Post-Soviet transformation and conflict narratives (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict): factors affecting pervasiveness of attitudes in conflict

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Edited by Leila Alieva

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Introduction

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict dates back to early 1988 with mass rallies in Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) Autonomous region of Azerbaijan supporting incorporation of this part of Azerbaijan into Armenia[1]: both Azerbaijani and Soviet Central authorities rejected the claim, citing unconstitutionality of Armenian claims and stating that "perestroika did not mean change of borders".

In the context of further actions, Armenian nationalist groups started the process of formation of armed groups[2] sending them to NK to terrorize and expel the local Azerbaijanis out of their lands clashing with the Soviet internal forces and Azerbaijani police[3]. Violent, forceful deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia during the Soviet time was followed by violence in the two largest cities in Azerbaijan - Sumgayit and Baku, against the Armenians, which contributed to mutual enmity. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in late August 1991, Armenia was the only country in the former Soviet Union to have its own armed forces[4]. It played a primary role in their ethnic cleansing campaign of the Azerbaijani population of NK which was launched in late September 1991 and completed by early May 1992, accompanied by brutal atrocities occurring in the town of Khojali[5].

In March 1993, Armenian forces advanced into the areas beyond NK, capturing the Kelbejer district, and in June 1993, took advantage of the political turmoil in Azerbaijan and launched a wide scale military offensive, subsequently occupying six other regions of Azerbaijan, ethnically cleansing hundreds of thousands of people, and burning and looting their homes and properties. Subsequently, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces, but did not take decisive steps for implementing them. The status quo remains unchanged until today.

The Armenian military offensive and internal political struggle has led to political turmoil in the country, resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected government and paving

[1] Sovetskiy Karabakh, 21 February 1988, Stepanakert, Azerbaijan.
[2] See "Krovaviy Omut Karabaxa"

[3] "Literaturnaya gazeta", 7August 1991

[4] "Nezavisimaya gazeta" Interview with President of Azerbaijan N132, 1991

[5] "Karabag", 28 February 1992.

the way for anti-democratic forces to arrive in power, diverting the policy of democratization and reform towards Soviet style repressive stability within the corrupted system.

Consequently, the failure to realize the promises to end the 23-year occupation undermined the hopes of people for any peaceful end of occupation. The continued status quo, being the primary security threat to Azerbaijan's statehood, is also a source of immediate danger to the stability and security of the greater region, as acknowledged by world powers[6] and the conflicting sides.

The ceasefire agreement which was signed in 1994 and since then preserved without stationing of any peacekeeping forces has not produced any visible progress towards a viable political solution. The analysis of the media during this period, however, showed little sign, if at all, of changed rhetoric or narratives.[7]

The paper is intended to explore the reasons and nature of such a persistence of narratives and attitudes. It aims to show how various narratives emerging during the period of no peace/no war affected views on conflict. This paper argues that restrictions on democracy and growing authoritarianism have also contributed to the status quo and hindered the emergence and spread of alternative views on conflict resolution in three specific ways. First is the absence of freedom of expression and media, which has hindered the development of alternative views. Second is a highly state-controlled economy and politics which had direct implications for social transformation, obstructing the liberalization of thinking. And the third is monopolization of the process of conflict resolution and manipulation of the nationalist discourse by the authorities with political purposes.

The structure of the paper is the following. The first part will describe the objective factors contributing to pervasiveness of narratives and attitudes, which includes continued occupation of the nearest 20% of the Azerbaijani territories and non-implementation of the 4 UN SC resolutions, lack of progress of the Minsk group peace negotiations, followed by the literature review of sources on relations between democracy and conflict resolution. Then the paper analyses authoritarian practices, controlled economy and resulting socio-political composition of Azerbaijani society and these groups' views on the overall situation in the country and the conflict. And to conclude, the paper shows the political manipulation of the unresolved conflict by the authorities. Overall the study aims to contribute to the "democratic peace" theory through analyzing the influence of democracy on prospects of resolution of the protracted conflicts.

[6] NATO: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict threat to regional security http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/85478.html

[7] Margarita Ahvlediani, presentation at the ICP conference "The Nagorno –Karabagh Conflict: Russia's Next Pandora Box?" Bern, 10 February, 2016.

Democracy and conflict resolution: approaches

Issues of peace and war have always been the focus of scholars, philosophers, conflict resolution specialists. While there is no precise theory applied to particular conflicts, there are well analyzed and developed approaches which could be explored. One of them is called democratic peace theory which takes its roots from the works of Immanuel Kant, written in 1795:'On Perpetual Peace" that was further developed and took momentum in the 70-90s of last century[8]. The premise of the theory is that liberals believe that individuals, regardless of government, are fundamentally the same; that going to war against a fellow liberal democracy would be harmful to one's own well-being. In other words, the democratic peace theory or simply the democratic peace holds that democracies — usually, liberal democracies — never or almost never go to war with one another[9], or democracies are *less likely* to fight wars with each other[10].

Followers of democratic peace have argued that democratic *institutions and norms* place constraints on the ability of leaders to fight other democracies[11] and that democracy tends to foster *economic interdependence*, which reduces the likelihood of war[12].

Some find that interstate wars do have important impacts on the fate of political regimes, and that the probability of a political leader falling from power in the wake of a lost war is particularly high in democratic states[13]." This idea is supported by James Ray who claims that "leaders in democracies might avoid wars against other democratic states ... because they feel that fighting such wars might be harmful to their chances of staying in power[14]"

There are works suggesting that some democratic systems also face obstacles to the peaceful settlements of disputes, obstacles that are endemic to the particular institutional and social configurations of the democratic polity itself, and thus certain democratic configurations,

[8] N. W. Doyle ("*Liberalism and World Politics"*), J. L. Ray ("*Wars Between Democracies: Rare or Non-Existent"),* S. A. Bremer ("*Democracy and Interstate Conflict"),* S. Chan, ("*In Search of Democratic Peace")*

[9] Q and A on democracy and War, by R.Rummel (2002)

[10] David A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review*, (March 1992).

[11] John M. Owen, "How Peace Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," *International Security*, 19:2 (Fall 1994), pp. 87–125

[12] John R. Oneal and Bruce M. Russett, "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950–1985," *International Studies Quarterly*, (June 1997)

[13] Bueno de Mesquita & Rundolf Siverson, War and Survival of Political leaders: A comparative study of Regime types and Political accountability, (1995)

[14] James Lee Ray, Does democracy cause peace ? (1995), p. 40

cultures, identities and leadership views and decision-making styles impede conflict resolution[15].

Some argue[16] that the conflict resolution is complicated by a vicious circle of reinforcement between the lack of democracy and the unresolved status of a conflict. In support of this argument, L. Alieva, for instance, brings example of Azerbaijan and Armenia where attempts to resolve the conflict for the past 20 years have not yielded any result due to absence of fundamental political reforms; furthermore that post-soviet authoritarianism has successfully used totalitarian legacy in society's way of thinking as a social basis, with consciousness remaining closed and confined to narrow nationalist goals and perspectives. She concludes that the authorities are using the unresolved conflict and nationalist rhetoric to justify the political stagnation and lack of reform and expresses her skepticism towards any negotiated solution in these societies[17].

The others, such as Jack Snyder, suggest that the process of democratization is accompanied by greater instability and conflict and that transitioning states, whether to or from democracy, are more likely to be involved in war. They indicate the institutional weaknesses as one of the reasons. They carefully discuss the role that nationalist's ideology and coalition politics in newly democratizing states play in producing a heightened danger of conflict with their neighbors[18]. Any meaningful explanation of how and why people engage in violent conflict must refer to ideology. Shared systems of beliefs, concepts, emotions and values give groups a sense of identity, specify targets of hostility, legitimize aggression and enable coordinated action[19], believe S. Mock and T. Homer-Dixon .

Slade Mendenhall[20] finds that ideology is not always pronounced and that full understanding of conflict situations is hindered by presumptions that ideology is generally inclined to announce itself openly, to the contrary: ideology is often implicit, imperfect, informal, and amenable.

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[15] Miriam Elman, Oded Haklai and Hendrid Spruyt, Democracy and Conflict Resolution: The dilemmas of Israels's peacemaking, (2014)

[16] Leila Alieva : Expanding the borders of post-Soviet thinking: liberalism and conflict resolution, The Soviet Legacy 22 Years On: Reversed or Reinforced ? edited by Leila Alieva, Baku 2013

[17] Leila Alieva: Expanding the borders of post-Soviet thinking: liberalism and conflict resolution, The Soviet Legacy 22 Years On: Reversed or Reinforced ? edited by Leila Alieva, Baku 2013

[18] Brown (p.301), (Mansfield, Edward D. & Jack Snyder, Democratization and the Danger of War, in Michael E. Brown et al (eds) *Debating the Democratic Peace* (MIT Press, 1996)

[19] The Ideological Conflict Project: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations, July 9, 2015 CIGI Papers No. 74, Steven Mock and Thomas Homer-Dixon

[20] War and ideology: Slade Mendenhall, May2013 http://themendenhall.com/2013/05/22/war-and-ideology

This notion received more confirmation in the case of the Soviet demise, where many nations expressed their past grievances and territorial disputes at various levels of conflict and in some cases, such as in the Caucasus, moved to an open armed conflict and destruction. In the democratization period, in the absence of democratic institutions and a democratic peace culture, the kind of education received by successive generations could be both a balancing element for interethnic or inter-state stability or a conflict energy for driving latent grievances into violence.

Ali Abbasov argues that in countries of transition, ethnic conflicts largely due to democratization itself often threaten democratic changes. In short, democracy and nationalism are interrelated phenomena. In addition to creating grounds for conflicts, the former is capable of creating the necessary conditions for their occurrence. In turn, nationalism and ethno-political problems may threaten with a rollback from principles of democracy, especially when democratic institutions are weak. It again give us an argument in favor of differentiated approaches to each conflict[21]..

The politics of nationalism is contrary to the very essence of the liberal democratic process, says S. Burg. The material hardships imposed on the population by the transition make it difficult for governments to win popular support and this heightens the effectiveness of appeals to national sentiments, which can be satisfied through actions more easily under the control of the state[22].

Alan Smith argues that in societies that have experienced violent conflict, education also has another important role in the longer term to help successive generations understand the violent conflict that took place within their own society and potentially contribute towards future peacebuilding[23]. Education can be part of the problem as well as part of the solution[24]

As A. Smith notes, in conflict-affected situations[25] education is a means of socialization and identity development through the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes across generations.

Bush, K., and Salterelli indicate that education may therefore be a driver of conflict, fueling grievances, stereotypes, xenophobia and other antagonisms[26] but can also be a way of contributing to ‘conflict transformation” and “peacebuilding”.

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[21] Ali Abbasov, “Liberalism and Conflict” p. 96, The Soviet Legacy 22 Years On: Reversed or Reinforced ? edited by Leila Alieva, Baku (2013)

[22] Steven Burg, War or Peace ? Nationalism, democracy and American foreign policy in post-Communist Europe, (1996.)

[23] Alan Smith, The influence of education on conflict and peace building

[24] A.Smith & Vaux T. 2003 Education, conflict and international development

[25] Alan Smith, The influence of education on conflict and peace building

[26] Bush, K., & Salterelli, D. (Eds.) (2000). *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict*

Education fueling ethnic hatred based on stereotypes and humiliation creates an unchanged attitude with conflict energy which easily transmutes into violence in an environment conducive to nationalism and weakened state institutions.

Galtung's ideas on the role of education in peacebuilding come from an important distinction between negative peace (the cessation of violence) and positive peace[27] (structural changes to address social injustices that may be a cause of violence).

In countries where authoritarianism is developing, narratives refer to sets of values. It is reflected in their behavior on democracy, conflict resolution and nation building. Authoritarian leaders, for defense of their anti-democratic regimes are using counter-narratives against liberal democracies referring to their own values, such as repressing human rights and political diversity to guarantee security for all, referring to the cultural differences between countries and civilizations and to their own 'traditional' values, deploring Western individualism as a moral decay[28]. The surging wave of counter-narratives needs to be reversed by liberal democracy's confidence that it is the righteous form of governance[29].

Laurence Broers, in analyzing frozen conflicts, notes that the idea of an Enduring Rivalry (ER) is applicable to frozen conflicts and this theory more explicitly acknowledges the danger inherent in rivalries of this kind: ER theory explicitly addresses the interstate dynamics and therefore an interstate theory of competition that is needed in order to identify rivalry effects in the domestic sphere[30]. Maoz and Mor defined ER as "a *persistent*, *fundamental* and *long-term* incompatibility of goals between two states" in case of no war/no peace situations[31].

The existing literature suggests rather unclear and non-linear relations between democracy and conflict resolution, based on the controversial experience of authoritarian leaders preserving stability and democratically elected leaders resorting to war. However, there is an observed dynamic between the domestic politics and the conflicts, which hints at a broader and deeper connection between the narratives, reflecting the values and vision of the political (economic) trajectory of development, on the one hand - and the attitudes/narratives in the conflicts on the other.

[27] Galtung, J. (1990) Cultural violence, *Journal of peace research*, 27(3), 291-305

[28] Ingrid Habets Liberal democracy: the threat of counter-narratives
European View (2015) 14:145–154 DOI 10.1007/s12290-015-0369-z

[29] Ingrid Habets Liberal democracy: the threat of counter narratives
European View (2015) 14:145–154 DOI 10.1007/s12290-015-0369-z

[30] *Laurence Broers, From frozen conflict to enduring rivalry: reassessing the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict, Nationalities Papers* (Vol. 43, No.4, 556-576),June 2015.

[31] Maoz and Mor Maoz, Zeev and Ben D. Mor, 2002. *Bound by Struggle. The Strategic Evolution of Enduring International Rivalries*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

The status of parties to the conflict by the time of ceasefire

The ceasefire agreement in 1994 was reached in the position of the military advantage of Armenia, who up till now has been occupying 7 more administrative regions besides Nagorno-Karabagh. The status quo, reflecting this asymmetric power balance at the moment of signing of the ceasefire agreement, could be considered a structural factor of pervasiveness of the attitudes by the Azerbaijani population. Preparedness for the conflict is another profound feature which was lacking in Azerbaijan, unlike in Armenia. Within this context, when this conflict started with the Armenian territorial claims, it was a big surprise for the majority of Azerbaijani people and some others perceived it as betrayal, as Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno Karabagh and other parts of Azerbaijan lived in harmony, having a firm traditional friendship. Rumors, provocative speeches and actions, along with lack of true information have become the driving elements for developing enmity between the two people. The dominant violent Soviet culture with totalitarian thinking went into channels in both societies. Violent Armenian groups started to intimidate and force local Azerbaijanis to leave Armenia, triggering an environment of anger in Azerbaijan which was used by criminal elements to attack and kill local Armenians and some Azerbaijanis in Sumgait, Azerbaijan. These criminal actions, although condemned by the majority of Azerbaijanis, were used in Armenia as a pretext for expanding and inflaming hostility against Azerbaijanis, and expelling first all Azerbaijanis from Armenia, then moving to Nagorno Karabakh, where ethnic cleansing culminated in Qaradagli and Khojali, towns located inside NK. The atrocities against the local population, especially in Khojali, dramatically changed the attitudes of the Azerbaijani population. The further occupation and ethnic cleansing has deepened those attitudes and lifted them to the enemy level.

The period after the ceasefire was not helpful for the healing of wounds and suffering, as the following three primary live events have had a crucial impact on people's attitude: the Khojali atrocities, years of life of refugees in "tent cities" across the country and the heart-breaking stories of hundreds of crippled Azerbaijani civilians and prisoners of war returned from Armenian captivity. One could imagine what Azerbaijani refugees and stakeholders felt watching and reading news about the settlement activities in the occupied regions, destruction of their properties and homes, change of names of their villages and district center or watching military parades in their occupied lands. This only aggravated the sense of frustration and revenge. As information technology becomes more sophisticated, the people have closer access to their lands and properties via these systems and the scale of its effect on their attitudes is not easily measureable.

The technology-altered attitude is also dictated by the so-called social media where people have free access to electronic media and make their comments on various issues concerning the conflict. It often used as a platform for racists, ultra-nationalist elements whose only purpose is to humiliate and insult the other side. Absence of condemnation of the Hocali massacres by the Armenian society or the government, except for individual human rights defenders, or any compromises on the issue of withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories has also contributed to the sustainability of hostile feelings.

It should be added that for Azerbaijani side forming of anti-Armenian attitude has no strategic goals and importance as Azerbaijan has been in a defensive position. Furthermore, there has been a widespread view in Azerbaijani society that it is Russia who is using Armenians against Azerbaijanis, that "Armenians are not enemies"… they are "hostages of Russia". The statement of Armenian PM V. Sarkisyan that the "mono-ethnicity that we have gained for Armenia is more valuable than Armenian independence" was in stark contrast with the traditions of multicultural co-existence in Azerbaijan.

The changes in overall Azerbaijani attitude could be affected by Armenian peace statements which have never been made before, like "we should live in peace with Azerbaijan" or "these people should live in peace and friendship". H. Aliyev made unprecedented gestures and proposals for peace in the forms of statements and appeals[32] both to the government and the Armenian people [33] even during the hostilities. In addition to different models and options, H. Aliyev's proposal on the Caucasian Security Pact allowed the Armenian side greater opportunities using the economic advantages of Azerbaijan[34].

Son Aliyev was also open to peace, suggesting numerous proposals about the involvement of the Armenian side in Azerbaijani energy projects and energy transportation routes as a stimulus for economic revival and further integration of the two, in return these peaceful steps were similarly declined. The offer to withdraw from the occupied regions adjacent to the railway lines so as to establish communications with Armenia has also been rejected by official Yerevan. The idea of establishment of close ties and meetings among the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in NK was also declined by the Armenian side[35].

[32] Meeting with V. Kazimirov, Special representative of Russian President, January 31 1994

[33] Inauguration speech of President , Oct 19, 1993

[34] Speech of President H. Aliyev at New Azerbaijan Party's first Conference, Dec 20, 1999

[35] Araz Əzimovdan sensasiyalı bəyanatlar 27 Sept, 2012 "Yeni Musavat"

Lack of progress of OSCE Minsk Group activities

Besides the status of parties to the conflict by the time of ceasefire agreement, the other structural factor determining certain narratives and attitudes is the questioned effectiveness of the peace negotiations. Following the Khojali massacre, the OSCE formed a Minsk group of OSCE members to convene a conference in Minsk[36] to settle the conflict and in 1997 the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship was created and comprised of the USA, France and Russia. Co-chairmen proposed two peace plans[37] in 1997 known as the "package" and "staged" plans, which stipulated a high degree of autonomy for NK within the Azerbaijani republic[38]. Both were accepted by Azerbaijan but rejected by the Armenian side. A third plan called "common state" was proposed in late 1998, was rejected by Azerbaijan[39]. Bilateral negotiations in Geneva[40] led to the Paris talks in 2001 which was followed by the US, initiating the Key West meeting in early April 2001, and all of them failed to produce any result[41].

As a result of a so-called Prague Process, the peace plan formulated by the Co-Chairs was presented to OSCE Foreign Ministers in Madrid in 2007, which is now known as the Madrid Principles. These principles include the return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh, a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, final status of Nagorno-Karabakh to be determined in the future, the right of all internally-displaced persons and refugees to return and international security guarantees.

The activities of OSCE Co-chairs have created an attitude of mistrust in the institute of peaceful resolution and justice, which has been reflected in the statements of both Azerbaijani leadership and in the attitudes of the society at large, who perceived that co-chairs were acting as advocates of the opposite party. In attempt to monopolize the issue, they are preventing other international organizations from intervening concerned by the status-quo, such as the Council of Europe and European Parliament blocking their efforts by their governments' mechanisms to disrupt the adoption of any documents reflecting the situation on the ground.

[36] 'Finland as a mediator in the Karabakh Conflict', publication of MFA, Helsinki, 1997.
[37] "Azerbaijan" qazeti, 21 February 2001, Baku.
[38] Statement of OSCE Chairman in Office, 3 December 1996, Lisbon.
[39] Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq, 2008. Meeting of President H. Aliyev with Minsk Group delegation. December14,1999
[40] Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq, 2008. Meeting of President H. Aliyev with Minsk Group delegation. December14,1999

[41] Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia complete Nagorno-Karabakh talks in Key West 07.04.2001 | Source: **Pravda.Ru** http://www.pravdareport.com/news/hotspots/07-04-2001/40137-0/

The "neutrality" of co-chairs has reached such an absurd point that they assumed neutrality on all issues taken by occupiers in occupied lands considered as war crimes in other parts of the world, In the case of UN demand to investigate looting, burning and settlement of occupied lands, their fact-finding mission's report has served for hiding the actions associated with war criminals in the occupied lands with carefully selected words.

The Co-chair countries "neutral" vote against Azerbaijani resolution at UN GA in 2008 and recent lobby activities at CoE in favor of Armenian actions on the occupied areas has led to the perception that Co-chairs are more interested in preserving the status-quo rather than a solution[42].

Social-economic transformation and the official narratives

Azerbaijan, like other members of the former Soviet Union, inherited the Soviet system of economy, educational and value systems, approaches and party intelligentsia. It required a total restructuring of the entire socio-economic spectrum and adoption of the national strategy of development. Within this context, the first democratic changes to get rid the Soviet system and open the way for new formation was started by the democratically elected president A. Elchibey in 1992, who made revolutionary changes in the educational field as well as starting the privatization process, distribution of lands to people and promoting small business development which changed the entire mood in the country. Establishing the branches of free society paved the way for the multi-party system with a flow of independent newspapers serving fundamental changes in the minds of people. Having Russian military pulled out from the country have been the initial steps for political independence.

The changing atmosphere took another form with the old communist party leader's arrival into power again. Experienced H.Aliyev crashed rival to him political and paramilitary forces inside the government and firmly consolidated his power, making emphasis on preserving stability and public safety inside the country. The way of maintaining stability and security purposefully or not have created an atmosphere of fear in society and restriction of political activities. The restricted rules over political processes and strict monopoly over economic activities had an immediate impact on the social structure of society. The policy, indeed, has in no way served for open discussions and rational assessments of the country's development, pushing forward Soviet-style propaganda and thus cementing the remaining

[42] Президент Ильхам Алиев: "Азербайджан сумел утвердить себя в мире, на международной арене как надежный партнер, надежный друг" Day.az 08.07.2014

democratic thinking by propaganda terror. Semi-independent TV and radio services were shut down, public meetings and opposition activities restricted.

The unfolding elements of free society and democratic governance have been undermined and replaced by the clan system, based on regionalism and the old system/style of governance, acting under instructions rather than according to the respect of law. Establishing its one-man ruling system, the government has kept tight control over society by monopolizing the political situation in the country. Occasionally, loss of hope for political change has affected many people's minds and in an effort for economic survival, they started tacitly distancing themselves from the political life and emigrating.

The pressure for reform urged by the European institutions has been carried out in a manner of manageable transformations within the framework of the regime's survival policy. OSCE demands on election reform, free press and human rights and the Council of Europe's reform package on the road to membership have been adjusted to Azerbaijani realities. A year after joining to CoE in 2002, the government changed the electoral law by the disputed referendum changing proportional election system which has been the greater challenge to the ruling party, undermining yet another pillar of democratic development. Yet all electoral commissions which represent the heart of the ruling regime are acting as a branch of the executive. The governmental narratives that "We are located between Iran and Russia and we should guarantee stability but you are talking about democracy", "We are newly independent state", "We have hundreds of thousands of refugees and our lands are under occupation" were persistently used in defense of election falsifications and a poor democracy record before international delegations served as unfounded grounds - serving only for the regime's survival.

The preceding arguments for shortage of democracy in late 90s represented the provision of "stability" in the country, and the famous "democracy is not apple to go to market and buy" and "we have democracy and we are developing democracy[43]" narratives have been replaced by the slogans of "economic well-being is first for seeding democracy" arguments in the mid-2000s for manipulation of democracy records. From this perspective, the notion that "liberal democracy" and "low intensity democracy" measured merely by regular election practice and respect for basic human rights is largely dependent on the role played by political elites and the perceptions they hold of the benefits and potential losses of consolidating a democratic regime"[44] was applicable in our case.

[43] Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq,2008.Meeting with National security ministry people, 28March,1998

[44] Schimmellennig,F., Engert S.,Knobel H. Costs,commitment,compliance.The impact of EU democratic conditionality on Latvia,Slovakia and Turkey. Journal of Common Market Studies 41(3). Gils B., Low Intensity Democracy Political Power in the new world order

The widely expected democratic transformation did not occur in 2003 presidential elections as the presidency was slipped into the Gulf regions' energy-rich rulers' experiences, ending hope for democratic change, leading to demoralization, triggering a new wave of labor emigration (as it happened in 1994-1995 massively) and for the first time, the great wave of political emigration to Europe which continued more intensively after the 2005 parliamentary elections.

These three major developments in post-Soviet history in 2002 and 2003, and later on the constitutional change of two tenure presidency in 2009, shifted the total direction of the country from semi-democratic changes to an autocratic system of dynastic rule, culminating with the destruction of civil society and political party functions in the past five years.

The succession of the presidency coincided with the completion of energy transportation routes to Turkey and the world market and the flow of high level oil money into the country. Certainly it has shaped the country's face to the extent that the allocated money was used for its intended purposes and allowed to improve in some places roads, water supply, electricity generation, renovation and building of new buildings and hotels. Defense capabilities have been strengthened.

Within 10 years Azerbaijan became the leading country in CIS for investment per capita and with $174 billion being invested in the economy, half of it by foreign companies[45]. Over 60 billion has been invested in the oil industry by AIOC operated by BP[46].

According to government statistics, poverty levels declined from 49 to 7.6 percent[47], which was still questionable and hundreds of thousands of workplaces have been newly created, although the numbers are highly questionable due to the harsh reality of huge emigration of the labor force to Russia. Azerbaijani per capita GDP reached around $7,884 in 2014[48].

"Azerbaijan's dynamic development is a reality. World-leading financial agencies are showing appreciation for Azerbaijan's reform policy. Azerbaijan's reform policy could be an example for many countries and some countries are learning from Azerbaijani experience. Azerbaijan is the fastest growing economy. The most dynamically developed economy is the Azerbaijani economy" said I. Aliyev in his speech during the Cabinet Ministers meeting in 2013[49].

[45] Jafarova Aynur, Azerbaijan leading country in CIS for investment per capita, Azernews Oct10, 2014

[46] www.bazcci.com

[47] Poverty level declining substantially, Aug1 2014, by Aynur Jafarova, Azernews.

[48] Data.worldbank.org

[49] http://www.economy.gov.az/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=478:h-aliyev-muasir-azerbaycan-qurucusu&catid=10&Itemid=263&showall=1&limitstart=&lang=az

According to its "Doing Business" report, Azerbaijan was proclaimed the most reformist country in the world[50] in 2009 and was included in 50 countries with competing economies, being in the first place among CIS countries. “For the past ten years our economy has grown three times, diversified, a modern social-economic infrastructure has been built and the non-oil sector is developing dynamically. GDP growth is 5%. All of these are the result of true economic reforms and these indicators are the highest indicators in the world”, said I. Aliyev at the same meeting.

Systemic and social reforms, along with heavy dependence on oil money have remained a substantial challenge for economic development. The stated goals of market economy and privatization[51] were implemented, partially impeding transformation from a transitional economy to a market one. The statistics indicated that Azerbaijan had the third lowest score in large-scale privatization among CIS countries[52]. The reluctance in privatizing the large-scale enterprises and state sectors indicated again a leverage of control over all levels of society, which in turn drastically slowed non-oil sector development, enhanced corruption, torpedoed transitional economy towards a market model. Lack of competition policy has also led to emerging monopolies and oligarchies and so discouraged diversification of the economy[53]. The country’s oligarch-ministers and affiliation with ministries and top officials’ business circles have totally divided the country’s business sector among themselves, monopolizing foreign trade or import and export of goods, getting some kind of consensus with each other.

In this regard, one foreign scholar has masterly assessed the cycle operating in the Azerbaijani system: “corrupt officials rent-seek to gain more money and consolidate power, these officials use their political and economic power to limit political rights and obstruct the democratic process, these officials can then remain in office and the process begins again. Since the current officials are personally benefiting from the status quo, there is little reason for them to enact reforms[54]”.

But both the World Bank’s and Transparency International Corruption Index have ranked Azerbaijan in the worst line of corrupted countries. Azerbaijan ranks only above the three non-reforming CIS countries, according to the WB Corruption index[55]. Azerbaijan’s score on

[50] http://www.economy.gov.az/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=478:h-aliyev-muasir-azerbaycan-qurucusu&catid=10&Itemid=263&showall=1&limitstart=&lang=az

[51] Interview of Heydar Aliyev,President of Azerbaijan with correspondents of the Wall Street Journal, July28, 1997

[52] See: *EBRD Transition Indicators for CIS Countries* European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, *Transition indicators by country*

[53] ERBD. *Country assessments: Azerbaijan*. http://tr.ebrd.com/tr13/en/country-assessments/1/azerbaijan

[54] Grace Mausser, The George Washington University. Economic Transition Report on Azerbaijan: An Issue of Governance

[55] The World Bank, World Development Indicators. (2013). *Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) for Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.* http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG/countries/AZ?display=graph

the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index was extremely low ranking in 2004, out of 145 countries at 140, which has been improved to 126 out of 174 in 2014[56]. The amendment made to the law on commercial secrecy prohibits researchers and investigative journalists from obtaining information about the suspicious business activities of the ruling elite[57]. The judiciary is corrupt and inefficient, and is subservient of the ruling party and the executive.

The government has too many restrictions, licenses, permissions and bureaucratic obstacles that potential businesses are obliged to financially cover, in order to start up their business operation. In the context of the recent crisis, some of these have been removed but the system itself has not undergone reform, and the bribery-based control and absence of any court system constitutes a major challenge for independent businesses. The existence of such a business climate has surfaced in the context of the recent crisis connected with the decline of oil prices, and the statements of the president of the country has indicated the extent of the corruption deeply rooted in its top governmental offices. The dispersion of billions of currency by state-sponsored International Bank to pro-governmental businessmen and the government-sponsored businesses without any firm accountability has tarnished the bank sector and disclosed the degree of governance system operating in the country.

Despite significant corruption, the country has become economically less dependent of any country and used its resources to deepen authoritarianism and the search for ways for long-term survival. Growing confidence has caused the political leadership to speak out and conduct itself more defiantly to international organizations and western powers on issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms, putting forward the economic independence of the country and the growing economic standards of its people, as well as western dependence on Azerbaijani energy resources.

Such development in turn has deprived the society from creating a middle class independent from the government; on the contrary, the government has created a class of its own intelligentsia: scholars, professors and cultural figures, sportsmen and even a solid group of NGOs awarding them various Soviet-style privileges like presidential pensioner status, people's actor, people's artist, people's writer or poet or numerous ranks and orders who in turn may in critical moments appear on TV and defend whatever policy they are ordered to defend.

Preventing people from being united under independent unions where they might demand their labor rights, be it within different enterprises, sectors and educational systems or trade

[56] See transparency.org

[57] 09 iyul 2012, "Kommersiya sirri haqqında" Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanununda dəyişiklik edilməsi barədə Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu http://www.president.az/articles/5364

unions or independent war veterans' organizations, the government has left no choice for them except remaining again under the direct dependence of authorities. Development of energy fields and transportation links has led to the creation of a new generation of young and middle-age professionals with a socially-advantageous place in the country, but they do not represent a separate social group as such. The small class of NGO community has been paralyzed, prevented from acting as a mobilized group and spreading their ideas and initiatives constructively to a wider society. The union of journalists in the form of the Press Council, supposed to represent the development of a free press, has been turned into another branch of the government.

The circumstances in which the society is functioning under the above-mentioned conditions are not conducive to an environment where the liberal society and values could be developed. And this situation is deepening as the system is strengthening its roots by narrowing the people's rights. According to Freedom House estimates, Azerbaijan went from the "Partially Free" country status it had in 1998-2003 to a "Not Free" status from 2004 onwards[58]. Consequently, the people are being perceived as dissidents, not as representatives of democratic society where development of democratic liberalistic values is not at stake, but physical safety and security is prevailing.

Social and political groups: views and narratives

Nationalism and national consciousness had been one of the consolidating elements in early XX century for the Azerbaijani independence movement in the context of national revival in Tsarist Russia. It was again serving as one of uniting elements for Azerbaijani independence in the late 80s. Actually, Azerbaijani nationalism could be called patriotism, since it has emerged as a chaotic, defensive response to Armenian nationalism which has been well organized, and is ideologically strong, with decades-long terror practices and huge conflict energy. Azerbaijani nationalistic sentiments represented the fragmented slogans for the defence of its lands with a crippled nationalistic ideology and forgotten memory. Ideological debates have again been prevalent when the first political parties and organizations emerging had been in greater dispute over the newly-formed popular movement's program and tactics of independence movement.

The leading idea in the nationalist revival served Turkism which was banned in the soviet period which has again declined in late 1990s probably because of weak ideological grounds in Azerbaijan. Nationalism in the form of Azerbaijanism continued to survive and was developed by both government ideologists and opposition groups who were in favor of a united Azerbaijan, using the "Azerbaijanism" idea for pushing the nationalistic consciousness

[58] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/azerbaijan

of people in Iranian Azerbaijan[59] . The government position on Azerbaijanism was publicly argued on account of the existence of many ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan. There is also the perception that the term Azerbaijanism as a separate identity with its "distinct history and culture" is being used by governmental circles as a way of distancing Azerbaijan from Turkey, aimed at diminishing the impact of Turkish cultural and democratic influence over Azerbaijan. Nationalism has also been applied in the form of patriotism by government circles.

The nationalism idea continued to be debated by ideologists, political party activists and newspaper journalists until the end of the 90s, and as monitoring has showed, this has drastically declined starting from the 2000s[60]. From these perspectives the emerging political party programs experienced a poor ideological basis, primarily benefiting from the ideology formed in 1911 Musavat party, which embraced the national-democratic values of the early XX century[61].

Liberal vs nationalist debates have been the subject of those parties again in the mid-90s, and the largest and oldest party with huge intellectual composition - the Musavat Party - took the lead, opening an intense debate in the press and inside the party itself. Evidently, nationalists within the party had more space for debates, a big auditorium and more arguments for speakers to engage in because of the situation the country was facing. Liberals, in their turn, argued that "in critical circumstances, the authority of the government can be enhanced with the consent of the citizens, demonstrating the real mechanism of protection of national interests in the liberal state"[62]. Representatives of the liberal wing in support of their arguments were resorting to the experiences of prosperous liberal democracies in Europe, while having no strong ground among the party branches due to the shortage of traditions and historical experience. These debates had increasingly impacted on in-party democracies, ideological discussions and formation of civil society groups and semi-independent newspapers in the country. From this perspective, the ideological debates inside the Musavat party have led to the inclusion of a more liberal ideology, so-called national liberalism, economic and social liberalism, including Azerbaijanism in the party program[63].

The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan party was not ready for and incapable of any ideological intra-party debate due to its nature, and its leaders' communist past left no argument for them to enter into debate on an inter-party basis with pro-democracy parties. Although the experts questioned the ruling party's having any political ideology and stressed that it was formed on

[59] Azerbaijan: In search of a national idea, FAR Centre,1996

[60] Azerbaijan: In search of a national idea, FAR Centre,1996

[61] Mirza Bala Mammadzade Azerbaycan Istiqlali ve Musavat

[62] Azerbaijan: In search of a national idea, FAR Centre

[63] Musavat partiyasinin programi ve nizamnamesi Baki 1997

a personality cult[64], the party declared the basis of its ideology to be on i**ndependent statehood, the rule of law and secularism, Azerbaijanism and social justice, and included them in its party program.** The restoration of Azerbaijani territorial integrity, removal of the consequences of military aggression is the main direction of the party's activities as featured in the program[65].

Freedom, equality and solidarity, Marxism-Leninism, liberalism, liberal democracy and social democracy are primary elements of the social-democratic and liberal party programs. Principles of Azerbaijanism, liberal conservatism, modernism, reformism, liberal views on economic development are major ideologies of the conservative National independence party and Popular Front parties[66].

While all parties emphasize the cultural and ethnic values in their party documents, neither Turkism nor Islam takes any priority in the party programs[67]. Rather, democracy and democratic development, based on universal values adopted by the free world, are prioritized. These parties are in partnership with the European liberal democratic camp rather than any Turkish or Muslim country parties or organizations.

In terms of inter-party ideological debate, these parties are no more rivaling each other on ideology and ideas, rather on procedural issues during the big events like elections or nomination of a candidate to parliament or presidency or on joint actions against government decisions. So far, the only unifying ideology is not to betray parties' values in relations with the government - which is considered as corrupted.

The role of political parties around the NK conflict has dramatically evolved in comparison to the role they played in the 1990s. Practically any step of the government at that time was met with reciprocal positions and statements of these parties, evidencing suspicion that the Aliyev government was willing to bring back Russian troops and that the government was making too many concessions to the Armenian side in ongoing negotiations[68]. In response to such threats they formed the National Resistance Movement[69] and allied themselves with the coalition of major political parties to challenge the government's policy, forcing President Aliyev to make explanations at different stages of negotiations, which reached a high

[64] Farid Guliyev ,Pearce Katy The challenges of electoral competion in an oil rich State: Azerbaijan pre-election report. Washington Post Oct6,2013

[65] Yeni Azerbaycan Partiyasinin proqrami http://www.yap.org.az/az/view/pages/9

[66] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Azerbaijan

[67] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Azerbaijan

[68] Qarabag munaqisesinin hell merhelelerinde siyasi partiyalarin fealiyyetleri ve tesebbuslere munasibetleri Feb2, 2011

[69] See: Qarabag munaqisesinin hell merhelelerinde siyasi partiyalarin fealiyyetleri ve tesebbuslere munasibetleri Feb2, 2011

intensity in 1999 before the OSCE summit in Istanbul[70], most likely due to information shortage.

The political parties activities in this field declined after the 2003 presidential elections, as the major parties have been repressed and deprived of the role they had in the life of society. Consequently some parties dismantled or merged or stopped functioning, and the major parties were weakened both morally and financially, with the policy of silencing the voice of the opposition parties affecting their views and activities on the conflict.

Nowadays, the political parties' stated policy on the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh is relatively the same with some particularities emanating from these parties' values. For instance, regarding the rights of Armenians living in NK, the liberal-inclined leading Musavat Party has repeatedly declared it would offer them the same rights as the European minorities have in EU countries. The political parties and the larger society have the common approach that Azerbaijani refugees from NK should be securely returned and enjoy the same rights that the final granted status will provide to the entire pre-war population and their descendants. Within this context, the society is not very much concerned by the level of the status granted, but in preserving the territorial integrity of the country, and this is also a sign of policy change.

Nevertheless, the main opposition parties acknowledge their very limited role in changing the situation and they are pre-dominantly looking at this problem through the lens of regime change[71], recognizing their powerlessness without having any voice inside the government. Such an approach has stimulated the government's consistent policy of monopolization of the issue and opposition parties' policy - first power and then involvement into resolution of vital problems - has failed and ultimately marginalized them from intervening into the fundamental issues the society is facing.

The tendency of monopolization of the issue in the hands of one man is deepening, leading to isolation of not only public, opposition parties and NGOs but also the top governmental and parliamentary leaders and diplomats[72] being used for control of society.

In addition to political parties' ideologies and systems of views, there are wide spread ideas circulating in the press and TV, promoted predominantly by governmental and pro-governmental groups:

The idea of independentism/statism is emanating from the ruling regime's rhetoric that "we are independent and no-one has a right to intervene into our internal affairs and foreign

[70]See : the same source

[71] Interview of the author with party leaders

[72] T. Zulfuqarov Elmar Memmedyarova qarsi Yeni Musavat qazeti 5 Yanvar, 2016

policy"[73] in response to international reactions to human rights violations and election fraud in Azerbaijan and this phenomenon has been the routine response of many officials. "The government and the people are united and our unity is the source of our successes" is similar to the popular idea dominating in the Soviet period[74]. "We are the regional leader in the Caucasus" and "Azerbaijani military and economic power far exceeds the neighbors'" "Azerbaijan possesses around 80% of the economy of Caucasus[75]", and "We are providing energy security for many European democracies"[76] are the growing ideas infused in the society by the government. The idea of the strong leader, consolidation around a strong leader[77] has been the cornerstone of the propaganda of pro-governmental press and TV media. This idea has excluded any democratic vision for the nation, on the contrary portraying father Aliyev as the savior of nations, founder of independent Azerbaijan, guarantor of independence and well-being, driving force of all our "successes"[78].

The idea of a sovereign democracy[79] copied from Russia has been and is the main ideology propagated by the ideologists of the ruling elite: that Azerbaijan has its own culture, the level of society, mentality, values and traditions quite different from European and we must develop our own style of democracy and live by our own rules which are sovereign and actually subdued to the will of the ruling regime.

Anti-Iranian and anti-Russian ideas[80] are mainly propagandized by various media outlets, sometimes in radical ways inconsistent with the national interest of Azerbaijan, portraying both nations as an enemy, creating an aggressive monster image of them.

By analyzing the complex spectrum of society, we observe the following developments among different levels of society: some of them emerged in the years of independence as a result of the economic transformation but others like budget organizations and law enforcement forces are institutionally still representing the styles of the old system with enormous force, impacting negatively possibilities of change.

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[73] Prezident İlham Əliyev Qərbə meydan oxudu 'Heç kimdən və heç nədən qorxmuruq"01.01.2016 Strateq.az

[74] AzerTac Mart1,2006 Meeting of I.Aliyev with refugees in Agdam.

[75] https://www.treasurers.org/node/9922

[76] http://metbuat.az/news/7501/eli-hesenov-azerbaycan-isteyir-ki-onun-milli-iradesine-ve-be.html

[77] . "Xalq Qazeti," N24(22167), February 3, 1996, pp. 1, 2

[78] "Xalq Qazeti" (N2(22145), January 4, 1996, p.1

[79] Eli Hesenov: Azerbaycan isteyir ki, onun milli iradesine ve beynelxalq huquq normalarina uygun siyasetine hormetle yanasilsin Jan8, http://metbuat.az/news/7501/eli-hesenov-azerbaycan-isteyir-ki-onun-milli-iradesine-ve-be.html

[80] It is very popular in Azerbaijani electronic news media to portray the news coming from Iran and Russia only in black features and with comments preventing readers themselves from assessing the information they receive.

Budget organizations representatives inclined to express the state propagated ideologies and not to disclose their own in public places as do the business people who are not bearers of the special type of ideologies due to the nature of the system. Their attitude towards the ongoing conflict is not different from the governmental one, at least in public, but in private they are diverse. Business people are more concerned about the rule of law and business environment in the country.

Overseas-educated young professionals are more focused on their own career and well-being, have individual views for the rule of law and transparency liberal ideology but not a specific expressed attitude towards ongoing conflicts. Such an attitude is explained by many of them due to the character of their workplace as they work for foreign and local companies which have their own internal rules. Those who are involved in humanitarian sciences are active promoters of the country's interests with their works.

Members of political parties are the proponents of their parties' ideologies, while NGO people are pre-dominantly inclined to liberal views and some of them are ideologically affiliated with the political parties they are supportive of. Their attitudes towards the conflict are expressed in the defense of the national interests more freely and effectively and they believe the pluralist society with a strong army and economy and with liberal values represents grounds for restoration of territorial integrity and both groups have more clearly expressed views on the conflict. Youth organizations are divided into governmental and pro-democracy organizations with ideologies dependent on their political background. The former is benefiting from the government or government-sponsored events and the latter is struggling with its ideas being discriminated against and members jailed. One unconditionally condones the government's action on the NK settlement while the other is totally critical.

Refugee communities who are affiliated with the political parties are bearers of diverse ideologies dominating both within political party and the government arenas. Hopelessness, economic hardship and the psychological trauma and daily death accounts have alienated refugees in their own country existing only to bury and be buried by the family members. Karabagh war veterans have significant influence over them and among the population generally, and share more national values comprised of elements of Azerbaijanism, Turkism and patriotism and have numerously expressed their determination for fighting again if any such decision is taken.

The numbers of religious followers are growing and they believe in justice, equality and transparency within society and that the sources of economic hardship and moral degradation are to be sought in people's alienation from their spiritual values. Their attitude towards the ongoing occupation is not religiously-based although it has some features and they are for the country's integrity and sovereignty. Pro-governmental religious organizations are acting as a branch of the government while different religious communities have their own approaches..

Rural communities are much more interested in the satisfaction of their social needs, while urban communities are more politicized; but the tendency of ruralization of urban

communities is also taking place in the form of migration from rural areas to big cities. While the native urban people have more liberal attitudes representing the most part of the intelligentsia, the second generation have more nationalistic feelings. Traditional women among rural communities are focused on their families' safety and well-being, having their own local traditions and customs, and with non-political attitudes and a more social-oriented ideology of justice and tolerance. The same values are shared by the majority of retired people.

Students have lost their once famous role in the independence and pro-democracy movement and are less represented in youth organizations and have diverse views on all issues including the Armenia occupation. The majority do not believe in a peaceful end to the occupation.

Law enforcement agencies and security forces have no stated ideology but are pursuant of the government's expressed ideology of fulfillment of the instructions and the will of the leader and the law. Their attitude shows nothing different from the government view regarding the Armenian occupation.

The media is a major force influencing society and is divided into elements of national ideology like Azerbaijanizm, patriotism, Turkism and Islamic trends and liberal ideologies of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. More anti-Russian, anti-Iranian ideologies are dominating in many media outlets. Media is the source and driving force of views and approaches to Armenia-Azerbaijan development and many of them are heavily involved in news and analysis of the ongoing developments, keeping attention on the subject.

The government's narrative on Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict

A peaceful resolution has been the leading philosophy of Heydar Aliyev, who even during the military hostilities in 1993[81] was calling for peaceful resolution and early 1994[82] repeatedly made calls to the Armenian side to cease fire and to resolve whatever the problems were by peaceful means[83]. He himself signed a ceasefire and was committed to a mutual ceasefire, declaring that "we are determined to maintain it till the final settlement of the conflict"[84] and Minsk Group[85] efforts and pushed for peaceful resolution[86], believing

[81]Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq,2008.Inauguration speech of President Aliyev Oct 19, 1993

[82] Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq,2008.Meeting with V. Kazimirov,Sepecial representative of Russian President, January 31, 994

[83] Prezident H. Aliyev's meeting with Commander of Russian troops in South Caucasus General Reut, Jan4,1994

[84] Speech of Prezident H. Aiyev at NATO meeting, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-FD968EA0-E9AF4DC0/natolive/opinions_25584.htm

[85]Meeting with the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs Dec14,1999

[86] Appeal of H.Aliyev to Azerbaijani people on TV and Radio Oct 3,1994

totally in a peaceful method and outcome[87]. "I believe there should be no other option for both Armenia and Azerbaijan except peaceful resolution". "You can be confident that we will never allow the resuming of military activities from our side. We are struggling for peace, we want to live in peace with all our neighbors and we want peace everywhere, especially in the Caucasus" said H. Aliyev[88] during his meeting with CoE delegation. In response to Armenian agression we offer peace and we would like to acheve peace[89]. During his meeting with the Interior ministry officials expressing his confidence to peaceful resolution he said: "By telling you all of these, I am fully confident that we can achieve resolution of this issue peacefully, restore Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and return the refugees to their homes[90]". His commitment to peaceful resolution despite the military situation on the ground could be seen by this statement when terror and turmoil prevailed in Armenia and NK: "Azerbaijan does not plan to use the difficult situation in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to achieve its own military objectives. This, despite the fact that in 1991-1993 Armenia took advantage of internal tensions within Azerbaijan to occupy our lands. We support peace. We don't consider a military solution acceptable[91]."

In the search for peace H.Aliyev went far from the established position among Azerbaijani people on the status issue for NK, offering the high level of successful self-rule practiced in Aaland in Finland [92] or the republican status of Tatarstan[93] which had special republican status within Russian Federation. "Armenians do not like the word autonomy; I offer the highest degree of self-rule for NK" stated H. Aliyev[94], which was an expression of his willingness to make peace. In response to such statements, they actually lifted their demands to a higher level demanding independence, taking advantage of Aliyev's calculated peace statements. Here it is worth mentioning Russian president B. Yeltsin's remarks during Aliyev's visit to Moscow in July3-4, 1997. "H.Aliyev is ready to grant the status of Republic to NK but they say we want more status: do they want the status of the United States of America ?". President Aliyev has also dispersed the idea of cultural autonomy dominant at that time in Azerbaijan regarding the status of NK as opening more space for status debates[95].

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[87] Meeting of President H. Aliyev with Prosecutors' office employees, Nov28,1998

[88] Prezident H. Aliyev's meeting with CoE delegation. April,1998. AzerTac news agency

[89] Appeal of H.Aliyev to Azerbaijani people on TV and Radio Oct3,1994

[90] Meeting of President H. Aliyev with Prosecutors' office employees, Nov 28,1998

[91] AZERBAIJAN INTERNATIONAL Spring 2000, (8,1) p.25
http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/81_folder/81_articles/81_quotes_aliyev.html

[92] Turan News Agency, May7,1995

[93] Novoe Vremya, Moscow No 31 July 1996

[94] Turan news agency, June 24, 1998

[95] Speech of President H. Aliyev at New Azerbaijan Party's first Conference Dec 20,1999

The ceasefire agreement has allowed the government to take drastic steps in stabilizing domestic security, which was in chaos with criminal elements and illegal armed formations including the members of law enforcement agencies and government factions with their own armed formations[96]. Occasionally the government established regime-controlled stability which has been the major slogan of the government for the people. Highlighting the government's achievements in creating domestic stability, security and economic improvement, the government put emphasis on a stability-based society with "security precautions against democratic opposition" making constant comparisons with the instable period which the country experienced during the early years of independence.

"Heavy consequences of political and public processes and the threat of civil war have been removed and coup attempts as in 1994 and 1995 have been vigorously prevented, illegal armed groups, bandit and provocative groups have been isolated and the turmoil has ended[97]". Now socio-political stability is dominating in Azerbaijan. This is a great achievement of Azerbaijani state, government and law enforcement agencies. We should maintain this stability. Civic-political stability is important for successful state building. Stability is important for social-economic reforms. Stability is necessary for building of market economy[98]. What is important is that we have stabilized the country, removed all internal complications, dismantled and isolated many illegal armed bandit formations and established political stability and public safety[99]. These narratives have been the subject of daily propaganda of the ruling machine which is being expressed by the current regime in order to tarnish the image of pro-democracy forces who governed the country at those difficult times.

From the other side, in an effort to isolate the local pro-democracy parties and organizations, the experienced leader was trying to convey to both local and international actors that he was the main initiator of all major democratic reforms designed for establishing democracy and free market economy. The calls for democratic reform have always been challenged by irritation and anger and as a threat to the ruling regime. "We are making economic reforms. We are doing privatization. We are doing land reform. We are doing privatization of land. We are doing social and political reforms. We have established social and political stability in the country. We are building rule of law and we are ensuring protection of the rights of people. Who are you? Who are the people standing aside and crying democracy, democracy, democracy? What did you do for democracy? What did you do towards establishing stability? But many, through their destructive actions, would like to violate this stability. But they should know - it is impossible. We have signed the ceasefire and we have established stability and we are developing the economy and democracy[100]".

[96] Presidential decree on strengthening the fight against criminals and enhancing law and order Aug9,1994
[97] Prezident H. Aliyev's meeting with CoE delegation. April, 1998. AzerTac news agency
[98] Speech of President Aliyev on the occasion of 80th anniversary of prosecutor's office Nov 28,1998
[99] Speech of H. Aliyev during the ceremony at Moscow Law Academy, March 29, 1997

[100] Heyder Aliyev ve Qanunculuq,2008.Meeting with National security ministry people, March 28,1998

Such statements and daily pro-governmental propaganda has only one purpose: of creating the understanding that only the ruling elite and its prominent leader were capable of resolving the outstanding problems the country was facing, be it economy, stability or democracy and most importantly, if H.Aliyev was not capable of resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, nobody could do that. Such propaganda machine had the sole purpose of isolating people from political life, depoliticizing people and insisting that there is only one capable leader to resolve all the outstanding issues, subduing people's minds to one man's ideology and approaches although the leader himself did not lay claim to that role, stating that he did not have any magic stick for all problems[101]. Within this context, the proposed ideas and alternatives and values of proposals made for change and conflict resolution had no meaning in practice, consequently attitude change remained dependent on the leader's views.

Another narrative in response to the Armenian occupation was a policy of isolation of Armenia from Azerbaijani energy and transportation projects, but always making clear to Armenian side that they might benefit from these projects if they ceased their aggressive behavior. The aim of this policy was to strengthen the Azerbaijani economy and weaken Armenia and to force them to pay a price for occupation, and this policy did not change. "I believe we should not make haste, we should wait ... Azerbaijan will achieve what it desires by consolidating the country's economic potential and settling problems connected with this[102]". This policy of isolation has also been applied to big regional and international projects. "The processes ongoing in the region, regional cooperation, energy projects connecting Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey will all bypass Armenia. The transportation routes connecting Central Asia with Europe are all bypassing Armenia. Why ? We do not allow it[103]" said I. Aliyev.

Economic pressure has been followed by military as the series of negotiations has yielded no progress and Azerbaijani president was convinced that Armenian president was not willing to leave the territories peacefully[104], consequently making him to change a tone warning that Azerbaijan would achieve liberation of its land from occupation no matter what it takes "Although Armenia claims that it has won the war, in reality, only the first stage of the war has ended" he said[105], repeating it at several other occasions[106]. It was a sign of frustration which has been expressed even during H. Aliyev's presidency in a different, stating that "Armenian

[101] Speech of President H. Aliyev at New Azerbaijan Party's first Conference Dec 20,1999
[102] "Ilham Aliyev: no compromises or haste in settling Karabakh conflict" ITAR-TASS News Agency, Feb 9, 2004.

[103] "President Ilham Aliyev's interview to Turkish NTV .AzerTac Feb 23, 2006.

[104] I. Aliyev's meeting with refugees in Agdam, AzerTac March 1, 2006
[105] I.Aliyev's speech before refugees in Guzanly, Agdam http:// www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/1274.html

[106] http://survincity.com/2011/01/ilham-aliyev-at-a-military-parade-in-baku-the-war/

policy has clearly showed that the Armenian side, by signing the ceasefire agreement, tried to keep the territories under its control by imitating endless negotiations[107]" which was expressed sharply at the Key West meeting as well[108].

Such statements have been occasional after each round of failed negotiations: "Today we are ramping up our military potential; we can resolve the issue by military means. But we believe, the potential of negotiations is not exhausted. Using political and economic as well as military pressure, we will reach the point that the issue may be resolved by peaceful means. But it should be resolved. It cannot be remained in frozen form. Everybody should know that. The mediators who are dealing with this issue should know as well and they know that[109]" (Day.az 08.07.2014 Президент Ильхам Алиев: "Азербайджан сумел утвердить себя в мире, на международной арене как надежный партнер, надежный друг" – ОБНОВЛЕНО). Relevant information following such statements embodied the elements of ER, instigated mostly by the government- sponsored press and TV media, depending on the government mood with its ebb and flows.

The government has also taken advantage of peaceful settlement rhetoric and stability for an excuse to worsen the democracy record, such as falsification of election results and restriction of opposition party activities. By falsifying the parliamentary and presidential elections for the past 20 years, this has prevented the change of power which would have brought new alternatives to society. Limited activities of civil society organizations had been stipulated by the authorities' non-registration policy.

In the late 90s and early 2000s, President Aliyev then opened up more channels, allowing NGOs and activists from Armenia and separatist NK people to visit Baku and appear on live TV and radio. Azerbaijani society has increasingly been flexible in debating alternative ideas during this period, although it had no effect on the situation on the ground. More Azerbaijani NGOs participated in trilateral and multilateral projects covering the perspectives for future areas of cooperation and peace. Visits of ministers and parliamentarians to international events and CIS meetings to Yerevan both took place during Aliyev's rule. President Aliyev encouraged political parties and NGOs to make proposals and initiatives to the president's office, parliament or Minsk Group co-chairs, while the current leadership has taken a totally different line.

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[107] Appeal of Prezident Aliyev to Azerbaijani people on the occasion of May 28,1999

[108] http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/karabakh/karabakh_current/keywest_aliyev.html
Statement: Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev in Key West, Florida. Source.US State department

[109] Day.az 08.07.2014 Президент Ильхам Алиев: "Азербайджан сумел утвердить себя в мире, на международной арене как надежный партнер, надежный друг" .

Currently, the stagnant activities in the context of the overall policy of crackdown of NGOs and specifically the activities on conflict resolution, let alone exchange of visits, have dramatically diminished. It has also impacted and alienated refugees themselves from any debate on their own future destiny. It has totally silenced any alternative ideas except for newspaper information and analysis within the context of governmental policy.

By increasing authoritarianism and restricting opposition party and civil society activities, and depriving their access to TV and radio, the current leadership has totally monopolized the entire issue putting an end to any alternatives. Such monopolization is sometimes accompanied by the negligence and indifference of high officials to the problem. Statements like "it is impossible to make breakthrough or make progress just at one meeting[110] after 22 years of negotiations and "Actually the Armenian side is in much need of a resolution of this problem than Azerbaijan does[111]" are consequence of monopolization and lack of accountability before those people desperately waiting to return to their homes.

Now, the government narrative restricts itself with the statements that the Armenian side is imitating the negotiations, has no plan to withdraw peacefully and is interested in maintaining the status quo by manipulations and avoiding bilateral negotiations. "Certainly, there is no progress at all for the past years. Because the Armenian side does not want peace and resolution of the conflict. They want to win time and avoid negotiations under various pretexts. By making provocative actions in the contact line they want Azerbaijan to be engaged and use it as a pretext to thwart negotiations[112]". The same statements are being repeated; it seems there is nothing to add**.** "Armenia does not want peace. They want to drag out the negotiations and win time. They are not sincere in their negotiations and under various pretexts try to extend them permanently" stated I. Aliyev. Speaking about the Azerbaijani position, he added: "Our policy is that this conflict should be resolved under international norms and principles, Azerbaijani territorial integrity should be restored, occupiers should be driven out, and Azerbaijani refugees should return to their homes[113]".

Analysis of government narrative for the past 21 years has yielded several judgments. First, the government's statements and reports at the end of each year that "we did everything possible", "Armenia does not want peace", "absolutely no progress in the negotiations this

[110] Е.Мамедъяров: «В Базеле может быть проведена встреча министров иностранных дел Азербайджана и Армении» «Этот конфликт не может быть урегулирован за один день» Day.az 3 Ноябрь 2014.

[111] Rəsmi Bakı: Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsinin nizamlanması, əslində, Azərbaycandan çox Ermənistana lazımdır. Milli.az 14 Yanvar 2016

[112] http ://www.president.az/articles/17279 Speech of I.Aliyev before Azerbaijani parliament, Nov24, 2015

[113] Day.az 08.07.2014 Президент Ильхам Алиев: "Азербайджан сумел утвердить себя в мире, на международной арене как надежный партнер, надежный друг" .

year", and in the end with the self-insuring statement that "we still believe that the negotiations can yield results" are all the indications of negative effects on attitude change and trust in peaceful resolution.

Second, "People of Azerbaijan should resolve it" and finally by declaring that "if you think that we have failed to get back our territories and restore sovereignty and consequently must go, but that this is impossible[114]" narratives are clear indicators that the government does not feel any responsibility for the status quo and manipulates people to believe that there could be no change. The regime is more inclined to use the current situation for its sales promotion in the international arena and for strengthening it against internal political opposition[115].

Third, the government's behavior strongly suggests that the government itself is controlling the environment around the situation and in needy moments may escalate the information war and in certain cases of no real interest the situation being ignored, at least with incidents not reported.

Fourth, the government does not feel any responsibility due to the absence of democratic institutions in the country and free debates which are a major source of attitude formation.

On the contrary, accusing the western nations of double standards and ignoring the calls and appeals of international institutions for the respect of freedoms and human rights, the government has contributed to ignorance of the occupation for the sake of the regime's survival, thus leading the country to isolation where the changing attitudes and alternatives are perceived as betrayal. From this perspective, to conclude how the development in the country has affected people's mentality and views on conflict resolution is ambiguous and dependent on the level of democracy. Generally, people's attitudes are influenced by the established environment in the country that the enemy forces should leave Azerbaijani territories, and the prevailing Azerbaijani culture indicates that the government should resolve it and the army should tackle it.

The policy of isolation did not change the situation on the ground and economic development and wealth did not bring any advantage in peace negotiations at all; on the contrary, the continued military situation on the ground changed the situation regarding negotiations. Azerbaijan being in the worst economic and military condition in the mid-90s had been in a better position and the peace proposals discussed and presented at that time were aimed first of all at removing the occupation and discussing the status for NK within Azerbaijani sovereignty.

[114] It was expressed by President H. Aliyev in response to opposition leader's remarks during the discussions in Azerbaijani parliament, Feb 23, 2001.

[115] Day.az 08.07.2014 Президент Ильхам Алиев: "Азербайджан сумел утвердить себя в мире, на международной арене как надежный партнер, надежный друг".

Today, Azerbaijan has an economy which is many times stronger than Armenian and Azerbaijan's international recognition and importance is higher than Armenia's; Azerbaijan has greater influence for its role in energy and regional security issues but is in a disadvantageous position in negotiations compared with the late 1990s and early 2000s. The government's narrative that time is working for us[116] has failed and history has showed that time is working for the other side as long as the status quo continues. That time is working for the party was an advantageous position at the time of concluding the ceasefire. Within this context, the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict settlement plan has taken the form of a military solution to the conflict promoted by the Co-chairs. Whoever controls militarily, dictates. For that reason the Armenian side by all means is striving to extend the current situation, considering its 23 years of experience. The protracted conflict experiences in Cyprus, Kashmir, and Israel-Palestine in this regard have had a demonstrative effect. The Azerbaijani leader sees one of the reasons underlying it as the presence of the religious factor. But the latest development ongoing in the country gives us an argument to judge that the top leadership has lost its hope for peaceful resolution and prefers a "wait and see" policy.

Conclusions

Azerbaijan by now is a highly divided society where the regime's vision and propaganda is not shared by the majority of people, but the repressive system is operating regardless via the security agencies it controls. The society is deprived of the opportunity to express these differences and grievances in an open vote and consequently to participate in a peaceful change of power.

By closing the doors of open society, the government has silenced internal democratic forces with repressive methods, scaling back the country to one-man rule that restricts the nation from exposure to new ideas, debates and initiatives for democratic development and consequently leading in the end to its political isolation.

Two decades of rule have been accompanied by the repressive brutality of security forces and irrational Soviet-style TV propaganda accordingly. What the government did after joining the CoE was in ignorance of its international obligations, totally crippling and isolating the

[116] 23 Feb2006 AzerTac, Interview of I.Aliyev to Turkish NTV

political opposition and NGOs, creating parallel fake opposition parties and groups loyal to the regime.

The same policy was applied to those independent media representatives who have been killed, tortured, arrested and fined, while some have emigrated and the remaining majority been subdued by money, blackmail and rewards. The picture has been critically changed to the scale that a significant portion of journalists are thinking only about their own security. The latest repressive actions against civil society, human rights groups and youth organizations across the country, especially in the light of Arab and Ukrainian revolutions and uprisings, have led to a conclusion that for the inviolability of the regime, the political leadership is ready to sacrifice all its international obligations, defying the calls of democratic communities, consequently leading to increased tension with the free world and to political isolation of the regime by the EU, OSCE and the United States.

From this perspective, the transformation of ideas and free thought of people was not in the interests of any government which was not capable of working in new pluralist circumstances. A transformed and open-minded society is a threat to power which is a life-and-death issue for any corrupt regime, and for that reason, this government is only interested in a managed transformation not threatening to the primary pillars of the regime, so as to easily control it. This in turn prevents alternative and liberal approaches developing and spreading in an oppressed society. We must note, of course, that attitude change is essentially related with the "facts on the ground" – the continuation of the occupation and behavior of the other side and as well as by the conditions resulting from the internal political development in the country, such as democracy and governance. The regional environment surrounding the country is also contributing to the formation of attitudes.

Making no political and economic reforms, the regime is totally focused on the flow of oil money, ignoring international institutions and domestic experts' warning of heavy consequences the country could face. With hydrocarbon resources comprising above 90% of local exports which engaged only 7% of employed citizens, one could predict the volatility of a "dynamically developed economy". That is the reason that the devaluation of the local currency has turned the country towards disastrous uncertainty, due to the underdeveloped non-oil sector and total dependence on oil money. The dramatic decline of the oil prices has put the population into deteriorating economic and social conditions, making up to 2,5 million people dependent upon on bank credits. Absence of political reforms makes the expected anti-crisis economic reforms unworkable. Twenty years of rule with the abundance of oil money is causing the country to head towards unpredictable uncertainty.

In this part of the research we have tried to give an overview of the few modes of interconnection between democracy and conflict resolution during the prolonged "status

quo". First, we showed that in the times of relative freedom of the media, there is an opportunity for alternative ideas and approaches to the conflict to emerge and circulate within society and at the decision-making level. In spite of the partially controlling rule and emerging monopoly on conflict resolution of Heydar Aliyev, civil society was actively participating in grass route initiatives, suggesting alternative ideas and proposals, conducting debates, meetings, projects and conferences. The situation was radically distorted with the change of political leadership and deteriorating degrees of freedom. Public diplomacy activists were turned into "people's enemies" and "spies"[117].

Secondly, the increasingly monopolized economy and politics had a "preservation effect" on both the economic and social structure of society, affecting the system of views and process of overcoming the Soviet mental legacies of totalitarianism. The delay of the formation of a free market economy, and absence of a significant class of independent producers as a result of unfavorable conditions for its development, has prevented the strengthening of the middle class and social groups contributing to plurality, the "opening of Soviet minds" and development of liberal ideas. The major expanding social group during the course of 20 years was the class of the state bureaucracy, which by the end of 2nd decade of transition constituted nearly 1m. people.

In this paper we have made a review of the attitudes of social and political groups, based on primary and secondary sources. The link between the system of views of certain groups and the attitudes and narratives of the conflict will be the subject of the second part of the study. One thing is clear from our preliminary research, that official narratives of the 1990s related to the vision of the country's development reflected the attempts to reconcile the objectives of "stability" on the one hand, and the restoration of justice (first of all return of the lands and people to their homes) in relation to the Karabagh conflict. The unresolved conflict and continued status quo was used as a tool to consolidate non-democratic rule at the end of the 2000s in the wave of criminalization of civil society activities, combined with the increasingly nationalist rhetoric of the Azerbaijani government.

[117] This was the case of well-known human rights defenders, scholars and journalists arrested through the winter 2013-spring 2014 , such as Rauf Mirgadirov, Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunusov.