



**THE HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDER OF ARMENIA**

**THE HUMAN RIGHTS
OMBUDSMAN OF ARTSAKH**

JOINT AD HOC PUBLIC REPORT

**FACTS ON AZERBAIJANI FICTITIOUS PEACEBUILDING AND
ABSENCE OF HONEST DIALOGUE AS LONG-STANDING
THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS:**

**THE BAKU-TBILISI PLATFORMS
(The situation in 2016 and 2017)**

**YEREVAN
STEPANAKERT
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I. THE HISTORY OF TRACK-II PEACEBUILDING IN THE CONTEXT OF ARTSAKH (NAGORNO KARABAKH) CONFLICT

Track-II peacebuilding in the South Caucasus region has a long and complex history that begins even before the end of armed confrontation in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

Since the beginning of the conflict, several attempts were made from all sides at the civil society level, to address possible resolutions and pathways to lasting peace. While these initiatives were met with various degrees of success, their advantage was predicated on the nature of their formats.

Specifically, it was their ability to provide a non-political channel for communication and participation, which allowed for personal transformations of civil society members that could act as agents of change in their respective societies. Their shortcomings were often related to exogenous factors, such as limited financial resources, which narrowed the participation scope, failed to engage younger generations, and had limited media exposure.

Overall, the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives was determined by the following factors (at least):

- a) scope of participants and personal motivation driving each participant;
- b) level of engagement of international organizations and donors;
- c) widening and diversity of the format;
- d) level and nature of support from government;
- e) a desire to make at least some contribution to the resolution of the conflict;
- f) presence or participation of experienced experts, persons with positive experiences and positive memories of coexistence, and opportunities for exchanging these experiences.

The overarching [announced] aims of these initiatives were:

- (i) to overcome mutual distrust;
- (ii) to address the image of an enemy;

(iii) to prevent any action from all Government sides that may encourage or incite distrust or hatred;

(iv) to identify possible areas of collaboration that could help in peacebuilding efforts.

The most effective peacebuilding initiatives were those that met “public demand” in both societies, as these were deemed most likely to achieve positive results. We are convinced that true peacebuilding must be based on human rights pillars and must not tolerate political sponsorship or political guidance.

The mentioned projects, for example, included: initiatives on exchanges of prisoners of war, hostages, missing persons and bodies of the deceased; and some media initiatives directed at working with public opinion and the exchange of information.

The need for urgent steps towards real peacebuilding and reduction of tensions and hatred between in the region became particularly urgent after the 2016 April War in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). This war resulted in casualties (killed and wounded civilians, including children), severe torture and inhuman treatment, mutilation of bodies, targeted shelling of civilian communities, and other atrocities in Artsakh¹.

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia² and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh³ have been always considering confidence and peace building priorities as long standing safeguards for human rights and prevention of any form of violation of these rights. For this purpose, both Human Rights Defenders participated in different international meetings and consultations (e.g. Brussels, Strasbourg, and Bucharest) aimed at promoting confidence building.

¹ See, for example, Interim public report of the Artsakh Human Rights Ombudsman on atrocities committed by Azerbaijani Military Forces against the civilian population of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and servicemen of the Nagorno Karabakh Defence Army on 2-5 April 2016; Legal Assessment / Facts on Human Shielding and Use of Indiscriminate Attacks against the Civilian Population of Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijani Military Forces; Second interim report on atrocities committed by Azerbaijan during the 2016 April war // <https://artsakhombuds.am/en>.

² See, for example, <https://ombuds.am/am/site/ViewNews/123>; <https://ombuds.am/am/site/ViewNews/119>; <https://ombuds.am/am/site/ViewNews/122>.

³ See, for example, <https://artsakhombuds.am/hy/news/230>; <https://artsakhombuds.am/hy/news/156>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIUsag-9xDM>.

Similar meetings were held with civil society organizations (NGOs) of Armenia and Artsakh in Yerevan and in Stepanakert.

The current special report was drafted jointly by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia Mr. Arman Tatoyan and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh Mr. Ruben Melikyan in 2017 and reflects facts by 2017.

The purpose of this joint report was to show to the worldwide community that the peacebuilding lead by the Azerbaijani Government is fictitious and is being carried out in the absence of honest dialogue. This report shows that dishonest approach of the Azerbaijani Government undermines the peace and its building process, hinder confidence-building measures (CBMs).

II. THE HISTORY OF TRACK-II PEACEBUILDING

The history of track-II peacebuilding can be divided into 4 distinct periods:

Period I – 1992-1994:

During this stage of active military operations, leading intellectuals in Armenia and Azerbaijani society generally tried to prevent tensions from growing out of control.

Namely, in 1993, the Armenian-Azerbaijani initiative referred to as the “Ben Lomond Peace Process” was launched. Following the signing of a cease-fire agreement in 1994, the Azerbaijani and Armenian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly held two meetings in border regions – in Ijevan, Armenia and Gazakh, Azerbaijan – which were attended by women’s and youth groups.

Period II – 1994-2000:

International organizations, NGOs and international donors launched peacebuilding projects, with the participation of representatives of local NGOs, the expert community, students, journalists and women leaders.

- Operations were carried out to find prisoners and hostages by the National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly jointly with the Helsinki Initiative 92 organization in Nagorno Karabakh;

- The “Ben Lomond Peace Process” continued (1993–1998);
- In 1994–1996, under the National Peace Foundation (US) initiative “Women for Peace and Democracy in the South Caucasus”, meetings were organized between female representatives;

- August to December 1995 - The Centre for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at Maryland University, in the United States implemented a program

entitled “Partners in Conflict: Building Bridges to Peace in Transcaucasia” – with representatives of academia from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and this continued up to 1999;

- In 1997 and 1998, with the support from the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Azerbaijan and organizational support from the National Peace Foundation (US), week-long courses on “Leadership in conflict prevention and resolution” were run at the Tbilisi State University for students from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. The Azerbaijan branch of the regional organization Women implemented the project with partners from Armenia and Georgia. A total of around 120 students attended these courses during this period;

- In 1997–1999, summer and winter schools for young people were held with the assistance of the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian National Committees of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly;

- Between 1997–2000, visits by Azerbaijani journalists were organized to Armenia (1997) and Nagorno Karabakh (1998), and by Armenian journalists to Azerbaijan (1999), under a three-year project supporting the media of the Caucasus, sponsored by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); and

- In February, May and June 2000, the Academy of Educational Development (AED) organized three seminars on conflict resolution and women’s leadership in Bakuriani (Georgia), Tsakhkadzor (Armenia) and Baku (Azerbaijan). Twenty women from each country (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) attended seminars sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Period III – 2000-2007

The third period is characterized by initiatives aimed at strengthening operations to find prisoners and hostages and the start of implementing a long-term regional peacebuilding project involving international organizations and NGOs.

- In 2000–2007, operations to locate prisoners and hostages were continued by the International Group on the freeing of prisoners and hostages and locating of missing persons, founded in Germany. The coordinators of this group operated in Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert. During this period, exchange visits between coordinators took place;

- In 2001–2006, a regional project entitled “Women for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus” of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was implemented in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.

- In 2001, the Dartmouth Conference on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh was launched. This initiative lasted six years, during which 11 meetings were held (2001–2006);

- In the same period, the “Consortium Initiative” (2003–2009) was launched. This project was sponsored by the UK government and was aimed at creating a favorable enabling environment for the peaceful resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. The project was implemented by a coalition consisting of American NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and three UK organizations: Conciliation Resources, International Alert and the London Information Network on Conflicts and State-building (LINKS).

- In 2006, Conflict Transformation Resource Centers were created in Baku, Yerevan and Stepanakert, with funding from International Alert.

Period IV – from 2007

This stage is distinguished by the fact that, from 2007 onwards, members of intellectual and official circles had the opportunity to participate jointly in peacebuilding initiatives.

In this period, a major long-term regional project began operating: the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh (EPNK), sponsored by the European Union.

- In July 2007, at the initiative of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ambassadors to the Russian Federation, delegations of representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals visited Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. During the visit, the delegations met the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan;

- In July 2009, the delegations took part in a further visit to Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan; this visit involved the participation of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ambassadors as well as meetings with the heads of state;

- In April 2010, the head of the Armenian Church, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, visited Azerbaijan for the first time to attend the Baku World Summit of Religious Leaders. During the visit, he also met the president of Azerbaijan;

- In November 2011, the Chairman of the Caucasian Muslims Board, Allahshükür Pashazade, attended a meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Interreligious Council Presidium, held in Yerevan. During the visit, he also met the president of Armenia;

- Azerbaijani deputies attended a session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society, organized in Yerevan in February 2012. In turn, Armenian deputies attended the second Plenary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, which was convened in April 2012 in Baku;

- The year 2010 saw the launch of the first phase of the long-term EPNK project, which ended in 2011. The project was implemented through the efforts of the Finnish NGO Crisis Management Initiative, the Swedish NGO the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the three UK organizations Conciliation Resources, International Alert and LINKS.

III. CURRENT STATE OF TRACK-II PEACEBUILDING (2016-2017)

Over the past few years, track-II peacebuilding has been undermined by the Azerbaijan Government's intentional policy of repressions of its civil society.

This has made it too risky to continue engaging in such activities. Members of Azerbaijan's civil society, who have previously participated in track-II peacebuilding, faced severe state repressions. It should be noted that, while the rhetoric has also become more polarized on the Armenian side, there have been no such state sponsored repressions towards Armenian civil society actors that participated in track-II peacebuilding in the past.

Nevertheless, Armenians and especially the civil society activists really want to reach peace. During the wartime and especially in the 2000s Azerbaijan has carried out a state policy of cleaning and destroying the political opposition; civil activists and human rights defenders. As a result, the opposition arena of Azerbaijan is almost empty and there is almost no one, who is not under the control of authorities. At the same time, Azerbaijan has been more consistently carrying out an ultra nationalist and revanchist policy with signs of hatred towards Armenians. As a result, there is no one with whom it could be possible to start a free dialogue to reach real peace. If there are honest and independent Azerbaijani political activists, Armenian civil society actors would gladly communicate with.

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, civil society representatives of Armenia want and are ready for a dialogue aimed at overcoming hostility and reaching a real peace between the two neighboring peoples.

For example, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia participated in a discussion dedicated to confidence-building measures (CBMs) and peacebuilding in Brussels in 2017. The

same is about the Human Rights Ombudspersons of Artsakh⁴. Similar meetings were held with civil society organizations (NGOs) of Armenia and Artsakh in Yerevan and in Stepanakert

Thus, these meetings and dialogues may take place in the fields of human rights, culture, sport and art with participation of respective specialists and activists.

This entails honest and respectful actions from the side of Azerbaijan. Otherwise we will again witness creation of different types of “Baku-Tbilisi Peace Platforms” that are under control of the Azerbaijani state propaganda which overall undermines trust, confidence building and peace.

This opinion is also shared by the professional organizations of civil society of Armenia and Artsakh.

We clearly realize that this route will be very complex, but it is necessary to make first steps to somehow reduce the long-lasting hostility and better understand each other’s positive sides. If authorities do not intervene into that process, the so-called “people’s diplomacy” will facilitate creation of such a long-awaited peace.

⁴ Please, see the first chapter above.

IV. THE BAKU-TBILISI PROCESS: THE CONCEPT AND CREATION

The Founding Principles

The Baku-Tbilisi process is a general concept that implies both Baku and Tbilisi Platforms. These two Platforms are interconnected and the second is a continuation of the first one.

Hence, on November 2nd 2016, several activists and formally announced civil society organizations held an international conference in Baku, entitled, “Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno Karabakh conflict: main obstacles and prospects of the settlement – View from Armenia and Azerbaijan”⁵.

During the conference it was formally declared that nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan are tired of the never-ending conflict, and declared the need for a peace initiative and public diplomacy effort aimed at reaching a peaceful resolution.

The “Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Platform” – known colloquially as “The Baku Platform” – was founded on December 6th 2016 as an outcome of this conference, and reported extensively throughout Azerbaijani media. According to their site, the Platform’s stated aims are to facilitate civil contributions to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with international norms and principles.

The following principles were adopted as founding pillars of the Baku Platform:

1. Unite civil society organizations, public and religious figures, experts, media, political figures and ordinary people from both Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as from further abroad.
2. Support a sustainable peaceful resolution of the conflict referring norms and principles of international law, the resolutions of the UN Security Council regarding the conflict.
3. Return internally displaced people and refugees to their native lands and houses.

⁵ <http://arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1079&lang=en>

4. Highlight the importance of guaranteeing the security of Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of the Nagorno Karabakh, Stressing the importance to determine the final status of Nagorno Karabakh as Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Republic within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

5. Organize civil society lead public discussions aimed at proposing suggestions to both sides.

6. Maximize trust-building efforts between the Armenian and Azerbaijani people, in order to decrease the level of collective hate and bitterness⁶.

Later, on 30 October 2017, a platform was created in Tbilisi called “Armenia-Azerbaijan civil peace platform” and was introduced as so-called Tbilisi Platform.

Monitoring and studies of Offices of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh confirm that in reality this new initiative is direct transformation of the failed Baku Platform with the same basic principles and messages⁷. The formally declared goal of the Tbilisi Platform is promotion of peaceful settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. It is created on the basis of the Baku Platform. Its essence is the same - fake peacebuilding.

With transformed structure and partly different set of participants, the Tbilisi Platform members, however, have similar anti-Armenian views.

The restructured initiative has an expert group, members of which are known for their hatred towards Armenians and some of them even called for violence against Armenians.

Thus, the Baku and Tbilisi Platforms constitute parts of a single state supported process. This is the reason that the two platforms in this report are called a Baku-Tbilisi Process.

⁶ <http://www.arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1078&lang=en>,

⁷ <http://arm-azpeace.com/index.php?lang=en>

Adopting Official Baku's Rhetoric

Much of the two platforms' rhetoric is framed by the use of intentional language that reflects the official sentiments of the Azerbaijani authorities, suggesting congruence in their policy positions.

In the Baku Platform's 2nd founding principle⁸, a reference to resolving the conflict within international norms and principles based on UN Security Council resolutions demonstrates consistence with official Baku policy, which uses the exact passages of UN Security Council resolutions and in the exact context that are used by the Azerbaijani Government to argue for territorial integrity using the language of international principles. As Foreign Minister Mammadyarov has stated, "The UN resolutions call for unconditional withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from Azerbaijan's territories. (...) All negotiations must be resolved on the basis of international norms and principles, and all UN member countries must abide by it."⁹ While citing UNSC Resolutions can appear authoritative, doing so exactly in the context used by the Azerbaijani political authorities reveals the Platform's policy preferences and subjective interpretation of the essence of the conflict and the documents related to it. After all, it is an established fact that the Resolution of the conflict is the exclusive responsibility of the OSCE Minsk Group.

The Baku Platform's 3rd founding principle is less subtle still. By "Stressing the importance to determine the final status within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan", it exposes the Platform's clear bias in favor of Azerbaijan's preferred resolution to the conflict. It totally ignores other fundamental principles, such as the right to self-determination. Human rights and humanitarian aspects in these documents are generally ignored.

The President of Azerbaijan has often made public remarks mirroring the Platform's 3rd principle. The same rhetoric is used within the frame of the so-called Tbilisi Platform.

⁸ <http://arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1078&lang=en>

⁹ <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/114606.html>

Particularly, on June 23rd 2011, in an interview with Euronews, President Aliyev noted that the proposals of the mediators are based on the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Armenian troops from all the occupied territories, and the return of internally displaced Azerbaijanis¹⁰. On October 18th 2016, during an interview with Dmitry Kiselyov¹¹, President Aliyev stated that peace can be achieved within the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, and that Nagorno Karabakh can become an autonomous state within the territory of Azerbaijan, while also guaranteeing the security of its people¹². He similarly repeated this sentiment once more during an interview with Al Jazeera on February 8th 2017: "Azerbaijan's territorial integrity must be restored, the Armenian occupying forces must be withdrawn from the occupied territories, and Azerbaijanis should have the right to return the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including Nagorno Karabakh. After that, there will be a peace in the region"¹³.

Exposing State Involvement and undermining human rights

The seeming congruence with the Platforms' rhetoric and official state policy suggests a degree of Azerbaijani state interference and control in the Platforms' activities. At the very least, it exposes the Platform's lack of balance, impartiality, and scholarly expertise. It also undermines human rights and humanitarian aspects of the issue by ensuring prevalence of political components.

They also ignore another fundamental principle that ensures the status neutral principle and protection of human rights regardless of political factors, including the non-recognition of a state. This also entails that there should not be grey zones in terms of their accessibility for

¹⁰ <https://www.eurodialogue.eu/interview-ilham-aliyev-president-azerbaijan>

¹¹ Kiselyov is also the director of Russia's News Agency, "Rossiya Segodnya"

¹² <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2674834.html>

¹³ <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/president-ilham-aliyev-azerbaijan-will-never-agree-to-independence-of-nagorno-karabakh.html>

human rights protection, including for international organizations, monitors and journalists. However, the Azerbaijani authorities always have been hindering application of all these universal values in the context of the Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) conflict.

It is particularly evident and noteworthy that despite insistence and formal declaration of the Platforms as independent civil society initiatives, a number of Azerbaijani state officials have actively supported the Platforms or the process and made statements suggesting state involvement.

Thus, members of Azerbaijan's parliament, the Milli Mejlis, actively promote the platform not only in national settings but also internationally. For example, the head of delegation to Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, Samed Sayidov MP, has stated that he is an active supporter of the Peace Platform and intends to raise awareness about it not only in the European parliament, but other international organizations as well¹⁴.

On December 2016 another Member of Parliament, Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Azay Guliyev MP referred to the essence and role of the Platform noting that all members of the Milli Mejlis must actively work to inform the public and the parliament about the Peace Platform. During a speech in the Milli Mejlis, Guliyev encouraged members to carry out awareness raising campaigns within international organizations¹⁵.

Other members such as Zahid Uruc MP, Fazail Agamali MP, Zahid Oruc MP and others have similarly expressed public support for the Platform, stating that it can be used to demonstrate to the world, the peaceful intentions of Azerbaijan¹⁶.

It should be mentioned that none of the mentioned ideas or initiatives have been discussed or agreed with the civil society in Armenia or Artsakh. They have not been even discussed with any of Armenian authorities.

¹⁴ <http://www.1news.az/politics/20170522042048587.html>

¹⁵ <http://azayguliyev.az/news.php?id=1046&lang=en>

¹⁶ <http://www.arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1037&lang=ar>

It is also the case that Platforms were established in a country or with support of a country with non-independent civil society.

Between 2013 and 2016, over twenty six amendments to the Azerbaijani Law on Non-Governmental Organizations have resulted in the termination of many independent efforts on issues of mutual Armenian-Azerbaijani focus. Moreover, since 2014 the Azerbaijani authorities have severely limited operations of international organizations and foundations in Azerbaijan, obliging many organizations to seek government approval of the scope of their activities before initiating any programs. As a result, many of the civil rights activists who engaged in peacebuilding efforts in the past currently find themselves in prisons. The details related to the civil society situation are presented in the first chapter of this report.

The Founders and Participants

Founders

According to their website, the initial Baku Platform was founded by six individuals – three Armenians and three Azerbaijanis.

The founders from the Armenian side are: Vahe Avetyan, a human rights defender based in Sweden; Vahan Martirosyan, chairman of “National Liberation Movement” NGO; and Syusan Djaginian, a journalist and vice president of “Meridian” Human Rights NGO. The founders from the Azerbaijani side include: Rovshan Rzayev, a member of the Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno Karabakh; Kamil Safarov, professor of Baku State University; and Shalala Hasanova, chairwoman of Public Union “Support for the Development of Communication with Public”.¹⁷

¹⁷ See <https://vahevetian.blog/biography-2/>, <http://arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1017&lang=en> , <http://arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1720&lang=en>, <http://www.armtimes.com/ru/article/97106>.

The same situation appeared to be with the Tbilisi Platform¹⁸.

It is immediately clear that none of the Armenian founders of the Platforms have a history or expertise in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. On the contrary, they are relatively unknown figures with little to no track record in any human rights endeavors, and no implicit or explicit popular mandate to represent Armenian Civil Society.

One of the founders in particular has recently come out to denounce the entire Baku Platform as being a farce. Vahan Mardirosyan, who is currently based in Ukraine, has exposed the inner workings of the Platform in a series of video statements¹⁹. He describes his experience below:

“When I had already arrived to Azerbaijan, on the second day of my stay in Baku, I was given a document titled, “Baku Declaration”. After acquainting myself with the document, I expressed my opinion that firstly, we had not discussed any complete solution to the Karabakh conflict and secondly, in the document there was nothing in common with reasonable interests of the Armenian side. I even remember that I half humorously asked whether this document was a “plan maximum” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. I was told that the document was not a subject of negotiations and that my job was to find as many Armenians as possible.”

Vahan Mardirosyan
Co-Founder, Baku Platform
June 2017

¹⁸ <http://arm-azpeace.com/news.php?id=1852&lang=en>

¹⁹See, for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbGaBdyM_qU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ej7P5hUfW0;>

Peace Ambassadors

As one of its activities, the Platforms have established a Peace Ambassadorship, intended to support their efforts of information dissemination. These so-called Peace Ambassadors represent the Platform in their home countries, and are empowered to speak on its behalf. They are active in organizing events on behalf of the Platforms and are a key channel for engaging with the international community. Currently, there are eight ambassadors from other countries who are also well known for their anti-Armenian rhetoric and personal suspicious ties with authorities of Azerbaijan.

People and Organizations Supporting the Platform

Alongside Azerbaijani public figures, international individuals and organizations have declared support for the Platform, expressing readiness to participate in programs and events organized by the Platform. For example the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mladen Ivanic noted that the Baku Platform is a place for positive initiatives and is of great importance in terms of discussing problems²⁰. Many international individuals and organizations that support the Platform are known to have benefited financially from Azerbaijani state structures.

One such example is the former Parliamentary Advocate (Ombudsman) of Moldova Ms. Aurelia Grigoriu, who has demonstrated consistent public support for Azerbaijan even during her tenure as Ombudsman. She has made several public statements labeling Armenians as “aggressors” who are responsible for a so-called “Azerbaijani genocide”, and has been rewarded handsomely for her words with numerous Azerbaijani State accolades. To date, she has been awarded the “Heydar Aliyev” Gold Medal, the Medal of Honor of the Milli Mejlis, and “Historical

²⁰ See <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/baku-platform-a-place-for-positive-initiatives.html>

Signature” Award²¹. The latter was especially awarded for her speech against Armenians made in the Parliament of Armenia²². As was also reported by media, Ms. Grigoriu got also financial benefits from the authorities of Azerbaijan for her service to them²³.

Other public figures have also expressed support for the Platform. These include: Gurm Markhulia, a Georgian historian, Mehmet Perinçek, Head of Turkish “Talaat Pasha” organization, Michel Ivor, Director of the movie “Aghdam 5 fragments”, and Shukhrat Salamov, an Uzbek historian. It is worth highlighting that nearly all of these individuals are well known for their Armenophobia and continuous support of Azerbaijan²⁴.

²¹<https://news.az/articles/society/82006>;

https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Moldovan_ombudsperson_receives_Historical_Signature_award_in_Azerbaijan-85474;
http://caviar-diplomacy.net/azerbaijan/en_US/grigoriu/

²² https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Moldovan_ombudsperson_receives_Historical_Signature_award_in_Azerbaijan-85474

²³<http://caviar->

[diplomacy.net/azerbaijan/en_US/%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%83%D0%B5%D1%82-%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2/](http://caviar-diplomacy.net/azerbaijan/en_US/%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%83%D0%B5%D1%82-%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2/)

²⁴ <http://razm.info/103633>

V. THE METHODS USED

A Weapon of Information Warfare

It is now clear that the organization's main efforts have little to do with establishing a dialogue of peace between two estranged and warring nations. Rather, the Platforms have been exposed as being weapons of information warfare in the 21st century, meant to dominate the discourse, define the debate, and spread misinformation.

The Platforms' intended audience is not, however, the people of Armenia or Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) and not real peace, but rather, the international community. It is a curtain for the international community.

As evidenced by the Platforms' adopted rhetoric, its aim is to contribute towards a resolution to the conflict based on the principle of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, by convincing and confusing international policy makers. It aims to convince them of a few things: i) the platforms aim at peacebuilding involving genuine local stakeholders, and as such, should be supported for the sake of its rarity; ii) by demonstrating the success of locally driven efforts, it aims to discourage international mediation or involvement in the long-run; iii) it aims to convince the international community of the vibrancy of Azerbaijan's civil society.

As mentioned above, the platforms completely ignore the fundamental right to self-determination. We want to reiterate that these platforms also ignore another fundamental principle that ensures the status neutral principle and protection of human rights regardless of political factors, including the non-recognition of a state. This also entails that there should not be grey zones in terms of their accessibility for human rights protection, including for international organizations, monitors and journalists.

However, the Azerbaijani authorities have been always hindering all these universal values to be applied in the context of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) conflict.

Spreading Misinformation

The platforms also aim to confuse policymakers who may not be experts in the conflict with misinformation that supports Azerbaijan's preferred resolution. First, it advocates for the relevance of the UNSC resolutions, through which it claims the superiority of the principle of territorial integrity over that of self-determination, in international law. This is both inaccurate and irrelevant. Second, it depicts the participating Armenians as legitimate representatives of Armenian civil society, who support of the official Baku policy on Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

Seeking International Legitimacy

The strategy of confusing and convincing the international community is executed using a wide array of methods. The first method it employs is seeking international legitimacy for the project. Through the establishment of its so-called Peace Ambassadorship program and the opportunity for organizational membership, the Platform is endowed with diversity of international voices in support of the Platforms' activities and overall framework for understanding the conflict. Its international supporters also provide access to various venues of policymaking and advocating, which allows the Platform to be internationally present and relevant.

Recruiting Armenians as a misleading tool

From its outset, the Platforms have focused heavily on recruiting as many Armenians as possible, regardless of whether they live in Armenia or share the Platform's vision.

This recruitment effort is crucial to its very existence and success, as it can only claim to be a Peace Platform if it can include a few Armenians.

According to the recent statement of the Baku Platform co-founder Vahan Mardirosyan, they seek out three types of Armenians as potential candidates for recruitment: First, people extremely dissatisfied with the Armenian authorities; second, those dissatisfied with their financial circumstances or social status, and third, people inclined to adventurism and people without any kind of patriotic emotions towards Armenia.

Some former Armenian participants recently shared their experiences during an interview given to the Armenian “Shant” TV Channel.

They describe how Platforms’ members tempted them via social networks to join the initiative and build up their future careers. One former participant, a French teacher, Ms. Narine Dermenjyan was even promised a job in Germany if she decides to join the platforms. Soon thereafter, she noticed the Platform was publishing false statements on her behalf, specifically about her alleged approval of a plan to return control of Nagorno Karabakh to Baku. “This is absolutely a falsehood,” said she during her interview²⁵. This was also the case with Janet Hakobyan, a well-known Canadian-Armenian publicist who was similarly misled by Platform recruiters, and had false statements attributed to her in the Azerbaijani media²⁶.

The same methods are used within the Tbilisi Platform. An economic researcher, Mr. Rafael Isakhanyan was presented as a member of the Tbilisi Platform’s Steering Committee and a co-chair. Immediately after this falsification, he made a public statement speaking out that the Tbilisi Platform has fake aims and that he, as well as several other Armenian members was engaged into the Process under false information. Mr. Isakhanyan has also publicly stated that the real goals of the created platform are of political nature and do not pursue real peace building measures²⁷.

²⁵<https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2017/06/23/Armenians-victims-Azerbaijanipeace-platform/1797848>;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=0g2WoVpGI2E

²⁶ <http://www.panorama.am/am/news/2017/06/23/խաղաղության-պլանֆորմ/1797848>

²⁷<https://www.aysor.am/ru/news/2017/12/11/%D0%A0%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B0%D1%8D%D0%BB%D1%8C-%D0%98%D1%81%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BD/1349488>

Later, Mr. Isakhanyan was removed from the post of the Platform's co-chair for criticizing the Platform and its members. In the Azerbaijani press he was labeled as a person who does not deserve to be in the Platform. This is publications are made with clear hatred towards Armenians and anti-Armenianism²⁸.

²⁸<https://ru.sputnik.az/karabakh/20171225/413362956/platforma-mira-sopredsedatel-armenija-azerbajdzhan-zasedanie.html>