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## New Knowledge Journal of Science

### Списание за наука „Ново знание”

University of Agribusiness and Rural Development Academic Publishing House  
Bulgaria

Академично издателство на Висше училище по агробизнес и развитие на регионите  
Пловдив

#### DIASPORA IMPACT ON ETHNIC CONFLICTS OF POST-SOVIET SPACE (CASE STUDY: ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT)

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**Key words:**

*ethnic conflicts  
post-soviet space  
Azerbaijan  
Armenia  
diaspora  
aggression  
South Caucasus*

**Abstract**

The article represents the analysis of the diaspora impact on conflict resolution process and particularly brings out the role of the diaspora in Armenian Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. It also highlights the difference between Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora and the relationship between homeland country and diaspora. As for Armenia, diaspora represents almost the main financial tool in maintainance of the conflict and it has direct implications in internal politics of the country, for Azerbaijan diaspora worldwide represents a tool of homeland of lobby of the national interest and county's position with regard of conflict. We consider of a high importance the highlight of the conflict for European public, considering the role of EU in process of conflict regulation.

#### ВЛИЯНИЕ ДИАСПОРЫ НА ЭТНИЧЕСКИЕ КОНФЛИКТЫ ПОСТ-СОВЕТСКОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА: АРМЯНО-АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКИЙ НАГОРНО-КАРАБАХСКИЙ КОНФЛИКТ

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**Ключевые слова:**

*этнические конфликты  
пост-советское  
пространство  
Азербайджан  
Армения  
диаспора  
агрессия  
Южный Кавказ*

**Аннотация**

Статья представляет собой анализ воздействия диаспоры на процесс урегулирования конфликта и в частности выявляет роль диаспоры в Армяно-Азербайджанском Нагорно-Карабахском конфликте. В ней также подчеркиваются различия между армянской и азербайджанской диаспорами и отношение между страной родиной и диаспорой. Таким образом, для Армении диаспора является главным финансовым источником для поддержки конфликта, и это имеет прямые последствия на внутренние процессы в стране. Для Азербайджана диаспора является инструментом родины для лобби национального интереса за рубежом и освещение положения вокруг конфликта. Считаю очень важным освещение данного феномена для европейской публики, учитывая важную роль ЕС в процессе урегулирования конфликта.

Almost every violent conflict and the process of its resolution referes not only to security matters, but also to the definition of ethnic and national communities. Apart from questions of sovereign boundaries and territorial security, these conflicts also affect the lives and well-being of diaspora communities outside the homeland country that share ethnic linkages with the people engaged in the conflict. Consequently, the resolution of such violent conflicts often requires addressing an audience beyond the immediate geographic boundaries of the conflict's area<sup>1</sup>.

The terminology used by Brown to describe external-level factors (bad neighbors, bad neighborhoods) emphasizes the regional level, which is undoubtedly of great importance, but he does so at the expense of the global level. While he makes some reference to broader international developments, such as “sharp reductions in international financial assistance” and “sharp declines in commodity prices”, more recent literature identified a range of other factors around the conflict's immediate neighborhood. These include diaspora communities<sup>2</sup>, international human rights norms and their use in the justification of outside intervention into ethnic conflicts<sup>3</sup>, the moral hazard what interventions precedents create, and links between ethnic conflict and organized crime.

Diasporas provide the uprooted masses a home away from home and a sense of belonging. Together with keeping alive their culture, traditions and historical heritage, diaspora have a wide influence to enrich their adoptive home to contribute to the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity. A lot of , diaspora groups become politically active in order to influence policymaking not only at the level of their adoptive homes, but to bring the change in their origin countries, by contributing to democratization and human rights<sup>4</sup>.

The diaspora's impact in homeland conflict perpetuation or resolution can be so impressive that some of the leaders prefer to ignore their voices at their own risk. Standing face to face with the state's conflict, diaspora endeavor the promotion of its own points of view of the ethnic community's identity and interest, which is not always similar to the homeland vision of local authorities. Diaspora have an important

impact on economics and politics of their countries of origin as well as in the production and articulation of their homeland's national identity. Despite the growing recognition of Diaspora's role as transnational players, only few studies have focused on their specific impact on conflict resolution (peace processes) that involve their countries of origin. Those who tend to view diasporas mostly as detrimental to such processes, often failing to appreciate its potential to advance peace negotiations. Many scholars also overlook the complexities concerning the negotiations of identities between homelands and diasporas in such processes. As a matter of fact, some of the narratives that are prevalent among diaspora communities may challenge the dominant ideology at home. In other cases multiple forms of nationalisms and kinship identities that emerge in diaspora can play positive role in checking and countering the vicissitudes of the homeland's nationalism. This dynamic is particularly, but not uniquely, evident in the Armenian and Jewish diasporas. Their behavior and its effects on Armenian Azeri and Palestinian-Israeli peace efforts in the last decade show that conflict resolution in communal conflicts is often not just a two-level, but a “three-level game of peace-making”. The diaspora becomes a key constituency of concern for homeland leaders, their homeland's adversaries, the governments of their host states, and, through their international diplomatic activities, for other states as well<sup>5</sup>.

Armenian Diaspora represents one of the external factor which stops the conflict resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. After the signature of the Turkish-Armenian protocols in Zurich in 2009, became an obstacle to peace<sup>6</sup>. Being driven by the quest for recognition of the Armenian “genocide”, the Armenian Diaspora in the United States, France and other European countries holds a more nationalistic and uncompromising stance than Armenia. It included the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as part of its anti-Turkey resistance, and added a specific identity twist to the conflict. To the Armenian diaspora, for whom the 1915 genocide constitutes a significant part of their identity and a major mobilizing cause, reconciling with Turkey (and their Turkic Azerbaijani kin) at the cost of relegating the issue of genocide was inconceivable. The diaspora, therefore, sought to support and strengthen the more nationalistic politicians in the government who were less yielding on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and more in-sync with the diaspora's efforts of genocide recognition. The genocide indeed represents a critical identity formation factor in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Role of Diasporas in conflict perpetuation or resolution:

<https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/9780472099108-ch4.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Adamson F.B., Globalisation, transnational political mobilization and networks of violence, Cambridge review of International Affairs, 2005, 18/1: 31-49.

<sup>3</sup> Holtzgreve J.L., Keohane R.O., Humanitarian intervention: Ethical, legal and political dilemmas, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Afa Alizada, Meddling from far> Diasporas' role in conflict resolution: <http://caucasusedition.net/lates-from-the-region/blog/meddling-from-a-far-diasporas%E2%80%99-role-in-conflict-resolution/>.

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<sup>5</sup> The Role of Diasporas in conflict perpetuation or resolution:

<https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/9780472099108-ch4.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Fariz Ismailzade, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Current trends and Future Scenarios:

<http://www.iai.it/pdf/dociai/iaiwp1129.pdf>

Diaspora, the single most important feature defining, uniting and mobilizing the nation.

Members of the Armenian diaspora have played a significant role in Yerevan since 1991. During the early stages of talks about Karabakh, Gerard Libaridian, a US citizen, was the key architect of Yerevan's approach.

Moreover, Raffi Hovanissian, the first foreign minister of Armenia, and Vartan Oskanian, who followed him in that post, were also members of the diaspora. Such people played a role both in Armenia and in the countries from which they came<sup>7</sup>.

A key example of the latter is the role the Armenian diaspora in the United States played in getting the Congress to pass Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which banned all US government assistance to the Azerbaijani government, even though Armenia was receiving more assistance per capita than any other post-Soviet country. While the diaspora sent few of its members to fight in the war against Azerbaijan, it did help provide aid to refugees and stepped up its lobbying effort on behalf of Yerevan's positions<sup>8</sup>. And the conflict itself helped unite diaspora organizations that had been at odds for other reasons. However, when it comes to a conflict resolution, diasporic groups, wittingly or unwittingly, seem to bring more harm than to create preconditions to good results. Thus United States, as a major player in international affairs and encourages lobbying activities – may be a good example of diasporas' role in conflict resolution in their home countries, specifically in our case the influence of Armenian and Azerbaijani Diaspora from United State on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution<sup>9</sup>. Both of them seem to create large segments of adopting an intransigent stance with regards to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which slows the peace building process. For example, the Armenian diaspora played a (not insignificant) role in the resignation of President Levon Ter-Petrosian, a moderate who was ready to make concessions on the Nagorno-Karabakh and sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to normalize relations with Turkey, even if that meant deemphasizing the genocide issue.

The financial remittances and assistance from the Diaspora to Armenia make Yerevan highly dependent on it and creating the conditions for Diaspora organizations to create situation of pressure on the Armenian government and shape public opinion. Lack

of financial support would put the Armenian regime in a very difficult situation. Due to the fact that the economic stability was seriously affected by the global financial crisis and the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, it would not be able to resist to a punch from the Diaspora<sup>10</sup>.

Managing Diaspora relations, keeping the Diaspora satisfied and preventing a rift between the Diaspora and the Armenian government is a key Armenian priority.

It is well-known that representatives of the Diaspora oppose any compromise on Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan issues without a prior recognition of the "genocide". Despite the lack of connection between the genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the real-life linkage drawn by the Diaspora makes it serves as one of the obstacles in front of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution<sup>11</sup>.

The Azerbaijani diaspora, although younger becomes increasingly visible and active, thus contributing to the counterproductive power contest. By contrast to the Armenian diaspora, the Azerbaijani diaspora is on the receiving side (of both financial and other support) in its relationship with the homeland. The Azerbaijani government is funding much of its diaspora's activities in an effort to counter the Armenian diaspora's activities. Just as their counterparts, the Azerbaijani diaspora is emphasizing the issues such as the Khojaly massacre of 1992 and is working toward the recognition of the events of March 1918 as the Azerbaijani genocide by Armenians. The Azerbaijanis are also not sparing their efforts in promoting the linkage between the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which further complicates the peace process.

Relevant policy in the field of creation of Azerbaijani Diaspora was developed and adopted at the national level starting from 2000's<sup>12</sup>. The aim of the policy was to form an united and hierarchically subordinated diaspora organizations. This structure offers the possibility to keep up the control over the organizations activities. Main goal of the diaspora organizations is to "spread the truth about Azerbaijan"<sup>13</sup>, inform about official positions of the political homeland; create the lobby for Nagorno-

<sup>7</sup> Zaur Shiriev, Armenian Diaspora: Influence on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

[http://biweekly.ada.edu.az/vol\\_3\\_no\\_10/Armenian\\_Diaspora\\_and\\_Nagorno\\_Karabakh\\_conflict.htm](http://biweekly.ada.edu.az/vol_3_no_10/Armenian_Diaspora_and_Nagorno_Karabakh_conflict.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Koinova, Maria (2009) "Conditions and Timing of Moderate and Radical Diaspora Mobilization: Evidence from Conflict-Generated Diasporas", Global Migration and Transnational Politics, Working Paper no. 9, October - p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Afa Alizada, Meddling from far> Diasporas' role in conflict resolution - <http://caucasusedition.net/lates-from-the-region/blog/meddling-from-far-diasporas%E2%80%99-role-in-conflict-resolution/>

<sup>10</sup> Zaur Shiriev, Armenian Diaspora: Influence on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

[http://biweekly.ada.edu.az/vol\\_3\\_no\\_10/Armenian\\_Diaspora\\_and\\_Nagorno\\_Karabakh\\_conflict.htm](http://biweekly.ada.edu.az/vol_3_no_10/Armenian_Diaspora_and_Nagorno_Karabakh_conflict.htm)

<sup>11</sup> МИД Великобритании признал влияние армянской диаспоры на Нагорно-Карабахский конфликт: <http://virtualekarabakh.net/read.php?lang=1&menu=85&id=1237#.VMstDC4V61g>

<sup>12</sup> Азербайджанская диаспора: реалии и перспективы: <http://lezgistan.tv/lezgistan/azerbajdzhanskaya-diaspora-realii-i-perspektivy/>

<sup>13</sup> Азербайджанская диаспора: <http://lezgistan.tv/novosti/azerbajdzhanskaya-diaspora/>.

Karabakh conflict resolution and develop ties with other communities.

The argument here is not that these diasporic groups are single-handedly or even largely responsible for the derailment of the peace processes. Leaders both in Azerbaijan and Armenia have repeatedly failed to capitalize on windows of opportunity and rally their people around a peaceful resolution when an opportunity presented itself<sup>14</sup>. However, the point here is that while having the power to wield a positive impact on the conflict resolution, the diasporas', more often than not, choose to pursue less conciliatory avenues.

However, diasporas' can and should play a positive role in conflict resolution. To do so, they first need to ask themselves a very important question; "How representative are we of the people in our native homes and are our activities reflective of their current needs?" Despite the linguistic, cultural, and religious ties, the diasporas develop distinct identities and needs over time. So, the assumption that they know what's best for their brethren overseas should be put aside. Secondly, diasporic groups should take advantage of the political space and other freedoms available in their adoptive homes (that is usually absent in their countries of origin) to open up dialogue with the opposite side. Finally, they need to remember that by promoting the hardliner approach and contributing to the endurance of the conflict, they are not helping the plight of their brethren in the conflict zones, since it is those people who suffer the day-to-day realities of living as refugees and IDPs or fearing for their lives because of the ongoing violence.

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