

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ATTEMPTS BY ARMENIA AND RELATED ACTORS TO DISRUPT AZERBAIJAN-GEORGIA RELATIONS

(ERMENİSTAN VE BAĞLANTILI AKTÖRLERİN
AZERBAIJAN-GÜRCİSTAN İLİŞKİLERİNİ BOZMA ÇABALARI)

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Abstract: *Azerbaijan and Georgia, two of the three states that make up the South Caucasus, support peace and stability. The third state Armenia, on the other hand, deals the greatest blow to the stability and peace in the region by applying an occupation policy directly to one of these two states and indirectly to the other. As of the writing of this article, Armenia has seized more than 20 percent of the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic as a result of the occupation.*

In Georgia, acts by Armenians have posed a threat to the territorial integrity of this state in two ways. First, the Armenians, together with the Abkhaz, fought against the Georgian state. Second, Armenians from time to time make territorial claims in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, where they live as a community.

Armenia and related actors, which include diaspora Armenians living around the world (including those living in the region after the collapse of the USSR), have been making various efforts to disrupt Azerbaijani-Georgian relations since the restoration of the independence of the South

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Caucasus states. The actors working to disrupt the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations can be listed as follows:

- *Representatives of the Armenian state and government;*
- *Embassy of Armenia in Georgia;*
- *Media of Armenia;*
- *Pro-Armenian media representatives abroad;*
- *Sources of information of Armenian origin operating in Georgia;*
- *Armenian organizations operating in Georgia;*
- *Armenian Diaspora organizations;*
- *Population of Armenian origin in Georgia;*
- *Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia;*
- *Pro-Armenian politicians and scientists living abroad.*

The breakdown of bilateral relations will cause economic and political losses for both Azerbaijan and Georgia, and allow Armenia to capitalize on these losses. For these reasons, the current state of relations between the two countries must be maintained and further developed, and provocations must be ignored and resolutely prevented.

Keywords: *South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, bilateral relations, Armenian diaspora*

Öz: *Güney Kafkasya'yı oluşturan üç devletten ikisi olan Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan barış ve istikrarı desteklemektedir. Üçüncü devlet olan Ermenistan ise, bu iki devletten birine doğrudan, diğerine dolaylı olarak işgal politikası uygulayarak bölgedeki istikrar ve barışa en büyük darbeyi vurmaktadır. Ermenistan, işgal sonucunda Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti topraklarının yüzde 20'den fazlasını ele geçirmiştir.*

Gürcistan'da Ermenilerin eylemleri bu devletin toprak bütünlüğüne iki şekilde tehdit oluşturmaktadır. Birincisi, Ermeniler Abhazlarla birlikte Gürcistan devletine karşı savaşmışlardır. İkincisi, Ermeniler zaman zaman topluluk olarak yaşadıkları Gürcistan'ın Samtshe-Cavahetya bölgesinde toprak taleplerinde bulunmaktadır.

SSCB'nin dağılmasından sonra bölgede yaşayanlar da dahil olmak üzere dünyanın dört bir yanında yaşayan diaspora Ermenilerini de içeren Ermenistan ve ilgili aktörler, Güney Kafkasya devletlerinin bağımsızlığından bu yana Azerbaycan-Gürcistan ilişkilerini bozmak için çeşitli çabalar

göstermektedir. Azerbaycan-Gürcistan ilişkilerini bozmaya çalışan unsurları şu şekilde sıralanabilir:

- *Ermenistan devleti ve hükümeti temsilcileri;*
- *Gürcistan'daki Ermenistan Büyükelçiliği;*
- *Ermenistan medyası;*
- *Yurtdışında Ermeni yanlısı medya temsilcileri;*
- *Gürcistan'da faaliyet gösteren Ermeni kökenli medya organları;*
- *Gürcistan'da faaliyet gösteren Ermeni örgütleri;*
- *Ermeni Diasporas örgütleri;*
- *Gürcistan'ın Ermeni kökenli nüfusu;*
- *Gürcistan'daki Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi;*
- *Yurtdışında yaşayan Ermeni yanlısı siyasetçiler ve bilim insanları.*

İkili ilişkilerin bozulması hem Azerbaycan hem de Gürcistan için ekonomik ve siyasi kayıplara neden olacak ve Ermenistan'ın bu kayıplardan yararlanmasına olanak sağlayacaktır. Bu nedenlerle iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin mevcut durumu sürdürülmeli ve daha da geliştirilmeli, provokasyonlara geçit verilmemeli ve kararlılıkla önlenmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Güney Kafkasya, Azerbaycan, Gürcistan, ikili ilişkiler, Ermeni diaspora*

Introduction

Azerbaijan and Georgia, two of the three countries that make up the South Caucasus, have demonstrated through their foreign policy that they are committed to peace and stability. The third country, Armenia, however, is undermining the stability and peace in the region by pursuing a policy of direct aggression against one of these two states and indirect aggression against the other. As a result of the Armenian military aggression, as of the writing of this article, more than 20% of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been occupied.

In Georgia, acts by Armenian groups have posed a threat to the territorial integrity of this state in two ways. First, the Armenians, together with the Abkhaz, fought against the Georgian state. At present, the majority of the population of the separatist Abkhazia region are Armenians, and their number is growing.¹ It should be noted that brutal massacres against Georgians were perpetrated by Armenian groups during the 1992 Georgian-Abkhaz war.

On the other hand, Armenians from time to time make territorial claims in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, where they live as a community. Armenians are the second largest minority in Georgia after Azerbaijanis. According to the 2014 census of Georgia, 168,100 Armenians (4.5%) live in Georgia.² If we take the Armenians who took Georgian surnames into account, it becomes clear that the number of Armenians is even higher. Armenians were relocated to the territories where they now live in Georgia, historically inhabited by the Turks of Akhiska and Borchali, during the reign of Tsarist Russia, and strengthened their position during the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) period. Near the collapse of the USSR, beginning with M. Gorbachev's "reconstruction" period, Armenian organizations began to be actively formed in Georgia. It is known that more than 20 Armenian public organizations (according to some sources, 40) operate in Georgia.³

During the years of independence, the separatist claims of the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti were always on the agenda, and even in 2007 the "solution" of the Javakheti issue was included in the "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia." At the initial stage, they demand the annexation of Chalk municipality (about half of the population is Armenian), which is part of the Kvemo-Kartli region in terms of territorial and administrative division, to Javakheti. As a next step, they claim autonomy for Samtskhe-Javakheti,

1 Elnur Kəlbizadə, "Ermənilərin Abxaziyada məkrli niyyətləri və hədəfi: 'Qaradənizsahili Ermənistan'", *Xalq Qazeti*, October 16, 2020, <http://xalqqazeti.com/az/news/59933>

2 "2014 General Population Census", *National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT)*, last modified April 28, 2016, http://census.ge/files/results/Census_release_ENG.pdf

3 "General Population Census in 2014".

giving Armenian the status of official language and the Armenian Apostolic Church official status.⁴ However, Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding regions has pushed the Armenians' demands for autonomy into the background. Concerning this issue, the leader of the Georgian Freedom Party, Rezo Shavishvili, said in a statement that "if the Armenians did not raise the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, they would demand the annexation of the Armenian region in Georgia to Armenia."

Terrorist Acts Committed by Armenians in Georgia in the Early 1990s

Armenian groups' actions that disrupt peace and stability in the South Caucasus do not end with direct and indirect opposition to the sovereignty of states. It is no secret that the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations have risen to the level of strategic partnership. Bilateral relations are multifaceted and beneficial mutual partnership has been ensured in all areas. Georgia is also represented as a close partner in all projects initiated and mainly participated by Azerbaijan.

On the one hand, Armenia sees it against its own interests for Azerbaijan to have a say in the Caucasus and the world, to become a leader in the region. On the other hand, it lacks mechanisms for having influence on Georgia. For these reasons, Armenian actors in Armenia and around the world, including those living in the region, have been trying to find other ways to disrupt Azerbaijani-Georgian relations since the restoration of the independence of the South Caucasus states after the collapse of the USSR.

The crimes committed against Azerbaijanis living in Georgia in the early 1990s not only oppressed them, but also served this purpose. During the first few months of 1990, several terrorist acts were committed against the Azerbaijani population of the Marneuli region. On March 10, a resident of Sadahli village was abducted and taken to Armenia. In April, a resident of the village of Gasimli was killed. On August 3, a resident of Arikhli village was killed. On August 11, 1993, an explosion occurred at the central collective farm market in Marneuli. As a result of the explosion, two people killed and more than 20 were injured.⁵ In the same year, two residents of the village of Kapanakchi were taken as hostages taken to Armenia. The property of civilians was looted, cars were stolen and burned. These crimes were perpetrated by Armenians and Georgianized Armenians. These events served as a catalyst for the breakdown

4 Ərəstü Həbibbəyli, "Ermənilər Qafqazda daha bir separatist bölgə yaradır. Gürcüstanın ərazi bütövlüyü təhlükədə - Araştırma", *Strateq.az*, last modified December 16, 2017, <https://strateq.az/manshet/220283/erm%C9%99nil%C9%99r-qafqazda-daha-bir-separatist-bolge%C9%99-yaradir.html>

5 Şahbaz Şamioğlu, *Borçalıda etnik proseslər və millətlərarası münasibətlər: XIX-XX əsrlər* (Bakı: Azərbaycan, 1997), 154.

of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. However, the relative improvement in the public security situation in Georgia with the change of government and the consistent steps taken to improve relations with Georgia after the election of Heydar Aliyev as President of Azerbaijan have prevented the realization of the intentions by Armenian groups.

Armenia's Attempts to Obstruct Regional Projects Organized by Azerbaijan and Georgia

With the flourishing of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations after the signing of the 1994 Contract of the Century, Azerbaijan embarked on a path of rapid development, bringing its natural resources to the world market. This contract, which ensured the economic independence of Azerbaijan, was also very important in terms of establishing mutually beneficial cooperation with countries with participant and transit potential. However, Armenia -like its patron Russia- did not shy away from seeking ways to prevent the signing of the contract. At that time, the Armenian National and Strategic Research Center held a round table on the Contract of the Century. The speech of the head of the economic center "Armat", Edward Agajanov, attracted special attention. The essence of his speech was that the signing of the contract should not be allowed, and the Armenian ruling circles and all political parties should be mobilized and work to prevent the signing of the contract in the following direction.

This was done by firstly informing the contract participants that Azerbaijan's oil reserves were overstated; secondly, by disseminating information about the tense internal socio-political situation in Azerbaijan and the struggle for power in accordance with civil rules; thirdly, by creating public opinion that this project was unprofitable because oil was around \$ 18-20 per barrel; fourthly, by ensuring more active and flexible activity of the Armenian Diaspora in this field -by establishing contacts with foreign companies included in the Contract of the Century and persuading them to abandon this agreement at any cost, even if necessary, through pressure, to convince them that they would fail economically. Speaking at the rostrum, Alvard Barkhudyan, in his rather absurd speech, said that at the beginning of the century, 40% of Baku's oil belonged to Armenian millionaires Mantashov, Ter-Gugasyan, Lalayan, Gulbekyan, and others. Accordingly, their heirs allegedly had shares in Baku oil and thus should also benefit from this oil. It was argued that Baku oil was their private property and according to international law, the Contract of the Century could not be signed without the consent of the Armenians.⁶

6 "Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin - Prezident Kitabxanası Əsrin müqaviləsi, III fəsil, 'Azərbaycan neftinin dünya bazarlarına nəqli' - 'Əsrin müqaviləsi' kontraktının imzalanması Heydər Əliyev diplomatiyasının qələbəsi idi", *Preslib.az*, accessed December 3, 2020, s. 162, <http://files.preslib.az/site/10il/gl3.pdf>

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An extensive smear campaign was launched in the media on this issue. Igor Muradyan, a correspondent for the *Novosti Armenii* (Armenian News) newspaper, noted in an article that H. Aliyev had decided the fate of both himself and Azerbaijan by signing the Contract of the Century. According to the author, the agreement did not take into account the interests of the Russians, that Russia would therefore increase pressure on Azerbaijan and the Karabakh war would flare up again. The Armenian lobby did not lag behind its compatriots, trying to create a negative public opinion by acting as a protagonist in the campaign against Azerbaijan. A collaborator of the Armenian Diaspora, Caroline Anne Cox (Baroness Cox, member of the British House of Lords), addressed the British Parliament demanding that British Petroleum (BP) suspend all economic relations with Azerbaijan and tried to create a negative image of Azerbaijan by substantiating the claims of the Armenians. Analyzing the above-mentioned facts and keeping in mind the importance of the Contract of the Century, we can conclude that Armenia and pro-Armenian actors tried by all means to hinder the development of Azerbaijan, its economic independence, and beneficial cooperation with world powers, including neighboring countries.

From time to time, Armenia takes steps aimed at violating the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. It is known that Azerbaijan and Georgia successfully cooperate in a number of international and regional projects. One of such regional projects is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway. From the first day of the project's planning, Armenia began to take different positions, trying to take advantage of every situation.

First of all, Armenia tried to spread information claiming that the realization of the railway line was impossible. In those days, the media of Russia and Armenia published some information that the Georgian Dream coalition, which had just come to power in Georgia, did not support the BTK railway project. At the same time, it was claimed that the relevant transport line was inefficient and posed risks to Georgia's economic infrastructure. These unrealistic views were intended to debunk the project. However, when it was clarified that Azerbaijan would not allow the debunking of the project, Armenia moved to expand relations with Georgia. Thus, during the meeting of the then Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan with his Georgian counterpart, who visited Georgia in December 2017, the possibility of opening the Abkhazian railway was noted.⁷

It is worth to remind that this railway line connects Russia and Armenia, passing through the separatist region of Georgia, Abkhazia. The railway

7 "Gürcüstan Azərbaycanla Ermənistan Arasında Balans Saxlaya Bilərmimi?", *Kafkassam*, December 28, 2017, <https://kafkassam.com/gurcistan-az%C9%99rbaycanla-erm%C9%99nistan-arasinda-balans-saxlaya-bil%C9%99rmi.html>

through Abkhazia was suspended in 1991-1993 because of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.⁸

The Armenian government has been requesting for several years now from the Georgian government to open the railway, because this railway will create a direct transport link between Armenia and Russia and break the transport blockade. Thus, it will be possible to transport military cargo from Russia to Armenia by rail.

Armenia is also trying to open this road to save its economy, which is in a difficult situation after the opening of the BTK railway. One of the main goals is to undermine the Azerbaijan-Georgia strategic partnership. However, this alternative is neither economically nor politically viable for Georgia, whose territorial integrity has been violated. Under these conditions, Georgia's move -the opening of the Abkhazian railway- would be a political suicide for official Tbilisi. Georgia's consent to the opening of the Abkhazian railway would be one of the biggest threats to the country's integrity, which means the establishment of official relations with separatist Abkhazia. This means that Georgia would accept the so-called Abkhaz state.

It is no secret that the main interested side in the opening of the Abkhazian road is Armenia. For this reason, the Armenian media, supporting the country's leadership, has already spread information that the BTK project is useless and exaggerates the importance of the Abkhazian project. It was not accidental that Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement coincided with an article published by the Armenian *Lragir* newspaper. Armenia was trying to change public opinion in its favor. The *Lragir* newspaper claimed that the South Caucasus region was in a state of disrepair in terms of railway transport, which was inadequate to the region's transport potential. He also noted that the West was not satisfied with the fact that transport in the region passes only through Azerbaijan and Turkey. Although the West did not prevent this, it did not give its full consent. However, according to the newspaper, an alternative route here could be the Abkhazian railway, which can connect Russia with Georgia, Iran, the Black Sea, the Gulf of Basra, and even the Indian Ocean. It was noted that the advantage of the Abkhazian railway is not to start from scratch, but to modernize the old road, and the implementation of this project may result in the passage of the main artery of the Caucasus through Armenia.⁹

As a result, first, the Georgian government would be questioning the territorial integrity of its country. Second, it would amount to considering the separatist

8 "Gürcüstan Ermənistanla Ruisyanı birləşdirən Abxaziya dəmiryolunu açır", *Kafkassam*, November 20, 2017, <https://kafkassam.com/gurcistan-erm%C9%99nistanla-ruisyani-birl%C9%99sdir%C9%99n-abxaziya-d%C9%99miryolunu-acir.html>

9 "Azərbaycan-Gürcüstan əlaqələri strateji xarakter daşıyır", *Ses Qazeti*, December 25, 2012, <https://sesqazeti.az/news/analytics/326906.html>

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Abkhazia as an independent entity, thereby creating conditions for international recognition of Abkhazia. Third, in the face of Russian pressure, it would call into question the sovereignty and independence of its government. Fourth, despite so much support from Azerbaijan, Georgia would be taking steps against Azerbaijan. Fifth, it would create conditions for Russia to arm Armenia, which indirectly plays a role in the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia.

Over the past 20 years, the Azerbaijani state has invested billions of dollars in the Georgian economy. For the implementation of the BTK project alone, Georgia has been gradually allocated about 800 million dollars in soft loans.¹⁰ In return for all this, Georgia's pro-Armenian and pro-Russian steps, in fact, do not serve the national interests of Georgia but create a certain incentive for new threats and pressures on this country. In fact, the current security and development of Georgia depend on Europe, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. Therefore, attempts to get too close to Russia and Armenia may displease and alienate Azerbaijan and Turkey from this country. This is Armenia's dream scenario for Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

After a series of agreed global projects to transport Azerbaijan's natural resources to the world market, Armenia began to look for a way to exist in the region, on the one hand, and to overshadow the multifaceted relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, on the other. The export of Azerbaijani hydrocarbon resources through Georgia has led Armenia to dream of becoming a transit country. Thus, Armenia began to draw up plans for the transportation of Iranian natural gas through its territory, first to Georgia and then to European countries.

Although the 120 million dollars natural gas pipeline project was planned in the early 1990s, it was not completed on time due to technical and financial problems.¹¹ Later, this project was implemented with the financial support of the European Union, which has a political interest in solving Armenia's energy problems. Thus, the European Union provided 30 million euros to Armenia in 2001 to prepare a technical and legal project for the construction of the Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline. Since 2007, Iranian gas has been exported to Armenia.¹² The pipeline, with a capacity of 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, is 141 km long. 100 km of the pipeline passes through Iran and 41 km through Armenia.¹³

10 "Azərbaycan-Gürcüstan əlaqələri strateji xarakter daşıyır".

11 Hatem Cabbarlı, "Ermenistan'ın İran Politikası", *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Uluslararası Avrasya Strateji Dergisi* 10, no. 10: 158, https://arastirmax.com/tr/system/files/dergiler/169983/makaleler/1/1/arastrmx_169983_1_pp_147-174.pdf

12 Vüsal Qasımlı, Zaur Şiriyev & Zülfüyyə Vəliyeva, *İran-Ermenistan münasibətləri: geosiyasi reallıq, versus, siyasi iddialar* (Bakı, 2011), s. 17.

13 Qasımlı və digərləri, *İran-Ermenistan münasibətləri...*, s. 15.

In the following years, Armenia and Iran began to plan to extend the natural gas pipeline through Armenia and Georgia to the Black Sea coast, from where it would be laid on the seabed to transport natural gas to Ukraine and eventually to Europe. Armenia tried to involve Georgia in the project to prove the profitability of it. In this regard, Armenia stressed that cooperation with Iran is in the interests of the region and that Georgia could also participate in energy projects. When this project was discussed, Russia stated its opposition. Because, if the Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline stretches to Ukraine, both Armenia will be free from energy dependence on Russia, and an alternative source of Russian natural gas will appear in Europe, which could result in price fluctuations against Russia in the international market. A small change in the price of natural gas could cost Russia millions of dollars. From Russia's point of view, this is undesirable.

Armenian President's hasty visit to Georgia in 2015 (Serzh Sargsyan was president at the time) after Georgia announced that it would solve its energy problem with alternative sources brought the issue of Iranian natural gas transportation to Georgia via Armenia back on the agenda of the regional media. However, this attempt by Armenia also failed.

Armenia made its next move on this issue in 2019. On February 20, 2019, the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Consultative Council was held in Baku.¹⁴ The meeting was attended by the heads of the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, energy ministers of the United Kingdom, the United States, Turkey, Italy, Georgia, and other European countries. In response, the Armenian Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources said in a statement that official Yerevan is ready to discuss the export of Iranian gas from Armenia to Georgia and from there to Europe via the Black Sea. Following this, the media reported that on February 27, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan paid an official visit to Iran. It seems that Armenia, which is excluded from all international economic projects in the region, is trying to get out of its isolation again.

It is no secret that the existing natural gas pipeline between Iran and Armenia cannot be extended to Georgia due to its small diameter. The construction of a new natural gas pipeline from Iran through Armenia to Georgia is very expensive. Georgia's statements about alternative energy sources are unacceptable to the Azerbaijani state. Achieving economic development with the support of Azerbaijan and Turkey, Georgia pursues a policy that threatens the overall security of the region. Russia or Iran are unlikely to sell cheaper natural gas than Azerbaijan to Georgia. Thus, Russia sells gas to Armenia, a

14 "İlham Əliyev Cənub Qaz Dəhlizi Məşvərət Şurası çərçivəsində keçirilən nazirlərin beşinci toplantısında iştirak edib", *President.az*, February 20, 2019, <https://president.az/articles/31920>

strategic ally in the region, for 165 dollars per thousand cubic meters. It is unlikely that Russia or Iran (via a non-existent pipeline) will sell natural gas to Georgia for 55-65 dollars. This can only damage the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

Armenian Provocations Against Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia Trilateral Cooperation

Turkey is the state with which Azerbaijan and Georgia have established the closest neighborly relations and strategic partnership in the region. Cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia ensures stability, security, and sustainable development in the region. Turkey is a regional country that unequivocally supports Azerbaijan's regional policy in the South Caucasus and all its geopolitical, geo-economics, and military-geostrategic initiatives. This is not accidental. Despite regional pressures, the idea of exporting the rich oil and gas products of the Caspian Basin to world markets through Turkey is based on the Azerbaijani state. This strategic choice has increased Turkey's geopolitical, geo-economic role and prestige in Eurasia and the world as an energy and transport hub. As Azerbaijan considers Turkey its most reliable and strategic partner in the region, it has decided to implement all its energy, transport, and other relations with the West through this country.

The implementation of oil and gas pipeline projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), the future dividends of new transnational gas pipelines such as TANAP, TAP, the rich gas reserves to be produced under Shah Deniz 2 phase, etc. will not only meet Turkey's energy needs but also is of great importance in terms of strengthening the country's geopolitical position in the region. In addition, the BTK railway, TRACECA and other transport and communication arteries make Turkey the center of East-West relations. Taking advantage of the favorable situation created by Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, Turkey was able to establish a regional strategic partnership with Georgia. In particular, Turkey is actively involved in the process of bringing the Georgian military system in line with NATO standards within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace.¹⁵

Armenia is seriously concerned about this beneficial trilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The trilateral joint military exercises of these countries in 2019 caused sensation in the Armenian media. Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Georgian servicemen took part in the Eternity-2019

15 Mete Taşkın, *Bağımsızlığından Sonra Gürcistan Türkiye İlişkileri*, yüksek lisans tez çalışması (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 2016).
<https://acikerisim.deu.edu.tr/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12397/6721/186131.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

military exercises organized to ensure the security of the BTC oil pipeline, the BTE gas pipeline, and the BTK railway.¹⁶ Tasks related to the protection of economic projects were performed during the joint training. But Armenia is more concerned about Georgia's participation in the exercises. The Armenian media reported that Tbilisi's rapprochement with Baku and Ankara was a matter of serious concern in Yerevan, given the hostile attitude of Azerbaijan and Turkey towards Armenia, which was a natural reaction.¹⁷ Former Georgian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, senior researcher at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies Georgi Badridze commented on the issue:

“Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey are allies. There are a number of joint projects. During the military exercises, tasks were performed to ensure the security of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. It is inappropriate for this to provoke another nervous reaction in Yerevan. I would like to remind my Armenian neighbors that Armenia has close economic and military ties with our northern neighbor. I do not remember Georgia giving any instructions to Armenia on who to join the alliance with. Therefore, Georgia will further develop its strategic relations with its neighbors against the background of its economic and political interests.”¹⁸

Activities of Armenian Organizations and Media in Georgia

A letter on behalf of the Armenian people was published in the Georgian newspaper *Akhali Taoba* (New Generation). The letter stated that the Georgians, together with the Azerbaijanis, were trying to oust the Armenians from the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli regions.¹⁹ The letter also called on the Armenian government to help prevent this process. Van Bayburtyan, an adviser to then-Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, called the letter unfounded and said it was written by the Javakh National Movement organization. According to the adviser, such a step was expected because the organization was funded by Russia. It should be noted that Bayburtyan was one of the propagandists of Armenian separatism in Samtskhe-Javakheti during Eduard Shevardnadze's rule. After the revolution in Georgia, the views of this

16 Ədalət Verdiyev, “Azərbaycanda 3 Ölkənin İştirakı ilə 3 Strateji Təlim: Ermənistanın Səfərbərlik Elan Etməsi Əbəs Yərə Deyil - Hərbi Ekspert”, *Ordu.az*, September 30, 2019, <https://ordu.az/az/news/155086/azerbaycanda-3-olkenin-istiraki-ile-3-strateji-telim-ermenistanin-seferberlik-elan-etmesi-ebes-yere-deyil-herbi-ekspert>

17 “Georgi Badridze: Gürcüstan Ermənistanına göstəriş vermir, Yerevan da fikrini özünə saxlasın”, *Aqreqator.az*, September 17, 2019, <https://aqreqator.az/az/siyaset/296055>

18 “Georgi Badridze: Gürcüstan Ermənistanına göstəriş vermir, Yerevan da fikrini özünə saxlasın”.

19 Nəsimə Mirzəyeva, “Gürcüstanda fəaliyyət göstərən erməni təşkilatları”, *Modern.az*, September 26, 2017, <https://modern.az/az/news/144363>

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person, who began to serve as a consultant, also changed. Bayburtyan was the editor-in-chief of the Georgian newspaper *Vrastan* for ten years, and in his articles, he also condemned the ideas of Armenian activists in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

On the other hand, there is a systematic and planned increase in anti-Azerbaijani and anti-Turkish slogans in the Georgian media. This tension in Georgian-Azerbaijani relations, on the one hand, serves to divert public attention from the real problems of the country, and on the other hand, to damage the existing good relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan.

From time to time, articles in this line are published in the media. For example, on April 17, 2017, the website of the Armenian Union in Georgia posted an article titled “Why the Georgian government should recognize the genocide of the Armenian people.” The article said that the main issue stems from moral values; the Georgian state, which considers itself part of European civilization, must recognize the massacre as a crime against all humanity; that for 26 years, the Georgian elite has been justifying its silence under the pretext of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the recognition of the “Armenian genocide” in Georgia has become a matter of national security; and that the Armenians had only one way out – they must clarify with the country’s ruling circles that these circles are trying to protect Georgia’s national interests, and not the interests of any other states.²⁰

This organization is engaged in continuous propaganda against Turks and Azerbaijanis in Georgia. On every anniversary of the so-called Armenian genocide, the activities of this organization become more active. Thus, every year on the anniversary of the claimed genocide, this union carries out a protest in front of the Turkish embassy.

Not only members of this organization, but most Armenians living in Georgia annually organize protests on April 23-24 in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region and the capital Tbilisi on the anniversary of the claimed genocide.²¹ The “flag” of the occupying Armenian regime in Nagorno-Karabakh (“Nagorno-Karabakh Republic-NKR/Artsakh”) created in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is also waved during the protests. Georgian authorities do not take any measures to prevent these displays of separatism of local Armenians and this provocation against Azerbaijan. In Georgia, which suffers from the occupation and recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the waving of the “flag” of the occupying Armenian regime must be stopped immediately and such cases must not be allowed to happen again.

20 Mirzəyeva, “Gürcüstanda fəaliyyət göstərən erməni təşkilatları”.

21 “Gürcüstan erməniləri Azərbaycanca qarşı təxribata əl atıblar”, *Report.az*, April 24, 2019, <https://report.az/region-xeberleri/gurcistan-ermenileri-azerbaycana-qarsi-texribata-el-atiblar/>

From time to time, in general, provocations and targeted information are spread by citizens of Armenian origin or their organizations and associations in Georgia to disrupt the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

Attempts by Armenians Living in Georgia to Disrupt Relations

On January 20, 2019, a monument to Mikhail Avagyan, who took an active part in the operations in Nagorno-Karabakh, was inaugurated by the occupying Armenian militants in the village of Bugashen, Akhalkalaki region of Georgia.²² Avagyan, who was killed during the Karabakh war, was called the “national hero” of the Armenian people in Armenia and the predominantly Armenian-populated southern regions of Georgia. Armenian media reported that Avagyan took part in military operations in Horadiz, Khojaly, Hadrut, and Füzuli regions after the start of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and knew the Azerbaijani language (this was undoubtedly used in reconnaissance operations). His repeated involvement in the killing of unarmed civilians, as well as his involvement in the executions of the Khojaly massacre (which Azerbaijanis consider to constitute a genocide), has been confirmed. It is no coincidence that a monument to the Armenian terrorist was unveiled on the anniversary of the tragic events of January 20, 1990 in Baku. The participation of Georgian officials in this opening together with the Armenian deputies is undoubtedly a blow to the long-standing Georgian-Azerbaijani friendship.

Avagyan and his Armenian colleagues directly or indirectly participated in the expulsion, killing, and torture of thousands of Georgians. To this day, the population is unable to return to their native lands. Despite all this, a monument to such a terrorist has been erected in Georgia. This is a pre-planned action, deliberately held on the anniversary of the saddest historical day of Azerbaijan and aimed at seriously damaging the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

The erection of the monument is very thought-provoking in the context of Pashinyan’s visit to Georgia after the legitimization of his government and his meeting with the then Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze in Bolnisi, the historical place of Azerbaijanis. Let us pay attention to the opinion of the Georgian political scientist, historian Guram Marxulia about the erection of a statue to the terrorist:

“I could not believe it when I heard that a bust would be erected in Georgia, in my homeland, for a man who fought shoulder to shoulder with the separatists. Unfortunately, the information was confirmed. I am

22 Ədalət Verdiyev, “Erməni separatçının abidəsi Gürcüstana nə verə bilər? – Ekspert”, *Ordu.az*, January 28, 2019, <https://ordu.az/az/news/146368/ermeni-seperatcinin-abidesi-gurcustana-ne-vere-biler-%E2%80%93-ekspert->

terribly outraged that such an incident took place in Georgia. After all, we, like our Azerbaijani brothers, are living witnesses of what ethnic separatism means. The monument in Akhalkalaki must be demolished immediately, and those who pursue this policy must immediately apologize to the Georgian and Azerbaijani peoples. Although the decision to erect a bust of Avagyan was made at the local level, the central government could not be unaware of it. The Georgian government must take this issue seriously. No step should be taken that would undermine the friendship, brotherhood and strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia. It should be noted that Armenians have erected a monument to someone in Javakheti before. None of these have served the Georgian people or the Georgian government. Avagyan even fought against a people close to us, contrary to the national interests of the Georgian state. Why should a monument be erected to such a person in Georgia? I do not understand that. I think that such provocative steps should be prevented. The bureaucracy exists for this. If the construction of the monument has not been agreed with the authorities, it means that official Tbilisi no longer controls the situation in the Akhalkalaki region. How would the erection of a monument to the separatist who fought against the territorial integrity of Georgia in Azerbaijan be received in Georgia?”²³

Another trace of Armenian provocation was observed on the Azerbaijani-Georgian border. On July 14, 2019, an incident took place between Azerbaijani border guards and Georgians in the Keshikchidag cave complex.²⁴ According to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, a group from Georgia violated the state border in the direction of Azerbaijan, attacked and insulted the border guard service near the Keshikchidag Temple Complex.

“We regret that such actions are completely contrary to the spirit of the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia, and we consider it a provocation to create a confrontation between the two countries,” the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said in a statement.”²⁵

After the incident, Deputy Chief of Border Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia Teymuraz Kupatadze made a statement about the incident. According to him, the locals came to the area where the Georgian and

23 “Quram Marxuliya: Qarabağ müharibəsində iştirak etmiş erməni terrorçuya Gürcüstanda büst qoyulması xalqlarımıza qarşı təxribatdır”, *Azertag.az*, January 25, 2019, https://azertag.az/xeber/Quram_Marxuliya_Qarabag_muharibesinde_istirak_etmis_ermeni_terrorchuya_Gurcustanda_bust_qoyulmasi_xalqlarimiza_qarsi_texribatdir-1238197

24 “DSX Keşikçidağla bağlı bəyanat yayıb”, *Gulustan.info*, July 15, 2019, <https://gulustan.info/2019/07/15/dsx-kesikcidagla-bagli-b%C9%99yanat-yayib>

25 “Ermənilər Gürcüstan-Azərbaycan münasibətlərinin pozulmasında maraqlıdırlar - Təhlil”, *Aqreqator.az*, July 22, 2019, <https://aqreqator.az/az/siyaset/193859>

Azerbaijani border guards were, insulted them and an incident occurred. This was stated on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “As a result, the relevant Georgian authorities immediately rectified the incident and began to study the details of the incident.”

To clarify the roots of the Keshikchidag incident, if we look at history, we can see that the height where this temple complex is located was the territory of Azerbaijan during the Soviet era. After the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan and Georgia began delimitation and demarcation of their 480-kilometer border. For this purpose, a commission on delimitation and demarcation of state borders was established in both republics. So far, these commissions have met 11 times. In recent years, work has been carried out with the participation of experts on a distance of 168 kilometers.²⁶

It should be noted that on the eve of Easter in 2019, Georgian border guards officially appealed to their Azerbaijani counterparts to facilitate the passage to the Keshikchidag Temple Complex in Azerbaijan, and they received a positive response in accordance with the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. The following week, the Azerbaijani side responded to the appeal with understanding. This ancient religious site has not been so important for Georgians for many years. Strange as it may seem, the temple suddenly received increasing attention, the number of visitors increased, and it became a point of interest for the clergy. Against the background of this activation, certain people appeared and tried to create a confrontation. As a result, religious and ethnic confrontation between the two peoples was created. It is not convincing that all this was accidental.

The best way to create discord between two peoples of different religions is to dress the game around the temple character, which Azerbaijanis call Keshikchidag and Georgians call David Garechi. The high level of relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia helps in the prevention of serious dissatisfactions among ordinary citizens. The religious-ethnic direction can be considered an ideal plan for the creation of a confrontation. Azerbaijani-Georgian relations could have been radically damaged if Azerbaijani soldiers used weapons to drive away those who attacked them, resulting in injury or death. Also, in the eyes of the world, Azerbaijan could have been branded as a radical and barbaric Muslim country that takes up arms against unarmed Christians. The coolness and vigilance of the Azerbaijani soldier, the foresight of the country's leadership prevented the provocation that could have led to great problems in the future, hindered the successful implementation of the plan dressed in religious character. Looking at the sequence of events, it is clear

26 “No:138/19, Azərbaycan və Gürcüstan Xarici İşlər nazirlərinin müavinləri arasında baş tutmuş görüş ilə bağlı mətbuat üçün məlumat”, *MFA.gov.az*, May 14, 2019, <https://mfa.gov.az/az/news/6167/no13819-azerbaycan-ve-gurcistan-xarici-isler-nazirlerinin-muavinleri-arasinda-bas-tutmus-gorus-ile-bagli-metbuat-ucun-melumat>

that the multifaceted relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia are the target of certain actors, and this is one of the provocative acts committed against the two republics.

“It should be noted that, in general, the development of this type of provocation, which completely contradicts the spirit of strategic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia in recent months, raises certain questions.” Views such as this are already being voiced at the level of experts on both sides. It seems that the friendly relations and strategic partnership between the two neighboring countries are of serious concern to some, and there are actors trying to pit these countries and their peoples against each other. There are also certain opinions about the identity of these actors in the discussions. Undoubtedly, the latest provocation against the Azerbaijani border guards is aimed at a direct blow to relations between the two countries and therefore, the relevant authorities of both countries should conduct a serious investigation, identify the actors that perpetrated this provocation and take serious measures against them. The Georgian ambassador to Azerbaijan was invited to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry and asked to comment on the issue. The Georgian Foreign Ministry also condemned the incident and promised to conduct a serious investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice. Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Public and Political Issues Ali Hasanov openly stated the official position of Azerbaijan on this issue and called on the society fall into provocations. This reaction significantly reduced the tension and was of exceptional importance for everyone to understand the essence of the issue.

It should be noted that not only the Georgian-Azerbaijani border has not been delimited and demarcated. The Georgian-Armenian border has also not been delimited or demarcated. The Georgian-Azerbaijani border is perhaps the most stable and secure border in the region and the world. The non-delimitation of the Georgian-Armenian border is a problem, since in recent years, about 10 nationally Azerbaijani citizens of the Republic of Georgia have been arrested for border violations, and have been detained in Armenia for a long time. Official Tbilisi has not taken the necessary steps to protect its Azerbaijani citizens. It is noteworthy that the President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili did not raise the issue of delimitation of the Armenian-Georgian border, while making three statements of concern about the delimitation and demarcation of the Azerbaijani-Georgian border. We can substantiate that the address of the Georgian president’s concern is wrong:

First, Azerbaijan and Georgia have signed an agreement on mutual security in several variants, cooperating in the Azerbaijan-Georgia, Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia format. There is no security agreement between Armenia and Georgia. Even Armenia rejected Georgia’s offer in this regard.

Secondly, Georgia offered an agreement not to attack each other, but Armenia refused it.

Third, Armenia has insinuated that it does not recognize Georgia's territorial integrity and has never supported Georgia's position in the UN and other international organizations.

Fourth, Armenians living in the United States are raising money for the development of the Javakheti region and engaging in activities that could threaten Georgia's territorial integrity.

The point is that the border issue with Armenia is more dangerous for Georgia. In the years since the collapse of the USSR, Armenian border guards have been illegally "sliding" the Georgian-Armenian border into Georgia. In one area, the border was drawn more than 400 meters north, and as a result, the Georgian monastery of Khujabi, which Georgian clergy and pilgrims could not visit, came under Armenian control. Elsewhere, border sliding occurs on a similar scale. As a result, the entire Georgian-Armenian border from Turkey to Azerbaijan was illegally "moved" to the north. The Armenian government illegally "owns" tens of square kilometers of Georgian territory. This is not only harmful to the population of Georgia and the border areas, but can also be a threat to peace and security. Armenian border guards are also illegally "sliding" the territories adjacent to the Georgian-Turkish and Georgian-Azerbaijani borders. As a result, the "crossing" border areas of these territories in Georgia have now been arbitrarily pulled forward by Armenia. In addition, at the junction of the Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani borders, the Armenian side illegally entered military units to the territory of Georgia. In other words, Armenia, as an aggressor, not only moved the border arbitrarily, but also illegally deployed troops there. And in fact, it has begun to provoke military operations in Georgia. The illegal occupation of the territories of Georgia by Armenia could continue until the Azerbaijani border guards capture a number of strategic heights on the border with Armenia in the Gazakh region. As a result, Armenian troops illegally occupying Georgian territories were "squeezed" between the new positions of Azerbaijani border guards and the unoccupied territories of Georgia. Thereby, the Armenian occupiers were forced to partially clear the Georgian lands adjacent to the border junction.

Pro-Armenian propagandists tried to take dividends from this failure, as well as to worsen relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan. For example, a provocative article was posted on the website *PanArmenian.net* by a nationalist Armenian publication: "Bellingcat: Azerbaijan is trying to enter the territory of Georgia." The article, cited by propagandists in a British publication, was clearly written by special order. "Azerbaijan has strengthened its position on

the new heights of Mount Babaker in the Georgian part” *Bellingcat* said in a study.

Babaker Mountain is a point where the state borders of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan meet. The reality is that when Azerbaijani border guards seized strategic heights on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border on August 16, 2019, and Armenian troops on the slopes of Mount Babaker, facing Georgia, left Georgia as soon as they were faced with the incoming Azerbaijani army.²⁷ Azerbaijani border guards have never violated Georgia’s internationally recognized borders and have never entered Georgia. However, the disinformation sources operated by Armenian actors are trying to foster indignation with provocative articles in foreign media.

The provocations committed by the Armenians within the borders of Georgia can reach the level of vandalism. Speaking at the plenary session of the 16th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in Sochi, Russia, on October 3, 2019, President Ilham Aliyev spoke about the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, drew attention to the consequences of Armenia’s policy of aggression, emphasizing that four UN Security Council resolutions on the settlement of the conflict have not been implemented for 25 years. I. Aliyev stressed that the statement of the Armenian Prime Minister N. Pashinyan that “Karabakh is part of Armenia, period” was false: “Karabakh is a historical, ancient land of Azerbaijan. Thus, Karabakh is Azerbaijan, exclamation mark.” This speech caused anger amongst nationalist Armenian groups around the world and resulted in vandalism; after the speech of I. Aliyev, the expression “Karabakh is Armenia, period” was written in four different languages on the statue of the late President Heydar Aliyev in Tbilisi.²⁸ While vandalism against a statute might seem trivial to an outside observer, the vandalism of a political figure so revered by Azerbaijanis in a neighboring country’s capital city (a country that in general enjoys close relations with Azerbaijan) should be treated seriously.

The head of the Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Leyla Abdullayeva commented on this provocation against the monument to H. Aliyev:

“The Ambassador of our country to Georgia immediately met with the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia in connection with the provocation committed by a group of Armenians against the monument

27 “Gürcü torpaqlarını ələ keçirən Ermənistan separatizmi Gürcüstana ötürür”, *Ordu.az*, November 7, 2019, <https://ordu.az/az/news/156872/gurcu-torpaqlarini-ele-keciren-ermenistan-separatizmi-gurcustana-oturur>

28 “Gürcüstanda Ümummillî lider Heydər Əliyevin heykəlinə erməni təxribatı”, *Moderator.az*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.moderator.az/news/294312.html>

to the National Leader erected in the park named after Heydar Aliyev in Tbilisi, Georgia and the issue of investigating the perpetrators of provocations and severely punishing them has been raised before the relevant authorities. At present, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs is taking appropriate measures in this direction.”

This act of vandalism foreshadowed the deterioration of relations between the two countries.²⁹

The next attempt at disrupting Azerbaijan-Georgia relations failed at a meeting of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. At the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs on February 13, 2018 in Tbilisi, a report on Georgia’s economic development and investment opportunities was heard. At the meeting, Georgian Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Georgi Cherkeshishvili said that Azerbaijan ranks first among the countries investing in the country.³⁰

This speech of the Deputy Minister was met with disdain by the Armenian deputies, who sought to spread false information about Azerbaijan, as well as to damage the Azerbaijani-Georgian friendly relations. Member of the Azerbaijani delegation, co-chair of the Committee on Social Affairs of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Malahat Ibrahimgizi said that the statement of the Armenian deputies was not true. She stated that Azerbaijan has adopted very progressive laws to ensure democracy and freedom of speech, the highest level of protection of human rights, the fight against corruption: “This is confirmed by international organizations. Azerbaijan and Georgia are implementing very important projects in the region, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines. These projects are also important for the development and security of Europe.”³¹

M. Ibrahimgizi also touched upon Armenia’s military aggression against Azerbaijan:

“Unfortunately, the Armenian delegation, which lives in ignorance, hunger and poverty, and serves the interests of other countries, cannot see these realities. It is well known that Armenia is an aggressor and a state that supports terrorism. The terrorist attack in Yerevan in 1999 and

29 “Ümummilli lider Heydər Əliyevin heykəlinə erməni təxribatı - XİN-dən açıqlama”, *Eurasia Diary*, October 23, 2019, <https://ednews.net/az/news/politics/396645-umummilli-lider-heyder-eliyevin-heykeline-ermeni-texribati>

30 Xətayi Əzizov, “Avronest PA-da erməni təxribatının qarşısı alınıb”, *Azertag.az*, February 13, 2018, https://azertag.az/xeber/Avronest_PA_da_ermeni_texribatinin_qarsisi_alinib-1136443

31 Əzizov, “Avronest PA-da erməni təxribatının qarşısı alınıb”.

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the fact that it did not liberate Azerbaijani lands prove this once again. The Armenian delegation is trying to cover it up, divert the attention of the international community from its problems, and at the same time strike a blow at the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. I think this is unacceptable.”

M. Ibrahimgizi’s speech was positively assessed by the participants of the meeting, while Armenian deputies refused to deliver a second speech.

The Karabakh Liberation Organization (KLO)³² said in a statement that it was seriously concerned about the possibility of certain Armenian individuals preparing to instigate a provocation against Azerbaijan in Georgia. It was noted that the provocation prepared in Georgia was led by Georgi Vanyan, an Armenian citizen and head of the Caucasus Peace Initiatives NGO: For a long time, he has been carrying out the provocations on behalf of the Armenian special services on the basis of a plan called the “Tekeli Process”. For this purpose, Vanyan bought a plot of land in the Marneuli region of Georgia, between the village of Takali and the checkpoint “Broken Bridge” (“Red Bridge”), and stated that he would create a “Friendship Market” in this area. He initially seized 4 hectares of land and is now trying to increase it to 100 hectares. This area is located between the village of Takali and the border checkpoint “Broken Bridge”, and is connected with Armenia. The construction of a highway from Armenia to this area has already begun. Anyone who has studied the history of actions of various Armenian groups in Georgia will be inclined to consider that the “friendly market” may be used as an excuse for provocation and threat against Azerbaijan under the name of the market. Armenian groups can commit provocations here at any time and block the access of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia to the “Broken Bridge”.³³

The statement regrets that some Azerbaijanis are being used to carry out such insidious plans: Georgi Vanyan and his gang have chosen the village of Takali, where Azerbaijanis live, as their home, and hold their meetings there. The KLO also said that the Azerbaijani law enforcement agencies should immediately and seriously investigate these facts and take effective measures to neutralize the provocations against Azerbaijan:

“The Azerbaijani side must take steps to draw the attention of the Georgian special services to this issue. Tekeli processes must be

32 The Karabakh Liberation Organization (KLO) is an Azerbaijani organization created in Baku, Azerbaijan on January 28, 2000, with the objective of liberating the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh. KLO represents cultural figures of Azerbaijan, former military soldiers, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

33 “Gürcüstanda Azərbaycanı qarşı təxribat hazırlanır”, *Teleqraf.com*, September 18, 2014, <https://teleqraf.com/news/gundem/22841.html>

prevented, the insidious intentions of the Armenians must not be allowed to materialize. Measures should be taken against those who leave Azerbaijan and take part in Takali events. The population of the village of Takali should not allow their names to be tarnished, and the tricks set up by the Armenians there should be stopped. Azerbaijan and Georgia must act together at the state and public levels, and prevent Armenian provocations in a timely manner.”³⁴

Provocations Committed by the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia

It is known that throughout history, the main ideological centers of the Armenians were the Armenian churches. Unlike many other religious institutions, Armenians churches have oftentimes been instrumentalized for political pursuits.

In November 2017, a provocation against Azerbaijan was organized in Tbilisi, Georgia. An exhibition entitled “Revival” consisting of works by seven young artists from the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” was opened at the Ayartun Center of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Tbilisi. The exhibition was supported by the Ministry of Diaspora of Armenia, Teyekan Central Foundation, and Shusha Museums. The official opening ceremony of the exhibition was attended by the pastor of the Armenian Church in Tbilisi Virab Kazaryan, an employee of the Armenian Embassy in Georgia, and representatives of the Armenian community.³⁵ The Azerbaijani Embassy in Georgia expressed its concern to the relevant government agencies. Historian Guram Marxulia strongly condemned this step and stressed that it was a provocation that damaged the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Meanwhile, Badri Natchkebia, director of the Georgian Center for Terrorism and Political Studies, a professor at Tbilisi State University and a political scientist, expressed concern over the opening of the exhibition:

“It is not right for Armenians to organize such an exhibition on behalf of an unrecognized so-called republic. We received information that an exhibition of Armenian artists will open. But to open an exhibition there on behalf of the so-called ‘Nagorno-Karabakh Republic’ does not fit into any ethics and political morality.”³⁶

34 “Gürcüstanda Azərbaycanca qarşı təxribat hazırlanır”.

35 “Gürcüstanda Azərbaycanca qarşı erməni təxribatı – Tiflisdə sərgi keçirirlər”, *Dosye.org*, November 28, 2017, <https://www.dosye.org/gurcustanda-az%C9%99rbaycana-qarsi-erm%C9%99ni-%C9%99xribati-tiflisd%C9%99-s%C9%99rgi-kecirirl%C9%99r/>

36 “Gürcüstanda Azərbaycanca qarşı erməni təxribatı – Tiflisdə sərgi keçirirlər”.

Conclusion

From the facts presented, it can be concluded that the actors working to disrupt the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations can be listed as follows:

- Representatives of the Armenian state and government,
- Embassy of Armenia in Georgia,
- Media of Armenia,
- Pro-Armenian media representatives abroad,
- Sources of information of Armenian origin operating in Georgia,
- Armenian organizations operating in Georgia,
- Armenian Diaspora organizations,
- Population of Armenian origin in Georgia,
- Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia,
- Pro-Armenian politicians and scientists living abroad.

The main directions of the actions by Armenian actors concerning Azerbaijani-Georgian relations can be listed as follows:

- Overshadowing the energy relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, or trying to attract Georgia's attention to alternative projects;
- Achieving the opening of the Abkhazian railway, looking for both an alternative to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and a way for Armenia to escape isolation;
- Controlling the creation of artificial agitation behind the scenes to ignite religious and ethnic conflict;
- Disseminating misinformation about the potential danger at the Azerbaijani-Georgian border;
- At multilateral meetings, using Georgian venues to try to create a negative image of Azerbaijan;
- Engaging in provocations against territorial integrity of Azerbaijan through Armenian organizations and the churches operating in Georgia;

- Carrying out propaganda against Azerbaijan through the media;
- Carrying out a smear campaign, presenting the Armenians in Georgia as a poor people, oppressed by Georgians and Azerbaijanis, etc.

It is clear that Armenian and related actors are trying to damage the Azerbaijani-Georgian relations in a multitude of ways. In this respect, it is important for both countries to maintain and develop relations. The Azerbaijan-Georgia strategic partnership is a guarantee of stability and economic development in the region. Azerbaijan is the driving force of Georgia's economic development. Georgia, in turn, is a particularly important partner for Azerbaijan as a transit country. The two countries are also closely linked by ancient historical ties. The development of both countries is directly related to the level of relations. The two countries are partners in all areas - political, economic, transport, humanitarian, cultural and others, and jointly implement major regional projects. The breakdown of relations will therefore cause significant losses for both countries. The winner from such a breakdown of relations will no doubt be the occupying Armenia. For these reasons, the current state of relations must be maintained, further developed, and provocations must be ignored and resolutely prevented.

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