenetration of cultures is presented in a negative light and formulated as an accusation. The culture, architecture, art, economy, and territory of modern Turkey are believed to be proceeds of crime, and, therefore, they are not



considered Turkish, but are thought to have ‘real owners’, first of all Armenians.

In addition, such statements clearly show the fear of losing one’s cultural identity, because if the Turkish culture is assumed to be similar to the Armenian (even if some elements have been borrowed from it or even if both Armenian and Turk-ish cultures borrowed it from a third source), then that, in the representation of nationalists, is very bad, because it blurs the clear distinction between Armenians and Turks. And, that distinction is essential, above all in relation to the image of the ‘chief enemy’.

### ***Armenian-Turkish normalization is wrong***

The Armenian society has ‘forgotten’ the recent Armenian-Turkish rapprochement like a bad dream. With the rare exception of few political figures, no one remembered about the rapprochement efforts in the reporting period. It seems that the issue here is not only in the awakening of the domestic political struggle and in the economic problems that drove the process of normalization to the background.

The past few months showed that most of the threats alleged by the opponents of the settlement did not materialize. In fact, the process of the in-ternational recognition of the Armenian Genocide did not stop; another country, Sweden, joined the process. It was also discussed in the parliaments of different countries that have not yet recognized the genocide. Nothing changed in the Karabakh conflict with the beginning of the normalization process, and Turkey did not become a ‘concerned mediator’, as predicted by the opponents of the protocols (they were claiming that Turkey would start participating in the Karabakh process, even if the protocols did not come into effect).

The positive scenarios of the normalization of relations did not materialize either: Turkey did not abandon its support of Azerbaijan, at least on

the level of rhetoric. Neither did it open the border or lift the embargo on Armenian products.

While there were still voices, calling on the Armenian side to refuse any further contact with Turkey, some of the forces opposed to the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations assessed the current state of affairs as satisfactory:

*“...I hope that we will continue to pursue policies that would allow us not to make any concessions in future. Note that in the Armenian-Turkish issue, too, we did not agree to concessions that would compromise our national identity and national interests”*

*News.am/ MP from the ARF, born in the year of the rabbit: I appreciate the caution of the rabbit, but not its cowardice / Author: an opposition politician. Dec. 31. 2010*

Despite the increased attention to Turkey, Armenian nationalist groups do not react to the “Armenian initiatives” within the Turkish society, most notably, the efforts of the Turkish civil society to discuss and promote the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. The nationalist discourse views the peacemaking initiatives of NGOs negatively, branding them collaborationists and ‘traitors’, while isolationism in relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and even the mutual blockade, is perceived as acceptable or a ‘lesser evil’ compared with the revival of the Armenian-Turkish relations at the level of people-to-people contacts.

Thus, the Armenian-Turkish settlement enters a conflict with a system of representations, in which Armenians and Turks are antipodes. The ‘carriers’ of these representations are afraid of a dialogue with the Turkish society and try to shield the Armenian society from it.

Those Turks that are geared up for a dialogue with Armenians and are even ready to discuss



the Armenian question in Turkey, are much less perceptible for this discourse than Turkish national-ists who call for a deepening of the conflict with Armenia. The advocates of dialogue, then, “are trying to mislead people” by threatening to destroy the black and white picture and hindering the mobilization of the public against the Turkish threat.

### ***Turkey is a threat***

Compared to 2009, the number of publications, in which the authors declared Armenia defenseless against Turkey and stressed the threat to the physical security of Armenia emanating from Turkey, significantly reduced. However, it is Turkey (rather than, for example, Azerbaijan) that is still regarded as the main source of threats to all spheres of life of the people of Armenia, as a kind of supernatural force, some ‘intelligent evil’.

As before, the destruction of the Armenian state, coupled with the fear of the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population, remains the main perceived threat. Present-day events are analyzed through the prism of history:

*“... The same thing is happening now, when Erdoğan declares to the whole world that the basis of the Turkish-Russian friendship is the destruction of Armenia and the division of the spheres of influence in the Caucasus and the Balkans, and Medvedev confirms that.”*

**Lragir.am** / *Turkey and Russia divide Armenia* / The author: an expert. March 16, 2011

In another article, one of the authors stated that the objective of the “pro-Azerbaijani majority” in the Turkish parliament is the expulsion of Armenians from Karabakh, with the aim of resettling Azerbaijanis there. However, the range of threats emanating from Turkey is not limited to these. In the opinion of some authors, the Armenian monuments in Turkey are

destroyed on purpose, in order to erase from memory the people who lived there.

Therefore, Turkey threatens the Armenian cultural heritage, too: the deliberate policy of the Turkish state is responsible for the poor preservation of the Armenian monuments. In addition, a lot of the voices claim that the Turkish culture is presently expanding in Armenia. As for longer-term prospects, there are concerns regarding the demographic, economic and other types of expansion by Turkey. Nevertheless, we should reiterate that such alarmism is not as common these days as a year ago.

# AZERBAIJAN

For obvious reasons, the image of Turkey is closely intertwined with the image of Azerbaijan. Both images are almost identically hostile and demonized.

In the research period, mass media mentioned Azerbaijan much more frequently than they did Turkey. Using tags to create associative series, we were able to show that Azerbaijan is almost always mentioned in the context of possible threats. Armenian mass media simply do not project any integral and autonomous images and representations of Azerbaijan.

While news reports focus - most often - on statements by President Aliiev, and some of the events in Azerbaijan (primarily the negative ones), analytical pieces or interviews by various figures do not address these things; they merely analyze possible threats from Azerbaijan.

Judging by the press articles we analyzed, there is an interesting distinction in the attitudes towards Turkey and Azerbaijan: while statements on Turkey are more likely to happen without a specific reason, with Turkey being given a general characteristic, known in advance, Azerbaijan is a different case.

References to Azerbaijan are most often made in response to some event, for example, statements of the Azeri authorities or their actions. Thus, negative comments on Turkey are present in certain amounts as a background; in the case of Azerbaijan those comments are made

primarily under the influence of external stimuli (for information reasons).

There are, of course, differences in the context. To begin with, the history of estrangement between Armenians and Azeris is not a long one (only 20 years), while the Turkish-Armenian grievances date back to the beginning of the 20th century. Secondly, Turkey and Armenia are not of comparable sizes, while Armenia and Azerbaijan are, at the end of the day, in the same 'weight category'. Thirdly, over the past few months, there has not been any significant visible activity in relations with Turkey, while the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations remain tense (as reflected in the repeated incidents along the line of contact between Karabakh and Azerbaijani armed forces).

Nevertheless, even in the absence of specific news events, the opposition to Turks and Turkey is constantly refreshed in the Armenian nationalist discourse; furthermore, earlier we already hypothesized that the Armenian identity in this discourse is actually determined along the axis of Armenia and Turkey (we are Armenians, because the Turks our enemies). The conflict with Azeris, on the other hand, is not as crucial in the nationalist paradigm. A possible reason for this is that Armenians came out as winners in the latest armed conflict with Azerbaijan, while the latest Armenian-Turkish war, which happened in the short period of Armenia's independence in the early 20th century, resulted not only in the death of many people, but also the loss of territories. Therefore, Armenia is perceived as the losing side in the Armenia-Turkey standoff, but in the Armenia- Azerbaijan confrontation, the loser is, after all, Azerbaijan, notwithstanding the numerous war-time losses, refugees, etc.

The studied articles frequently repeat the idea that the Armenian side must make the border changes that resulted from the Karabakh war permanent. This means that the status quo must

be preserved at all costs, even if this implies putting minimum efforts towards the resolution of the conflict and blocking – to the best of one's ability - third-party initiatives on changing the status quo.

As for relations with Turkey, the existing status quo does not satisfy the nationalist segment of the society. Even if the aim of the Armenian authorities is the opening of the Armenian-Turkish borders, which in and of itself would represent a significant change in the status quo, the ideas of compensation and return of territories were dominating the discourse we studied. In the most radical discourse, the idea of the need for the disintegration of Turkey and its destruction as a state (in its present form), resulting in the formation of new states on its territory, with most of its remaining areas redistributed among other countries, such as Armenia, Greece, etc., has gained currency.

Thus, when it comes to Turkey, the objective is to change the status quo and restore justice, but in relation to Azerbaijan, justice has already been partly restored thanks to the victory in the Karabakh war.

### ***Azerbaijan has no right to exist***

Part of the nationalist segment of the Armenian society believes that Azerbaijan is not an independent state, but only “an appendage”, a vassal of Turkey; the ‘Elder Brother’ fully coordinates Azerbaijan’s actions. Therefore, conflicts of interest between them are simply impossible, and anything that might look like a conflict to an outside observer is simply cunning diplomacy, aiming to deceive unsuspecting Armenians. In this model, any differences between Turkey and Azerbaijan are erased, and both countries form a united front to threaten existence of Armenia.

However, following several scandals in the Turkish-Azerbaijani relations last year, this

viewpoint was heard less frequently and was mostly limited to publications with a smaller reach.

Another narrative, also amounting to denial of Azerbaijan, was more widespread, and did not lose its relevance in the Armenian nationalist discourse in the reporting period.

In that paradigm, the very existence of Azerbaijan is declared an error, an even bigger one than the existence of Turkey (we referred to that above). This ‘error’ is due to the fact that Azerbaijan was created relatively recently, with the support and participation of Turkish troops. As with Turkey, in this case, too, almost everything, from culture to the (whole) territory of the country, is denied: *I treat the notion of the “Azerbaijani carpet” figuratively; the same applies to the concept of the Azerbaijani culture and Azerbaijan as such.*

In addition, those who hold this view state that all of that - the culture, customs, and territory - has “legitimate owners”, referring, as with the Turks, to the various non-Turkic peoples of the region, who lived there before the settlement of the Turkic tribes.

For instance, a statement released by one of the Armenian political parties, says that only the recognition of the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic can help achieve justice. The same statement calls to unite Nakhichevan with Armenia (referring to present day Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, a landlocked exclave of Azerbaijan):

“...From now on, to prevent any repeat of the human, national and cultural genocides against the Armenian people, the international community, including Armenia, should, as a first step, recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. This should be followed by the return of Nakhichevan home, to form a legal part of its native land”

**A1+ /** *The vandalism was not spontaneous / Declaration by a political party. 15 Dec. 2010*

A softer version of the denial of Azerbaijan is common, too. Even though the existence of Azerbaijan is recognized, it is declared a failed state. When discussing this issue, many authors emphasize the undemocratic nature of the ruling regime in Azerbaijan; the dynastic-style transfer of power from Heidar Aliiev to his son, Ilham; Azerbaijan's economy's inefficiency and near total dependence on commodities. Often, Armenian mass media brand Azerbaijan an oil monarchy, a sultanate or a feudal state.

### ***Azerbaijan is hostile to all its neighbors***<sup>3</sup>

In the Armenian nationalist discourse, the conflict with Azerbaijan, following its comprehension, looks as natural as the absence of any conflicts in relations between, say, Finland and Sweden.

In the eyes of the nationalist-minded part of the society, conflicts, massacres and ethnic cleansing are the norm in modern day Azerbaijan.

*“...Azerbaijan became an arena of massacre, crimes and genocide. Hostility and hatred reign there”*

**PanArmenian.net /** *Ethnic groups, important for the Caucasus, are under threat in Azerbaijan / Author: an ethnologist. Dec. 13. 2010*

Below is a quote that illustrates another hypothesis, which may be simplified as “Azerbaijan is dangerous for its environment”:

*“...What is there to do? Independent Azerbaijan is that type of a nation – it does not let anyone live peacefully in the region. Everyone has got used to this state of affairs; so, we just have to wait and see who and when will get tired of this..”*

**News.am /** *Azerbaijani state television announced Ilham Aliiev as "the leader of the 50 million Azeris of the world" / Author: an analyst. Dec. 24. 2010*

In the reporting period, we ran into such statements quite frequently, which suggests that we are dealing with a search of a psychologically comfortable state, in which Armenia, blockaded both by Turkey and Azerbaijan, speaks from the position of strength and on behalf of an imaginary majority.

*“...Turkey [...], unlike Armenia, appeared before the world community as an unreliable partner. [...] as a matter of fact, (Azerbaijan) pits itself against the opinion of the international community. All international organizations, all structures and countries that are engaged in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement adhere to these approaches and attitudes that are consonant with the position of Armenia”*

**ArmToday.info /** *Azerbaijan will soon be complaining that there is oxygen in Karabakh / Author: an official. Dec. 31. 2010*

Since in this interpretation Armenians get a lot of “companions in distress”, all issues related to the Karabakh conflict receive simple and clear answers. Understandably, if Azerbaijan is at loggerheads with everybody, then the cause of the conflict lies precisely in the character of that state, and so the disregard of its interests in resolving conflicts is not only permissible, but also desirable.

<sup>3</sup> In this paradigm, the fact that Turkey is one of the neighbors of Azerbaijan is irrelevant and not mentioned.

## ***Ethnic minorities are oppressed in Azerbaijan***

This narrative is closely intertwined with the previous one, but is more specific and refers only to the peoples living in Azerbaijan.

Armenia has only recently been paying close attention to the problems of the ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan, including the Talysh, Lezgins, Avars and the others. During the reporting period, we found four articles in the monitored media outlets the put their emphasis on the violations of the rights of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan.

The articles draw special attention to the failure of international institutions in dealing with these issues properly:

*“... The rights of national minorities in Azerbaijan are violated in every possible way; such actions by Azerbaijani authorities are constant. Different ethnic groups are afraid of even speaking their native language freely and learning it, but at the same time, Azerbaijan is trying to present itself as a tolerant country. The UN simply has to sort out these problems.”*

**PanArmenian.net/** *Azerbaijan violates the rights of national minorities, while Europe dutifully turns a blind eye*  
/ Author: a public figure. Dec. 14. 2010

The above-said leads to several conclusions:

- The oppressed ethnic groups in Azerbaijan are “comrades in misfortune” for the Armenians of Karabakh, i.e., the reasons for which all these groups are oppressed are the same (chauvinism, hatred);
- The oppressed ethnic groups in Azerbaijan are potential allies for Armenians in their fight against Azerbaijan;
- That Azerbaijan violates the rights of ethnic minorities proves that in case of horizontal subordination to Azerbaijani authorities, Karabakh Armenians will meet the same fate. Accordingly, Azerbaijan must solve the problems with its minorities, before

embarking on a dialogue with Karabakh Armenians.

In this case, as will be shown below, the desire to disrupt the dialogue with the Azerbaijani side stems from the need to preserve the status quo.

## ***Dialogue with Azerbaijan is unnecessary and undesirable***

Similar to the case of the Armenian-Turkish relations, the nationalist-minded section of the society offers to reject the dialogue with Azerbaijan. In addition, when it comes to Azerbaijan, it offers to take unilateral actions aimed at consolidating the status quo.

In the framework of this concept, the road to peace lies not through negotiations, but the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent nation, coupled with more fortified defensive positions for the Armenian army, a better front line, well trained soldiers and large quantities of heavy weaponry. Thus, the adherents of this view do not treat the peaceful way of the resolution of the conflict seriously; they put the emphasis on strengthening military capacity. As time wears on, this point of view is gaining more ground; the fact that Baku regularly repeats its threats of renewed hostilities only reinforces it.

Mutual concessions are no longer considered the optimal solution to the Karabakh conflict. The occupied territories, referred to as “liberated territories” in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and known as “occupied territories” in Azerbaijan, must be fully incorporated into Karabakh (in fact, at the administrative level, this has already happened). This view is now dominant in the Armenian mass media outlets we studied, and these outlets portray it as dominant for the society as a whole.

Because the conflict resolution negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group have addressed the option of transferring the



occupied territories under the control of Azerbaijan, this causes nervousness in the Armenian society. Calls to abandon the option of transferring the territories or to even stop the negotiations in their current format are heard regularly; some suggest making counter-claims against Azerbaijan.

This proposition is embedded in the slogan of “not an inch of native land to the enemy” and voiced by a variety of actors, with the exception of the representatives of the government structures of the Republic of Armenia.

“...As for handing over the territories, then I must say that this cannot happen; it's just not realistic. If it comes to that, we, too, have demands. Part of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic has been occupied; in Armenia, the village of Artsvashen has been occupied.”

**PanArmenian.net**/ *Handing over any territory to Azerbaijan is unrealistic* / Author: a Karabakh official. Jan. 14. 2011

### ***Azerbaijan is a lesser threat than Turkey***

As Turkey, Azerbaijan, too, is often referred to in the context of various threats. For instance, the Azerbaijani-Turkish population expands demographically in Georgia in order to cut Armenia from the outside world (“*Azeris occupy Georgia*”, December 28, ArmToday.info).

Azerbaijan falsifies history and threatens the cultural identity of the Armenian people. Azerbaijan does not miss the occasion to incite foreign countries, oblivious to the particulars of the Karabakh conflict, against Armenia, thereby creating an atmosphere of intolerance around Armenia.

The threat of massacres or ethnic cleansing on the part of Azerbaijan and Turkey remains high on the agenda. Many, including officials, voiced the opinion that “*if Karabakh is under Azerbaijani control, no Armenians will be left there*”.

However, if in the case of Turkey we are dealing with fear and deep-rooted phobias, the ‘rating’ of Azerbaijan’s harmful potential is much lower, and, accordingly, the alleged threatening calls from Azerbaijan are considered less dangerous; moreover, nationalist circles expect a crushing defeat of Azerbaijan in the event of a new war:

“...Well, now to our “sworn friend”, Azerbaijan. Ilham Aliiev may try to start a war in Nagorno-Karabakh, but he will last a day or two, not more. What will happen then? He had better not think about that, because despite having huge quantities of arms and money, the Azerbaijani army is not able to fight.”

**PanArmenian.net**/ *Predicting the future in the troubled region is akin to guesswork* / Author - analyst. Dec. 28. 2010

# GEORGIA

Armenian mass media focus on Georgia much less frequently than they do on Azerbaijan. On the one hand, Armenian authorities have always stressed the friendly nature of interstate relations between Armenia and Georgia. On the other, there are a number of issues concerning both the preservation of the Armenian historical monuments on the territory of Georgia and the differences in the foreign policy orientation of the two nations.

The negative connotation in the descriptions, ascribed to Georgia, is not very pronounced, but is still there. In all likelihood, this is due to the current state of affairs on the foreign policy arena, rather than with the presence of negative ethnic stereotypes, which, as we shall see with the case of Iran, may change.

## *Georgia is not important per se*

For the majority in the Armenian society, the image of Georgia, as well as the overall image of the outside world, represents a reversal of the representations about oneself, and in some quarters the attitude to Georgia is a marker of a “pro-Western” or “pro-Russian” orientation. As for the nationalist-minded members of the Armenian society, they do not show any considerable interest towards Georgia.

Even though the references to Georgia were few and far between, they allowed us to trace an interesting feature in how that country is perceived: in general, it is not perceived as an

independent actor, but is viewed as a theatre of action and an arena where various external forces collide.

During the reporting period, nationalist groups paid attention to Georgia, in connection with the following topics:

- Problems facing the Armenian minority in Georgia (special attention is paid to Javakheti, or Javakhk, as well as issues related to the preservation of historical monuments)
- The Georgian-Turkish and Georgian Azerbaijani relations
- The sale of the “North-South” pipeline, supplying gas to Armenia;
- The Russian-Georgian relations.

Georgia (unlike Turkey and Azerbaijan) is virtually never mentioned in articles or interviews independently, as a background; references to Georgia are almost always a reaction to some event, or its interpretation.

Based on the few articles and interviews that were published in the media in the research period, one may come up with a somewhat simplified image, which is dominant, and serves as a focal point for explaining current political developments.

## *Georgia is an unreliable partner*

In the nationalist circles in Armenia, Georgia is believed to be an unreliable partner. Its actions are interpreted as actions of a ‘timeserver’, benefiting from the current foreign policy environment.

This is primarily a historical narrative that is based on an interpretation of historical events. At least part of the society believes that the Armenian-Georgian church split occurred precisely because of the weakening of the Armenian statehood and the simultaneous strengthening of the Byzantine Empire. However, parallels are drawn with the present, too.



## ***Georgia takes advantage of Armenia's conflicts with Azerbaijan and Turkey***

At present, this narrative is used to explain Georgia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Turkey is a large, strong country, and despite differences in religion and their historical conflicts, Georgia gives preference to the relationship with it and its satellite, Azerbaijan, over relations with Armenia. In addition, Georgia extracts obvious dividends from both the continued blockade of Armenia and the problems in Armenia's relations with its neighbors.

In particular, the sale of the "North-South" main pipeline, used to transit gas from Russia to Armenia, is looked at through these lenses. According to some authors, Georgia takes advantage of Armenia's isolation and tries to earn money. Having sold the pipeline to Azerbaijan, the actor interested in the blockade of Armenia, Georgia seeks to boost its benefits at the expense of Armenia's isolation.

### ***There is a 'Turkish ring' around Armenia***

Armenian mass media reflect the public anxiety about the fact that Armenia shares most of its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the two countries imposing blockade on Armenia. Iran's Azeri minority lives in the border regions of Iran, lying to the south of the Armenian-Iranian border, and Georgia's Azeri minority populates the regions of Georgia bordering Armenia to the north. This situation reinforces both the sense of a 'besieged fortress' and isolationist sentiments.

The nationalist camp perceives Georgia's economic and political cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan as a clear threat and equates it with a "Turkish belt", or "tightening of the Turkish ring" around Armenia, citing as evidence the economic projects (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, currently under construction) bypassing Armenia.

The current government policies explain the emigration of Armenians from the Armenian-populated regions of Georgia (Javakheti). The policies are presumably dictated by Turkey in order to later populate these areas with Turks (Meskhetian Turks). This, too, arouses a feeling of threat emanating from 'the tightening Turkish ring'.

In addition, a number of publications do not consider Georgia an independent actor in politics, assigning it the role of a mere tool or the 'proxy' of the West in the region. In the nationalist interpretation, too, Georgia is a dependent actor, but in a different sense: Georgia is held subject to Turkey and Azerbaijan and adopts policies that please them.

### ***Georgia oppresses ethnic Armenians***

One of the widespread views in the nationalist discourse is that Georgia's objective is the expulsion of Armenians from the areas they currently inhabit.

In the opinion of several officials, in Samtskhe-Javakheti or Javakhk (the Armenian name of the region), the existing political regime is different from the rest of Georgia and pursues the goal of forcing part of the Armenian population to emigrate, with the rest being forced either to adapt or to assimilate, leading to the de-Armenization of the region, i.e. ridding it of its Armenian population.

*"...Georgian authorities have adopted policies of persecution against Armenians and have resolved to de-Armenize Javakhk. ...Javakhk is under a Stalin-Beria style regime ... Georgian authorities look at Javakhk not as a province, but as a colony. He was surprised that Western nations consider Georgia a democratic country. Although Georgia has access to sea and enjoys U.S. financial support, this does not mean that it can develop"*

In addition, Georgia is assumed to be intentionally destroying Armenian monuments in order to erase any memory of the Armenian culture and its presence in Georgia. This, too, is branded a state-sponsored policy.

***Problems in Armenian-Georgian relations are incited from the outside***

While the majority of the nationalist-minded public accepts some level of tension in the Armenian-Georgian relations as a given, a smaller section considers this situation a mistake and points out that the Armenian-Georgian relations, which must be fraternal, are being poisoned by ill-wishers from the outside. Turkey assumes the role of such an ill-wisher more often than others; sometimes that role is assigned to Azerbaijan and - in few cases - to Russia.

In the research period, Armenian mass media tackled Iran quite rarely, even more rarely than Georgia. However, the stereotypes related to Iran (the Iranian state) are different in tone from those that relate to Georgia (and strikingly different from the images of Turkey and Azerbaijan).

In the media discourse (as well as in nationalist publications), the historical context of the Armenian-Persian relations is largely ignored. The persecution of Armenians in Persia, the numerous Armenian-Persian wars of the past, etc. are not reflected in the attitude of modern day Armenians towards Iran and Iranians.

For nearly two centuries, Armenians did not have absolutely any contacts with Iran. Following the restoration of relations in the 1990s, foreign policy considerations influenced the development of the current attitude toward Iran. Besides, the position of Armenians, as an ethnic group, in modern Iran is believed to be a rather good one. Therefore, at the present historical juncture the primarily positive aspects of the shared history are in demand in the public discourse.

In part, this is probably due to the friendly and cooperative nature of the Armenian-Iranian relations, against the backdrop of Armenia's bitter conflicts with its two other neighbors, Azerbaijan and Turkey, and even the relations with Georgia, which have their own problematic aspects.

## ***Armenians have ethnic affinity to Persians***

Armenian nationalist circles treat the fact that both Armenians and Persians belong to the Indo-European family of nations, with the two languages being part of the Indo-European language family, as evidence of "common origins". From the perspective of the proponents of the racial theory, Persians are the Aryan neighbors and "brothers" of Armenians, in contrast to the peoples of other language families and groups, especially Turks (Turks and Azeris) and Caucasians (Georgians and the peoples of the North Caucasus).

This background (Turks and Azerbaijanis belonging to a common linguistic group, the Oguz (within the Altaic family)), serves as a fertile ground for building a speculative configuration of "2 vs. 2", where Armenia and Iran are the two Aryan countries, which must revert to their premonotheistic roots, i.e. to paganism, and defend their culture against external encroachments.

Thus, Armenia gains an imaginary ally who can be relied on in the fight against the Turks; moreover, this is an ally of mixed cognation, similar to the kinship between the Turks and Azeris. The demand for this image is rooted in that Armenians are not closely related to any of the peoples of the modern world and constitute an isolated group in the Indo-European language family.

However, it should be noted that this narrative is not very widespread; it is used mainly by ultra-nationalist circles that are very small in number.

## ***Relations with Iran need further development***

Armenia finds it difficult to swallow – and this is reflected in mass media – that Turkey supports the Azerbaijani blockade of the country, and that Georgia has been developing its relations with

those two countries more actively, than with Armenia.

To have a more comfortable sense of reality, against the background of its two enemies, Armenia needs to rely on the image of a friend from among its neighbors that would serve as a bright spot against the backdrop of the demonization of the other two neighbors. Iran is this friend.

When in the early 1990s first the border with Azerbaijan and later the border with Turkey closed, followed by the disruption of communication with Russia via Georgia, Iran became the main route for the supply of food to Armenia. Nationalist circles interpret this as evidence of Iran's friendly intentions. Accordingly, some authors believe that the development of relations with Iran is the only way for Armenia to conduct a "national policy" (policy based on national interests) and to defend its national interests, since, as already mentioned, Georgia is perceived as an unreliable partner, as is Russia (see below), and only Iran has managed to 'prove' that it is a trustworthy partner.

In the nationalist paradigm, Baku's concerns about the current level of the Armenian-Iranian relations only add value to the importance of the Armenian-Iranian relations (we should like whatever the enemy does not).

*“...In his words, the Armenian-Iranian cooperation causes serious concern in Baku, because it may interfere with the Azerbaijani policy of blockading Armenia”*

**PanArmenian.net/** *Baku is trying to interfere with the Armenian-Iranian cooperation, but it will not succeed / Author: an expert. Feb. 16, 2011*

### ***Iran is an inversion of Azerbaijan***

Armenian mass media cite the cases of worsening relations between Azerbaijan and

Iran, as well as any contacts between Azerbaijan and Iran's Azeri minority as evidence of the evil intentions of Azerbaijan toward Iran; this fits well with the paradigm of Azerbaijan's hostility towards all neighboring countries.

*“...Aliev used his favorite television channel to declare himself the leader of the huge Azeri-Iranian community. His words sounded in the context of real rather than symbolic leadership. But this cannot be a threat to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its foundations ..”*

**News.am/** *Azerbaijani state television declared Ilham Aliev "the leader of 50 million Azeris of the world"/ Author: an analyst. Dec. 24, 2010*

Armenian mass media regularly publish and nationalist-minded actors widely discuss reports on the political and religious level conflicts between Iran and Azerbaijan, while reports on Iranian-Azerbaijani contacts and cooperation do not arouse much interest. This confirms the assumption that good relations with Iran - against the backdrop of hostilities with Azerbaijan - are important primarily from the psychological point of view.

News about the difficulties in the Iranian-Azerbaijani relations is virtually the main context in which Iran is mentioned in Armenian mass media, in addition to the news on the economic relations between Iran and Armenia.

However, since the Iranian-Armenian economic relations, too, fit into a political context, as an alternative to both the Azerbaijani energy projects and the dependence on Russia, it turns out that the image of Iran is not an autonomous one and in many ways is the inverse image of Azerbaijan. The fear of the deterioration of the Armenian-Iranian relations is not only about the fear of losing business contacts or supply lines in case of war, but also the fear of losing a comfortable psychological state.

## ***The Azeris of Iran are a potential threat to Armenia***

The nationalist camp considers the presence of the Azeri population in the north of Iran (including in border areas of Armenia) and its contacts with Azerbaijan as a threat to the security of Armenia. This is the reflection of the fear that Azerbaijan may be able to mobilize Iranian Azeris against Armenia, thereby significantly increasing its resources. Therefore, these contacts are perceived negatively and rather aggressively:

*“...Without exception, Azerbaijani authorities do everything in a special and unique way, in the worst sense of the word. It seemed that at least on the eve of the favorite New Year holiday one could leave people alone and could stop infesting them with propaganda, which is aimed at a single target - strengthening and taking to new extremes the power of the Aliev clan. But no, the government that knows no limits is unable to do that. That's how the "national leader", Heidar Aliev, invented the holiday of the "Day of Solidarity among Azerbaijanis of the World", celebrated on December 31”*

**News.am/** *December 31: in Azerbaijan, they'd never do anything like anybody else / Author: a journalist. Dec. 31. 2010*

## ***Iranian immigration to Armenia is a threat***

Of all the politically motivated narratives related to Azerbaijan, there is a group of representations associated with visitors from Iran, both tourists and students. This narrative is the 'live' image of Iran; in fact, it is the image of Iranians, as seen by Armenians in Armenia.

It is interesting to draw parallels with Georgia. Even if in respect of Georgia, as a political entity, the stereotypes are rather negative, while in respect of Iran they are positive, when it comes to the level of individuals and ethnic groups, perceptions about Georgians are mostly positive,

compared to the largely negative perceptions about Iranians.

There are three main phobias with regard to Iranians who enter Armenia:

- Their immigration to Armenia is a threat to the Armenian and Christian identity;
- They either offend or deprave Armenian girls;
- Most of the tourists from Iran are not ethnic Persians, but they are Azeris, and they threaten the national security of the country.

These representations are fairly widespread, although in comparison to spring 2010, when we held our pilot monitoring, the number of such comments has decreased dramatically.

# RUSSIA

Russia gets relatively few mentions in Armenian mass media, excluding the news about international politics; in the reporting period, publications analyzing Russia and its role in the region were only slightly more in number than the publications on Georgia.

Today, among the nationalist-minded people in Armenia, Russia is not a hot topic for discussion. However, the comparison of the results of the present study and the pilot conducted a year ago shows that the image of Russia has become more negative.

We identified four main narratives in relation to Russia. In some texts, all four were represented at once, although often those were the points of view of different people.

## ***Russia is Armenia's ally***

Historically, Armenians developed an image of Russia *the savior* (at the time of the arrival of Russia to the then Ottoman- and Qajar-controlled Armenia).

Subsequently, when the territory of Armenia became part of the Russian Empire and later the USSR, this image was gradually transformed into the image of Russia *the patron*. Nowadays, the image of Russia *the ally* is rather common.

In mass media, the image of Russia *the ally* is omnipresent in the statements of government officials of different levels. This image is not in

great demand in nationalist circles, but, still, it is present in their discourse.

In the opinion of some nationalists, ensuring the national interests of Armenia depends on cooperating with Russia. Thus, the cooperation must be promoted, and the union with Russia can yield something other agreements cannot give.

Typically, in this context, nationalist quarters are not interested in the discourse that Russia had once conquered Armenia, incorporating it into its empire, although that was exactly what happened in the case of Soviet Russia and the first Armenian republic.

## ***Russia is an unreliable partner***

There are different interpretations of Russia's role in Armenia's history. People quite often remember the events of 1920-1921. As a result of the Treaty of Moscow, penned by Lenin and Atatürk, Turkey and Russia partitioned Armenia.

The part that remained in Russia was either immediately or later partially divided between the Union Republics. This was how Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh became part of Azerbaijan.

Some media outlets regularly publish articles written in the spirit of this narrative; this usually happens on the eve of the anniversaries of the historical treaties, negotiations, etc., as well as at times when Turkish-Russian political contacts intensify.

Most often, this narrative emerges either as continuation of the dissident tradition that existed in Armenia in the Soviet times (USSR as a prison of nations), or in the context of rethinking the role and place of Russia in Armenia's foreign policy priorities. Because articles on this subject are published not only in connection with current political events, this narrative trails after the image of Russia.



Often, this image is projected onto the present: it is assumed that in future too Russia can easily sacrifice the vital interests of Armenia for the sake of its short-term gain.

### ***Russia is not a friend but a master***

There is a deeply-held view that Russia and Armenia cannot be equal partners, due, among other things, to their vastly different sizes.

Various circles treat this reality differently. Part of the nationalist-oriented community sees this as humiliation of Armenia and tries to counter it. Some other quarters share this view:

“...The “Stockholm syndrome” is prevalent in Armenia; the hostage loves the hostage-taker, believing that his life can only be safe with the latter - his sole friend in this cruel world, the only one who wants to help, nurture and cherish him; our sole brother. It is beyond doubt that had someone conducted a public opinion poll in Armenia, Russia's reliability rating would have been at least 50 percent. Russians do not like and do not trust us, but we, like a flock of faith-ful, continue to believe that Russians are our sole rescue..”

**Lragir.am/** *The moment of hostage-taking / The author: a journalist. Dec. 14. 2010*

### ***Armenians are the main targets of xenophobia in Russia***

The frequent cases of ethnically motivated murders in Russia, where Armenians become victims of skinhead groups, have recently become a hot topic, widely discussed in the Armenian media.

Some articles claim that Armenians have become the main target of the neo-Nazi groups:

“...One gets the feeling that the surge of nationalism in Russia affects Armenians living in that country more than anyone else. Obviously, for the most militant nationalists in today's Russia, all Southerners are alike, but it seems no one - neither Georgians nor Azeris, worries about the unrest as much as Armenians do”

**Armtoday.info/** *Armenians in Russia are the weakest link / Author - browser. Dec. 28. 2010*

Often, commentators hypothesize that the leaders of Russian neo-Nazis have connections with Azerbaijani officials, who support their attacks on Armenians in Russia. Thus, Armenians seek the Turkish hand or the Turkish trail in any act of hostility directed against them.



# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The attitude of the nationalist-minded part of the society to the international community and the “West”, collectively, is built primarily around century-old events, starting with the Berlin Congress, and including the events that happened immediately before, during and after the genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

When talking about the “international community”, in most cases Armenian mass media refer to Western countries, although they do not always state this openly.

Current events are very often interpreted through the prism of history and as its continuation. The perceptions of Armenian nationalists about the West are, in general, negative. However, as will be shown below, the significance of the West is high both in the nationalist and other discourses.

## ***The West is a conflict arbitrator***

Despite the generally negative attitudes towards the West, commentators tend to emphasize the importance of the West’s opinion. Any action of the representatives of western countries and organizations is of great interest to mass media. For instance, any statement of a foreign expert in favor of either of the parties is treated as victory in a local confrontation, because it is understood as the recognition of their own rightness by a higher authority.

Therefore, Azerbaijan’s active promotion of its position on the international arena receives special attention; Azerbaijan’s efforts are perceived as a threat because it is believed that the international community does not know what is really going on in the region, and it is, therefore, easy to deceive that community.

The opinion of the international community is given such importance that when recently a Russian-British encyclopedia published erroneous entries and allegedly biased presentation of facts on Armenia, people organized protests in front of the Russian and British Embassies in Yerevan.

“...Hundreds of people took to the streets of Yerevan chanting slogans such as “Do not distort the facts”, “In Armenia, the main language is Armenian”. Participants of the demonstration went to the embassies of Russia and Britain, where they handed over a letter to the Ambassadors of these countries in Armenia. In their letters, the members of the initiating group asked the ambassadors to assist in this case, preventing such fraud from happening in future publications.”

**News.am/** *The protest against the “Big illustrated encyclopedia of geography”/ Author: a journalist. Dec. 15. 2010*

The international community is perceived as a judge, who ultimately decides the winner in a particular conflict. And, because the judge is known, it is clear whom it is necessary to appeal to for support. In this paradigm, the task of Armenians and Armenia is not only and not so much winning the confrontation with its enemies, but better presenting its position to the world community to better inform them about the situation and make them speak on their side. Presumably, in that case the conflict would ‘resolve’ – by itself - in favor of Armenia. But, in case Azerbaijan gains the upper hand in informing the global community, Armenia will be doomed.

## ***The international community has betrayed Armenia***

Nationalist quarters like to pay special attention to the historical, rather than the present day period of the attitude of Western countries to Armenia and Armenians.

The event, key to this paradigm, happened during the First World War. Armenians were then hoping that the world powers would enable the creation of an Armenian state on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. But their hopes were dashed, because Armenians overestimated their importance to the West. Resentment for the results of the Lausanne Conference has been conserved to this day and finds expression in Armenian media. Moreover, this factor is occupying center stage in the Armenian nationalist circles' perception of the West, and remains the principal motive behind the high levels of their mistrust towards the West.

This narrative is closely linked to another narrative - *Russia is an unfaithful, unreliable partner* - both in tone and in that the basis of this narrative is the same historical period. Moreover, the West, as Russia, is treated with deep resentment, rather than hostility. This means that the authors of these statements would have liked to see an ally in the West, because only a friend can betray.

“... The Turkish political elite proved to the world community - once again - that their mentality has not changed since 1915.”

**1in.am/** *In 2010, Armenia was a reliable partner/* The author: an MP. Dec. 31. 2010

## ***The international community applies double standards***

The statements and principles of international organizations and some Western countries give

high priority to morality in foreign policy, in the case of states, and to advocacy, in the case of organizations.

The nationalist segment of the society tends to be very critical about the activities of international organizations, and it draws attention to the noncompliance of these organizations with their own standards.

“...Azerbaijan is the only country in the OSCE area, which boasts about its military expenditures. Under these circumstances, I can not understand the position of the OSCE member states and the superpowers, who keep claiming that Karabakh needs peace and that all the outstanding issues must be resolved peacefully. On the one hand, of course, these words are right, but they remain only words if they are not followed by deeds.”

**PanArmenian.net/** *Azerbaijan is the only OSCE member country, boasting about its military expenditures/* Author: an official. 27 Jan. 2011

The proponents of this view cite the threats of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, the destruction of Armenian cross-stones in Julfa and the fact that these acts have not led to an international outcry, as evidence of the accuracy of their point.

“...President Ahmadinejad has repeatedly stated that Israel has no right to exist, and the whole world has condemned such statements. Azerbaijan has been doing the same thing at different levels for more than fifteen years now, but this has not yet been given due attention”

**Regnum.ru-Armenia /** *We need to clarify what borders of the NKR we should recognize /* Author: a military person. Dec. 14. 2010

Often, in this context, the situation with the rights of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan receives attention:

*“...For a long time, we believed and hoped that the UN and other international bodies would take specific steps to address the violation of the rights of national minorities in Azerbaijan, but we now see that nothing serious is happening on that front, so we have decided to take the matter into our own hands”*

**PanArmenian.net** / *Armenians are fighting for the rights of national minorities in Azerbaijan* / Author: a public figure. Dec. 13. 2010

When an international organization subjects Armenia to harsh criticism, the emphasis on the presumed double standards of international organizations resurfaces.

The authors of some articles link this treatment by international organizations to Azerbaijan's possession of oil and gas. Thus, in the words of one of the authors, "it is important that you possess hydrocarbons, which have - with U.S. support - turned into a measure of democracy".

Over and over again, the international community gets slammed for not supporting Armenia in certain cases, and for not adequately condemning both Azerbaijan and Turkey for their actions. In the opinion of nationalists, international organizations and Western countries are obliged to defend Armenia's position, condemning Turkey and Azerbaijan, and they believe that this is going to happen sooner or later.

*“...And the rationale of this issue is that the longer the adoption of the [genocide] resolution by the House of Representatives is postponed, the more means of pressuring Washington Turkey will get. But no matter how much Turks brag, the "sword of Damocles" will be suspended over Turkey forever. Moreover, one day it may even fall, leaving Turkey with nothing”*

**PanArmenian.net** / *Judgement day for Turkey will sooner or later arrive* / Author: a journalist. Dec. 21. 2010

## ***Armenia is part of and a bulwark for Western civilization***

Even if negative perceptions about the West dominate the nationalist thinking, the same circles often feel the urge to identify oneself with the Western civilization.

Such identification with the West is intertwined with the narrative on Iran being the only friend in the region, and, in fact, it represents a search for allies, though on a global scale.

Many actors think that the clash of civilizations is real, and that Armenia is not only part of the Western and Christian civilization, but also its main bulwark in the East and on the front line with the other civilizations. In this understanding, Armenia was in the past one of the main battlegrounds for different civilizations, and it will stay one in future, too.

## ***The international community unfairly ignores Armenia***

The view that Armenia is an integral and important part of the Western civilization is held mostly by Armenians, rather than Westerners. This causes disappointment among nationalist circles who believe in conspiracy theories, claiming that the West deliberately ignores Armenia.

In the below cited example, the author equates the passive response of international structures to the acts of vandalism in Julfa with intentional disregard:

*“...Had this cemetery been Semitic or had it belonged to any other community, the world would have been outraged - and rightly so - and the issue would have been included in the agendas of various forums and conferences. But in the case of the Armenian Jougha, this act of state terrorism never became a topic for discussions in international organizations and was never condemned; instead, it was ignored. Moreover, the efforts of Azerbaijan to prevent the visit of the PACE and even UNESCO Rapporteur to Nakhichevan did not get a proper response..”*

**A1+ /** *The act of vandalism was not spontaneous /*  
Declaration issued by a political party. Dec. 15. 2010

# ARMENIA

Armenian mass media frequently address the attempts of Armenians to comprehend their identity and their role in the world. It appears that this is a reflection of the ongoing process of nation building in Armenia.

The complex of auto-stereotypes and views on Armenia that we identified is very diverse and contains a lot of negative and positive traits that characterize both Armenia and Armenians. Of these, we isolated the nationalist perceptions, most of which, of course, are positive.

It is worth noting that whereas during the previous study, the media widely reported on the Armenian-Turkish normalization process - the focus of an active nationalist discourse - by the end of 2010 the main topic covered in mass media was domestic politics. Within the framework of this topic, there were relatively few nationalist statements; many more of those statements were present in articles that one way or another touched on Azerbaijan, as well as in materials on Turkey and Turks, which, as already noted, form a certain background in Armenian mass media, even in the absence of explicit news events.

In the context of domestic politics in the research period, mass media outlets often talked about the Armenian authorities, frequently in a negative context. Also, it is worth stressing that we identified a large number of statements that either directly or indirectly pointed to the failure of the Armenian state or nation.

## *Armenians are a Messianic nation*

In the perception of the nationalist-minded members of the society, Armenians are bearers of messianic ideas and spread culture among their neighbors. This is reflected, for instance, in media discussions on Armenia being the first nation to adopt Christianity as state religion. The websites of nationalist organizations, for example, are awash with historical evidence on the sermons of Armenian priests in the early days of Christianity in the Middle East and the North Caucasus.

As part of the messianic paradigm, nationalist circles like to seek traces of the Armenian culture in different parts of the world; the results of those investigative efforts were published on some of the websites we studied. For example, some websites write about the Armenian origin of the Hyksos, the Basques and others. Also, often they refer to the fact that Armenian architects constructed Dolmabahçe Palace and many other famous buildings in Istanbul.

The publication of literature on similar topics is common; mass media, too, discuss those topics, although not very often: monitoring of such content in mainstream media yielded very few results. For instance, mass media references to evidence pointing to the creation of the Georgian and Albanian alphabets by Mesrop Mashtots, as well as the creation of the modern Turkish alphabet by an Ottoman Armenian belong to this narrative. In the course of debates, other participants challenged the veracity of these facts, and that caused the irritation of nationalist-minded actors.

The Messianism of Armenia is not only a historical and cultural, but also a religious and political idea. Whereas in the late 1980s the emphasis was on the idea that Armenia was in the vanguard of the struggle against the Soviet

machine<sup>4</sup>, at present the stress is on the historical and cultural role of Armenians in the destinies of the humanity. This corresponds to the narrative of “Armenia is a stronghold and an outpost of the Western civilization”. Here, the Armenian messianism acts as a ‘last bastion’ in the way of Islam advancing to the West. Despite the fact that at present the Armenian society is not very religious, its narratives widely represent the idea of the sameness of Armenians and Christianity. This idea is almost never challenged, except by a relatively small group of neo-pagans.

In the same narrative, Armenia acts as the “bur in the throat” of the Turkic world, the only barrier to the uncontrolled proliferation of Turks in Eurasia. Below is a typical quote illustrating this point:

“...Armenia is a “front line” of sorts, protect-ing European and Christian values... It must consider such a scenario, so that later it does not face a total-ly hostile environment. Moreover, hostile not so much in the religious sense, but in the civilizational one”

**Regnum.ru-Armenia / Karabakh analyst: The West has many other leverages at its disposal to “break” Russia: / Author: an expert. Dec. 21. 2010**

### ***Armenians are creators of world culture***

In the narratives about Armenia, discussed by mass media, we discovered a high level of interest toward the Armenian culture, including the culture that thrives or used to thrive in foreign countries. It is worth noting that this interest began to emerge back in the Soviet times, when it was no longer punished by repressions. From late 1950’s onwards, Magda Neumann’s book, “The Armenians”, was widely reprinted, rewritten and distributed in Armenia.

<sup>4</sup> See Hrant Ter-Abrahamyan, The Yerevan urban environment and dissent // Collection of articles on The South Caucasus: Territories, Histories, People, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 37

The book challenged the conventional version of the Armenian history<sup>5</sup> and put into circulation lists of “famous Armenians of the world”, etc.

Today Armenian media pay special attention to the Armenian heritage beyond Armenia, including the Armenian churches, built in different countries, and the other representations of the material culture passed on to our generation by the Armenian citizens of those countries. In addition, mass media display strong interest in the Armenians, or people of Armenian descent, who have distinguished themselves in other countries.

In the research period we came across articles on the role of Armenians in the Iranian cinema, as well as a review of a new book on Armenian-Americans:

“...Without falling into the trap of provincial self-conceit, on these Christmas holidays we want to re-mind our compatriots what the Armenian people are capable of in conditions of freedom, justice and rule of law”

**Armtoday.info/ The outstanding inventions of Armenian-Americans in the twentieth century / Author: a politician. Dec. 28. 2010**

### ***Armenians are nation-victim and must learn to be tough***

The image of Armenians and Armenia as victims is deeply entrenched in the mass consciousness of Armenians, and especially in the minds of the nationalist segment of the society. Armenians have were subjected to genocide and betrayed by the international community.

Against this background of self-perception, Armenians tend to interpret current events in the light of the image of a victim: Armenia is an object of the aggressive intentions of Turkey and

<sup>5</sup> Oganessian E., Armenian dissent / 1979. № 7, p. 28.



Azerbaijan, and the world community does not want to protect Armenia from those countries.

*“...At the same time, Azerbaijan is hiding its criminal actions that led to the bloody conflict and is branding the real aggressor a victim and vice versa, in an effort to shift the responsibility for the war imposed on the Armenian side”*

**Panorama.am/** *In 2011, Armenia's parliament will consider a draft declaration on the responsibility of Azerbaijan / Author: an MP. Dec. 28. 2010*

However, compared to the previous study conducted a year ago, and the pilot monitoring conducted in the spring of 2010, this narrative was discovered in fewer articles this time. Moreover, today this narrative has been transformed into the idea of the ‘weakness’ of Armenia and Armenians. In this paradigm, Armenians are weak and vulnerable; they are easily influenced by other countries and cultures; they easily assimilate in the Diaspora; and they lose their identity in Armenia.

In this narrative, the state of Armenia appears as too passive and indecisive. Armenia, according to these authors, must be uncompromising and tough in order to be able to defend its interests in the confrontation with its neighbors. Nationalists often urge to follow Turkey’s example, which, they believe, acts toughly and defends its interests aggressively.

We must, however, note that we have come across some articles that thought that the real threat was the growth of nationalism in Armenia, rather than the insufficiently aggressive behavior of Armenia.

### ***Armenia is an ancient civilization***

For Armenian nationalists, the idea of ancient Armenia, Armenian culture, language, etc. is extremely important. Within this narrative, there were articles that stressed Armenia’s ‘antiquity’,

noting that Armenia existed in ancient times or even earlier; that it used to be one of the ‘contemporaries’ of Assyria and Babylon, with Yerevan being older than Rome.

In the Armenian nationalist paradigm, history (or, rather, their idea of it) continues to play the role of the principal source of legitimacy of Armenia’s existence. As E. Hobsbawm writes: “Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pa-kistan are to heroin addicts; we supply the essential raw material for the market.”<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, in the research period, the websites of Armenian nationalist organizations published articles attacking historians and political scientists working in Armenia and beyond its borders, who, in their opinion, “molest” the traditional interpretation of Armenia’s history. The principal target of such publications were the scholars working within the paradigms of modernism and constructivism who talk about different (later) dates or put forth new interpretations of historical events, including the idea of the emergence of nations in a later historical period.

### ***Armenia is a failed state***

In recent years, negative auto-stereotypes have been widespread in the Armenian society. The presentation of Armenia as a failed state, or even an ‘an incomplete state’, occupies center stage in the group of negative auto-stereotypes.

Whereas in the past this view did not extend to the nationalist segment of the society, lately this narrative has appeared in the nationalist discourse, too. In this context, Armenian authorities are accused of both failing to run “national” policies and of not properly defending the interests of the people.

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<sup>6</sup> E. Hobsbawm. *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe today* / Collected works: Nations and Nationalism, Moscow, 2002



# NATIONALISM: THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT

## *Hate speech in mass media*

The pilot media monitoring undertaken by the Caucasus Institute in the spring of 2010, registered decrease in the number of nationalist commentaries, and the current study done from December 2010 to March 2011, revealed near total migration of radical nationalism from mainstream mass media to more marginal publications and a fall in the reader interest in marginal media outlets of nationalist persuasion (some of them have even closed).

We may assume that this was a consequence of the end of the Armenian-Turkish normalization process; the deemphasis of the Karabakh negotiation process; and a switch of the public attention to domestic political and economic issues.

The role of mainstream media in the dissemination of nationalism in Armenia is, in general, low, because, even though the majority of Armenian mass media are not impartial<sup>7</sup>, none of the ten most popular online media we analyzed was engaged in active promotion of intolerance and none of them propagated - in any significant quantities - the views of nationalist groups.

The surge of nationalist sentiments in Armenia was apparently associated with the

activation of the Karabakh settlement, the launch of the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement process, and, possibly, the economic growth of 2002-2008 when problems associated with poverty were somewhat sidelined. Additionally, in light of the rejection of the Armenian statehood, widespread in the society, in recent years nationalism has taken shape as a form of opposition.

We found only few examples of hatespeech in the Armenian mass media publications that we studied: less than 3% of the articles we analyzed contained hatespeech.

In the course of the study we did not discover any manifestations of xenophobia against the ethnic minorities currently residing in Armenia. Hatespeech was most often directed against Turkey and Azerbaijan and the authorities of those countries, and in only a handful of cases it was directed against ethnic Turks and Azeris.

Most of the analyzed material were news reports that did not contain any commentary. The choice of news was interesting, though: for example, Azerbaijan was almost exclusively covered in the context of adverse events happening in that country; Armenian mass media published more negative than positive or neutral news from Turkey; a somewhat negative background was present in the coverage of other neighboring countries, too.

In analytical articles and commentaries, there was significantly less ethnic hatespeech than political hatespeech related to Armenian domestic politics.

## *Armenia's allies and enemies*

In the Armenian nationalist discourse, Armenia is depicted as having both enemies and allies, but the image of the enemy is more crystallized than that of the ally.

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<sup>7</sup> See the "Media Environment and Attitudes to Media in Armenia" report, Policy Briefs of the Caucasus Institute, № 1, 2010.

When it comes to enemies, everything is crystal clear: Turkey and Azerbaijan are the arch-nemeses of Armenia. This virtually never caused debates; we did not find any publications revising this image of the enemy.

As for Georgia, in the minds of nationalists, it is neither an ally nor an enemy, but more of an undesirable neighbor which Armenia has to deal with.

The image of Russia is closer to that of an ally, with the current state of bilateral relations between Russia and Armenia conforming to this image. However, the image of Iran is the closest to that of an ally. The West is perceived as a desired ally; however, the international community and its activities (including the human rights movement) are often treated with resentment and mistrust.

The chief 'scale of measurement' for gauging the attitudes towards different countries, including the closest neighbors, is the situation of the Armenian Diaspora in those countries, as well as the recognition or non-recognition of the Armenian Genocide by those countries.

In this construct, the section of the Armenian society that has contacts with Turks is considered another enemy: in the perception of nationalists, it is a 'fifth column', undermining the security of the country from within.

### ***Primordialism and isolationism***

Armenian nationalism considers the issue of the origin of nations from the so-called primordialist perspective. Nations have existed since ancient times, and the nations of today are a logical development of the tribes that were the blood ancestors of modern peoples living on the same territory (or of migrants, if these were nomadic tribes).

Within the framework of this concept, political developments are extremely ethnicized, and

states act as spokespersons for the will of dominant ethnic groups. If the leadership of a country takes an action on the international arena, then the subject of that action is, by default, the titular ethnic group of the country (the French, the German, etc.). Moreover, this extends to the internal life of the country. The internal organization of a state is believed to be an expression of the qualities of its 'principal' ethnic group. Thus, the world looks like a community of ethnic groups, and ethnic stereotypes replace the ideas about and representations of states.

The outside world is generally viewed through a century-old prism: we have world powers that determine the world order. The image of Britain is closely connected with the events of the past, and that is why this country acts as a measure of hypocritical policies attributed to the West. Armenian nationalism prefers history over the present day and it often denies or ignores current events. Perhaps the only exception to this 'rule' is the Karabakh war.

Interestingly, sometimes mass media cite the Armenian political figures and thinkers of that period, e.g. Garegin Njdeh, Shahan Natalie, Zarevand, etc. To this day the works of these authors remain at the core of the ideology of Armenian nationalism, and in that sense nothing new has been invented. This is why the Treaty of San Stefano and the ensuing events, i.e. the Armenian Genocide, the First Republic, and the other developments of the half a century interval of 1875-1925 remain central themes. Later historical layers are of minor importance and relate, in part, to the 1960s and partly to the period after the Karabakh war.

This situation is due not only to conservatism. On the one hand, this discourse, like others, was largely conserved during the Soviet period. On the other, the nationalist idea was, in part, imported from the Diaspora into Armenia after

the waves of repatriation in the 1940s and 1960s.

Because nationbuilding and a quest for identity are still in progress in Armenia, Armenian nation-alists are above all interested in Armenia and Armenians. Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Azerbaijan are in focus, too, but the interest in them is based on the opposition to Armenia and Armenians, i.e., at the end of the day that interest too is pointed inward. The qualities and actions of Turks and Azeris are interesting only to the extent that they are distinct from Armenian qualities and actions and thereby allow Armenians to define their place in the world and in the ideological space “from the opposite end”.

In general, Russia and Georgia have ‘living’ images in Armenia, due, most likely, to the very active contacts of the residents of Armenia with these countries<sup>8</sup>. The images of the other countries and peoples are either a reflection of historical events or an inversion of other images (for example, Iran is an anti-Azerbaijan).

In the Armenian nationalist paradigm (as in any nationalist paradigm), the main actor is not Armenia as a country but Armenians as an ethnic group equated with the nation. Thus, ethnic interest is understood as national interest. In the case of Armenian nationalism, an important intervening factor is that Armenians, as an ethnic group, long existed without a state and formed part of states that suppressed their identity. Unsurprisingly, schools in Armenia teach History of the Armenian people and not History of Armenia. Accordingly, in the Armenian nationalist discourse, as in many other Armenian discourses (e.g., the liberal discourse), there is a negative attitude towards the phenomenon of the state.

One of the interesting features of this ideological construct is isolationism. Since nationalists do

not trust the Armenian people and consider them weak and unable to cope with external challenges, they display a paternalistic attitude towards the Armenian people. They believe that the best solution in the present situation is being shielded from any external influences as long as Armenia, from their perspective, is not be ready to oppose them, or, in other words, until it takes steps towards consolidation on a nationalist basis.

Until then, they see themselves as the last pillar on which Armenia can rest, thereby considering their ideological position as a mission to rescue the country.

The normalization of relations with Turkey appears to be a problem primarily from the psychological point of view, because it conflicts with the identity in which Armenians and Turks are antipodes. Obviously, this, along with the mistrust of their people, is the main reason responsible for the rejection of a dialogue with Turkey. For example, the Armenian-Aryan Order believes that the free movement of people amounts to the right for the enemy to freely move on the Armenian territory; the organization (party) also believes that ethnic Armenians cannot live side by side with ethnic Turks<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Perceived threats***

Nationalist circles believe that Armenia is surrounded by countless dangers. Apparently, it is not just that nationalists are using alarmism as an instrument for mobilizing the population, but that they also sincerely believe in the incapacity of the Armenian society and its inability to communicate on an equal footing with other societies.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2010, 475,000 tourists from Armenia visited Georgia.

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<sup>9</sup> Karabakh: an in-depth discussion. Part 1: The views of Armenian political parties on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflict resolution process, LINKS, 2010. See page 9.

In the reporting period, the Armenian parliament adopted a law “On Language”, establishing the legal basis for the opening of foreign language schools. This initiative met energetic opposition from the various quarters of the society, including its nationalist-minded members. Mass media in the research period expressed fear of the ultimate loss of the Armenian cultural identity as a result of receiving education in another language. The nationalist discourse views this as a fatal and irreparable loss, marking the beginning of the end of both the Armenian people and the Armenian state-hood.

apprehension about a new war with Azerbaijan, possibly on two fronts, with Azerbaijan and Turkey. The fear of the disruption of normal relations with Georgia and Iran was also prominent among of the discussed threats.

“... *In military terms, this is a “frontal” attack on the Armenian identity, an attack along the entire frontline. The man, who understands that his language is in a subordinate position in his country, will surely suffer from an inferiority complex. Death sentence is a lesser doom compared to a whole nation being thrown into the inferiority complex at the stroke of a pen*”

**1in.am/** *This is a “frontal” attack on the Armenian identity*  
/ Author: a culture figure. Dec. 21. 2010

In the framework of the discussions of the law “On Language”, the loss of cultural identity was not the only fear expressed. One of the articles stated that the adoption of the law would harm the status of Armenians:

“... *Whatever their tales about the foreign language schools, it is clear that the Armenian language is officially regarded as a kind of ethnic minority language on the territory of Armenia*”

**1in.am/** *The Armenian language is ours, but it is in Turkish hands.* / The author: a social commentator. Dec. 22. 2010

The remaining threats are mainly external in nature and have already been listed in the relevant country chapters. As already noted, we often came across fear of new rounds of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Also, there was

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