



**MONITORING REPORT
REFERENCES OF MEDIA/EXPERTS
OF ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN
TO THE SUBJECT OF THE CONFLICT
BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES**

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GENERAL INFORMATION

(Aims and objectives, research methodology)

The aim of the study is to support existing and create new media platforms for internal, inter-community and inter-conflict discussions on peace and conflict-related issues, as well as to build the capacity of experts to participate in the debates.

The objectives of the study are:

1. to determine the frequency of detailed reference of the media studied to the subject of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in general and specifically to such important thematic sections as: a) Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations (in different official formats), assessment of their effectiveness and prospects; b) policy of Baku and Yerevan towards Mountainous Karabagh; c) issues related to the borders between the two countries; d) issues of unblocking communications; e) activities of mediators, peacemakers and observation missions.
2. Fixation of references to the subject (according to thematic sections) of Armenian and Azerbaijani experts and determination of their attitude to it.

The current monitoring phase was conducted for two months - from June 1 to July 31, 2023. The research in Azerbaijan covered 10 media: Turan news agency, Internet channels Pressklub TV, Kanal13, Caliber TV, Meydan TV, TV channels CBC, ITV, websites Zerkalo.az, Qazqazinfo.az, Azadliq radio.

The monitoring subject was analytical pieces of the media studied (articles, interviews, debates, talk shows, discussions, author's programs, etc.), which contained a detailed reference to the subject of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

RESULTS OF MONITORING OF THE MEDIA OF AZERBAIJAN

1. MEDIA PLATFORMS

During two months 238 analytical pieces dealing with the monitoring subject were placed in 10 media outlets. They recorded 587 references to various thematic categories related to the conflict.

Table 1. Frequency of references to the subject and to all thematic categories

MEDIA Title	Pieces Quantity	Number of references to thematic categories
CBC	47	95
Caliber TV	45	134
ITV	34	108
Pressklub TV	31	81
Zerkalo	30	54
Turan	19	45
Kanal13	13	31
Azadliq	7	15
Meydan TV	6	12
Qafqazinfo	6	12

The analysis of the obtained data allows us to draw the following conclusions:

- The greatest interest in discussing the problem and finding ways to solve it is shown by local TV and Internet channels. They occupy the first four lines of Table 1: 66% of all pieces on the monitoring subject and 72% of references to thematic categories belong to them.
- State TV channels are highly active in covering the subject: CBC (first line in Table 1) is part of SOCAR Media group, and ITV (third line in Table 1) is the public channel of the country. This demonstrates the government's interest in ensuring that the discussion on the topic continues and that the authorities have the opportunity to present their vision of the situation widely.
- The media, broadcasting to the country's audience from abroad (lines 7-8-9 of Table 1), pay little attention to deep analysis of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, discussion of its most important details (in aggregate only 11% of pieces on the monitoring subject). They concentrate mainly on the coverage of internal political problems, where there is more opportunity to criticize the government policy.
- Independent local media resources, included in the list of media studied (Pressklub TV, online newspaper Zerkalo.az and Turan agency), often publish pieces devoted to in-depth analysis of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. They own more than one third of all pieces on the monitoring subject and more than 30% of references to certain thematic categories recorded by the researchers. It should be noted that given the limited capacity of the above-mentioned media compared to the government/progovernmental channels and publications, especially taking into account such indicators as the duration of daily broadcasting or the total number of articles produced per day, such attention to the subject can be considered high.
- One of the largest news websites of the country Qafqazinfo.az is at the end of Table

1 in terms of the number of references to the monitoring subject. This quite corresponds to the existing perception that websites controlled by the authorities try to avoid publishing analytical materials, preferring to disseminate reports of official structures or news borrowed from other sources. This picture is characteristic of the overwhelming majority of Internet publications in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion:

When choosing media platforms for internal, inter-community and inter-conflict debates on peace and conflict-related issues, it is recommended to give preference to local internet channels and independent websites. At the same time, given the violations of professional ethics in the materials of almost all resources, it would be more appropriate to discuss the possibility of creating special programs or columns that serve the purpose of the project.

Cooperation with state TV channels and their journalists can also be a good resource in terms of expanding access to specific audiences, provided that conditions that contradict the goals and objectives of the project are not imposed.

2. THEMATIC CATEGORIES

In 238 analytical media pieces dealing with the monitoring subject, 587 references to various thematic categories related to the conflict were recorded.

Only in 56 pieces the authors of the articles or participants of the programs focused entirely on the consideration of one of the aspects of the problem. In all other cases, various issues related to the conflict were discussed simultaneously.

Table 2. Frequency of references to each thematic category

Thematic category	Number of references	Tonality		
		+	-	0
Assessing the performance of mediators, peacekeepers and monitoring missions	157	12	94	51
Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations, assessment of their effectiveness and prospects	152	41	22	89
Baku's and Yerevan's policy towards Stepanakert/Khankendi	117	32	45	40
Issues related to the borders between the two countries	95	34	28	33
Unblocking of communications	43	16	4	23
Other issues	23	4	16	3

Azerbaijani media, journalists and experts most of all discuss the activities of mediators, peacemakers and observation missions, as well as Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations, their effectiveness and prospects. The first of these thematic categories is present in 66% and the second in 64% of the pieces that were the subject of the research.

In the overwhelming majority of discussions the activity of mediators is assessed negatively (60%). It should be noted that in almost all such cases the role of Russian peacekeepers is discussed. The efforts of European or American mediators do not meet with such criticism, but they are also rarely approved - in only 5% of the materials. And almost every third piece (30%) dealing with the monitoring subject speaks about Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations in a positive tone, but neutral assessment prevails (59% of pieces).

The policy of Baku and Yerevan towards Stepanakert/Khankendi, as well as the issues related to the borders between the two countries are discussed less intensively, but quite often (in 49% and 40% of pieces studied, respectively). As a rule, they support the policy of reintegration of Karabagh Armenians, pursued by Baku, criticize the positions of Yerevan and Stepanakert/Khankendi, resisting this process. But there is no unified approach to the issue of Armenian-Azerbaijani borders - there are many different proposals and approximately equal proportions of positive, negative and neutral assessments.

The fact that the thematic category "Unblocking communications" is present only in 18% of all pieces studied may seem somewhat unexpected. Obviously, both journalists and experts do not consider it to be an issue requiring an urgent or separate response. During two months of monitoring only 5 pieces were recorded, fully devoted to the analysis of this problem. Most often it is considered together with such themes as "Policy of Baku and Yerevan towards Stepanakert/Khankendi", "Issues related to borders between the two countries".

The "Other thematic categories" section was mostly filled with long stories by journalists and experts about the history of the conflict or speculations about what can be done to restore trust between the sides without directly referring to any specific issue.

Conclusion:

The media talks a lot about the conflict, but one can sense a focus on peace. It is not accidental that the topics "Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations" and "assessment of mediators' activities" are the leading themes of media analytical pieces on the conflict. However, they do not know how to find the way to this peace. For them peace is the result not of compromise and cooperation, but of complete subordination of one to the will of the other. Whatever is discussed, everything is reduced to the formula: "we agreed, they broke; we trusted, they cheated." Then there are often insults, threats, sometimes even profanity. This works to perpetuate negative stereotypes, even with the observed focus on peace-seeking. A change in **narrative and language of communication** is needed. For example, during the research period the monitors did not find a single piece about successful cooperation or an indicator of the possibility of peaceful cohabitation of representatives of the conflicting parties.

The monitoring also reveals **specific topics** that the media often refer to, seeing the increased interest of the audience in them. These "clues" can be used by the project participants in identifying topics for their future TV programs and articles:

- Five conditions for peace: why are the parties willing to accept them but not ready to sign them?
- Negotiations on three platforms - do mediators compete or complement each other?
- With whom Baku should or is ready to negotiate in Stepanakert/Khankendi?
- War in the name of peace? What is the risk of renewed hostilities in Karabakh or between Azerbaijan and Armenia?
- Roads or corridors? What do neighbors need to pass through each other's territory?
- Area of responsibility or irresponsibility? The role of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh;
- 2025: what awaits us after the expiration of the term of office of the Russian MK in Karabakh?
- Azerbaijani passport - what will it give to Karabakh Armenians?
- Is it possible for Azerbaijani refugees to return to Yerevan/Stepanakert and Armenians to Baku/Shusha? How can we learn to live together after long enmity and severe traumas?
- Do Armenian troops remain on Azerbaijani territory?
- War of Diasporas: what is the potential of the diasporas of the two Caucasian countries spent on?
- "Baku and Yerevan want to clear the field from the influence of the diaspora" - is this popular thesis among Azerbaijani experts true?
- The Aghdam-Askeran road: is it an alternative to the Lachin road and what displeases Armenians in Karabagh?
- What does the word serve? A language of communication, which can become both a means of inciting hatred and a tool of easing tension;
- Information warfare: who loses to whom and, most importantly, in what?
- Can civil diplomacy help establish trust between conflicting parties?
- Maps for delimitation: which one is the most "correct"?
- Karabakh Armenians have two paths:

3. EXPERTS

Out of 238 analytical pieces of media studied on the monitoring subject only in 7 (3%) journalists do not ask experts to comment on issues related to Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. In all the rest there is at least a "call to a friend" - a telephone survey of expert's opinion on this or that aspect of existing problems. At the same time, more than 76% of the pieces mentioned consist of TV interviews/debates/discussions, where the main participants are experts, and the journalist has only to ask questions or moderate the conversation.

The table of experts, compiled on the basis of the monitoring results, contains the names of 137 experts. But only 40 of them are asked by the media for comments more than once. The list is headed by political scientists Rasim Musabekov (15 pieces), Farhad Mammadov (10 pieces), Ahmed Alili (6 pieces).

In general, the media most often addressed to columnists, who can be conditionally labeled as "state experts" - these are MPs (Rasim Musabekov, Hikmet Babaoglu, Samed Seyidov, Sevil Mikailova, Kamran Bayramov, Sahib Aliyev), leading employees of government research centers (Farhad Mammadov, Farid Shafiyev, Gulshan Pashayeva, Zaur Mammadov), former high-ranking diplomats (Tofik Zulfugarov, Elmar Mammadyarov, Namik Aliyev).

The second group of active experts consists of young observers promoted mainly by governmental and pro-governmental media (Ahmed Alili, Orkhan Amashov, Ilgar Velizade, Fuad Chiragov, Anar Azizov). Azerbaijani political analysts living abroad are no less popular (Arif Yunus, Rauf Mirkadirov, Ramiz Yunus, Arastun Orujlu, Zaur Sadigbeyli), with whom independent Internet channels and websites actively cooperate.

Another group of media experts on the problems of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict are representatives of local political and public organizations, human rights activists, economists, security and military specialists (Uzeyir Jafarov, Natik Jafarli, Murad Sadeddinov, Sulhaddin Akper, Elkhan Shahinoghlu, Eldar Namazov, Azer Gasimli, Ali Mustafa, Isa Gambar, Zaur Ibrahimli, Ilham Ismail, Khagani Jafarli, Zardusht Alizadeh, Shair Ramaldanov).

Finally, the fourth group of analysts consists of foreign specialists (Azerbaijani experts in emigration are not included here). In 11% of pieces (25 TV programs and articles), dealing with the discussion of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the media studied present the views of Russian (Mikhail Neizhmakov, Yevgeni Mikhaylov, Ivan Starodubtsev, Yuri Fedorov, Vadim Dubnov, Kirill Krivosheev, Sergey Zhavoronkov), Armenian (Boris Navasardian, Alexander Iskandarian, Richard Kirokossian), Georgian (Gela Vasadze, Valery Checheshvili, Simon Kopadze), Ukrainian (Rinat Kovbasyuk, Igor Semivolos, Maxim Yali), British (Onik Krikorian, Leon Aslanov, Thomas de Waal), Israeli (Mark Gorin, Avigor Eskin), as well as Kazakh (Esen Usubaliev), Polish (Jakub Koreyba), American (Richard Spooner), and Moldovan (Aurelia Grigoriu) experts.

Conclusion:

It is difficult to name any other topic in the coverage of which Azerbaijani media would give so much role to experts. In fact, the events themselves take a back seat, while their interpretation becomes the most important. Thus, apart from changing the narrative, in order to improve the quality of such pieces we have three tasks: a) to strengthen their factual (journalistic) basis; b) to take measures to raise the level of experts (especially young ones), most of whom often take a one-sided approach to complex issues and

instead of serious arguments, switch to populist rhetoric; c) to improve the training of journalists who moderate TV debates/discussions or interview experts.

It is necessary to increase the number of Armenian experts, whose views on issues related to the conflict are reflected in the pieces on the relevant topics. First of all, this applies to the so-called "TV debates", most of which are held with the participation of representatives of the expert community of one of the conflicting parties only.

REFERENCES TO THE THEME OF ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI CONFLICT IN PIECES OF AZERBAIJANI MEDIA AND EXPERT SPEECHES IN SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2023

Significant change of the situation in September 2023 as a result of Azerbaijan's military operation against Armenian armed formations in Karabagh necessitated additional meetings with representatives of media community and experts in Baku. They took place in the first half of November and were devoted to the analysis of media coverage of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations after the completion of two-month (June-July) monitoring.

According to general observations, since the election of the new President in the parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh, which took place on September 9, the main subject of Azerbaijani media coverage of the conflict has acquired a different direction and a different tone. Before the mentioned event, they discussed the activities of mediators, peacemakers and observation missions, as well as Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations and their prospects mainly in a neutral tone. However, from that moment on, the media shifted almost entirely to the topic "Baku and Yerevan's policy towards Stepanakert/Khankendi", adopting a sharply critical stance. News about shootings on the "line of contact" between the Azerbaijani and Armenian military units in Karabagh, explosions of mines in the liberated territories, laid after the 2020 war, and the inability of Russian peacekeepers to stop the escalation dominated. The same topics dominated the conversations between journalists and political and military experts. They also spoke about the probability of resumption of hostilities in Karabagh, possible reaction of Armenia, Russia and Western mediators.

After a one-day anti-terrorist operation of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces in the zone controlled by the Russian peacekeeping forces, there was a mass departure of the Armenian population from this region to the neighboring republic. The media widely covered the process, emphasizing the voluntary nature of the departure, trying to document literally every case of border crossing through the Lachin border checkpoint. This was done in order to exclude the possibility of accusing Azerbaijan of forcibly expelling Karabagh Armenians. TV companies aired old footage showing the difficult conditions in which Azerbaijanis had once left these same lands and compared their condition with the current situation of Armenians; websites published day after day the government's appeal to Armenians urging them to stay and integrate into Azerbaijani society; experts discussed what mechanisms could be created to protect the rights and ensure the security of Armenians in Karabakh. Some experts expressed the opinion that at this stage it is impossible to persuade Armenians to agree to live together with Azerbaijanis within one state, it takes time to establish at least some trust between them, so the main task now is to exclude any possibility of violent treatment of civilians leaving their homes and to protect the property left behind.

However, the topics "Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations" and "Activities of mediators, peacemakers and observation missions" did not leave the agenda and gradually regained their leading place in it. Already at the end of September many journalists and experts argued that now signing of a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia becomes more realistic, as the issue of ensuring conditions for safe residence of Armenians in Karabagh, which is the subject of the most acute dispute, loses its practical significance in

the new situation. Nevertheless, in October, Azerbaijani President Aliyev refused to go first to Spain, then to Brussels, where negotiations with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan were to take place with the participation of European mediators. Aliyev explained this by the unfairness and partiality of the position taken by the mediators, who accused him of using force in Karabakh. Subsequently, local media actively promoted Aliyev's idea of bilateral negotiations without participation of mediators in order to reduce geopolitical risks and criticized France and the US for trying to promote their political interests in the region. In this context, the media and expert community paid much attention to the growing tension between Moscow and Yerevan due to Yerevan's recent military-political cooperation with the West and detriment of the former relations with Russia. Experts, on the one hand, expressed surprise at how the West can move towards establishing almost allied relations with a country that is still a member of the CSTO and EAEU, seeing in this the influence of major geopolitical games, and on the other hand, expressed the opinion that Azerbaijan should not participate in such games, continuing to pursue its independent and balanced policy. At the same time, the negative "contribution" of such behavior of Western mediators to the process of signing a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia was noted. For example, the thesis that by providing military assistance to Yerevan France loses the right to be called an "impartial mediator" was often repeated.

The frequency of reference of media and experts to such thematic categories as "Issues related to the borders between the two countries", "Unblocking of communications", "Other issues" remained at the same level. But it can be said that the theme "Baku and Yerevan's Policy on Stepanakert/Khankendi" has been replaced by another theme (it can also be considered a modification of the previous one) since the end of September: "The issue of the return of Armenian residents to Karabakh". Different opinions are expressed, the tone of the overwhelming majority of which can be assessed as "positive", although it is noted that for this they must accept Azerbaijani citizenship. In some cases, there is talk of 'parity' - that the process should occur parallel to the return of Azerbaijanis to the southern and eastern regions of Armenia, from where they were expelled more than 30 years ago.



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