



Youth speaks peace



I will write peace on your wings and  
you will fly all over the world

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# **YOUTH SPEAKS PEACE**

**Reflections on peace of youth from Tavush  
and Artsakh.**

**Yerevan 2021**

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The current study entitled “Youth speaks peace” presents the documentation of dynamics of the perceptions and visions of young people towards peace and peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh (hereafter Artsakh)<sup>1</sup> conflict.

Representing the most vulnerable bordering areas, participants became an asset for the study, with their thoughts and experiences of living in unrecognized territories and on the border. They brought up the challenges they are facing each day, demonstrating strength and eagerness to build sustainable peace in the region. This study aims at bringing their voices, opinions and visions of peace.

The activities of the project took place in 2019-2021, the most complex and tragic time in recent Armenian history. Drastic impact of Covid-19, the skirmishes in Tavush, and 44 days devastating war of 2021.

Forming a considerable percentage of the population both in Armenia and Artsakh youth has been insufficiently visible in the peace process, neither their perceptions and visions considered. The central theme of the project was strengthening the essential role of youth in building peace and empower them to take meaningful roles in countries' future. Young

representatives from the very bordering areas of Tavush and Artsakh took part in the project activities.

Being designed only for one year, the project was extended because of Covid-19 allowing to look for more creative methodologies to address the goals. This extension time though very tragic and emotional both for “Democracy Today” and the participants of the project provided an opportunity to organize more frequent discussions, meetings, and interviews, amplifying the possibilities to provide the participants with the knowledge and information. Thus, this study presents unique record on dynamic changes in visions of peace by the youth who had experienced the direct impact of two wars on the project's course.

The project is distinctive in many ways. The participants are the young men and women who have been born just after the cease-fire agreement of 1994, which sadly did not lead to the final peace agreement and stability. For these young people, peace has distinctive meaning as the narratives, writings, emotions on peace and good cross border relationship they have come from parents and neighbors, but never from the reality, since they never lived in the times of peace. Some of them lived through three wars during their lifetime.

The study presents the dynamic

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1. The President of the Republic of Armenia. 1999-2021. “Historical data.” Artsakh Republic: History and Current Reality. Accessed March 19, 2021. [https://www.president.am/en/Artsakh-nkr/#:~:text=B.C.\)%20Artsakh%20was%20known%20as,remained%20rich%20historic%20Dcultural%20heritage](https://www.president.am/en/Artsakh-nkr/#:~:text=B.C.)%20Artsakh%20was%20known%20as,remained%20rich%20historic%20Dcultural%20heritage).

change in perceptions from the first assessment which took place long before the Tavush war, and visions after first brief clashes at the borders of Tavush<sup>2</sup> and followed by the 44-day full scale destructive war.<sup>3</sup>

Another important trait of this study is that it includes chapters written by the young local experts bringing their personal insight.

The study is based on the analysis of many discussions, focus groups, individual interviews, and questionnaires held throughout the various stages of the project. Participants met each other and discussed existing realities of their communities. Living in the same territory, they did not always have an opportunity to travel or gain knowledge on the conditions of life of each other. Meetings with the representatives of state and non-state actors, members of international organizations have been organized for the group members in Yerevan and Stepanakert during which youth shared their views on different politics and peace perspectives.

Discussions on peace among this group have educational value and key to the understanding of the impact of many factors that shaped the views and perceptions of peace by youth in different parts of the world some living in unrecognized states, others between

fires of war and short intermissions of peace. It was an important observation that the communities directly affected by the conflicts are often the ones most inclined to resolve conflicts peacefully. And yet, different communities often have different understandings of what constitutes “a good peace” which is useful in framing efforts to prepare the broader society for peace.

The report has been re-written twice. The reason behind these changes as it was mentioned above was Covid-19, an escalation in Tavush Province and the full-scale war in Artsakh. Surely, the general geopolitical situation of the region has been re-shaped and, of course, this situation brought new realities, new perceptions, and changes that are included in this version of the report.

Some of the young people from Artsakh who took part in the project could return to their homes, others did not have this opportunity, as their homes have been moved under the control of Azerbaijan. Almost all the participants from Artsakh experienced loss of a close person because of the war.

This project aimed to invest in the “preparation of population to peace” through discussions and general discourse on visions of peace by youth that is the most important and

2. Washington Post. 2020. Armenia-Azerbaijan border fighting escalates; 16 killed. July 16. Accessed August 15, 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/correction-armenia-azerbaijan-story/2020/07/15/d1606484-c6d7-11ea-a825-8722004e4150\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/correction-armenia-azerbaijan-story/2020/07/15/d1606484-c6d7-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html).

3. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. 2021. “The Origins of the 44-Day War,” an article authored by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. January 04. Accessed March 9, 2021. <https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2021/01/04/Nikol-Pashinyan-04-01/>.

untapped resource. The results of this study might serve as a good basis for negotiators and considered by the officials during meetings. We hope to have an opportunity and share these results with diplomats and state officials. It is for the first time that youth from Tavush and Artsakh shared their experiences and expressed their views on the future and peace.

“Democracy Today” would like to thank all the participants and authors of separate national chapters for their inputs. Our organization wants to say special “Thank you” to National Endowment for Democracy and senior program officer Elspeth Suthers for their support of this important work. We would also like to thank young people who took part in the study for sharing their thoughts with us.

## BACKGROUND

The early 90s had been the most turbulent times for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; the time of political warming that raised hopes for change. Independence movements that started quickly spread over the entire territory of Soviet Union and brought to the final dissolution of the Union and establishment of independent states.<sup>4</sup> This was a pivotal opportunity for transformation and bringing about the critical need for restoration of justice towards peoples living in the territory of the Soviet Union against whom the Soviet regime, the politics of rule and divide have been applied to keep them under control. Many challenges have accompanied that important process of establishing a new type of governance and political thinking. Armenia was one of the first Soviet Republics whose people raised the voice for their Independence organizing mass manifestations throughout the country. The Armenian population of Artsakh that struggled since 1920th for its independence saw this process as an opportunity to restore justice.

The conflict of Artsakh has the long history of oppression towards indigenous Armenian population living on the territory of Artsakh, the territory which was by the decision of Stalin given to Azerbaijan. It meant for the local population double subordination

and pressure to forced assimilation and ethnic cleansing. The ethnic Armenians who were predominantly inhabiting Artsakh have never given up the hope for freedom and unity with living so close to Armenians, who had their national state. The questions of unification have been raised at any possible occasion during Soviet times, highlighting the urgency and vitality of finding solutions.

This was the reason for concern for the Azerbaijani government, which tried to undertake measures to increase the population of Azerbaijanis in Artsakh through the resettlement of this ethnic group.<sup>5</sup> Even during the Soviet era, Artsakh always stayed in the center of tensions, however, the strong Soviet hand stopped any possible tensions. With the beginning of “perestroika”<sup>6</sup> everything has changed. People from many disputable areas accepted the dissolution of Soviet Union as an opportunity to dissolve the geographical and political forced placement that was taking the indigenous people to assimilation and annihilation. For both Armenians in Armenia and Artsakh, independence meant opportunity to build new statehood with protected rights and preservation of cultural norms and national identity. The liberation movement turned into full scale war, taking many lives on both sides of conflict. Thanks to international

4. Marples, David R. 2013. *The Collapse of Soviet Union 1985 -1991*. New York: Routledge.

5. Waal, Thomas de. 2013. *“Black Garden”*. New York: University Press.

6. The common name for the reforms and the new ideology of the Communist Party used to refer to changes in the economic and political structure of the USSR, initiated by General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987-1991.

mediation, ceasefire has been reached in 1994.<sup>7</sup>

After ceasefire, the OSCE Minsk Group<sup>8</sup> has been established with the mandate to strengthen cease-fire, develop the basis for negotiation and take the role of mediator through the use of confidence-building measures. Enormous efforts have been placed by the Minsk group to negotiate possible peace, nevertheless due to numerous factors, including a change in external and internal political dynamics, as well as, moving from people's rights and protection concept towards more of political manipulations affected the process and made it far from being tangible. Systematic shootings in Artsakh and Tavush continued to affect the lives and livelihoods of the peaceful population. Irrespective of ceasefire, there have been shootings taking lives on both sides. The four days war in April 2016<sup>9</sup> which was the hugest clash after the ceasefire agreement have been signed. There were casualties in Tavush province.<sup>10</sup> This was signal on the possibility of the reinitiating of the military activities.

The "frozen conflicts" from different parts of the world have common traits, however, various researches and studies prove that extension of conflict makes

it more complicated to find durable and sustainable solution. Similarly, too many conflicts, the voices and opinions of those who live under military actions are not taken into consideration, together with their interests and visions. Exclusion is a very shaky fundament for peace negotiations and in many situations, this leads to new escalations. The authorities of Armenia, negotiators and international community used exclusive policies. Such kind of approach brought to exclusion of Artsakh from the negotiation process, which led to additional isolation of people of Artsakh and created space with limited opportunities for human rights and peace developments. Moreover, the absence of recognition of Artsakh as a state by the international community left very few possibilities to present the voices and needs of local people in the international arena. In addition, the politics of Azerbaijan encouraged these limitations, blacklisting those people who traveled to Artsakh and limiting any possibility of interaction of citizens of Artsakh with the rest of the world. In addition, permanent hate speeches and extreme Armenophobia<sup>11</sup> have been leaving little space for constructive dialogue.

In this regard, the role of the civil society organizations working in

7. OSCE. 1995. "Mandate for the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Process." [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org). March 23. Accessed November 05, 2018. <https://www.osce.org/mg/70125?download=true>.

8. Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. n.d. OSCE Minsk Group. Accessed January 19, 2019. <https://www.osce.org/mg>.

9. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Artsakh. n.d. "The Four-day War of 2-5 April 2016." <http://www.nkr.am/>. Accessed July 10, 2020. <http://www.nkr.am/en/four-day-war>.

10. Armenia Defense Ministry issues statement on military incident at Armenian-Azerbaijani border. 2020. [www.news.am](http://www.news.am). March 30. Accessed April 03, 2020. <https://news.am/eng/news/569363.html>.

11. Anzhela Elibegova. 2017. Armenophobia in Azerbaijan: Causes and Effects. May 07. Accessed March 2021, 9. <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/armenophobia-in-azerbaijan-causes-and-effects>.



the area of peacebuilding cannot be ignored. Civil sector plays a huge role when it comes to the people-to-people contacts and track two diplomacy. Even in the hardest times of the conflict, non-governmental organizations were the only bridge between societies. Nevertheless, the involvement of Track two diplomats and NGO members in the Track one diplomacy is not a simple task. It was not highly supported by the conflicting state parties, though Minsk group had policy to promote these contacts.

The “Velvet revolution”<sup>12</sup> which took place in Armenia in 2018, gave much hope and impetus to restart negotiations and find constructive common space for negotiators. After the revolution and establishment of a new government which has been elected through the free and fair elections, more efforts were invested to encourage peacebuilding activities. The statement of the Ministers of Foreign affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning “preparing populations for peace”<sup>13</sup> signaled on the intentions of new stage of policy developments.

The intention of the new Government of Armenia to bring back Artsakh to the table of negotiations has been brought up again. This is an important step, which will become a key aspect of an inclusive solution.

Nevertheless, it is also enormously hard task, as it requires wisdom from all the sides to have a fair and lasting solution. There had been some steps taken by the two governments. The most recent one is the exchange of Journalists, from Armenian and Azerbaijan<sup>14</sup>, who had the chance to visit Azerbaijan, Armenia and Artsakh.

Of course, in the light of long-term conflict, which did not show any signs of improvements for a very long period, even such kind of positive changes are important. However, for the most residents of the conflict affected regions and territories, such as Tavush Province of Armenia and Artsakh, no real concept of what “peace” would actually look like still exist. Former authoritarian regime, which is still powerful uses its financial and human resources to discredit the current government presenting “peacebuilding efforts” as betrayal.

Peace is one of those terms that’s frequently used, but is hard to define. In our study we looked through wider approach, not a binary one with an understanding of peace—as the absence of violence or conflict, otherwise known as Negative Peace—is not wrong and can be useful it is incomplete and leads to many misconceptions of how peace can be attained. It implies that once the guns fall silent, peace has been achieved.

12. The Guardian. 2018. Shock as Armenia’s prime minister steps down after 11 days of protests. April 23. Accessed July 4, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/23/serzh-sargsyan-resigns-as-armenias-prime-minister-after-protests>.

13. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. [www.mfa.am. January 16. Accessed March 3, 2020. https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2019/01/16/armenia\\_osce\\_NK/8962](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2019/01/16/armenia_osce_NK/8962).

14. —. 2019. [www.mfa.am. November 23. Accessed March 3, 2020. https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2019/11/23/spox\\_journalist\\_exchange/9972](https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2019/11/23/spox_journalist_exchange/9972).

According to Peace Index research<sup>15</sup> this closes off the possibility of finding alternative approaches to peacebuilding and development; ones that extend beyond security and create the conditions necessary to restructure our societies so that they can adapt and change to our transforming environments. It does not describe what creates a resilient peace, one that will not lapse back into violence, and one that is associated with many other social characteristics we consider to desirable, including stronger economic outcomes, better measures of well-being, and more sustainable environmental performance.

The concept of “peace” is very often being manipulated and used by my non-democratic actors in Armenia and outside to undermine the reputation of newly elected democratic government. The oppositional groups base their activities on militaristic and patriotic slogans to manipulate peace process and also create tensions between two governments. Thus, the project activities aiming at bringing youth from Tavush and Artsakh together to discuss the policies of peace and meet leaders in Armenian and Artsakh, as well as learn from each other, are vital in this political environment. That will strongly invest in understanding real meaning of peace and developing fertile soil for peace building. It is important to acknowledge that the communities

directly affected by the conflict are often the most isolated and excluded from any peace process. It is fundamental to highlight what people of border regions understand as “peace” and what is useful in terms of preparation of broader society for peace. Thus, it is important not only to build the capacity of civil society in the regions of Tavush and Artsakh, but also make the discussions about peace process in communities and make sure that the positions and issues of ordinary people who live on the border are taken into consideration.

The recent political processes that took place in Karabakh, such as Parliamentary and Presidential elections, showed a tendency to democracy and fair elections. It is unprecedented by the number of candidates, that were 14. All the candidates have diverse backgrounds, with only one similar statement in their programs with is self-determination and recognition of Artsakh. Because of COVID-19 there were a few local observers from Armenia. The observers of Armenia stated good participation rate (73%) and organized nature of elections.

The devastating 44-day war<sup>16</sup> broke out on September 27th 2020. Azerbaijan, with the military support of Turkey, attacked Artsakh in the early morning. Not only combatants become the target of the attackers but

15. Peace Index research, Accessed March 7, 2020. <https://www.positivepeace.academy/>

16. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. 2021. “The Origins of the 44-Day War,” an article authored by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. January 04. Accessed March 9, 2021. <https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2021/01/04/Nikol-Pashinyan-04-01/>.

also civilian population. Stepanakert, Shushi as well as other cities and villages have been under constant bombardment during the entire war. Azerbaijani manifested in of mass atrocities, including ethnic cleansing and war crimes. Azerbaijani authorities applied hate policy and extreme intolerance towards Armenians, which stimulated media war between the two. After 44-days of destructions, deaths and many hundred thousand displaced and placement of over 2,000 Russian peacekeepers for at least five years to monitor the situation on the borderline and facilitate the return of displaced population.

Of course, the war brought new challenges, political and social and security threats. The level of frustration is still extremely high, especially

among the younger generation. The disbelief towards the pace process tailored before grew significantly. An inadequate response of the international community created disbelief toward any possibility to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Impossibility to pressure on Azerbaijan to release all the prisoners of war and to move away from the territory of Armenia in Syunik and Gegharkunik regions becomes another source of frustration and disbelief in finding peace with diplomatic means and negotiations.

The project played a critical role in providing youth at the hard time with the knowledge and advice to move to future and understand the value and meaning of peace.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The study “Perspectives of youth on peace” was conducted using mixed sociological techniques: qualitative research method via focus group discussions, as well as quantitative research method through questionnaire-based surveys and in-depth interviews.

Study focused on young people who lived in the bordering areas and conflict zones. Among the study participants there were young people aged 20-32 from Berd, Paravakar, Movses, Chinchin, Aygedzor, Voskepar, Berdavan communities of Tavush Province of the Republic of Armenia, as well as, Stepanakert, Askeran, Hadrut, Martuni, Khachen, Patara, Martuni, Sos, Jivani communities of Artsakh. Most participants were students or early career professionals.

Four focus group discussions with a total number of 36 participants have been held during the entire period of the project. These discussions included mixed groups of young people from Artsakh and Tavush. The groups involved both young women and men to keep gender balanced participation and include original insights and perspectives to the report. The length of focus group discussions were 1.5-2 hours on average.

Alongside with the focus-groups,

four in-depth interviews have also been held, two of which have been conducted before the 44-day war and two more after. The length of the interviews were 1-1.5 hours in average. Both focus groups and interviews have been organized and held by the experts of Democracy Today NGO.

Three questionnaires-based surveys have also been held which comprised multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The survey was conducted twice (before and after the 44-day war). 36 respondents were surveyed each time with the total number of 72 questionnaires collected. Because not all surveys were fully completed, only 68 survey results were included in the analysis. It took 15 to 20 minutes for the respondents to fill in the questionnaires.

The inputs of the participants became an invaluable source of information, presenting better insight of the situation and forming the foundation of the study outcomes.

The upper mentioned methodologies were used because of the sensitivity of the topics. This gave a deeper understanding of many issues, concerns, and perceptions. The variety of the group allowed to have less controlled and one-sided information. Considering the Covid-19 crisis, which was followed by the 44-day war in Artsakh, the results of the study partially lost its relevance. Thus, additional focus group discussion

together with online survey and two in-dept interviews have been held to get more balanced, truthful and relevant information.

# QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

## Perception of war

Most young people who took part in the focus group discussions never lived outside the conflict affected zones and most of the answers to the questions once more highlighted the fact that these young people got used to the conflict, as military actions form part of their everyday reality.

Many of the respondents felt challenging to speak about the war and became too emotional. For the majority, there was not a single night when they could feel safe. The life they lived despite of being fragile and unstable was part of their existence. Even the peace was perceived as a short period between military actions. At that time, many participants did not want such kind of peace because they clearly understood that it was just an illusion which could disappear in a moment.

*“I do not want to see any sniper neither from this side nor from the other”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

During the focus group discussions, many of the participants mentioned the atmosphere of fear and danger paired with the feeling of uncertainty towards the future. This goes in line with the permanent feeling of loss,

which includes loss of human lives of friends, relatives and neighbors, as well as material loss. According to the youth, people living in conflict affected territories got used to experiencing loss all the time, and this becomes usual for them.

*“Conflict is a feeling of permanent fear when you do not know what will happen tomorrow with you and your family. The war is our reality.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

Even during the conflict and permanent military actions people always had to summon all their energy to continue their lives: daily household activities, work obligations, taking care of children and elderly people also were

ongoing obligations.

By some of the young people the war itself has been presented like a battle of two societies. Constant resistance which is noticeable not only on the borderline

and conflict zone but also in media. The conflict strongly conditioned people's

everyday life. Such kind of situation takes place although both sides face pain and loss all the time.

***“There are no winners in the war. The result is always negative for those who are part of the conflict.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

Apart from the permanent physical danger which became ordinary for civilians who are directly affected by the conflict, psychological trauma caused by an instability and military actions

which led to the constant stress and anxiety was also mentioned by many. This situation highly affects the mental health of people who are forced to live under extreme pressure all the time.

***“The conflict makes people different and the first demonstration of this is the feeling of fading away as a personality.”***

***Male participant, Tavush***

The following deserves attention, that even in the severely affected areas very often people still try to joke and find reasons for smile. Maybe humor

becomes their own tool to deal with depression and anxiety. One of the young people told the following story:

***“We have an old lady who lives in our village. When there are shooting caused by heavy weapons she complains saying “what is happening people...” and then when these heavy shootings are switched to machine gun shootings she says “ok that is different. Do war calmly...”***

***Male participant, Tavush***

Many of young women and men told that very often they perceive themselves

as silent guards of the border. As one respondent mentioned it:

*“... for us it is important to stay at the border, because if we all come to Yerevan, the capital city will become the border. We are border guardians.”*

*Male participant, Tavush*

The perception of the conflict among people who live right on the border is very much different from the understanding of those who live in capital city or other areas of the country which are not affected by the military actions. Although the Artsakh conflict

was always one of the most commonly discussed issues, before the 44-day war, many citizens who were not directly affected by the consequences of ongoing military interventions perceived this conflict as something remote and unreal.

*“Everybody speaks about the war, but nobody knows what exactly that is. I am from Chinary village, which is at the very border, however, currently I live in Yerevan. When I call my parents and they say that there were shooting I do not feel it directly on my skin. Conflict becomes something distant and non-real...”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

According to the insights present by the participants who live on the borderline. Youngsters perceive conflict and war completely differently. Parents often do everything possible to protect

their offspring. In fact, very often, conflict becomes a sort of game for children and not something actual and tangible. A young woman from Tavush Province mentioned:

*“I remember 90s when I was a child. It was more like a game for us. We had a big pit in our basement. It was a place where we were hiding during constant military actions when our village was bombed. In the morning children were coming out of the shelter and all were running to collect splinters. It was sort of game for us. We did not realize that it was dangerous.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*



This study not only aims to present the feelings and emotional state of young people, but it also identifies the existential influence of the conflict on the people who live on the border and helps to understand other related side effects of the military actions on the people.

The most common and vital issue which was mentioned by almost all

the participants because of the conflict was lack of human rights protection. The young people highlighted different human rights violations and limitation of freedom. This led to all kinds of restrictions, which made it almost impossible for people who live at the borderline or conflict affected territories to exercise the most fundamental human rights and freedoms.

*“The conflict supposes all kinds of restriction, including restrictions of fundamental human rights.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

Apart from non-realization of “right to peace” many basic human rights and needs become unattainable for the populations of conflict areas. Among these rights almost all the categories of economic, social and cultural rights, such as “right to work” “right to an adequate standard of living”, “right to physical and mental health”, “right to social security”, “freedom of movement” has also been mentioned.

Alongside with the social-economic rights, many of the political rights of people affected by the conflict are also not guaranteed. The very first article of “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”<sup>17</sup> includes the right of self-determination, which in case of people of Artsakh has been completely ignored.

Another issue of concern stressed by all participants from Artsakh was the invisibility of voices of youth and the population in the peace negotiations. Young people from Artsakh have specifically mentioned the feeling of insecurity and lack of visibility, which can be met in each aspect of people’s daily life. Since their voices are not considered at all, it brought to the fact that negotiations and the concepts of decisions do not include insights of the local population. Factually, people who are living in Artsakh cannot express their position concerning their own future.

The concern of young people was mainly related to the silence and complete invisibility of people from Artsakh, as well as the major

17. United Nations Human Rights (Office of the high commissioner). n.d. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” [www.ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx). Accessed July 04, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.

indifference of the international community and neighboring countries.

*“For me war is also indifference and apathy from our neighbors and the international community towards our situation.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

## April 2016

The focus group participants mentioned that during the escalation in April 2016, first time they understood what actual war looked like. Before they only faced the situation of permanent conflict and non-stop shootings, however, no full-scale military intervention. Many of them saw that there are young people of their age who are dying at the border and they realized that they, their friends and relatives can be among this youth.

The April 2016 brought many challenges. Of course, the conflict was unexpected for all the young people. It caused pain and frustration. Even those young men who passed mandatory military service have been shocked with the amount of cruelty which was applied during Azerbaijani military intervention. This situation showed everything could change in a moment. One of the young women mentioned.

*“Although I was a child, I remember the war of 90s. However, during April 2016, it was completely different. I felt pain with all my body and I was asking someone “the God” or “Universe” to stop this saying - I promise to do everything correctly just stop this situation”.*

*Female participant, Tavush*

Other young people spoke about how quick situation was changing and how the people could not believe that the actual war is taking place. Some of

them have been at the university when they found out that the war started and they realized it only when the roads were blocked.

*During April war I was in the city, and the helicopter has been shot. I was observing how “Smerch” was shooting at the neighboring village. But I had no fear. There was just an immense frustration, followed by shock.*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

Alongside with all the disasters which took place with ordinary citizens during April, young people also mentioned the unity which was present during these days. People from around

Armenia and Artsakh sent food, clothing, materials to the borderline. Hundreds of young men and women voluntarily went to the borderline to help with anything they can.

*“The war connects people more with their homeland, I think.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

People were shocked with the terrible violence and enormous hate which was present during this short period of time. Beheading and cutting ears, violence towards elderly. War is war, but this cruelty, violence and torture was above the understanding of ordinary

people. This severely affected many Armenians who lost even the tiny hope towards the peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis. This was a kind of reality check and became the point of concern that the violence is becoming part of the culture.

*“The concept of “power gives the right” should be diminished. If we do not use violence on the daily basis, it will also change. We are educated on the violence and thus we are “reproducing” violence.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

Another thing that the participants have noted was different attitudes

towards the soldiers within the societies of Artsakh and Armenia.

*“A guy can come to Yerevan and say that he returned from the military service from Artsakh and he will be respected and presented as a hero,*

*however, in Artsakh everyone are soldiers.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

While the young men who served in army and specifically those who took part in April four day war are considered being real heroes in Armenia, in Artsakh it is perceived as

something more usual, as almost all young people who live in there took part in “April war”. It was not the matter of choice; it was an obligation and call.

*“After April war when I came to Yerevan my relatives were proudly announcing to everyone that I took part in April war. I felt shame, as it was not only me but as all of my friends who took part in the war.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

Despite heavy resistance and distrust which was stimulated by propaganda and the military developments, some speakers mentioned about the memories which their parents often shared with them. Youth has mentioned friendship, trust, coexistence, which

existed during Soviet Union between ordinary people who lived in the same villages and cities. And yet, the memories and perceptions which young people had were mostly coming from their elder family members. Some remarks of the participants were:

*“My mother is from Baku and she speaks about this city warmly. She remembers everything...”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

Another young woman mentioned:

*“My mother is also from Baku and she has some dishes from crystal, which she brought from there and every time she says, - be careful I brought that vase from Baku”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

Some participants consider these memories to be nostalgic, romantic and beautiful because their parents tend to remember only good things, as those times were related to their youth.

Answering whether their parents

would like to return, they replied negatively, explaining it with the fact that everything has been changed and they do not want to be disappointed. Instead, they would like to keep all these exceptional memories which they have in their minds.

*“Azeris and Armenians were working and living together. Now it is not like that”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

## September 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic, which was followed by an extremely distractive 44-day war, brought many global changes and challenges. These also affected young people and their communities. The general geopolitical situation of the region has been completely re-shaped and of course, this situation brought new realities, new perceptions and attitudes.

During the entire period of 44-day there was an extreme consolidation.

Thousands of young women and men went to frontline as volunteers. Hundreds of doctors or early career medical professional left their secured homes in the bigger cities of Armenia and went to Artsakh. Hundreds of thousands of boxes with first-aid and the most essential products have been constantly collected and sent to the borderlines. People were ready to sacrifice anything: their lives, property, funds.

*“All my friends and relatives of my age either served in the army and were on the frontline during the war. We were all there, but not all of us returned.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

Thousands of displaced families have been forced to leave their homes in Artsakh. Most of them found shelter in Armenia. Many Armenian families accepted displaced people,

gave their roof above their head and basic essentials. Most times displaced civilians were forced to forsake their communities so quick that they took nothing with them.

*“When Shushi was bombed and my father already had to leave the city, the shelling was so heavy that he could not even cross the street to take documents and money from our house.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

After the war, the level of disappointment was very high. The situation was very sensitive, young people were emotional. It was hard for them to speak about their issue, the change of the situation, about the

fact of how the 44-war affected them personally. The level of frustration was obvious. After all the horrors of the war, they were mainly thinking about the physical security.

*Sometimes we were told that Artsakh is a burden for us and now when we have this situation, we see that the line of contact with Azerbaijan is much wider and we have an issue to keep these borders safe.*

*Male participant, Tavush*

Currently, many people in Artsakh want strong leader. The level of the expectations and the desire of democracy has fallen significantly. The youth stated that since there is no sustainable democracy in the region and only authoritarian dictators reach their aims, the vector of democratic development cannot bring them

peace and sustainability. According to youth, since such authoritarian regimes as in Azerbaijan and Turkey got no punishment because of their crimes during the war, this means that democratic development will not bring peace and sustainability and only firm hand can ensure security in the region.

*“Aliyev and Erdogan faced no condemnation of the international community and this means that we need to be strong in terms of security sector and diplomacy. Unfortunately, currently we cannot afford to have democracy.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

What extremely disappointed the young people was the absence of actions from the international community. According to them factually, the dictators and authoritarian regimes won over democracy and peace. During the entire war there were complaints

about the situation with use of white phosphor, cluster munitions, forbidden weapons and the break of international law. In result, no condemnation and sanctions and reaction from the international community.

*“Some countries and international bodies had their vested interests in Azerbaijan and Turkey and they did not want to sacrifice their personal benefits because of Armenia and Artsakh”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

Some participants mentioned the importance to have strong communication between the state actors and the citizens, together with the strong accountability of the government. According to the

youth, sometimes they see that the government wants to distract their attention from the most important issues, either presenting these issues differently, or being silent about it.

*“I think we all understand that the fact that our government does not trust us and does not always say the truth brings more issues.”*

*Male participant, Tavush*

The youth was extremely disappointed with the work of the

diplomatic sector during and after the war. They mentioned they saw many

times that the position of Armenia and Artsakh is absent. Young women and men mentioned that Armenian

diplomacy did not present its position and the interests in the best possible way.

*“During the war I understood we do not have collective thinking and specific diplomatic strategy. This prevents us from presenting our interest in the best possible way.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

It was amazing to see that although young people from Tavush and Artsakh experiences extreme losses because of the 44-day war, there was no animosity

and anger in them, they did not want to have a revenge or hurt someone. On the contrary, they knew the value of peace.

*“We paid an outrageous price for the peace and I do not want to pay such kind of price again.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

## War and the nature

Since many active young people are involved in different civic movements and part of these movements are directly related to the ecological problems existing in Armenia and Artsakh, it was quite visible that the impact of any military action on

the environment was also a point of concern for young people. Apart from the direct negative implication on the nature, the negative affect of the war on the people's health and well-being was also mentioned.

*Of course, people are affected. Many people cannot have children after the war.”*

*Male participant, Tavush*



***“The water resources have been poisoned and people have been dying from cancer or other dangerous diseases.”***

***Female participant, Artsakh***

Alongside, with the negative implications on the nature and people, the highly negative outcomes on the animal species have also been noted.

Some the of the wild animals just disappeared from the forests and some species were facing the issues of full extinction.

***“During the war in 90s in our village they said that there are no wild animals in the forest. During the recent years people noticed some animals returned.”***

***Female participant, Artsakh***

People who are sent to the war may use different means. They can burn the houses, causing air-pollution or pour petrol into the rivers poisoning all the animals and humans who are going

to use this water resource. Of course, the lands which have been aggregated by the water of the poisoned rivers also became inappropriate for the agriculture.

***“This situation is much severe for people who are living on the border. As the ecological damage or biological weapon can easily affect them.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

Another major issue is mining. The countries which are in the conflict have to use their resources carefully,

however, these states are damaging their ecology seriously, considering it as not an important issue.

***“Recently there were planning to open new mining on the border. Many protests and protests took place and the youth of the region did not allow this project to go on, however, this is just an example.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

The young people stated that during the 44-day war they saw that almost no international organizations or courtiers reacted to the situation and white phosphorus and biological weapons that have been used by Azerbaijan. There were many complaints about the

situation which brought to ecological challenges and will still affect the natural resources of the entire region. Green forests have been targeted, international law was violated many times.

*“Azerbaijan and Turkey brought ecological disaster to the region, but nobody reacted”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

After the 44-day war, many water resources stayed on the territories which are currently under the control of Azerbaijan. According to the participants, the water issue becomes more and more vital for the people of Artsakh and for the inhabitants of

bordering areas. Many villages were cut off by the water, which is used for the arrogation purposes. Those who still have water are afraid that these water resources might be poisoned by the aggressor, since they have witnessed a similar situation in the past.

*“The water issue is critical. Azerbaijan is trying to use its position as a weapon to frighten people.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

## Perception of peace

At this stage, the interviewer asked participants to speak on two dimensions of peace. Foremost, to deliberate on the meaning of peace and what kind of peace they want and mention what perceptions the

participants have regarding the peace.

For the majority to describe peace was quite a hard task. The generation of people who were born and grew up in the atmosphere of constant threat and danger could hardly imagine their lives

in peace and safety. The respondents mentioned mental calmness, freedom from fear.

***“The life taught us to think about the peace from the perspective of being ready to war. I do not know what real peace looks like.”***

***Male participant, Artsakh***

Many participants mentioned that absence of military actions and danger is already peace for them. They spoke about the opportunity to create

something new. Be free from fear that whatever you create will disappear in a moment.

***“Peace is living with the feeling of safety and understanding that tomorrow your child will not be raised in the conflicting state.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

Gradually, step by step, youth thought about other aspects of the

peace and what kind of privileges the peace can bring to people.

***“When the family sends their son to the army without fear that something terrible will happen and when the family does not wait for negative news.”***

***Male participant, Tavush***

Some young people, particularly young man mentioned about the duty which they have and the fact that they feel they are locked with the land and are deprived of the freedom of movement. They mentioned they are afraid to leave their home even for some period. However, in case they

would feel that their homes are safe, they might decide to leave for some other opportunities abroad. They might continue their studies in other counties or just travel abroad.

It was visible that young people do not even know what kind of future they would have chosen for themselves if

they had that chance. Most respondents agreed that it would have given them freedom to do whatever they want.

*“The love and duty towards my country makes me stay in Artsakh, but in case there will be peace and safety, I might leave for some other opportunities. I do not know it is hard to say now. Maybe I would stay and create something in the country I do now know.”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

Many of the focus group members also mentioned the fact that they would like to see Azerbaijan as a democratic state, highlighting that democracy and rule of law in the neighboring country will affect the general political situation in the region. It was specifically mentioned that in this situation it would have been much easier to discuss possible peace resolution with the leaders and build sustainable peace in the region together. It was highlighted that currently Armenia is democratically more developed

and people of Armenia and Artsakh becoming more and more liberal. In non-democratic states, conflict is being used for the political manipulations and very often the resolution of the conflict becomes non-essential for authoritarian regimes, while liberal, democratic and human rights-oriented policies bring to the importance of conflict resolution.

And still taking into consideration the current political situation, many of young people considered it important to have a strong military sector, as the main guarantee for peace.

*“Conflicting states need to be democratic. This will help a lot to build peace.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*

Apart from the democratic development, the importance of the social and economic well-being was also mentioned. Sense of security brings

to active economic activity, normal life, advancement of science and technology, life without borders, etc.

***“In case people will be socially and economically secured they will not want to have war.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

Together with the above-mentioned conditions, the importance of cultural development was also brought up together with the fact that the states should create conditions for the professional development of people. Discovering capacities of the citizens will be possible and much more productive in the peace atmosphere. Peace and sustainability give opportunity for the development and

discovery of talent in people.

Together with all the disappointing statements and internal fear which were visible among participants, the light and the hope were also going in line with all their comments. They mentioned that during many centuries of its existence Armenia had been in conflicts with many countries and states, however, now they peacefully coexist.

***“I am sure that we will resolve this conflict.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

And yet, many people could not imagine the situation, when the borders will be open. Since the conflict exists so long people of different generations got used to the situation of closed borders,

resistance and fear. Youth did not even see open borders and friendship, and imagining this change within one day seemed to be completely impossible for them.

***“I cannot imagine a situation when the physical borders will be open. Everything should be done gradually. People should get used to each other.”***

***Male participant, Artsakh***

***“I think we need communication. Knowing each other and trying to communicate more will help us.”***

***Male participant, Tavush***

The most useful and important initiative which could be implemented by young people and civil society sector was mentioned the exchange project. Of course, the recent exchange of the journalists could not be ignored. It was mentioned as positive development and good sign for the future projects. However, it was also stressed that the people were too afraid of the consequences of such kind of trip. This kind of attitude was predictable, as people are always suspicious of something unknown. There was seldom information on official negotiation process and its results.

Taking into consideration the militarization of both states, lack of democracy and strong propaganda, this kind of development was natural. The importance of breaking “enemy image” and “resisting fake information” was also highlighted.

Young people have enormous creative potential, which can help the effective and sustainable conflict resolution. Youth from all three communities should express their point of views, as well as their perspectives to peace.

***“The return of Artsakh to the negotiation table is very important for the peace settlement of the conflict. It is important to create a platform where people from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Artsakh will be involved. They will discuss how to reach the peace.”***

***Female participant, Tavush***

One of the key issues which came up many times by most participants was the importance to consider wishes and inputs of conflict affected populations. There are several refugees and IDPs who were forced to change their lives radically about thirty years ago. Many of these people have already stabilized their lives in alternative places and

communities. Nobody should have the right and privilege to decide instead of these people whether they should return. They should have a chance to choose. Some of them may return, others may wish to visit the regions they lived in, however, they should have an alternative and right for the opinion.

***“We need to have a right to express our position. Nobody should have the privilege to decide our future on behalf of us.”***

***Male participant, Artsakh***

## Participation

This part of the study focused on any suggestions and inputs that young people think they can have in the peace building. It was important to understand whether youth thinks that they can have a positive impact on the conflict resolution and coexistence and what steps they suggest from their side.

Foremost, a specific strategy which will help and guide the young people in the right direction was mentioned. The youth highlighted that the National Action Plan should be effective in a long run and involve more stakeholders.

Aftermath the participants discussed different points which they consider highly important to be included in the action plan. Among the priorities, strengthening peace and human rights education was specifically highlighted. In these regards, there were many suggestions, like first aid for the people and particularly youth who is living in the border and conflict-affected areas, raising awareness on the international legal mechanisms on human rights and peacebuilding, as well as, strengthening leadership through educational activities.

*“There is a lack of motivation among young people. If we speak about legal documents very often the language of conventions and resolutions is either too complicated or there is no translation into Armenian. It is important to make these materials more accessible for youth.”*

*Male participant, Tavush*

It is important to empower the state information mechanisms.

Apart from lack of these mechanisms, the mass disinformation was mentioned as a challenge for the participation and activation of young people. Many of the young

man and woman stressed that the only effective way to deal with these issues is awareness raising campaigns, organization of the events and education. It is also important to involve students and members of student unions, as well as lecturers.

*“Organize event programs: cultural, informative and inclusive. Involve*

*young people in a range of programs.”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

It was noted that most of the young people have creative potential to provide truthful information to empower and stimulate youth from different communities. The responsibility has to be triggered by each participant. In these regards, it is important to create a joint platform of actions with the participation of state actors and youth, creating cooperation between state and non-state actors.

It is also vital to involve young people, specifically from Tavush and Artsakh, who are directly affected by the conflict. To raise awareness on the role of international community in youth, peace and security agenda, as well as create communication between youth groups from other countries who are also working on the same agenda.

Learning other situations as well as discovering how conflicts have been resolved in other countries and regions and what was the role of young woman and man took in terms of youth, peace and security agenda is also critical.

The importance of various activities was also highlighted. There should be ongoing activities such as trainings, round tables, working groups on youth, peace and security, where young people from different regions, social and cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities can take part. This will educate young people, encourage them for the activities in their regions, as well as raise the voices and concerns of youth, empowering others to join the movement.

*“Encouragement of youth social entrepreneurship is critical, as it is a key factor for the development of community levels.”*

*Female participant, Tavush*



# QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

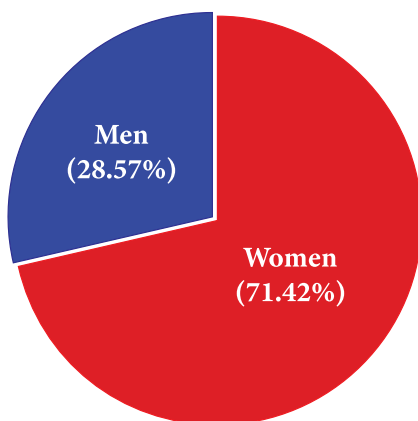
As it was mentioned in the report's introduction, the study was written during challenging times. Many events that happened highly affected the general geopolitical situation of the region and the participants who took part in the focus group discussions, submitted the answers to the questionnaires or gave in-depth interviews to the research team. This section of the study is divided into three parts.

The first part is an analysis of the responses collected before the 44-day war that took place in 2020. The second part results from the responses after the war, while the third section is a comparative analysis of the realities before and after the war. Such kind of approach helps to present the change of attitudes, perceptions and views of the participants.

## Section 1. Before the 44-day war

Democracy Today tried to include equal participation of men and women in the study, however, since the survey

was volunteering, more females rather than males expressed eagerness to take part in it.

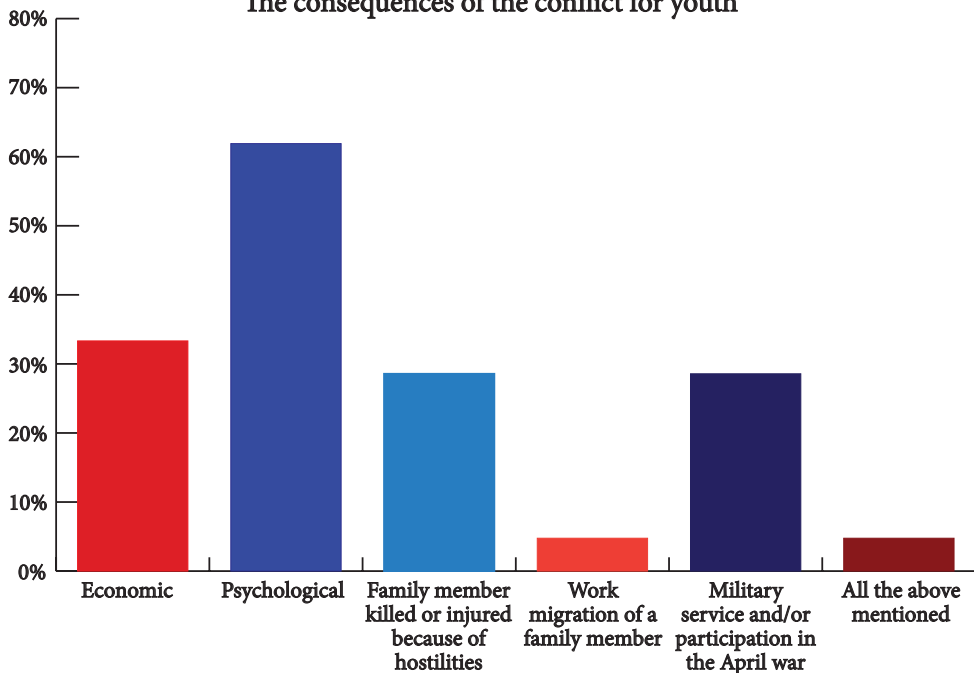


The war, permanent shootings and military actions became part of the ordinary lives of young people who live in Artsakh and Tavush. Many young people, while talking about the conflict, mentioned that it practically became everyday reality. Factually, young people who have been born during and after the conflict always lived in the fragile reality between the war and peace and for them this thirty-year-old conflict always existed.

Among the most visible results of the conflict followed by the permanent border shooting and instability, the young people mentioned the lack of economic opportunities (33.33%), the constant psychological pressure and

anxiety, that according to many became inseparable daily reality of their lives (61.9%). Many of the respondents also reported the cases when their family members or close relatives have been injured or killed because of the military actions (28.57%) and the same number of people also mention that their family members have gone to military service and/or took part in the war of April 2016 (28.57%). Some respondents mentioned among the economic challenges the labor migration which was caused by the unstable economic situation (4.76%), while there were some who reported about the all the motioned issues that the conflict brought to their realities (4.76%).

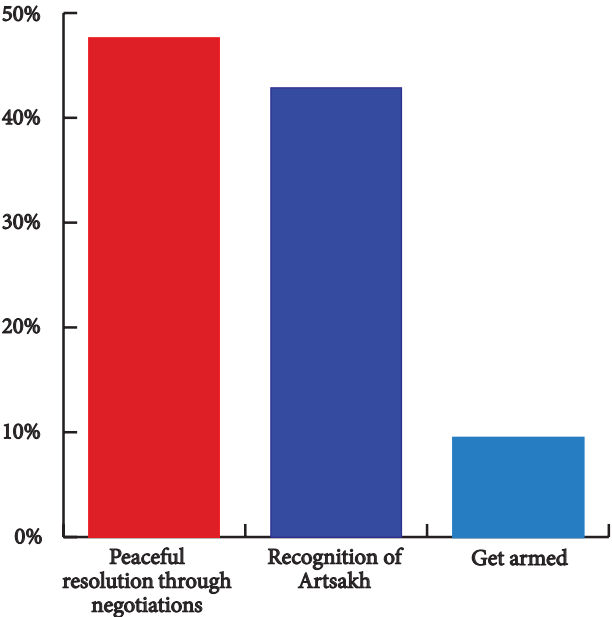
**The consequences of the conflict for youth**



In the survey that was held before the distractive war of 2020, most young people saw the resolution of the conflict and establishment of sustainable peace in the region only through the peaceful methods and diplomatic collaboration. The youth spoke about the steps and measures that should be taken towards integrating the two states through the establishment of peace. It was also highlighted that the “fair solution” is different for each side and it will be hard to find and agree on it. And yet, peaceful cooperation and negotiations are mentioned as a must (47.62%). Alongside with the peace that was highlighted by the majority, the young people mentioned,

as primary condition the importance of independence of Artsakh and recognition of its people. They talked about the fact that because of the lack of the recognition, the people of Artsakh are often deprived of the most fundamental rights, which puts them in a very vulnerable position. Thus, the recognition of the state and its people is an important step, which according to young people will put the end to the conflict and tensions in the region (42.85%). There were also the ones who thought that Armenia and Artsakh should get armed and prepare for the war, since they see the war as the only option for resolving the conflict. (9.52%)

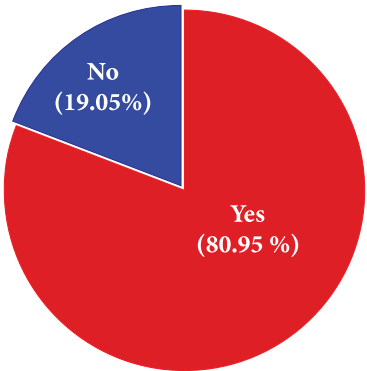
**The “fair” resolution of the conflict accroding to youth**



Most young people also stated that there are sure that their family members share their position concerning the resolution of the conflict. According to

youth 80.95% of family members agree with them, while the other 19.05% stated that most probably their families will have other position or positions.

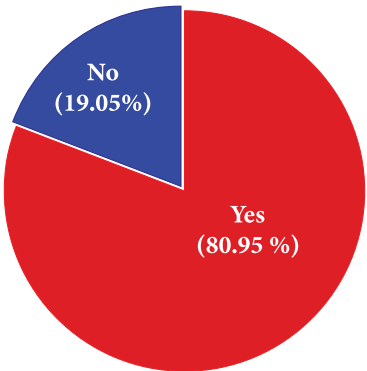
**Do your family members agree with you?**



Participants mentioned they think that the young people can and should take part in the peace process and to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. They recognized the importance of the potential that young people

have, including creative examples of coexistence and sustainability for the region (80.95%). And yet, some of the young people mentioned they do not see any opportunity for the youth to be involved in this process (19.05%).

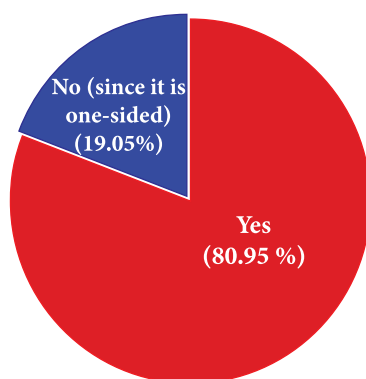
**Do you think that young people have an opportunity to participate in the peace processes?**



The vast majority of the respondents highlighted it is very important to stimulate peace discussions in the society. They stated they think it is not possible to build sustainable and long-lasting peace in case the societies of all three state parties accept each other and together decide that they have to find common grounds and possibilities for building co-existence in the region (80.95%). And yet, there was also an opinion that peace discussions are not effective in case it is only one-sided.

Among those who mentioned that they do not see the reason for peace discussions, the reason and explanation for this position was one and only and it was the fact that unfortunately no peace discussions are possible in Azerbaijan and even the civil society which is actually the one that has to stimulate that discussion is not fulfilling that duty and is very passive. Thus, they mentioned they do not want one-sided peace discussions (19.05%).

**Need for the peace discussions**



Answering the question, what the young people would do in case they meet an Azerbaijani peer, some of them mentioned that they never thought about that and they do not know what they will do in this case (23.8%), however, many of the respondents mentioned they will try to find common language, create relationships, learn more from them

trying to understand and create bridges for the cooperation. Young people said that they will communicate with Azerbaijanis as with the representative of any other country. Some shared their personal story saying that they met Azeris in the frames of some regional or international events (42.85%). As one of the young people highlighted:

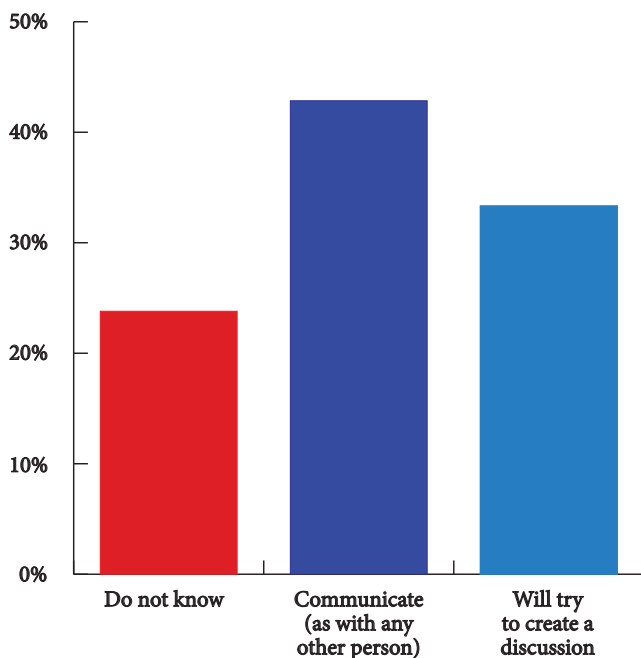
*“Humanity is not a sign of weakness, but of intelligence and progress...”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

The need of communication, discussion and understanding was also brought up by the young people, since the more than the half of the respondents answering this question

mentioned that they would like to discuss Artsakh with an Azerbaijani, that they should study the essence of the problem more in depth trying to find ways to live in peace. (33.33%)

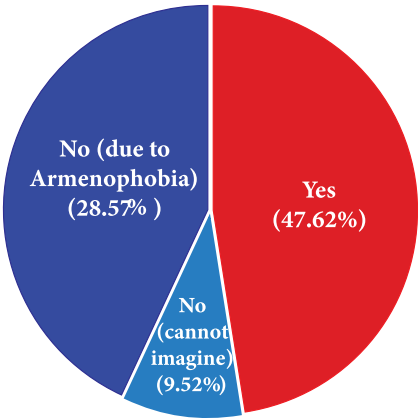
### What would you say if you met your Azerbaijani peer



Answering this question, 47.62% of young people stressed that such programs and projects are important to encourage peace and create a dialogue, while the rest 52.38% stated that it is not possible, mentioning that they have

never seen Azerbaijani and they do not know what to expect (9.52% out of 52.38% and the other 42.86% stated that they cannot trust Azerbaijanis seeing the Armenophobia which is taking place in their country).

Do you think it is possible to have cooperation with the Azerbaijanis in the frames of any initiatives or project?



Young people mentioned that each shooting and military action which takes place on the border of Armenia

and Azerbaijan or in Artsakh creates disappointment and disbelief with the peace process. The youth states:

*“They took peace from us, the opportunity to sleep peacefully, without trembling and think about our brothers and fathers, being in constant fear...”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

*“Our people were fighting for life, a few kilometers away...”*

*Male participant, Artsakh*

Many mentioned that, of course, the first is the psychological impact, the fear, anxiety (76.19%). Of course, the Armenian army could retaliate against another Azerbaijani aggression. However, youth mentioned that cannot

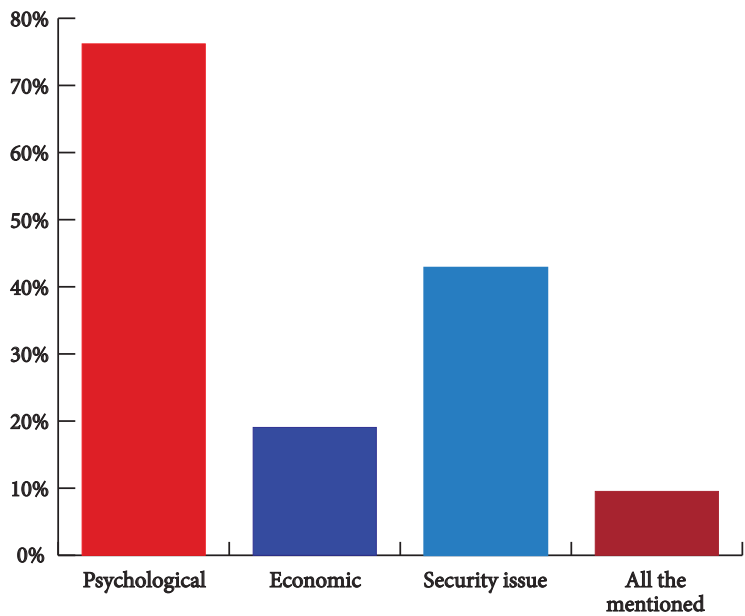
be sure that this will not happen again. People in Tavush also suffered “human” and economic losses.

The respondents mentioned that the sense of security was lost. The issues of hard security become most important

(42.86%) and of course as in each conflict military actions also brought up economic issues and made them more visible and vital (19.05%). There were

also several people who mentioned all the above issues that affected them during the military intervention, which took place in Tavush (9.52%).

How did the hostilities that took place in Tavush in July 2020 affect you?





## Section 2. After the 44-day war

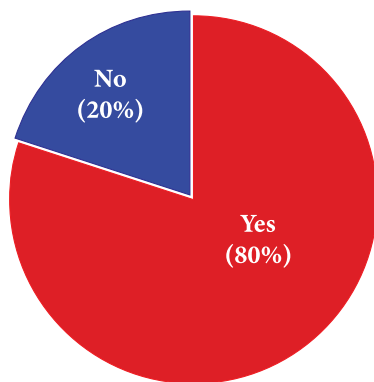
80% of respondents mentioned that there have been human losses among their friends or relatives. This highlights the fact that almost all the young people perceived this conflict as very personal. They spoke about the fact that the recent war changed them very much. The fragile peace which they had just broke in one day.

*“I am 30 years old and I already saw three wars...”* says one of the young

women from Artsakh. This shows the entire horror of the actual war and the suffering young people go through just to have a right to live in their homeland.

Many lost their friends, relatives, beloved ones. And yet despite of the frustration they all had enormous strength for peace and stability. 80% of the young people reported that they have lost someone during the recent war in Artsakh.

Human losses due to the war



Replying whether they perceived the ceasefire that was signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia<sup>18</sup> as a final peace deal, all the respondents stated they do not think that the current document is the final one. The

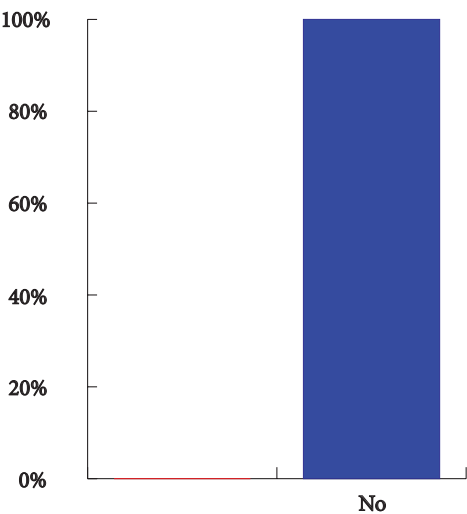
majority mentioned they see possibility to review it, supporting their arguments with the fact that agreement which does not satisfy all the parties involved in the conflict cannot be fair and consequently and cannot last long.

18. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. "Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation." The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. November 9th. Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/>.

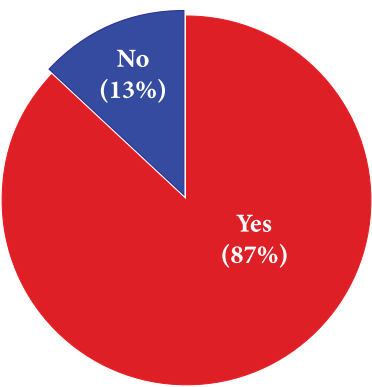
According to young people, this agreement can only become a reason

for the reinitiation of the future conflicts and tensions.

**Do you consider the current ceasefire agreement as final one**



**Do you think that it is possible to review the current ceasefire agreement**



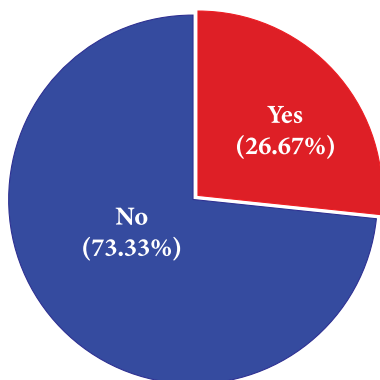
Over 26% of the respondents think that Russian peacekeepers that have

been brought to the region after signing the cease fire agreement are capable to

ensure the physical protection of the people of Artsakh as well as can serve as a guarantor of the secured borders of the Republic of Armenia, while the rest 73% are inclined to think that it is not

in the best of the interests of Russia to ensure full security and stability of the borders of Armenia and Artsakh, since the country has its own interest in the region.

**Whether you think Russian peacekeepers can ensure safety of the residents of Artsakh and safeguard the border of Armenia?**



There is also an opinion among the youth that Russia is a superpower that has its firm hand in the region and nothing is possible to change without the “permission” of that country. Many think that Russia will act purely out of its own interest and the peace and stability, as well as the safety of the people of Artsakh and Armenia can be only ensured by the Armenian army. Thus, many young people see important to strengthen local armies as well as develop diplomacy, since they see this as the only way of protection.

Many issues have been raised by

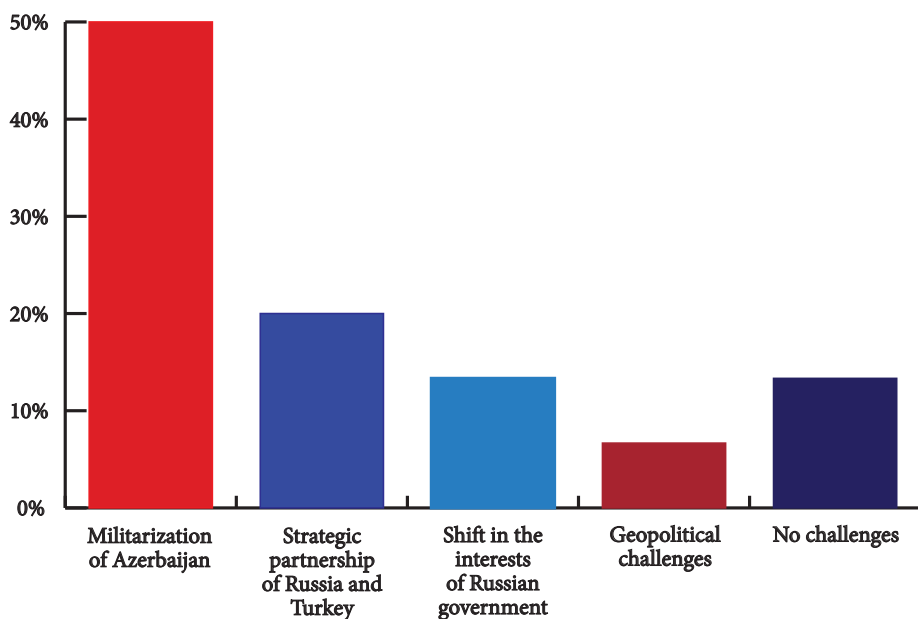
the group regarding the protection of the people of Artsakh and among the most important raised one was related to the status of peacekeepers, which is not clear and completed. The societies of Artsakh and Armenia are lacking informed about the mandate of Russian troops, which created additional concerns and uncertainties. Many have also been highly concerned by the Russian-Turkish monitoring center which was established.

Answering the question related to the challenges that might prevent Russian peacekeepers from being

a security guarantor for the region, most respondents highlighted that the militarization of Azerbaijan and its strategic partners together with encouragement of provocations by Turkey is the fundamental challenge for the region. (50%). Since the Turkey was the dominant party destabilizing the region and supporting Azerbaijan in its military intervention, many of respondents and interviewees also stressed on the specific interests of Russia, which might not be coherent with the interests of Armenia. The strategic partnership of Russia and Turkey which can be dangerous for the interest of Armenia and Artsakh as well

as become challenge for the peace of the region. (20%) Another fear was related with impartial attitude and the fact that Russian peacekeepers are under the command of Russian government and just after its decision, they might change their strategy or do not fulfill their duties in the decent manner. (13.33%). Some of the young people also mentioned geopolitical challenges, which might affect the situation in the region (6.67%). Among the youth, there were also people who did not see any challenges which may prevent peacekeepers to fulfil their duties and ensure full security of people and stability of the region (13.33%).

### **The challenges that will prevent Russian peacekeepers from being a security guarantor for the region**



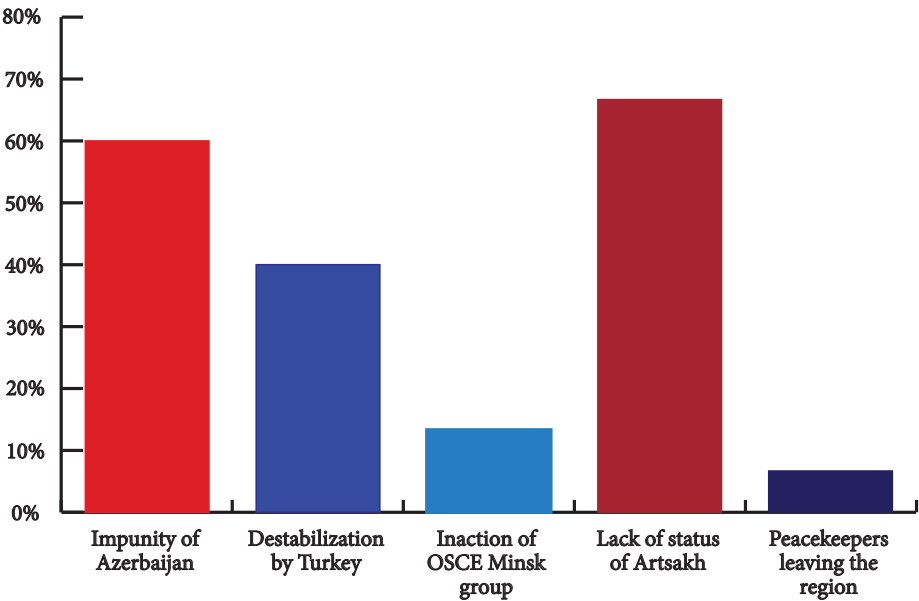
According to the respondents, there are many threats that people of Artsakh face today. These threats do not allow them to enjoy peaceful, dignified live, however, there are some security issues that require immediate attention. According to youth, among the most vital threats and concerns that Artsakh and its peaceful population face today is the impunity of Azerbaijan, disrespect towards any international legal norms and recently signed cease-fire agreement (60%).

Although Azeri militaries do not have a right to enter the territory of Artsakh, as well as change their dislocation on the border with Armenia, they do not obey these rules and make military interventions.

There are still shootings provoked by Azerbaijani side which do not allow the inhabitants of Artsakh, as well as citizens of Armenia who leave in the bordering provinces to enjoy peace. The youth states that these militaries can enter the territory of Artsakh any moment and do whatever they want and nobody including Russian peacekeepers cannot prevent them from doing that.

Another significant threat is related with the fact that Azerbaijan is very much provoked and supported by Turkey and very often the hate speeches that are spread by the government of Turkey, become a destabilizing factor for the peace of the region and a huge treat for Artsakh (40%).

**The main security threats and concerns for Artsakh**

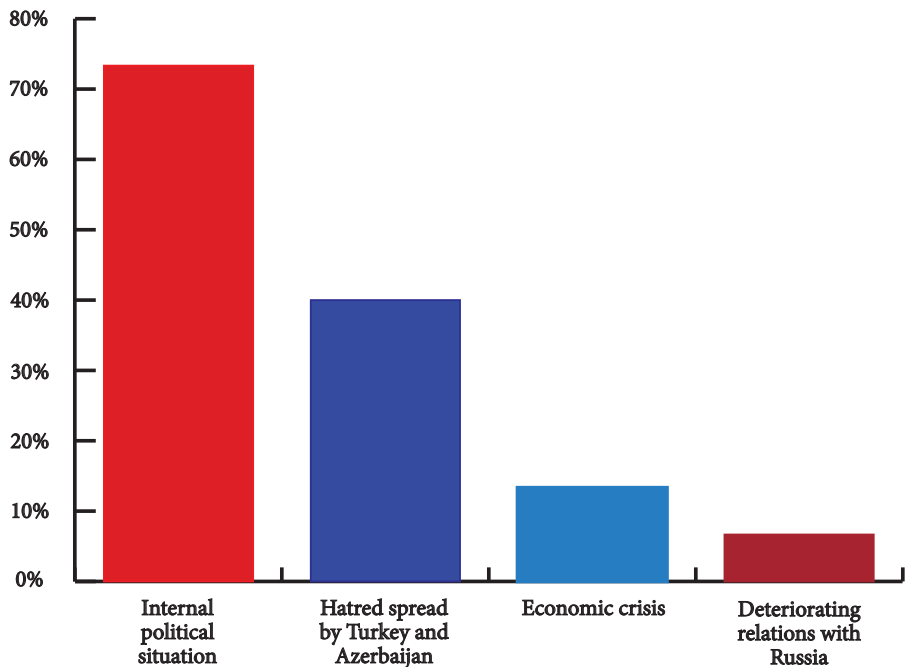


Inaction of OSCE Minsk group was a concern mentioned by young people (13.33%). Another important issue and threat brought up by the respondent is uncertainty related to the status of Artsakh, which invest in prolongation of the conflict more and more. Factually, there is no final peace agreement reached by the parties. It is only a cease-fire agreement similar to the one that was signed thirty years ago. However, the recent war showed that still after so many years the war repeated. This happened because no final peace agreement is reached and there is no specific position concerning

the final status of Artsakh (66.67%). Among the young people there was also an opinion that in case Artsakh and Armenia will not have good relations with Russia and the peacekeepers might leave the region, which would be a direct threat for the people of Artsakh (6.67%).

Among the most vital issues and threats that currently exist for Armenia is the current internal political situation of the country. The drop of the trust towards the current government, the oppositional political powers which are the representatives of the former regime, creates tensions between

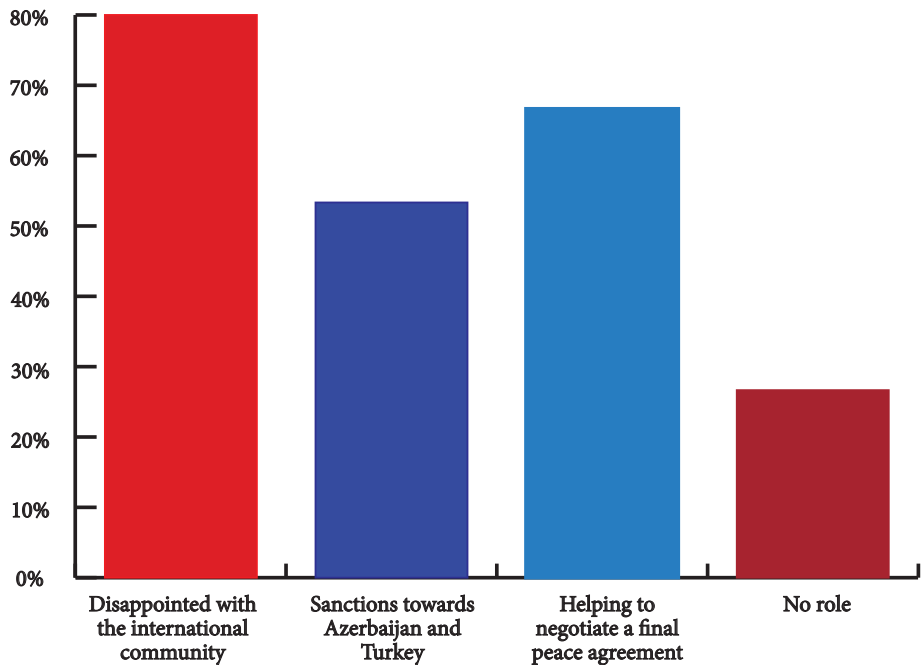
Main security threats and concerns for Armenia



these two powers. According to young people, this situation complicates the situation within society. Many young people highlighted they do not see that any of the parties is thinking for the better of the country, rather than chasing their personal interests (73.33%). Another factor was the constant aggression and spread of hatred by Azerbaijan and Turkey, which does not leave any way for the

possibility for the future cooperation and coexistence in the region. According to the youth, such kind of behavior and speeches can bring to new conflict and destabilization of the region (40%). Another important issue and challenge mentioned by the youth is the economic crisis (13.33%). And finally, the last treat highlighted was the worsening the relations with Russia (6.67%).

**The role of the international community**



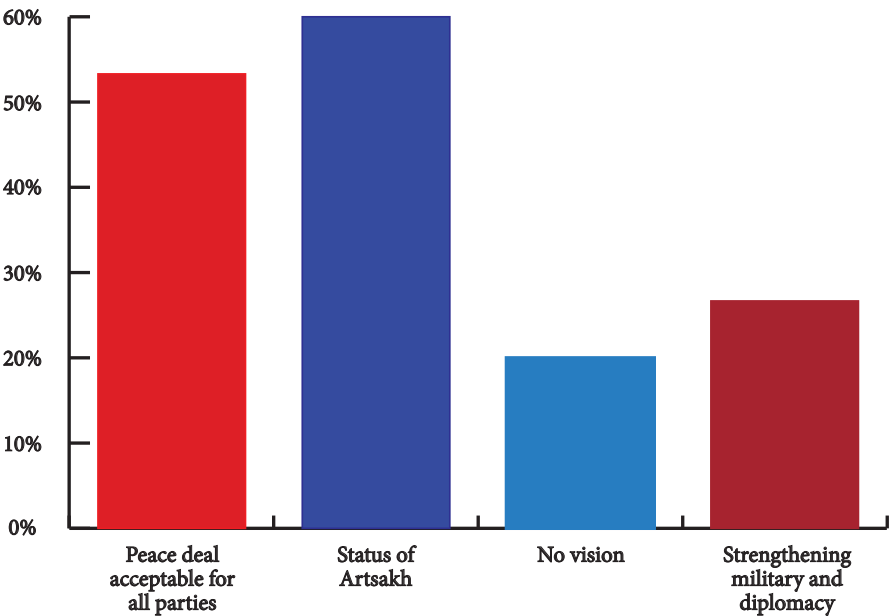
Answering whether the international community can help to resolve a satiation over Artsakh, the young

people noted they are disappointed with the lack of actions by the international community. (40%) The

call for “both” parties to stop the war was unacceptable for them since, they as inhabitants of Artsakh and bordering communities of Armenia, just woke up one day and saw the war. Youth have been forced to leave Artsakh, many of their friends and relatives died and for them this situation is very personal. Others mentioned that impunity of Azerbaijan and lack of sanctions towards both Azerbaijan and Turkey is a huge issue, which could be resolved by the international community (26.67%). Turkey, as a NATO members state, directly supported Azerbaijan during the war and continues destabilizing the region using hate speech and extremely

violent rhetoric towards ethnic Armenians. Such kind of situation does not leave any opportunity for the peaceful coexistence in the near future. There were also many people among the respondents who mentioned about the huge role that an international community can have in helping to negotiate the final peace agreement which can finally bring the sustainable and long-lasting peace and stability in the region (33.33%). A small percent of the respondents who did not see that the international community can play any role to complete the Artsakh conflict and the support final peace agreement (13.33%).

Vision of the final resolution of the conflict





The discussion with the respondent also referred to the fact of how young people see the future of the conflict and the final resolution. Answering this question, most of them spoke about the importance of restoration of historical truth. That the final decision and the peace deal should be acceptable for all parties involved in the conflict meaning Armenia, Artsakh and Azerbaijan. More than a half of the respondents mentioned that in case the peace agreement will not be mostly satisfying by all the state parties, it will not allow to build sustainable and long-lasting peace and rehab relationships (53.3%).

Those who have mentioned the importance of the right for self-determination and the recognition of the Artsakh, considering its Soviet borders, were the majority (60%). Since there is quite high frustration after the war and many young people did not still return to their ordinary lives, there were also ones who said that they do not have any vision of the final resolution of the conflict (20%). Others still consider it highly important to strengthen military sector of Armenia and Artsakh, as well as, put more effort into building strong diplomacy, since they saw their strength as the only guarantee for the sustainable peace and stability (26.67%).

### Section 3. Comparative analysis before and after the 44-day war

Of course, the 44-day war brought many challenges. The enormous pain and disappointment with the peace process, as well as extreme frustration is still persistent among many members of society. People faced all the horror of the war, experienced many losses which consequently resulted in the change of attitudes that is quite visible if comparing the situation and general perceptions and understanding of peace before and after the war. The issues related to human rights and fundamental freedoms together with the social and economic issues and any perspectives for the development gave up its positions to the critical issues of hard security reminded by the actual war.

#### Perception of peace (before the war)

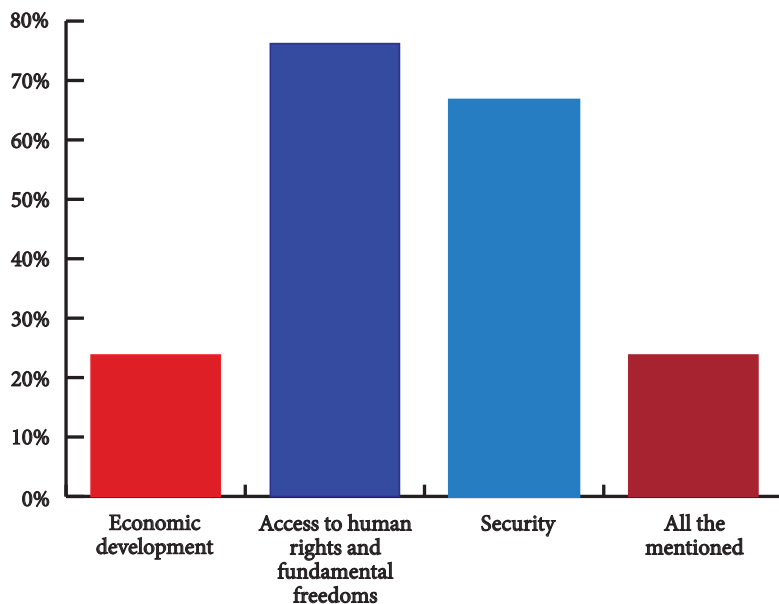
Answering the question on the perspective of peace and how young people “perceive the peace” many answered in a complex way. For some it is economic development and access to human rights and fundamental freedoms, for others it is security and social-economic stability. Young people mentioned that the economy has its role in the stability and peace (23.81%), while for the majority security of

borders (66.67%) and access to rights (76.19%) is more important. There were also the ones who mentioned all the above points as the important and inclusive components for the peace and sustainability (23.81%).

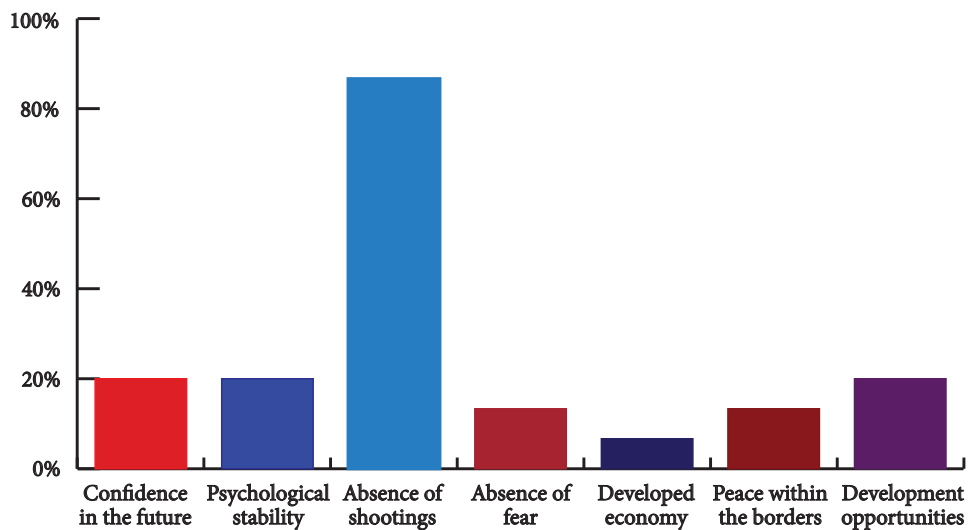
#### Perception of peace (after the war)

The fact that the last survey has been held with the group just a few months after the war, when there were still a lot of uncertainties and people could not get used to the new realities, affected the perceptions of peace they introduced. Most of the respondents brought forward hard security and the importance of the absence of war as well as any military interventions and only a small percentage of respondents highlighted the issues of economy, development, future opportunities, peace within the country, etc. The chart below presents the responses of the young people in present.

### Perception of peace (before the war)



### Perception of peace (after the war)



# ARTICLES OF EXPERTS FROM ARTSAKH AND TAVUSH

## Artsakh Youth in Between War and Peace

The Republic of Artsakh as probably every single state has also been affected by the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19. Nevertheless, the pandemic was not an obstacle for the authorities of Artsakh to complete the major political process of the country in 2020 – i.e. holding the concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections. According to the newly adopted constitution, the elections were held on the same day, despite the high risk of the possible outbreak of COVID-19 in the country, and calls from some candidates to postpone or boycott the elections. As a result, on April 14 the Artsakh people elected the fourth President of Artsakh and the National Assembly of the 7th convocation.

The Republic of Artsakh (also known as Nagorno-Karabakh) is a de-facto state in the South Caucasus region, with 150 thousand inhabitants. In the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the people of Artsakh exercised their right to self-determination and declared independence in 1991. The attempts of Azerbaijan to suppress – by all means, including military –

the inherent right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination, led to the outbreak of the armed conflict. In 1994 a trilateral termless ceasefire agreement was signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh. Since early 1990s peace talks under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs underway. However, attempts of Azerbaijan to solve the conflict by force remains a major source of persistent tension in the region and the reason for the lack of progress in the settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict. Major escalation occurred in 2016, when the Azerbaijani side undertook a large-scale offensive along the entire Line of Contact between the armed forces of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and Azerbaijan, using heavy equipment, artillery and combat aviation.

Amid the challenges Artsakh faces because of the conflict, Artsakh has been committed to building a state based on democratic values, rule of law, respect for human rights since the first days of its independence. Particularly, free, fair and competitive elections have become an inseparable part of Artsakh's political culture. Achievements of the people and government of Artsakh in the state-building process have

been spotted also in the reports of international organizations dealing with democracy issues. For instance, in the annual report “Freedom in the World - 2020”<sup>19</sup> of Freedom House Nagorno-Karabakh shares the list with the partly free countries, improving its position in terms of political and civil liberties with small but steady steps. This is the case when no international human rights organization works in Artsakh or directly cooperates with the local civil society, or provides financial and professional assistance to the development of democratic institutions.

If it is possible to develop democracy on its own to some extent, the same is unlikely to be the case with economy, given the limited resources and small market of the country. Here serious problems would have arisen if Artsakh does not get the support of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. It is worthy to note that this assistance is mainly focused on the development of economy and infrastructure.

Within the scopes of this cooperation, by the decision of the Government of Armenia<sup>20</sup>, in the first half of 2020 a budgeting loan to the Artsakh Government in the amount of 12 billion 600 million AMD to support its economic development was granted. For comparison, the state budget of the Artsakh Republic for 2020 is 121 billion

AMD, where the share of own revenues is 55.1 billion AMD, mainly formed from taxes on industry, mining, energy, and agriculture.

Regardless of the lack of the international recognition, life in Artsakh is developing in a normal way, even it may not seem so for the citizens of some recognized countries. Whereas, there are no differences in terms of living conditions between Artsakh and the recognized states, then there are certainly many limitations in terms of exercising some human rights and freedoms. Although nowadays international borders have been shaped a lot and ceased to be an obstacle in the process of global integration, people of Artsakh deal with restrictions in exercising their right to education, right to freedom of movement and etc., which mainly impacts young people. Particularly, there is a lack of access to the European and international educational programs, such as university exchange programs and courses provided by the international organizations due to the status of an unrecognized state. Indeed, this is violation of the right to education and a vivid example of a discrimination based on the international status of Artsakh which in its turn is a gross violation of the fundamental provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 2).<sup>21</sup>

19. Freedom in the World -2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nagorno-karabakh/freedom-world/2020>

20. N 1026 Order of the Government of Armenia from 22 June 2020, <https://www.e-gov.am/gov-decrees/item/34286/>

21. Article 2., Universal Declaration of Human Rights <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

Youth is the innovative and driving force of every society. In this regard, there is a need to create opportunities for effective realization of youth potential in Artsakh through organizing youth discussions on the issues of public importance in all spheres of public life, and ensuring youth involvement in the decision-making processes at all levels.

Since there are various approaches targeting individuals as youth by the age groups (the UN officially uses 15-24 age group, 18-30 age group is also commonly used), the number of youth aged 15-24 is 21.310 people (or it makes 14.2 percent of the population) and of 18-30 aged group is 28.447 people (or 19 percent respectively).<sup>22</sup>

Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Report<sup>23</sup> highlights the fact that the active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies by the target date, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration. While all the Sustainable Development Goals are critical to youth development, the Report focuses primarily on the

areas of education and employment, underlining the realization of targets under these Goals as fundamental to overall youth development. So we will try to observe the situation of the most mobile social class, the youth in Artsakh from these perspectives.

Voluntary Report<sup>24</sup> of the Republic of Artsakh on implementation of the Sustainable Developments Goals underlines that the enrolment ratio in education is high in Artsakh. The vast majority of population has at least secondary education. According to the official statistics<sup>25</sup>, 28.955 people or one fifth of the population has graduate or postgraduate education. At the same time, the issue related to the quality of education and competitive specialists continues to remain on the agenda.

It is not yet clear what the new government's strategy will be for the development of the education, especially taking into account the fact that a free higher education policy will be implemented in Artsakh from the 2020-2021 academic year. Indeed, the problem will not be fixed by replacing paid education system with the free one, it requires an in-depth study and a comprehensive solution. In this context, it should be noted that within the scopes of the state funding program, there are almost no real

22. Artsakh Statistical Yearbook 2019, <http://stat-nkr.am/hy/2010-11-24-11-18-12/1042--2019>

23. Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2018.html>

24. Voluntary Report of the Republic of Artsakh on Implementation of the Sustainable Developments Goals <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/282>

25. Men and Women in Artsakh, Yearbook 2017 [http://stat-nkr.am/files/publications/2017/kin%26txamard\\_2017.pdf](http://stat-nkr.am/files/publications/2017/kin%26txamard_2017.pdf)

levers of influence for those wishing to study at the universities in Armenia or abroad to return and work for a certain period of time, and the signed contracts between students and the state are mainly of a formal nature. In many cases, even those wishing to return fail to find a suitable professional job, and they have to look for it in other places. Meanwhile, there is a serious problem of generation change not only in the public and private sectors, but also in the realm of education, particularly among the faculty members of the universities.

Given the fact that the youth unemployment rate in the country is 25.6%<sup>26</sup>, relevant state institutions need to implement professional orientation programs for the youth aiming at significantly increase the awareness of the most demanded professions among the youth. Consequently, it will further reduce the supply and demand disparity, leading to unemployment in the labor market.

As the activities of the youth non-governmental organizations, it should be noted that it generally has a military-patriotic character. The lion's share of the government funding is directed to the implementation of programs within the scopes of this very idea. So the decision of the new government to rename the Ministry of Youth to the Ministry of Military Patriotism, Youth and Sports completely fits into that

logic.

On the one hand these features are in line with the needs and expectations of the society living neither peace nor war conditions but on the other hand there is a new generation with its more open, free and creative mindset, called the "Generation TUMO." The term is deprived from the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in Stepanakert, which is attended by a thousand of young people not only from the capital but also from the regions. The study of innovative and creative technologies allows students and graduates to apply that knowledge in practice and to make money with it. Regarding implementation of innovative ideas, it is worthy to also mention about the dozens of community projects funded by the Awesome Artsakh Foundation.

Youth actively involve in the agricultural production, particularly in producing eco-products such as honey, tea and etc. The online platforms assist young entrepreneurs creating their own brands of goods and handcrafts based on the Artsakh dialect and local culture, to sell their products not only in local but also in Armenian markets.

It is well known that youth employment and capacity building is a key component of a solid foundation of any society. Moreover, having a decent job is not only important for young people in terms of their future, but it also has a domino effect for

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26. <http://stat-nkr.am/hy/component/content/article/1043-----2019>

local communities, countries and the whole world. Given the war can resume at any moment, programs increasing defense capabilities left a small room for other fields. And there are a number of problems here: from attracting foreign investors to having a monopoly in communications; from lack of educational exchange programs to restrictions on mobility (Artsakh has a land link only with Armenia, and the airport does not operate due to the Azerbaijani threats). Summarizing, we can say that young people in Artsakh are building their lives and careers in this narrow corridor of war and peace.

Given this reality, a closer integration with Armenia is highly demanded. This is very logical, taking into account the facts of national identity, the same currency, common language,

educational, and cultural fields, and other features in two Armenian republics. If the internal political discourse sometimes is getting tensed then the vision of the foreign policy and the solution of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict is unambiguous: a return to the past in terms of status and territories is ruled out. It is impossible to find anyone in Artsakh who will see the future of the country within Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, a conflict cannot last forever. The establishment of peace and stability also greatly depends on the visions of youth of the region. In this case everything is more than clear: each generation works out for itself a fresh formula for peaceful coexistence and is guided by it.

*Anush Ghavalyan*



# Artsakh Youth In Between War and Peace

## About Tavush

Tavush marz<sup>27</sup> is in the North-Eastern part of the Republic of Armenia. In the South-East and South, the marz borders with Gegharkunik and Kotayk marzes. In the West it borders with Lori marz and the Republic of Georgia, in the North-East with Azerbaijan.

With around 122 000 population, Tavush is among the least populated marzes in Armenia. 47 settlements of the marz are bordered with Azerbaijan and have strategic importance for the country, since it always faces military consequences and civilian casualties. There is also low birth rate and weak economic development of the most bordering settlements.

The nature of the marz is wonderful. Mixed forests comprise 40.3% of total surface and 38% of national forests that are striking by a variety of fauna and flora, incomparable monuments of natural inheritance. Climatic conditions of the marz and, in particular, Aghstev valley are extremely favorable for the organization of population rest, recovery of health and promotion of international tourism.

Seven kilometers away from the administrative territory of Yenokavan

village and 7 km away from the town of Ijevan, on the territory of 7 hectares (1370m above sea level) there is an unprecedented extreme park. Every year, the park is experiencing an increasing number of extreme activities, as well as water sports. The increase of the visitors' numbers shows it has become more attractive for foreign tourists and has strong potential to promote the development of ecotourism in the entire country.

In 2018 the share of economy main branches of the Republic of Armenia Tavush marz in total volume of correspondent branches of the republic comprised: industry 1.5 %, agriculture 4.4 %, construction 3.4 %, retail trade 2.4 %, services 0.9 %. Tavush is predominantly agricultural. In animal husbandry, the main branches are cow and pig breeding and in plant growing in the most developed branches are grain and grape growing. Programs are implemented for recovering the orchards. During recent years, beekeeping develops too. Because of the many promising agricultural projects implemented in recent years, the horticulture has a significant development, by which the region has previously enjoyed a great reputation. Beekeeping is also developed every year. In processing industry, the most

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27. Marz – Armenian name of province

prevalent are the food industry and woodworking. From the industrial production in the region, wines, preserves, pumps, stone and wood, as well as textile goods are exported. Over 150 production and 1154 trade organizations are registered in Tavush marz of RA. Large production enterprises are “Karart” CJSC, “Ijevan Bentonite” OJSC, Berd branch of Yerevan Brandy Factory, “Ijevan Wine and Brandy Factory” OJSC, “Dilijan Mineral Water Factory” OJSC, “Dilijan Brewery LLC, “Ecogarden” LLC, “TavushTextile” LLC, etc.

The center of Tavush marz and its biggest city is Ijevan town (as of the beginning of 2019, 20.4 thousand people) The distance from Yerevan is 133 km. It is also the administrative, industrial, education and cultural centre as well as the transport junction of the whole North-Eastern part. The major trend of town industry is manufacturing (particularly, woodworking, production of food, mineral water and wine. Ijevan carpets have been very competitive in the internal and external markets, but in recent years carpet making showed decline in numbers.

The distance of Dilijan, (as of the beginning of 2019 17.4 thousands people) resort town from Yerevan is 99 km. The major trend of town industry is manufacturing, in which the food and of drinks production is separated.

“Dilijan Frolova” mineral water has received wide recognition. Since September 2014, “Dilijan international school of Armenia” (UWC Dilijan) has been operating and since September 2013, Dilijan’s central school, which is part of the “Ayb” School.

The distance from the city of Noyemberyan (at the beginning of the year 2019, 4.6 thousand people) is 187 km from Yerevan. Agriculture plays an essential role in the city’s economic life, the main direction of which is cattle breeding and fieldwork. The distance from Ayrum town (at the beginning of 2019 – 1.8 thousand people) is 206 km from Yerevan. City’s major occupation of the population is retail trade. In the recent years, stone production also has a great share in the city. In recent years, Noyemberyan’s territory has grown rapidly in the development of horticulture, especially the establishment of peach gardens, which will help re-launch the Ayrum cannery.

The distance of Berd town (as of the beginning of 2019 the population was 7.5 thousand. people) from Yerevan is 202 km. The dominant trend of the town’s economy life is multi-branch agriculture, which is separated by small cattle husbandry and field-crop cultivation. The recently launched textile manufacturing has a great importance in the economic development of the city, which also

solves the problem of population employment and migration flows in frontier settlements.

## **Neither War, Nor Peace**

While talking about the Tavush, one of the first associations that comes to people's minds is that the area is a borderland and has suffered from the conflict extensively. And indeed, except for Dilijan and its neighboring communities, almost all other settlements faced the impact of the military activities. Being on the border is also a factor determining the socio-economic situation.

It is worth to mention that not all communities are under enemy fire. These communities can be conventionally classified into several groups.

The first group includes the villages that are directly targeted by the opponent. It is not only dangerous to cultivate land in those villages, but simply going out on the street, sometimes to a plot of land near the house, can be fatal. These communities are: Aygepar, Chinari, Mosesgegh (Movses), Nerkin Karmiraghbyur, Berkaber, Barekamavan, Koti, Dovegh. The second group includes the villages where the danger increases during the escalation of border tensions: Berdavan, Baghanis, Voskevan, Voskepar, Kirants, Aygehovit, Vazashen, Paravakar. The

third group includes the communities that are subject to the rule of law, as they have arable lands near the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border: Tsaghkavan, Sarigyugh, Skar, Koghb, Choratan, Verin Karmiraghbyur, Artsvaber, Aygedzor.<sup>28</sup>

Since 2015, the Republic of Armenia has come up with several legislative initiatives to ease the burden on the residents of Tavush border settlements. Thus, the two major initiatives were to provide privileges to businesses operating in border areas, exempting them from taxes, and, second, partially reimbursing the utility costs consumed by the residents. Prior to that, there were small support initiatives, such as tax exemption for unused land because of shelling. These actions were taken to ensure some economic activity in the zone, but even the regional authorities state they do not have the expected activity yet.

Entrepreneurs who intend to do business in those communities or move some of their businesses there should be systematically supported. In Armenia and Diaspora, it is necessary to have a better idea of what the “neither war nor peace” situation means. Is it possible to invest in a high-risk zone, what difficulties and challenges should be faced?

The Artsakh conflict can continue for decades without changing the current

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28. Classification is done by T.Hakobyan

status quo. It is obvious that Baku will continue to keep under fire not only in the Azerbaijan-Artsakh sector but also the settlements near the Azerbaijan-Armenia state border.

Conditions did not improve after the May 1994 ceasefire. Year after year, the conflicting parties, at the expense of an uncontrolled, neutral zone, advanced their frontline positions, occupying convenient heights. The more the sides advance their frontline military positions, the more difficult it becomes to cultivate land in the border area.

Today, thousands of hectares of land where tons of grain, grapes, fruits and vegetables were produced in Soviet times are simply not cultivated. Thus, 350 hectares of fertile land is not cultivated in Barekamavan, as it is directly targeted by the Azerbaijani armed forces. Over 800 hectares of land is not cultivated at Berkaber. The area is under Azerbaijani control. About 1,400 hectares of Paravakar lands are under Azerbaijani control and under fire. Overall, 47 settlements in Armenia have unused lands because of armed conflict. 25 of them are in Tavush.<sup>29</sup>

These lands will be cultivated only when peace is established or Yerevan and Baku agree not to shoot at the peaceful, working villagers of the settlements. It is pointless to expect such a thing in the coming years. As the tension is growing every year, the

parties to the conflict are targeting the civilian objects - the population.

The proof of the above was the events that took place at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in July 2020, when the relative peace established in the previous two years was disturbed by an actual local war that lasted for several days. In the villages of Berd region, mainly in Aygepar, about 20 houses are to be reconstructed. The enemy had opened fire on community and economic buildings, such as kindergartens and factories. For the first time since the 90s, the regional center of Berd was shelled. The activities of the active agricultural season were disrupted, which is a mean of livelihood for the rural population. Unfortunately, it should be noted that despite some peculiarities during each escalation, the July events were not unprecedented for the Tavush border. The Tavush region was involved in armed conflict both during the Artsakh war and during the periodic escalations. Settlements along the border are often easily targeted by fire because of their low location. In March 2020, because of the intensified actions towards Noyemberyan, a child from the Voskevan village was wounded in the yard of his own house. In Voskepar, medium-caliber bullets damaged several houses and cars. The escalations along the border since the ceasefire. The cases of regular fires in the direction of settlements are

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29. Armenian Legal Information System (ARLIS), <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=103166>

innumerable, especially if there are no casualties, people forget it and go about their everyday works. However, the shootings not only violated the right to live and work peacefully, but often cost lives, including among the civilian population. In 2015, as a result of another aggravation, two women from Berdavan village were killed by Azerbaijani bullet in their homes. We can remember other residents injured by the bullet from the same years. Many people are taken captive and missing

The latest case is Karen Ghazaryan from Berdavan, who was captured by the Azerbaijani armed forces under unknown circumstances. He is not a serviceman and has not even served in the army due to health condition. He

has been in captivity for two years; it is not clear how the future fate of him and his family will be arranged.

Another problem is mine explosions, which injured people. No less important is the economic damage to people, for example, when a herd exploded on mines.

Thus, the war conditioned the entire reality of the border proximate part of Tavush region. There were human casualties in Tavush, as well as economic losses, thousands of hectares of unused land, destroyed agricultural, educational, community infrastructure. As a result, we can record high emigration, aging population, and poverty.

*Syuzanna Siradeghyan*

## WORDS OF CONCLUSION

*“I will do everything possible and impossible; I will live and devote my life to the peace and prosperity of my homeland.”*

*Male participant, Tavush*

*“We are all responsible for our future. Our unity and steps today will build our future”*

*Female participant, Artsakh*

Peace is the only condition for survival, development and prosperity for Armenia, Artsakh and the whole Caucasus. It is also the only condition for the survival of the humanity in the 21st century. Without peace, it will not be possible to achieve the levels of trust, cooperation and inclusiveness necessary to solve these challenges, let alone empower international institutions and organizations necessary to address them.

It will not be possible to build dignified and protected future for the younger generation. In these days, peace is in everyone's self-interest. Without understanding the factors that create and sustain peaceful societies, it will not be possible to develop the programs, create the policies or understand the resources required to build peaceful and resilient societies. Peace is in the highest interest of the

young men and women who took part in this project and lived through these terrible three wars. Young men and women whose age is of the age of this conflict and who dream of planning the future, of collaboration across the border, of love and not hate. Since 2018 Armenia has chosen the democratic way of development and protection of citizens became a central goal of the state's policies.

Addressing the rights and future of youth, Armenia took the path of development of the local programs and adoption of human rights and peace legislation. The country developed its first National Actions Plan on UNSC Resolution 1325 and is currently developing second NAP.

Armenia has also localized UNSC Resolution 2250 Youth Peace and is considering of setting up mechanisms that would enable meaningful

participation of young people in peace processes. Adoption of resolution marks the formal recognition of the positive role of young women and men for the maintenance of international peace and security. The five key pillars for action of UNSC Resolution 2250 are participation, protection, prevention, partnerships

and disengagement and reintegration. This has been subject to intensive discussions during the program and the group has also prepared important recommendations to address these specific areas. The document with the list of recommendations was collected by “Democracy Today” and passed to the government.



## GLIMPSES OF THE PROJECT

The photos are illustrating working meetings of the project participants with different state and non-state actors.

These meetings gave project participants an opportunity to

meet with the representatives of intergovernmental agencies, government institutions, and human rights offices to listen and discuss various perceptions of peace and role of youth in sustaining peace and sustainability in the region.



**Meeting at the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia**





**Meeting at the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia**



**Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia**



Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia



Meeting with the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia



**Meeting with the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia**



**Meeting with the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh**





Meeting with the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh



Meeting at the National Assembly of Artsakh



**Meeting at the National Assembly of Artsakh**



**Meeting at the National Assembly of Artsakh**

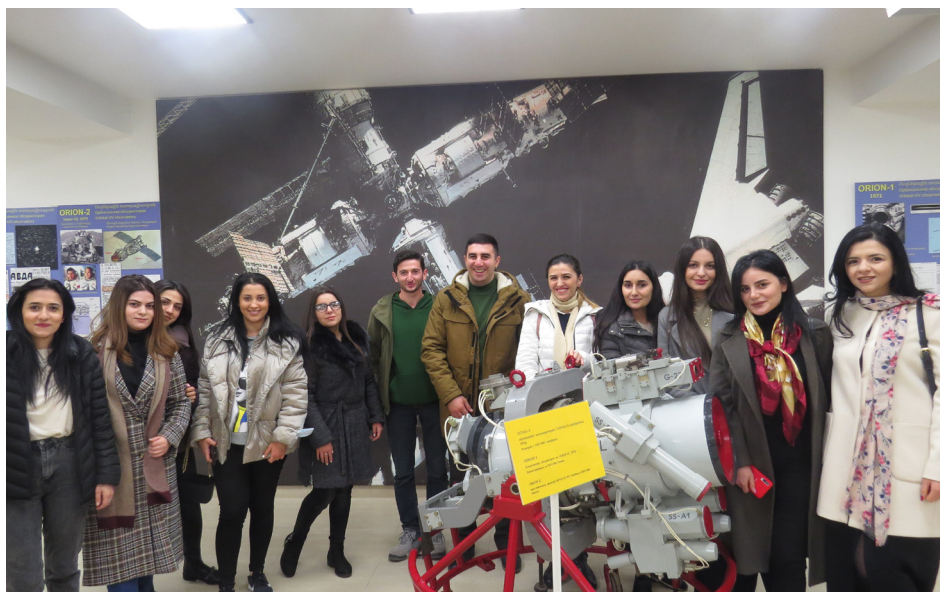




Group work during one of the training sessions of the project



Group work during one of the training sessions of the project



Visiting Enterprise Incubator Foundation



Visiting Enterprise Incubator Foundation





Film screening during one of the training sessions of the project



Youth from Artsakh greets youth from Tavush in Artsakh





Group photo of the project participants



Group photo of the project participants

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Democracy Today NGO wants to express its special gratitude to the National Endowment for Democracy for supporting this project.



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