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## ANALYSIS

# Marginalizing the Azerbaijani Perspective

During the 44-Day War and after the War

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## **Marginalizing the Azerbaijani Perspective:**

### ***During the 44-Day War and after the War***

#### **Introduction**

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Armenian diaspora in the West was able to effectively integrate into the intellectual, academic, business, and cultural elites of various nations, and attain strong and influential positions. Furthermore, the Armenian diaspora effectively incorporated the “Armenian cause” and their narrative of victimization into the broader global liberal agenda, depicting themselves as one of the “historically oppressed” peoples. Substantial resources, including financial and human capital, have been devoted to “genocide recognition” campaigns for many years. This advocacy has resulted in the Armenian lobby amassing significant political support and financial resources, which have been instrumental in both the military aggression and information warfare against Azerbaijan by the Armenian state. The Armenian diaspora continues to systematically and extensively exploit the characterization of themselves as a “historically oppressed, ancient, and highly civilized Christian people” for political purposes. They are able to tap into the empathy of liberal circles and the implicit or latent Christian solidarity that exist in various Western countries.

In contrast, the Azerbaijani community in the West was virtually unknown before the collapse of the USSR and lacked representation in, or direct contact with, the Western world. The historical absence of Azerbaijani voices has resulted in the dominance of Armenian perspectives and narratives in public opinion, perpetuated by long-standing cultural, religious, and geopolitical differences. Only after independence in 1991 did the Azerbaijani community gain access to Western intellectual platforms and academic institutions, but the young generation of Azerbaijani experts and scholars have faced significant challenges due to established narratives and perceptions. They often face difficulty getting their perspectives published in Western academic journals and media, which frequently demonstrate a biased and intolerant approach towards their alternative viewpoint.

Before the Second Karabakh War (September 27–November 10, 2020), most reporting and commentary on the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia aimed to justify the status quo and the legitimacy of the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories. This was done through a so-called “balanced approach” that failed to distinguish between the aggressor and victim and ignored basic principles of international law. Media coverage of the conflict was often distorted and manipulated to serve a particular agenda, and the majority of reports claimed impartiality while concealing the legal elements and historical facts of the conflict. During the war, the Armenian diaspora and its associated lobby groups exerted a significant amount of effort and resources to cast Azerbaijan in a negative light. Azerbaijan faced a long list of accusations, including the deployment of Syrian mercenaries and exterminating civilians indiscriminately. The voice of the Azerbaijani side was consistently ignored. This attitude, which is, among other factors, rooted in extensive Orientalist bias in Western academia and politics, still persists, and the voice of Azerbaijanis is suppressed and marginalized. This report aims to highlight some examples of this as seen through the statements of political and media figures and the approaches of some media outlets.

#### **During the 44-Day War**

During the Second Karabakh War, some media outlets, institutions, and journalists displayed a biased and one-sided perspective on the conflict and the history of the Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. Despite claims of impartiality and objectivity, their coverage was deliberately distorted, altered and manipulated to ignore legal and historical facts. This selective representation aimed to undermine and marginalize the Azerbaijani perspective.

During the 44-day-long conflict and after, following the signing of the Trilateral Declaration on November 9/10, 2020, the platforms belonging to certain academic institutions sidelined the Azerbaijani perspective. This lack of access has raised questions about the integrity and impartiality of these institutions. There have been numerous instances when organizations and individuals have neglected the Azerbaijani perspective in their coverage of the Second Karabakh War and its aftermath. This is just one aspect of a larger anti-Azerbaijani bias present in Western academia and media.

Many of these individuals and organizations have also shown indifference towards the rights and struggles of the one million internally displaced persons who have been forcibly exiled from their homes for the past 27 years. The blurring lines between Armenian state propaganda and the coverage of some international non-government organizations and journalists, who choose to exclude Azerbaijani voices, due either to bias or ignorance, has the potential to severely impact the future of peace-making efforts in the region. It is never acceptable to prioritize emotions, sympathies, or financial interests over professionalism, especially in such a sensitive matter. Instead, all entities and individuals covering the events surrounding Armenia–Azerbaijan relations should strive to be neutral facilitators, promoting peace, reconciliation, and respect for international legal norms.

### Events

During the war, a number of events that were held publicly in Western cities were limited only to the Armenian side of the conflict and propagated the Armenian perspective. For example, on October 31, 2020, the **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)** held an all-Armenian one-day conference titled “Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh and the Palimpsests of Conflict, Violence, and Memory,” which, predictably, presented a pro-Armenian, one-sided narration of past and current events.<sup>1</sup> In another instance, **The Armenian Center at Columbia University** held a “Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh in the Media: Perspectives from Around the World” discussion on November 5, with five Armenian panelists and no Azerbaijani presenter.<sup>2</sup> **The Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School** has conducted a “Crisis in the Caucasus: Human Rights Violations in [so-called] Artsakh” talk.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, **the Program on Peacebuilding and Rights (PBHR) at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR)** announced the launch of a research project, “Human Rights and Foreign Terrorist Activities in [so-called] Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh),” on November 12; this contained unfounded allegations about the deployment of Islamist terrorists on the side of Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup> An urgent appeal from scholars at

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<sup>1</sup> The Promise Armenian Institute UCLA (2020), “Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh and the Palimpsests of Conflict, Violence, and Memory”, available at: <https://www.international.ucla.edu/armenia/event/14629> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Mouradian, Khatchig [@khatcho], “A discussion on the coverage of the war on #Artsakh in the international media, featuring experts from around the world. Event organized by Columbia University Armenian Center, in partnership with @NAASR1955” [Tweet], Twitter, October 28, 2020, <https://twitter.com/khatcho/status/1321489679699578880>

<sup>3</sup> HumanRightsInstitute [@CLShumanrights], “Join us on 12/1 for ‘Crisis in the Caucasus: Human Rights Violations in Artsakh’ with @RachelDenber (@hrw), Larisa Minasyan (@OpenSociety), and @pstronski (@CarnegieEndow).” [Tweet], Twitter, November 24, 2020, <https://twitter.com/CLShumanrights/status/1331080697264697349>

<sup>4</sup> Institute for the Study of Human Rights (2020), “Atrocities Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)”, available at: <http://www.humanrightscolumbia.org/peace-building/atrocities-artsakh-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

academic institutions, published by Columbia University, asked for the involvement of the US “as an imperative step towards resolving the crisis in the [so-called] Republic of Artsakh.”<sup>5</sup>

Another such event amid the war in the South Caucasus was convened on November 5, 2020, by **the Department of Critical Theory & Social Justice at Occidental College** in Los Angeles. The “expert” panel was titled “The Armenia–Azerbaijan War & the Crisis in Artsakh” and had two Armenian panelists.<sup>6</sup> An online panel titled “On Ceasefires: International (In)action in the Nagorno-Karabakh War,” hosted by Zoravik (an Armenian activist collective), also held a discussion on October 26 that analyzed the ceasefire process without including one of the parties of said ceasefire.<sup>7</sup>

### Media representatives

Unfortunately, the one-sided approach to events in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict is not only limited to events held by academic institutions. There have been instances of journalists and reporters who, despite claiming to have an objective approach towards the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, have failed to cover the situation in its entirety, shedding light only on one side of the conflict. Inability to stick to impartiality, objectivity and accuracy all break the ethical codes of journalism and bring the professionalism of such reporters into question.

A Canadian would-be journalist and analyst, **Neil Hauer**, has been actively covering the events of the Second Karabakh War from the Armenian perspective. In his reporting during the conflict, Hauer has demonstrated numerous one-sided approaches to the events. Before arriving in the Karabakh region to conduct first-hand reporting, Hauer was already expressing disdain about the BBC’s reporting from Ganja city, not understanding the difference between the shelling within and outside the Karabakh region.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while outside the region himself, Hauer’s reporting relied on sources such as “WarGonzo,” a channel on Telegram that is acknowledged as a biased and unreliable source that misled the Armenian population about the situation in the region throughout the war. While expressing criticism about the BBC’s so-called “one-sided reporting of the events” and the alleged lack of attention given to shelling within the Karabakh region, Neil Hauer himself, while talking to the BBC at a later date, extensively covered the events in Khankendi while refusing to issue one sentence about the attacks on cities such as Ganja, Barda, or Terter.<sup>9</sup> In another instance, when asked to back his claims with evidence, Hauer stated: “The source is conversations with various well-informed people in Stepanakert [Khankendi].”<sup>10</sup> His lack of nuance or a clear understanding of the conflict, for instance, he referred to all the territories previously occupied by Armenia (including the seven adjacent regions) as “Artsakh,” makes clear

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<sup>5</sup> Institute for the Study of Human Rights (2020), “An Urgent Appeal for Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)”, available at: <http://www.humanrightscolumbia.org/news/urgent-appeal-artsakh-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Occidental College (2020), “The Armenia-Azerbaijan War & the Crisis in Artsakh – CTSJ’s the Matrix hosts an Expert Panel”, available at: <https://www.oxy.edu/events/2020/11/armenia-azerbaijan-war-crisis-artsakh-ctsjs-matrix-hosts-expert-panel> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, David L. [@DavidLPhillips4], “Tune in today at 3pm for the online panel: ‘On Ceasefires: International (In)action in the Nagorno-Karabakh War’”, [Tweet], Twitter, October 26, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DavidLPhillips4/status/1320780571623198720?fbclid=IwAR07pzh08eZT1Uno-ec1G4FkVHjUIL0cktb9Nx3HPS4a5NrsZ6Rn2jezE5E>

<sup>8</sup> Hauer, Neil [@NeilPHauer] “BBC devotes almost the entirety of its front-page Karabakh conflict report to the single strike on Ganja today. Meanwhile, Stepanakert shelled nearly continuously for the last 48 hours.” [Tweet], Twitter, October 5, 2020, <https://twitter.com/NeilPHauer/status/1312852569908293635>

<sup>9</sup> BBC (2020), “Good Morning Scotland: The Weekend Edition”, [podcast], available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p08vk8l6> (accessed: March 11, 2023, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Hauer, Neil [@NeilPHauer], “The source is conversations with various well-informed people in Stepanakert”, [Tweet], Twitter, November 26, 2020, <https://twitter.com/NeilPHauer/status/1331712516951584768>

that Hauer is a war-profiteering individual using his Patreon-backed reporting to manipulate nationalist sentiment and exploiting ethnic hatred to elicit financial contributions.



Image - @NeilPHauer (Neil Hauer), Twitter, from <https://twitter.com/NeilPHauer/status/1326137890649280512>

Moreover, Neil Hauer, in his arguments with opponents, uses coarse language and insults. This should alarm international media outlets such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, and others which occasionally give him a platform to conduct an anti-Azerbaijan propaganda campaign.

Another would-be journalist is **Lindsey Snell**, who was previously stationed in the Middle East and is suspected of connections with the PKK and other affiliated terrorist organizations. Detained in 2016 for illegally crossing the Syrian–Turkish border, Snell used every opportunity, including the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, to seek revenge on Türkiye for her detention. She openly stated in one of her tweets that “Türkiye should have never arrested me.” She reported one-sidedly about the conflict and even objected to findings by Human Rights Watch about war crimes committed during the conflict.<sup>11</sup> She also retweeted some conspiracy theories concerning Amnesty International being bribed by Azerbaijan. Lindsey Snell also used coarse language and insults in her social accounts.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, she has also reported about the war in Ukraine with pro-Russian sentiments.

<sup>11</sup> Snell, Lindsey [@LindseySnell], “Here’s the Aliyev-appointed chairman of an AZ gov thinktank claiming HRW/Amnesty reported more POW violations from the Armenian side than the Azerbaijani.” [Tweet] Twitter, December 22, 2020, <https://twitter.com/LindseySnell/status/1341287694329102337>

<sup>12</sup> Snell, Lindsey [@LindseySnell], “Can’t imagine what people returning to Artsakh feel passing through the Shushi checkpoint, where Azerbaijani forces stand close enough to the road to spit on”, [Tweet] Twitter, December 7, 2020 <https://twitter.com/LindseySnell/status/1335923354776301569>



Lindsey Snell ✓  
@LindseySnell



Can't imagine what people returning to Artsakh feel passing through the Shushi checkpoint, where Azerbaijani forces stand close enough to the road to spit on

### "Experts"

A resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), **Michael Rubin**, has been actively publishing anti-Azerbaijani op-eds in various media outlets, especially in the *National Interest* and *Washington Examiner*. In November 2020 alone, Rubin published ten op-eds in these journals, all openly one-sided, uninformed pieces spreading misleading anti-Azerbaijani narratives. The op-eds are filled with false information: For example, one mentions the widespread but false historical assumption that Stalin "transferred" the region of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, multiple pieces have relied on baseless and unconfirmed allegations about Azerbaijan's military counter-operation, which was conducted on its internationally recognized territory that had been held under Armenian occupation for twenty-seven years. In another piece, Rubin voiced an extremist opinion that Azerbaijan is "intend[ing] to complete the genocide the Ottomans began just over a century ago,"<sup>14</sup> while advancing an Islamophobic undertone about a jihadist war against Christians.<sup>15</sup> Rubin's policy advice is just as uninformed and carries a similar lack of expertise: In one piece, he urged the US to go against the norms of international law and "open a US Consulate in Stepanakert [Khankendi],"<sup>16</sup> and in another he urged Israel to cut ties with Azerbaijan, referring to them as "the victims of one Holocaust not only turning a blind eye toward but also selling weapons to the potential perpetrators of another."<sup>17</sup> Overall, Rubin relies on various factors (e.g., democracy, religion) that did not play a vital role in the origin or continuation of the conflict while completely ignoring the realities of international law, history, or diplomacy.

A former United States Ambassador to Armenia, **John Marshall Evans**, has also participated in the information war, spreading anti-Azerbaijani sentiment and supporting the Armenian governmental position, even extreme claims like Azerbaijan's wish to commit genocide in the region. Ambassador Evans downplayed the first attack on Ganja and later ignored the following three attacks on the city and other regions of Azerbaijan. Throughout the war, John Evans contributed to Armenian state-run propaganda, interacting with the Twitter accounts of state

<sup>13</sup> The National Interest (2020), "President Biden Must Shut Down Azerbaijan's Sanctions Waiver on Day One", available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/president-biden-must-shut-down-azerbaijan%E2%80%99s-sanctions-waiver-day-one-171872> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> The National Interest (2020), "It's Time for Pro-Israel Groups to Divorce Azerbaijan", available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/it%E2%80%99s-time-pro-israel-groups-divorce-azerbaijan-172255> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>15</sup> The National Interest (2020), "Israel's Azerbaijan Mistake", available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/israel%E2%80%99s-azerbaijan-mistake-173476> (March 11, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> The National Interest (2020), "Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis: It's Time to Open a U.S. Consulate in Stepanakert", available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/nagorno-karabakh-crisis-it%E2%80%99s-time-open-us-consulate-stepanakert-172224> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> The National Interest (2020), "Israel's Azerbaijan Mistake", available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/israel%E2%80%99s-azerbaijan-mistake-173476> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

officials of Armenia and the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and only delivering a one-sided narrative of the events. “Incinerating Karabakh’s forests is a disastrous move,” stated Evans regarding the purported news about Azerbaijan setting the forest on fire, but he held back his thoughts when Armenians were openly setting fire to Kalbajar, an instance bearing proof and covered by the international media.



Image @EvansinAmerica (John M Evans), Twitter, from <https://twitter.com/EvansinAmerica/status/1316069040327188482>

### **The period since the end of the 44-Day War**

We would like to draw attention to a number of incidents that we have observed since the end of the 44-Day War that demonstrate the continuation, and occasionally intensification, of the trend described in the previous section. In July 2021, the Georgian Institute of Politics, with the financial support of the **Heinrich Boell Stiftung**, organized a Summer Academy in Tbilisi that invited Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian experts and researchers. Our colleague, then Senior Advisor Vasif Huseynov, also attended this academy. The participants were supposed to write a research paper after the event that would be published on the website of the Georgian Institute of Politics. The paper written by Huseynov about the policies of the European Union towards the South Caucasus was checked by Sonja Schiffers, Director of the South Caucasus office of the Heinrich Boell Stiftung, who clearly demonstrated how biased is the approach that she and the institution she represents takes to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and political issues relating to Azerbaijan. In response to Huseynov’s statement that Armenia and Azerbaijan should recognize each other’s territorial conflicts, which is a very basic principle of international law, Schiffers retorted that “This sentence fully ignores the Armenian perspective and thus makes a peace deal very unlikely. What would have to be done to bring all conflict parties on board?” In response to another statement that the destroyed territories of Karabakh need international assistance, Schiffers replied asking, “What do independent voices say about this? Is the refutation credible? Of course, everybody always needs money. But in the AZ case, much is lost due to heavy reliance on natural resources and lack of development due to the lack of reforms and democratization in general. Does the EU have to pay for this?” These are only some of the statements that are more political judgements than academic feedback.

This biased attitude by the **Heinrich Boell Stiftung** towards Azerbaijan has been observed in many other instances since then. For example, in January 2023, this institution organized a webinar about the “Humanitarian Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict” at which representatives from both countries were supposedly invited as speakers along with Viola von Cramon, a member of the European Parliament. Notably, the organizers invited a very marginal

figure with an extremely negative reputation in Azerbaijani society, Bahruz Samadov, as a representative from Azerbaijan. It was very well known to the organizers that a very limited number of people in Azerbaijan share his views, which are characterized by most people as more “pro-Armenian” than “pro-Azerbaijani.” This was a clear attempt by the organizers to fake balance in their approach to the conflict. However, they, and specifically the director of the Tbilisi Office, Schiffers, demonstrated particular sensitivity and expressed concerns when she noticed that Armenians were not represented in events devoted to security and related issues in the South Caucasus. For example, she reacted hastily to a report that the Armenian Prime Minister would not be present at a panel about the South Caucasus, with the participation of the Azerbaijani and Georgian leaders, at the Munich Security Conference in February 2023 (see below). She apparently did not know that the Armenian Prime Minister had himself declined to join this panel before he changed his mind and attended.



**Sonja Schiffers**  
@sonjaschiffers



Withholding my comments except one: sad to see that - whatever the reason - [#Armenia](#) is missing on the [#SouthCaucasus](#) panel [@MunSecConf](#) [#MunichSecurityConference2023](#). Panel to take place tomorrow, Saturday 18 Feb, at 7:30 p.m. - 8:15 p.m. [#Tbilisi](#) time. [securityconference.org/en/msc-2023/ag...](https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2023/ag...)

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**Main Stage II: Panel Discussion**  
Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus  
Königssaal

**Ilham Aliyev**  
President, Republic of Azerbaijan

**Irakli Garibashvili**  
Prime Minister, Georgia

**Helga Maria Schmid**  
Secretary General, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; Deputy President of the Foundation Council, Munich Security Conference Foundation

**Moderator: Christoph Heusgen**  
Ambassador; Chairman, Munich Security Conference

 Munich Security Conference

10:46 AM · Feb 17, 2023 · **39.2K** Views

On September 29, 2021, the US-based **Newlines Institute** published a piece<sup>18</sup> written by Neil Hauer, who claimed to be a journalist and analyst based in Yerevan. However, even a superficial glimpse at his writings and posts on social media is more than enough to understand his unconcealed prejudice and hate speech against Azerbaijan, as discussed above. The mentioned piece was also full of baseless allegations against Azerbaijan. One staff member submitted a piece

<sup>18</sup> Hauer, N. (2021), “Azerbaijan’s Dangerous New Escalations”, New Lines Institute, available at [https://newlinesinstitute.org/azerbaijan/azerbaijans-dangerous-new-escalations/?fbclid=IwAR3Gj11COtzqM6nKHwIvczUEN3wWA2vkrGX\\_4OsDVFKo4HK4GsOqPr2hohY](https://newlinesinstitute.org/azerbaijan/azerbaijans-dangerous-new-escalations/?fbclid=IwAR3Gj11COtzqM6nKHwIvczUEN3wWA2vkrGX_4OsDVFKo4HK4GsOqPr2hohY) (accessed: March 11, 2023).



in response to the allegations by Hauer; however, that response was rejected. Later, another expert at the AIR Center submitted to the Newlines Institute a completely different piece on post-war opportunities and economic development prospects for Armenia and Azerbaijan, which was also rejected by the institute owing to one sentence critical of the Armenian perspective on regional cooperation. (That paper was published in a different outlet.<sup>19</sup>) Among many other unpleasant rejections, we can also underline **Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR)**<sup>20</sup> and the **Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft**, which published four anti-Azerbaijan op-eds and refused to accept an opposing perspective on a matter relating to regional security.

In another case, we observed the twisting and misinterpretation of the statements of Azerbaijani experts. One such case concerned Rusif Huseynov, Co-founder and Director of the Baku-based political think-tank Topchubashov Center. On February 7, 2023, he tweeted that some three weeks ago he had been contacted, through a common acquaintance, by Daniela Prugger, a journalist affiliated with Austrian daily Der Standardat.<sup>21</sup> “She wanted me to comment for her upcoming article ‘about the blockade of Karabach’ and I agreed,” he stated. In their conversation, according to Huseynov, he explained the concerns, expectations, and demands of the Azerbaijani side, and also Azerbaijan’s balancing actions with Russia and help to Ukraine (free gas, weapons, etc.) to his interlocutor, who happened to be in Kyiv at that time. “The end product shocked me. Having felt deceived and used, I texted to @Daniela\_Prugger, expressed disappointment. Her ignoring me was another surprise and disappointment. As she decided not to tire herself with explanation, I had no choice but to publicize my concerns.” He did so thus:

*[First,] the author claims neither food, nor medicine have been let through the roadblocks and barbed wire fences. Not sure about the latter, but when she had asked me about food during the interview, I shared with her the info on food supply from Armenian sources... My information, probably not suiting the article’s spirit, was ignored by the authors... My quote on Azerbaijan’s reintegration goal is not only put in the irrelevant context, but also followed by a sentence about “anti-Armenian hatred fueled by Azerbaijani propaganda.” The authors wanted to use this “fact,” they could’ve found another, more relevant, paragraph... In another paragraph, in which I describe the (rightful and legitimate) demands of the AZERBAIJANI side, the authors attribute them to the ruler of the authoritarian regime. Again with the aim of diminishing the importance of these demands and demonizing the Azerbaijani side... Nothing is said by the authors about Azerbaijan’s help to Ukraine in the latter’s war in order not to raise any sympathy (God forbid) toward Azerbaijan and further to keep anti-Azerbaijani nature of the article.*

Not only Azerbaijani experts, but also those foreign observers who incorporate Azerbaijani perspectives in their analyses face double standards. For example, Taras Kuzio, a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society and Professor of Political Science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, faced such a double standard after he published an article about Armenian war crimes in *Rolling Stone* magazine. In an interview with the Azerbaijani media, Kuzio narrated his experience:

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<sup>19</sup> Hajiyev, Shahmar (2021), “Economic integration and development as a catalyst for stability in the South Caucasus”, eureporter, November 16, 2021, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/azerbaijan-world/2021/11/16/economic-integration-and-development-as-a-catalyst-for-stability-in-the-south-caucasus/> (accessed: March 11, 2023)

<sup>20</sup> Institute for the Study of Human Rights (2020), “Documentation Project on Atrocities In Nagorno-Karabakh”, available at <http://www.humanrightscolumbia.org/news/documentation-project-atrocities-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed: March 11, 2023)

<sup>21</sup> Huseynov, Rusif [@RusifHuseynov2], “Thread about poor journalism, international media bias (toward Azerbaijan) and quotes in irrelevant context(s) / misquotes”, [Tweet], Twitter, February 7, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RusifHuseynov2/status/1622905443361124352>

*Rolling Stone magazine was sent thousands of emails demanding that the article be removed from social media. Armenians want themselves to be seen as the victims and by publicising their war crimes we remove their self-proclaimed status as victims. The murder of 4,000 Azerbaijanis is nearly as high as the murder of 6,000 Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs at Srebrenica. Rolling Stone magazine asked me to remove the scanned pages of the article and wait until there is a web link to it which can then be posted. This is rather strange as anybody can buy the August–September 2022 issue of Rolling Stone magazine, scan my article and post it anywhere on social media. The article is published and so it is too late for Armenians to demand it be withdrawn.*

Concurrently, there are a number of media outlets and so-called journalists who regularly disseminate brazenly anti-Azerbaijani posts. For example, **Open Caucasus Media**, via its website [oc.media.org](http://oc.media.org), persistently ignores any Azerbaijani perspectives about the country's conflict with Armenia despite the fact that its website states, "We stand for equality for all and give voice to all the diverse people of the Caucasus." Several attempts by our experts to get their articles published on this website by the same process and in the same format as those used by Armenian experts have regularly been ignored. **Opendemocracy.net** is another such outlet which presents itself as an independent media platform based in London. The reporting of this platform from the South Caucasus is almost entirely under the control Armenians (see below) who propagate extremely biased information about the conflict.



## Tatev Hovhannisyan

Based in Armenia, Tatev Hovhannisyan is **openDemocracy's Europe and Eurasia editor** on our Tracking the Backlash project. She is an investigative journalist with a particular interest in tracking attacks on universal human rights and investigating the funding of anti-gender movements in Europe. In 2022, she won an Emma Goldman Award for innovative research on feminist and inequality issues in Europe – the first time a journalist has won the award. Before joining openDemocracy, she worked for ten years, mainly as an editor, at leading Armenian media outlets. Follow her on Twitter: [@tahovhannisyan](https://twitter.com/tahovhannisyan). Contact her at: [tatev.hovhannisyan@opendemocracy.net](mailto:tatev.hovhannisyan@opendemocracy.net)



## Lucy Martirosyan

Based in Yerevan, Armenia, Lucy is **openDemocracy's Eurasia investigative reporting fellow**. They recently graduated from Sciences Po in Paris, France with a joint master's degree in journalism and human rights, with a focus on Russia and post-Soviet states. Previously, they worked as a producer for the US-based The World, a radio programme about international affairs. Follow Lucy on Twitter ([@lucymartiros](https://twitter.com/lucymartiros)) and email them at [lucy.martirosyan@opendemocracy.net](mailto:lucy.martirosyan@opendemocracy.net)

Another infamous figure who consistently targets Azerbaijan is a political scientist from Latvia, **Eldar Mamedov**. Until recently, he worked as a political advisor for the Social Democrat group in the European Parliament. Over an extended period, Mamedov has authored a sequence of articles and publications that intend to undermine Azerbaijan's reputation in the Western sphere and hinder its progression towards closer ties with Brussels and Washington. His works are disseminated across several platforms, including social media, foreign resources, and specialized expert blogs that are primarily accessed by academic and political science communities. He is often given space in Responsible Statecraft, the online magazine of the Quincy Institute, where Mamedov propagates mostly pro-Iranian, sometimes pro-Russian, and consistently anti-Azerbaijani views. Mamedov's profile page on Responsible Statecraft clearly shows his underlying intention to promote the interests of the Iranian government while casting Azerbaijan in a negatively light. In December 2022, in the course of the Qatargate scandal at the European Parliament, the center-left Socialists & Democrats group in the European Parliament suspended Mamedov and referred him to the Belgian authorities as part of an internal investigation into alleged foreign interference in Brussels. Politico.eu, reporting about Mamedov's suspension, noted that "His writing is largely targeted against Azerbaijan. He has also sought to defend himself against accusations he is friendly toward Iran, and notably toward a U.S.-based lobby that is often seen as soft on the regime and in favor of reducing sanctions on Tehran." Quite shockingly, the European Parliament had always ignored the information provided by the Azerbaijani side revealing the real intentions and suspicious links of Mamedov.

More from Eldar Mamedov



NOVEMBER 16, 2022

### The US should stay away from Azerbaijan-Iran tensions

Encouraging Baku at this moment could very well complicate Washington's efforts to calm tensions across the Caucasus.

by Eldar Mamedov



OCTOBER 4, 2022

### Protests in Iran make restoring the JCPOA more urgent than ever

Don't the hawks know that opposing the nuclear deal is giving the hardliners essentially what they want?

by Eldar Mamedov



SEPTEMBER 16, 2022

### Caucasus conflict highlights US hawks' reckless support for Azerbaijan

Full blown support for Baku doesn't serve American interests, particularly as it could lead toward conflict with Iran.

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AUGUST 22, 2022

### What if the US took a more nuanced view of Iran?

The prevailing wisdom that all fault for animosity between the two countries lies with Tehran does not serve American interests.

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JULY 21, 2022

### Azerbaijan and the EU's faltering gas realpolitik

EU head Ursula von der Leyen came home from Baku with a fuel deal, but it may not be enough to fix Europe's woes.

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JULY 11, 2022

### The Iran hawks' dangerous hubris

They're now pushing an Israeli-led regional alliance that would likely drag the United States into another Middle Eastern war.

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JUNE 30, 2022

### NATO boasts unity but potential for division lies ahead

As the war in Ukraine drags on, already diverging camps in the Atlantic Alliance are likely to fracture further.

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JUNE 8, 2022

### US dithering on Iran deal re-entry causing rift with Europeans

A resolution submitted to the IAEA this week seeking to censure Tehran is an illusion of unity.

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*A screenshot from Eldar Mamedov's profile page on the website of Responsible Statecraft*

In recent years, some groups based in Sweden have started to target Azerbaijan. More precisely, a public relations campaign against Azerbaijan is conducted by the Stockholm-based **Blankspot** organization. This particular entity has established itself as a leading proponent of disseminating negative information and mounting information-based offensives against Azerbaijan. An analysis of this campaign by Azerbaijani journalists states: "We will not go far for examples and proof and invite the readers to enter the name of the publication in the Google search engine – Blankspot.se. Out of 391 thousand results, Azerbaijan is in third place. The readers who know the algorithm of search engines will understand what is going on. Let's explain: the most important pages of the site come out at the beginning of the search, and in the case of Blankspot.se we see that this site has dedicated more than a dozen materials to our country." **Rasmus Canbäck**, a leading voice of this outlet, devotes most of his works to spreading disinformation and propaganda about Azerbaijan. Not only does he demonstrate a strikingly pro-Armenian stance in his works and social media posts, but he also seeks to project a negative image of Azerbaijan and employs various instruments to undermine contacts between Azerbaijanis and European politicians.

Anti-Azerbaijani propaganda can often be observed in the **German media**. There have been tens of articles and news reports published by German media outlets that propagate the Armenian perspective in the context of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict while totally disregarding the Azerbaijani version of the narratives they disseminate. One prominent case has been observed recently with *Der Spiegel*, a popular German magazine. An interview published on January 18, 2023, with Laurence Broers, an international expert on the South Caucasus, discussed the prospects for an Armenia–Azerbaijan peace treaty in the coming year.<sup>22</sup> The interviewer puts this question:

- *Earlier Armenian governments saw the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of their nation. Azerbaijan has developed a similar narrative, even claiming that the Republic of Armenia is in fact located on Azerbaijani land.*

In his answer, Broers discusses the Azerbaijani narratives that “the Republic of Armenia is located on ancient Azerbaijani land”; he even draws parallels with the Russian narrative concerning Ukraine: “We can see parallels between the Russian discourse about Ukraine as an artificial, fake nation, and the Azerbaijani discourse about Armenia, likewise claiming it has a fake history.”

Recently, an Azerbaijani expert, Rusif Huseynov, interviewing Broers, asked the following question:<sup>23</sup>

*Don't you think we could find more parallels between the Russian or Putin's discourse about Ukraine and Armenian discourse about Azerbaijan. I mean... Russia claims that Ukraine is an artificial state set up by the Bolsheviks, so the Armenian narratives are exactly so towards Azerbaijan. The Russian nationalists refer to Khrushchev's transfer of Crimea to Ukraine for their irredentist agenda and Armenians make similar claims about Karabakh being transferred to Azerbaijan by Stalin. Don't you find more parallels in this regard?*

In his reply to this question, Broers says that he had actually mentioned this in his original interview, but the editors cut it out. He does not, however, clarify whether he has raised this issue with the editors of *Der Spiegel* or not. Here is Broers' reply to Huseynov's question:

*Well, the original interview was actually quite a bit longer than the version that was published. In the original interview Ann-Dorit asked me a number of questions about Armenian irredentism and I discussed in my answers this notion of augmented Armenia which I've written about in in my book and I also discussed the discourse of liberated territories that was in circulation in Armenia with regard to the seven regions around Nagorno-Karabakh and how these regions were ethnically cleansed of their Azerbaijani populations. So, you know, the senior editors at Der Spiegel cut back the interview and I think they focused on those elements that are or which they saw as being most newsworthy which relate to the current situation so you know this is always a situation that that can arise; you give an interview and certain parts of it are foregrounded.*

It is apparent that, for *Der Spiegel*, the topic of Armenian irredentism against Azerbaijan is not considered newsworthy, whereas the topic of “Azerbaijani irredentism” is deemed newsworthy and receives significant attention. It is unclear whether Broers brought up this matter with the editors or simply disregarded it. It is also unclear whether Broers had indeed also discussed the

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<sup>22</sup> Boy, Ann-Dorit, “Blockade in the Southern Caucasus: ‘There Is Every Reason to Expect More Violence This Year’”, *Der Spiegel*, January 18, 2023, available at <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/blockade-in-the-southern-caucasus-there-is-every-reason-to-expect-more-violence-this-year-a-639a972e-cc4e-477d-99f2-766beb2fcbea> (accessed: March 11, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Topchubashov Center, “Road not taken: Likelihood of clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. TOPTALK with Laurence Broers”, [video], YouTube, February 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96GPEr7ZIME>

Armenian territorial claims against Azerbaijan. However, what is evident is that Azerbaijani viewpoints have been consistently dismissed and Azerbaijani voices marginalized, and this is not the first instance of such treatment.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the biased and one-sided approach towards Azerbaijan in general and the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict in particular has been observed in the publications, activities, and statements of various media outlets, institutions, and journalists. The exclusion of the Azerbaijani perspective has raised questions about the impartiality and integrity of these media outlets and the respective journalists and experts. This one-sided approach, combined with indifference towards the rights and struggles of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons, has created extensive misperceptions about the conflict and has had invariably negative consequences for the efforts to resolve regional disputes peacefully. It is, therefore, crucial for all media platforms and individuals covering the region and the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process to be neutral facilitators promoting peace, reconciliation, and respect for international legal norms.

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