

**THE ARMENIAN
DIASPORA IN RUSSIA:
THE SECOND
KARABAKH
WAR AND ITS
OUTCOMES**

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Introduction

According to preliminary data from the 2020 Russian Census, 147.2 million people live in the Russian Federation¹. This comprises about 200 ethnic groups, including both the country's indigenous peoples and representatives of the former Soviet republics. For example, Russia is home to the largest Armenian diaspora. Different sources estimate the number of Armenians living in Russia at 1.7-2.5 million. Most of them reside in Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai, as well as in Rostov Oblast. The concentration of the Armenian population is also high in Moscow and Saint Petersburg².

Armenian sources say that Armenians inhabited the territory of Kyivan Rus as early as in the 11th century³. However, Armenians came to live in Moscow by the end of the 16th century. The first records of Armenians living in St. Petersburg date back to 1710⁴. The main wave of migration of Armenians here falls on the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries⁵.

While there is a large number of Armenians in Russia, most of them are economic migrants, and many of the newly arrived Armenians do not join diaspora organizations at all. The main reason is the easy process of migration to Russia, the lack of a language barrier, and the lack of a visa regime. Even though the Russian language has not been actively used in Armenia in the past 30 years, immigrants easily adapt and learn it. Newly arrived Armenians often find their relatives who moved to Russia earlier, which also helps their adaptation.

Armenians move to Russia not only from Armenia, but also from Uzbekistan, Georgia and other former Soviet republics. Thus, the structure of the Armenian diaspora in Russia is not homogeneous and its distribution across the country is not very concentrated, although in some regions, such as Stavropol and Krasnodar, their number is significant.

Neither can all Armenians who come to Russia be considered part of

1 The 2020 Russian Census https://rosstat.gov.ru/vpn_popul

2 "The largest diasporas in Russia", 23.05.2022, <https://www.rbth.com/life-style/335055-largest-diasporas-russia>

3 "Armenians in the territory of the former Russian Empire", 10.04.2015, <http://barev.today/news/russia>

4 "Armenians in Saint Petersburg", <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1732786>

5 "Resettlement of Armenians to Transcaucasia in the 19th-20th centuries", <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/1325520>

the diaspora, since economic migration is of a temporary nature. Some of them eventually return to their homeland. Newly arrived Armenians, similarly to other immigrants, can be considered representatives of their diaspora only after 4 years of actual residence in the country⁶.

As for the attitude to Armenians in Russia, the main focus here is on language learning and social adaptation by representatives of the diaspora. For example, there are relatively few Armenian schools or schools with in-depth study of the Armenian language or Armenian cultural centers in Russia. There is no need for them, because immigrants learn the Russian language within a short period of time.

The Union of Armenians of Russia is the largest Armenian diaspora organization in Russia. It has 85 regional and 647 city offices across the country. According to the charter of the organization, its main goal is “to preserve the identity of the diaspora”, to support Armenia and to ensure the participation of Armenians in the development of Russia⁷. The organization has been active for more than 20 years, headed by Ara Abrahamyan. Despite the scale of the organization, Armenians themselves have a certain degree of mistrust towards the Union and its leadership. This is evidenced by the results of the 2021 parliamentary elections, in which Ara Abrahamyan ran in alliance with Tigran Urikhanyan from the Alliance party, getting only 0.95% of the votes. Nevertheless, representatives of the organization constantly speak out on the domestic situation in Armenia and the policies of the current government⁸. Armenian organizations such as the Assembly of Armenians, the Armenian National-Cultural Autonomy of Saint Petersburg, the Armenian community of Rostov Oblast, the Nairi Armenian National-Cultural Autonomy in Stavropol, the Sevan Armenian Society in Sochi, and so on, as well as some foundations: Tashir, headed by Samvel Karapetyan, Martakert Charitable Foundation in Rostov Oblast, Urartu Youth and Children Support Foundation, etc., are also active in Russia. There are offices of “branched out” Armenian organizations such as the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian Relief Society, etc.

6 “The Armenian diaspora in Russia—demographics, political status, and public opinion”, 22.06.2022, <https://kavkaz-uzel.eu/blogs/83781/posts/49967>

7 “Aims and key activities”, <https://www.sarinfo.org/about/Ideology/goals/>

8 “The Armenian diaspora in Russia—demographics, political status, and public opinion”, 22.06.2022, <https://kavkaz-uzel.eu/blogs/83781/posts/49967>

As for the relationship between the diaspora and the Armenian government, for many years the diaspora was viewed more as a financing instrument, while government officials were often wary of its strengthening. A certain revival of relations between the diaspora and Armenia took place under Serzh Sargsyan, when the Ministry of Diaspora was created. However, even these efforts were being carried out only partially, as contacts were set up mainly with influential representatives of the diaspora and members of only some communities. Prior to that, Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, was not a great advocate of building relations with the diaspora. Robert Kocharyan, on the other hand, mainly focused on building a relationship with Western Armenians in order to secure funding. Under the new government, the Ministry of Diaspora was abolished and a new agency, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, headed by Zareh Sinanyan, was established. However, both the new agency and its head were repeatedly criticized and accused of pursuing a failed policy⁹.

In the run-up to the 2018 elections, diaspora Armenians began to take a markedly greater interest in the processes in Armenia. Many supported Nikol Pashinyan and his team. However, following the Second Karabakh War, most Russian Armenians began to disapprove of the current government, although the attitudes may vary depending on the region.

9 Ibid.

Activities of Russian Armenians during and after the Second Karabakh War

Armenians of Russia began to support Armenia as soon as the hostilities broke out. Representatives of the diaspora both sent material aid and raised funds to provide financial support. For example, the Union of Armenians of Russia was the first to send aid at the end of September 2020¹⁰ and then proceeded to collect funds¹¹. Other representatives of the diaspora immediately joined the organization. In September 2020, the Armenians of Rostov Oblast collected about 2 million rubles in two days as part of the general fundraising campaign organized by the Armenians of the Don¹². During the hostilities Samvel Karapetyan, head of Tashir Holding, donated \$3 million to various projects in Armenia and in the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was under occupation by Armenia at the time¹³. Other Armenian NGOs also became active right away as well. The head of the Assembly of Armenians declared at a meeting with Armenian President Armen Sarkissian that the organization was investing over \$2 million in the development of IT projects. The organization also launched the #АрменияЯсТобой (#ArmeniaImWithYou) fundraising campaign across Russia¹⁴.

It should be noted that most of the air shipments of so-called humanitarian aid from Russia to Armenia were carried out by Armenia Air and NordStar Airlines, while the Armenian Embassy in the Russian Federation provided information about charter flights¹⁵. Under the guise of “humanitarian aid” Armenia was also supplied with weapons. For example, on former Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan’s return flight from Moscow to Yerevan on October 10, 2020, 300 Kornet

10 “The first batch of aid from the Union of Armenians of Russia is on its way”, 30.09.2020, <https://sarinfo.org/news/novosti-sar/pervaya-partiya-pomoschi-ot-soyuz-a-armyan-rossii-uzhe-v-puti.html>

11 “How to provide financial assistance to Artsakh in rubles”, 16.10.2020, <https://sarinfo.org/news/novosti-sar/kak-okazat-finansovuyu-pomosch-artsahu-v-rublyah.html>

12 “Don Union of Armenian Youth raised 2 million rubles to help the victims in Nagorno-Karabakh”, 29.09.2020, <https://rostof.ru/articles/donskoy-soyuz-armyanskoy-molodezhi-sobral-2-mln-rublej-na-pomoshch-postradavshim-v-nagornom>

13 <https://t.me/reartsakh/4779>

14 “Assembly of Armenians is ready to invest a billion drams in IT projects in Armenia and Artsakh”, 17.10.2020, <https://rusarminfo.ru/2020/10/17/assambleya-armyan-gotova-investirovat-v-it-proekty-v-armenii-i-arcaxe-milliard-dramov/>

15 <https://www.facebook.com/armembrus>

anti-tank guided missile systems were delivered to Armenia aboard the 701 Government Airbus A319¹⁶. It also became known to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan in October 2020 that the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia was bringing into the country weapons disguised as “humanitarian aid” from the Armenian diaspora, using for transportation planes registered as belonging to the Armenian government¹⁷. Commenting on these deliveries, Igor Korotchenko, Editor-in-Chief of the *Natsionalnaya Oborona (National Defense)* magazine, pointed out that they were mostly sponsored by nationalist-minded members of the Armenian diaspora, who had enough financial resources to purchase and smuggle weapons into Yerevan. In the expert’s opinion, apart from being a crime, these deliveries also resulted in the death of even more people, including on the Armenian side¹⁸. At the same time, it seems improbable that official agencies of the Russian Federation were unaware of these deliveries.

In addition to financial and material assistance to Armenia, members of the diaspora were also directly involved in combat operations. Thus, VoMA (Ողջ Մնալու և Արվեստ, translated as “the art of staying alive”), founded by Vova Vartanov and based in Yerevan, actively encouraged diaspora members to join the accelerated combat training course. Despite attempts to keep the organization’s activities secret, it became known that exercises were conducted under the auspices of the Armenian Ministry of Defense to train a mountain rifle battalion¹⁹.

The organization’s active engagement with the Russian-speaking population on social media indicates that recruitment was also taking place in the Russian Federation. According to the organizers, upon completion of all courses, the battalion was “put into action in assigned territories” under the command of the Armenian Ministry of Defense. For Armenians from the Russian Federation, charter flights from Moscow to Yerevan were organized by NordStar Airlines on October 9 and 25, 2020²⁰. The accompa-

16 “Kornet ATGM and Iгла MANPADS are supplied to Armenia from Russia - SENSATIONAL DETAILS”, 10.10.2020, <https://news.day.az/politics/1278534.html>

17 “Foreign Ministry: Weapons are being delivered to Armenia under the guise of humanitarian aid”, 09.10.2020, <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3313961.html>

18 “Arms deliveries to Armenia are a path to more casualties in Karabakh war”, 27.10.2020, <https://vestikavkaza.ru/news/postavki-oruzia-v-armeniu-put-k-bol-sim-zertvam-v-karabahskoj-vojne.html>

19 VoMA Special Training Center <http://www.voma.center/>

20 <https://www.radarbox.com/data/flights/y79702>

nying statement emphasized that “participation in the accelerated combat training courses and further membership in the volunteer battalion is free of charge”. It is worth mentioning that according to Paragraph 2 of Article 208 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, “participation in an armed formation not provided for by federal law as well as participation in the territory of a foreign state in an armed formation not provided for by the legislation of that state, for purposes contradicting the interests of the Russian Federation is punishable by imprisonment for eight to fifteen years with restriction of freedom for one to two years”²¹.

By the end of September 2020, the leadership of the Union of Armenians of Russia disseminated information that about 20,000 Armenians from the diaspora in Russia were going to participate in the hostilities. Abrahamyan also said in his statement that about a thousand Armenians from the diaspora had already sent requests to the Armenian government to participate in combat operations but they had been rejected²². Representatives of the Armenian diaspora in Russia traveled to Yerevan from Sochi on September 29 to take part in the hostilities. They also included representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee²³.

Thus, despite the illegality of these actions, Armenians of the diaspora in Russia were involved in the process of recruiting mercenaries and, in general, were actively involved in activities aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

The end of the war and the signing of the trilateral statement by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia provoked the diaspora’s outrage. Representatives of some organizations suspended financial aid to Armenia, demanding the resignation of the prime minister²⁴.

Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan’s visit to Moscow in January 2021

21 “ARTICLE 208 OF THE CRIMINAL CODE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. ORGANIZATION OF OR PARTICIPATION IN AN ILLEGAL ARMED FORMATION”, <https://rulaws.ru/uk/Razdel-IX/Glava-24/Statya-208/>

22 “20,000 Russian Armenians want to go to Karabakh as volunteers”, 28.09.2020, <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/09/28/volunteers/>

23 “We are not mercenaries, we are going to war. And this is the last war”, 29.10.2020, https://www.znak.com/2020-09-29/armyane_dobrovolycy_leytat_iz_sochi_v_erevan_dlya_uchastiya_v_konflikte_v_nagornom_karabahe

24 “Diaspora entrepreneurs refuse to send aid to Armenia as long as Pashinyan is in power there”, 13.01.2021, <https://yerkramas.org/article/178539/predprinimate-li-iz-diaspory-otkazyvayutsya-napravlyat-pomoshh-v-armeniyu--poka-tam-u-vlasti-pashinyan>

and his meeting with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin caused harsh criticism of the government. On January 8, 2021, Ara Abrahamyan, Chairman of the Union of Armenians of Russia, sent an open letter to the Armenian Prime Minister. In his letter A. Abrahamyan argued that the Armenian people had not expected Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Moscow but rather his resignation, accused the prime minister of abusing the people's trust, and said that Pashinyan was not authorized to sign any documents. On the same day, representatives of Armenian organizations in Russia gathered in the Union's building and urged diaspora Armenians to speak up by signing the special statement drafted by members of the Union in front of the Armenian Embassy in Russia. In the statement, the diaspora called on Pashinyan to immediately resign in order to prevent the aggravation of the crisis, as well as to renounce all "verbal and written agreements with the Azerbaijani side".

In February 2021, a new wave of confrontations between representatives of the Union of Armenians of Russia and the Armenian government began. This time, the leadership of the organization demanded the resignation of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs following his statement on the conflicts within the Union²⁵. In an interview with *republica.am*, Union's Chairman Ara Abrahamyan described the PM's actions as "destructive" for the Armenian people and called him a liar and a demagogue²⁶. Abrahamyan also accused Pashinyan of making no efforts to secure the release of the captured Armenian terrorists, or "prisoners of war", as they are called in Armenia²⁷.

The issue of the funds raised by the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund was also brought up. Established by a decree of the President of Armenia in 1992²⁸, the charity fund has raised about \$400 million over the years

25 "Statement of the Federal National Cultural Autonomy of Armenians of Russia on the withdrawal of one of its regional organizations" 06.02.2021 <https://yerkramas.org/article/179465/napoleonom-stat-suzhdeno-ne-kazhdomu-gn-sinanyan-podavajite-v-otstavku>

26 "Today Pashinyan suits everyone except Armenia and Armenians", 11.02.2021, <https://yerkramas.org/article/179644/segodnya-pashinyan-vygoden-vsem--krome-armenii-i-armyan>

27 "Pashinyan, who serves the enemy, is not the figure who can resolve the issue of POWs", 20.02.2021, <https://yerkramas.org/article/179905/prisluzhivayush-hij-vragu-pashinyan-ne-yavlyayetsya-toj-figuroj--kotoraya-mozhet-reshit-vopros-plennyx>

28 Hayastan All-Armenian Fund <http://bitly.ws/sB6Q>

to help Armenia and the illegal regime established by Armenia in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The fund has 22 affiliate organizations in 19 countries such as France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the US, Lebanon, Syria and others²⁹. It uses collected funds to implement various research, cultural and educational programs and sponsor the construction of homes, schools, roads, and so on. Funds are raised through annual charity TV, radio and bike marathons, as well as through various events, exhibitions and concerts. The organization is managed by the Board of Trustees headed by the President of Armenia. Since 1996, a charity telethon has been held in the USA every year, and it is broadcasted all over the world. Funds raised through such campaigns are spent on the implementation of “large-scale programs of strategic importance approved by the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees”³⁰. According to its charter, the fund is considered a humanitarian organization, not involved in politics and exempt from taxes in 16 countries of the world, of which Armenian oligarchs sometimes took advantage. The fund is notorious for its money-laundering activities³¹.

During the war, the fund raised and donated \$170 million to help Armenians. Some of these resources were donated in Armenian drams and some in US dollars. Most of the funds were transferred to the account of the Armenian government due to time constraints, resulting in groundless accusations of embezzlement for “personal purposes” being hurled at the government. According to some rumors, this money was used to maintain the exchange rate of the Armenian dram³². Former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan, then a member of the fund’s Board of Trustees, said in turn that he could not trust the government, which “cynically lied to its own people about the real situation at the front” and, therefore, did not believe that the funds had been allocated for the needs of the people. Nevertheless, according to his own words, there was no audit of how these funds were spent, so there is no evidence of “embezzlement”³³. In June of this year, the ex-president chose not to

29 Ibid

30 Hayastan All-Armenian Fund <https://russia.mfa.am/ru/hayastan-fund/>

31 “What is wrong with the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund?”, 21.03.2022, <https://vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/cto-ne-tak-s-vsearmanskim-fondom-ajastan.html>

32 “Funds from the Hayastan Fund were used to slow down the fall of the dram”, 23.01.2021, <https://yerkramas.org/article/178954/sredstva-fonda-ajastan-byli-ispolzovany-dlya-zamedleniya-padeniya-drama>

33 “The reputation of the Hayastan Fund is seriously damaged by the government’s actions”, 16.03.2021,

join the fund’s Board of Trustees, “due to the loss of financial transparency and accountability of the fund in the recent period”³⁴.

However, it is not only representatives of the diaspora that the fund has to report to on the legality of its activities. During the years of the occupation, the Hayastan Fund de facto supported the illegal regime established by Armenia in the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The fund repeatedly financed the construction of roads in the occupied territories, two of which connected Armenia and the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It also sponsored the construction of roads used for military purposes³⁵. Apart from road-building, the fund also allocated resources for the repopulation of Karabakh villages, where Azerbaijanis historically lived, in order to create a new demographic situation and prevent Azerbaijanis from returning to their homes³⁶.

According to the prime minister, half of the funds allocated to the government during the war was used to cover military expenses, which also raises many questions, since it contradicts the charter of the Fund. If this information is confirmed and the money raised for charity was indeed spent for military purposes, the legality of the fund’s activities in terms of international law will be called into question, as it is tax exempt because of its status³⁷.

In March 2021, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that early parliamentary elections would be held in June 2021, which provoked a mixed reaction in the diaspora. Up until the elections, Armenians from various parts of the world urged the citizens not to vote for Nikol Pashinyan. After the elections results were announced, Chairman of the Union of Armenians of Russia Ara Abrahamyan immediately accused the PM’s team of falsifying the results, saying that “serious internal and geopolitical troubles await Armenia”³⁸.

<https://yerkramas.org/article/180809/iz-za-dejstvij-pravitelstva--serezno-stradaet-reputaciya-fonda-%C2%ABajastan%C2%BB>

34 “Robert Kocharyan refuses to join the Board of Trustees of the Hayastan Fund”, 25.06.2022, <https://yerkramas.org/article/187952/robert-kocharyan-otkazalsya-vojtiv-sovet-popechitelej-fonda-ajastan>

35 “What is wrong with the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund?”, 21.03.2022, <https://vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/cto-ne-tak-s-vsearmanskim-fondom-ajastan.html>

36 Ibid.

37 “What Is Going On at the Armenia Fund?”, 20.03.2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/what-going-armenia-fund-201339?page=0%2C1>

38 “Union of Armenians of Russia: A new great crisis awaits Armenia”, 21.06.2021,

According to a statement of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, 47 Armenian organizations around the world supported Robert Kocharyan's candidacy and the Armenia Alliance he headed. Prior to the elections, Kocharyan held a virtual meeting with diaspora Armenians, which was also attended by Russian Armenians. At the meeting the former President of Armenia revealed his plans to establish the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, restore Armenia's funding by the Armenian diaspora, and repatriate Armenians to his homeland³⁹. Besides the above-mentioned organizations, the Javakhk Diaspora of Russia also supported Robert Kocharyan's candidacy and subsequently voiced its dissatisfaction with the election results⁴⁰.

The reason for the growing hatred of the prime minister was the diaspora's hardline stance on initiating peace talks in the region. Some diaspora members flatly refused to support the peace process in the region and the establishment of relations with Turkey. The confrontations continue to this day.

The trilateral meeting of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev with the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the President of the European Council Charles Michel in Brussels on April 6, 2022 resulted in the parties agreeing that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries. Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia had their first telephone conversation on April 11 would establish a commission on border delimitation and the beginning of work on a peace treaty. Protests against the prime minister and his policies began even before the meeting. The Union of Armenians of Russia once again did not stay away, this time publishing an "expert opinion", one of MGIMO professor Andranik Migranyan. According to the professor, the prime minister's actions were equivalent to a "total surrender of all Armenian positions", following which Armenia "will yield all its positions" and "withdraw all

<https://yerkramas.org/article/183271/soyuz-armyanrossii-armeniyu-zhdet-novyj-bolshoj-krizis>

39 "Robert Kocharyan discussed recovery of investment inflow in Armenia with Diaspora (video)", 13.06.2021,

<https://yerkramas.org/article/183081/robert-kocharyan-obsudil-s-diasporoj-vosstanovlenie-pritoka-investicij-v-armeniyu-video>

"Second President of Armenia proposed forming a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora", 13.06.2021, <https://news.am/rus/news/648672.html>

40 "Javakhk Diaspora of Russia appealed to Javakhk residents and all compatriots with the right to vote", 07.06.2021, https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=63165&lang=2

claims against Azerbaijan and Turkey before the international community”. The representatives of the organization believed that it was the “inherently anti-Russian” stance of the current authorities that caused the “crisis”. For example, Migranyan said that the prime minister sought “to push Russia out” from the start in order to “give up Karabakh” and build relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Representatives of the organization regarded the West’s intervention as a threat⁴¹.

On April 24, 2022, mass protests against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan broke out in the Republic of Armenia. Dubbed the “Resistance Movement”, the protests began on April 25 with several members of the Armenia Alliance marching from Ijevan to Yerevan⁴². Some representatives of the Armenian diaspora joined the Movement. In May 2022, the prime minister visited Moscow, where the Dashnaks were organizing protests. As a result, the prime minister postponed his meeting with the head of the Armenian diocese in Moscow. On May 20, Pashinyan flew to Nizhny Novgorod. The diaspora members there also met him with protest rallies, while a group of only 30 people came to the meeting with the prime minister organized by the administration⁴³.

Russian Armenians, for the most part, do not support the initiation of peace processes in the region. Hence their outspoken dissatisfaction with the prime minister and the work of his administration. The defeat in the war also showed the inadequacy of the diaspora itself. In the thirty years of promoting the occupation regime, not a single country in the world and no international organization recognized the independence of the illegitimate “NKR”. The conflict harmed Armenia itself and caused Armenians to migrate from the country. However, Armenia’s transition to a bilateral format of negotiations with Azerbaijan, further opening of borders and restoration of communications will help Armenia break out of its economic isolation.

41 “Andranik Migranyan: What Nikol is doing is a total surrender of all Armenian positions”, 06.04.22, <https://sarinfo.org/news/novosti-sar/andranik-migranyan-to-ch-to-delaet-nikol-eto-totalnaya-sdacha-vseharmyanskih-pozitsiy.html>

42 “Andranik Migranyan: What Nikol is doing is a total surrender of all Armenian positions”, 06.04.22, <https://sarinfo.org/news/novosti-sar/andranik-migranyan-to-ch-to-delaet-nikol-eto-totalnaya-sdacha-vseharmyanskih-pozitsiy.html>

43 “Nikol Pashinyan welcomed with open arms by Armenians of Nizhny Novgorod (video)” 18.05.2022, <https://yerkramas.org/article/187294/o-%C2%ABradush-nom%C2%BB-prieme-nikola-pashinyana-armyanami-nizhnego-novgoroda-video>

Pro-Armenian members of the Russian State Duma and their activities over the years of conflict

The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan revealed a seemingly paradoxical situation in the Russian expert community. Some experts saw Russia distancing itself from the war in Karabakh as “an example of restraint”, while for others the underlying reason for Russia’s refusal to fight on Armenia’s side was “the defeatist sentiments of the country’s leadership”. Interestingly, the liberal intelligentsia opposing Putin unanimously called this policy a betrayal. During the 44-day war, people traditionally advocating for liberal European values denied Azerbaijan the right to restore its territorial integrity.

For example, according to the renowned expert Andrei Piontkovsky, who is now practically the number one champion of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, Azerbaijanis’ suffering was not that big of a deal: “Of course, we feel sorry for the Azerbaijanis who were forced to leave their homes after Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence in the early 1990s. But otherwise, without annexing the seven Azerbaijani-inhabited districts, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh could not guarantee their own safety.”⁴⁴

When the 44-day war broke out, Piontkovsky began to argue that the escalation was the doing of Russian President Vladimir Putin, his attempt to return to the international arena⁴⁵. “I am sure that Azerbaijan launched the offensive with Moscow’s approval. Look how successfully Putin not just used, but created the Karabakh conflict.”

Piontkovsky believed that Putin allegedly had given Azerbaijan permission to start the hostilities to punish the “Soros fosterling Pashinyan”. And after Azerbaijan reclaimed one of the districts, Putin was to “stop further escalation of the conflict, once again appearing before the whole world as the guarantor of stability in the region”.

However, when Piontkovsky’s prediction did not come true and Azerbaijan was able to return all seven previously occupied districts and the

44 “Alexander Tsipko. A peacekeeping mission instead of an imperial syndrome. Lessons for Russia in Nagorno-Karabakh”, 09.12.2020, https://www.ng.ru/ideas/2020-12-09/7_8035_mission.html

45 “Andrei Piontkovsky: Azerbaijan launched the offensive with Moscow’s approval”, 4.10.2020, <https://news.rambler.ru/politics/44954537-andrey-piontkovskiy-azerbaydzhan-nachal-nastupatelnyuyu-operatsiyu-s-odobreniya-moskvy/>

city of Shusha, he began to argue that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan interfered in the conflict, “foiling Putin’s plans”⁴⁶.

At the same time, a number of Russian experts, on the contrary, accused Turkey and NATO of unleashing the war in order to push Russia out of the region. For example, Fyodor Voytolovsky, director of IMEMO RAS, voiced this idea at the Primakov Readings in June 2021.

Summing up the liberals’ approach to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Alexander Tsipko, Doctor of Philosophy, said that “our liberal intelligentsia is afflicted by the imperial syndrome”.⁴⁷

The bilateral relations have been volatile following the agreement reached between President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. It cemented Azerbaijan’s victory, but it also allowed the deployment of about 2,000 Russian peacekeepers in the region recognized by the international community as part of Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev, nevertheless, said that the agreement marked “the end of the conflict” and “restoration of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity”. Meanwhile, Putin stated that Karabakh’s status remained uncertain. “Yes, this problem exists. The final status of Karabakh has not yet been resolved. We have agreed that the status quo will be preserved, and what happens next will be determined by future leaders, future participants in this process.”⁴⁸ These disagreements over key issues pertaining to the conflict keep causing tensions between the two countries.

The most recent example is the Azerbaijani media’s discovery of a reference to the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” in the text of the tender for a procurement contract for the peacekeeping contingent, announced by the Russian government. Baku does not accept this name, as it considers the self-proclaimed government of the NKR an illegal entity in its territory.

46 “Piontkovsky: Erdoğan played a historic role in Putin’s adventures”, 17.06.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPOzUcw9188>

47 “Alexander Tsipko. A peacekeeping mission instead of an imperial syndrome. Lessons for Russia in Nagorno-Karabakh”, 09.12.2020, https://www.ng.ru/ideas/2020-12-09/7_8035_mission.html

48 “The status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be agreed upon in the future, Putin says”, 17.11.2020, https://tass.com/politics/1224805?utm_source=russian.eurasianet.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=russian.eurasianet.org&utm_referrer=russian.eurasianet.org

After Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war in Karabakh, the Armenian diaspora set the goal of increasing the number of pro-Armenian MPs in the State Duma. The Armenian lobby's goal was to ensure the dominance of pro-Armenian forces in the parliament elected in 2021. And the politicians' goal was to secure a budget for their election campaign at the expense of the Armenian lobby and get reelected.

Sergey Mironov

One of such representatives of the Armenian lobby is Sergey Mironov. Sergey Mironov's interest in Armenia dates back to 2003, when the chairman of the Union of Armenians of Russia, Ara Abrahamyan, publicly voiced the idea of founding a worldwide commercial and industrial holding with an authorized capital of \$100 million and the Armenia fund to which Armenian businessmen were expected to transfer 10% of their annual income. The agreement on financing the Russian Party of Life/Party of Russia's Rebirth alliance, of which Sergey Mironov was a member at the time, by the Armenian diaspora was reached on September 25, 2003 during Sergey Mironov's visit to Yerevan with the delegation accompanying Head of Russia's Security Council Sergey Ivanov shortly before the inauguration of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on October 31 of the same year. In Yerevan, the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia awarded Mironov the title of Honorary Doctor of Sciences. After his visit to Yerevan, which Mironov summed up by saying that "once all the election cycles have been completed, the negotiation process (between Russia and Armenia) to resolve the conflict (in Nagorno-Karabakh) should pick up the pace"⁴⁹, the financial situation of the RPL-PRR alliance improved significantly, and the Armenian media nicknamed him "Sergo Mironyan"⁵⁰.

In 2004, before the presidential election in Russia, Mironov, now a presidential candidate, endorsed Vladimir Putin, saying that "when a trusted leader goes into battle, you cannot leave him alone, you have to stand beside him"⁵¹. He was a dummy candidate who declared that

49 "Between Baku and Yerevan. Elena Baykova", 04.11.2003, https://www.ng.ru/cis/2003-11-04/5_pushaylo.html?id_user=Y

50 "Sergo Mironian Found Sponsors for RPL-PRR Bloc on Ararat", 26.11.2003 http://www.compromat.ru/page_14057.htm

51 "Standing side by side vs. Hakamada", 06.01.2004, https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2004/01/a_81400.shtml

he himself would vote for his rival, i.e., for Vladimir Putin. As a result, Mironov received the least number of votes of all the candidates, 0.75%. In 2006, with the president's permission, Mironov formed his own parliamentary party, A Just Russia.

The partnership between A Just Russia and the nationalist Dashnakt-sutyun party began in 2007, *after the first cooperation agreement was signed*⁵². According to Vahan Hovhannisyan, a member of Dashnakt-sutyun Party bureau and Vice-President of the Armenian Parliament, the party had long been looking for a partner in the CIS that could, together with Dashnaksutyun, establish a Socialist International base in the post-Soviet space.

In 2021, experiencing serious financial difficulties and having problems⁵³ attracting voters, A Just Russia merged with the For the Truth and Patriots of Russia parties under the name A Just Russia — Patriots — For the Truth, winning only 38 seats out of 450 in the State Duma⁵⁴.

After 2021, Mironov did not show much political activity until the start of the war in Ukraine. While speaking for his faction at the May 17 State Duma session, Sergey Mironov suggested postponing the single voting day to 2023 because of the war in Ukraine⁵⁵. Interestingly enough, this proposal was not welcomed by the Russian government. For example, President's Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov told journalists after the statement by the leader of A Just Russia — Patriots — For Truth that the Kremlin had nothing to say on the issue of postponing the September regional elections. It is possible that the Russian government made this decision to show that the war in Ukraine cannot affect the political situation inside the country.

52 "A JUST RUSSIA AND THE ARMENIAN DASHNAKTSUTYUN SIGNED A COOPERATION AGREEMENT", 08.2007, <https://noev-kovcheg.ru/mag/2007-08/829.html>

53 "How A Just Russia is dying", 28.08.2019, <https://meduza.io/feature/2019/08/28/sbrod-v-horoshem-smysle-slova>

54 "A Just Russia discussed the name change before the Duma election. Why the Kremlin is 'strengthening' Mironov with Patriots and Prilepin", <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/01/2021/600737079a79474afb28de02>

55 "On May 17 Mironov made a proposal in the State Duma to postpone the elections for a year", <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2022/05/17/922388-mironov-vistupil-s-predlozheniem>

Mikhail Delyagin

Mikhail Delyagin began his political career in 2002 when he became an assistant to Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov. At that time Delyagin became an assistant to Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov. Later Delyagin was criticized for trying to partner with both liberals and right-wing nationalists, as well as for condoning the organization of a color revolution in Russia and for being prepared to implement the Libyan scenario in the country.⁵⁶

Commenting on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin apologizing to the relatives of the pilot of the downed Su-24 in 2016⁵⁷, Delyagin suddenly called on the Kremlin to settle the Karabakh conflict in favor of Armenia. His logic suggested that Moscow must lay down tough conditions for Ankara, including the demand to “make Azerbaijan recognize the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh”.⁵⁸

On March 27, 2022, Deputy Chairman of the Duma Committee for Economic Policy and member of A Just Russia Mikhail Delyagin took an opinion poll in his Telegram channel, asking his followers if they thought that “the use of nuclear weapons to eliminate the oil industry of Azerbaijan” was legitimate. About 28% of the respondents chose the response “Yes, Turkish proxies in Baku wouldn’t understand any other way”, another 13% — “Yes, but it’s impossible because of the Azerbaijani mafia’s influence on the Russian authorities”.⁵⁹

In a live broadcast of the show hosted by Olga Skobeeva, who was hit by Western sanctions, on the News1 channel, MP Mikhail Dely-

56 “Mikhail Delyagin’s bipolar disorder”, <https://vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/bipolar-noe-rasstrojstvo-mihaila-delagina.html>

57 “Erdoğan apologized to pilot’s relatives for downed Su-24”, 27.06.2016, <https://www.dw.com/ru/%D1%8D%D1%80%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%81%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4-%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8B%D0%B9-%D1%81%D1%83-24/a-19360113>

58 “Mikhail Delyagin called Putin ‘a tiny little Stalin’” <https://aze.az/mihail-del-jagin-nazyval-putina-ochen-malenkim-stalinym-video.html>

59 “Russian MP threatened Azerbaijan with nuclear weapons”, 29.03.2022, <https://qafqazinfo.az/news/detail/rusiyali-deputat-azerbaycani-nuve-silahi-ile-vurmaqla-he-deledi-358218>

agin called on Russia to “punish” Azerbaijan, namely, to destroy the country’s oil and gas infrastructure, which is allegedly competing with Russia’s oil and gas exports.⁶⁰

Interestingly, Delyagin used to have a completely different position on the erstwhile Karabakh conflict⁶¹. Answering the question about the scenario he sees for the development of the Karabakh conflict in his interview with Day.az in 2011, he said: “I’m afraid that Azerbaijan may soon run out of patience and there will be a new round of military confrontation. I don’t see a mechanism for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. There is land, there is a million refugees in Azerbaijan...”

Vitaly Milonov

Vitaly Milonov adheres to radical views. He is notorious for his scandalous initiative to ban the promotion of homosexuality and the proposal to conscript all women who have not given birth to a child before the age of 23.

Milonov, who represents the ruling United Russia party in St. Petersburg Duma, illegally traveled to the occupied lands in the early days of the 44-day war and after it and made anti-Azerbaijani statements in Khankendi. For his illegal visits to Khankendi and extremely provocative statements, he was put on the “black list” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. In his interview to Armenian media, the Russian MP, who calls “Nagorno-Karabakh” his motherland, said that Azerbaijan’s victory was a great tragedy for him, which is unacceptable for a Russian official, especially for a United Russia MP.

On December 27, 2021, Milonov took part in the New Year’s event for children organized by the Heritage and Progress Foundation for the Development and Support of Russian-Armenian Humanitarian Initiatives. The president of the foundation is Director of the Medical Research and Education Center of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Aramais Albertovich Kamalov (who is of Armenian descent).

Milonov’s anti-Azerbaijani statements were made at the time of the

60 “Anti-Azerbaijani propaganda is back on Russian TV”, 29.03.2022, <https://news.day.az/politics/1448182.html>

61 “Russian political scientist: ‘Azerbaijan may soon run out of patience’”, 29.04.2011, <https://news.day.az/politics/264491.html>

2021 State Duma elections and the efforts of the Armenian lobby to build up the pro-Armenian forces in Russia. For this purpose, Milonov intended to have the budget for his future election campaign replenished. This was the main reason for his anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric: he wanted to be reelected to the Duma at the expense of the Armenian lobby and Islamophobic sentiments.

Konstantin Zatulin

From 1996 to the present, he has headed the Institute of CIS countries (Institute of Diaspora and Integration), which he himself established. This institution provides “a comprehensive study of socio-political and economic processes in the post-Soviet space and the problems of Russian compatriots”.

On March 27, 1997 K. Zatulin together with A.M. Migranyan wrote the piece titled “CIS: the Beginning or the End of History. Towards a Change of Milestones”⁶². In this piece, Zatulin viewed Azerbaijan as one of the centers of “containing Russia”.

In 1998, Zatulin was one of the founders of the Fatherland organization, established on Luzhkov’s initiative. On December 1, 2001, following the merger of the Fatherland movement and the Unity movement, he became a member of the General Council of the United Russia party. At the end of his second presidential term in April 2008, Vladimir Putin became the party’s leader. Until then, the party was headed by Speaker of the State Duma Boris Gрызlov.

In December 2003 and December 2007, Konstantin Zatulin became a member of the Duma once again (from United Russia). In January 2008, he became first deputy chairman of the committee of the State Duma for the CIS and relations with Russian nationals abroad.

In 2003 Konstantin Zatulin did not have a distinctly anti-Azerbaijani stance, but he clearly held no affection for Azerbaijan and President Ilham Aliyev either. Commenting on the presidential elections in Azerbaijan in his interview to Materik TV, he said: “I think there will be less confidence in stability in Azerbaijan with Ilham Aliyev coming to power. The vector of influence in Transcaucasia and Azerbaijan is gradually

62 K.F. Zatulin, A.M. Migranyan. “CIS: the Beginning or the End of History. Towards a Change of Milestones”, 26.03.1997, <https://zatulin.ru/sng-nachalo-ili-konec-istorii-k-smene-vex/>

changing not in our favor. And this cannot be a source of satisfaction for those who think not only about today but also about tomorrow. The significance of Azerbaijan and its position, its riches, the stake placed on these riches, it will make the situation speed up after all.”⁶³

In 2007 K. Zatulin was the coordinator of the deputy group of the State Duma on relations with the parliament of Ukraine and Deputy Co-Chair of the Inter-parliamentary Commission on Cooperation between the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. He was a member of the permanent delegation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in the Inter-parliamentary Orthodoxy Assembly and the Chairman of the Commission on International Affairs of the Inter-Parliamentary Orthodoxy Assembly (from 2008 to 2012).

Konstantin Zatulin lobbied the Armenian position on the Karabakh issue in the State Duma. He repeatedly visited the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan occupied by the Armenian armed forces, supported the separatists, and participated in their various activities. On May 23, 2010, Zatulin participated as an observer in what the Karabakh separatists called “parliamentary elections”. For his visits to the occupied lands without the permission of official Baku, Konstantin Zatulin was put on Azerbaijan’s list of *personae non gratae*. In the same year, he received the Armenian Order of Honor.

On April 5, 2011, the United Russia faction decided to remove Konstantin Zatulin from his post as first deputy chairman of the committee of the State Duma for the CIS and relations with Russian nationals abroad. A possible reason for his removal was his public criticism of President Dmitry Medvedev’s decision not to veto the UN Security Council resolution on Libya, which allowed allies to join the military campaign.

On August 1, 2012, Konstantin Zatulin was appointed member of the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation for Cossack Affairs by presidential decree. On February 21, 2015, by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, he was appointed member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. Zatulin also became a member of the Commission on Development of Public

63 “Who will get the Azerbaijani inheritance?”, 04.09.2003, <http://www.materick.ru/index.php?section=tv&id=2294>

Diplomacy and Support of Russian Nationals Abroad (with an advisory vote) and the Commission on Harmonization of Interethnic and Inter-Confessional Relations (with an advisory vote) of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. On February 22, 2016 the Council of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation appointed Konstantin Zatulin Head of the Civic Chamber's Working Group on Eurasian integration and development of the SCO and other institutions of international cooperation. On September 18, 2016 he was elected a member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation of the 7th convocation from the Sochi single-mandate constituency, which apart from Sochi includes Apsheronky and Belorechensky Districts of Krasnodar Krai, as well as Russian nationals in the Republic of Estonia. In October 2016, he was appointed First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Russian Nationals Abroad. Since December 2016, K. Zatulin has been the Chairman of the International Policy Commission of the Inter-Parliamentary Orthodoxy Assembly. In March 2017, by the Decree of the President of Russia, he was made a member of the Academic Council under the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

After the 44-day war, Zatulin continued his Azerbaijanophobic campaign. Regular trips to Armenia, where he often makes provocative statements aimed at undermining relations between Russia and Azerbaijan, have become routine. Almost every time he visits Armenia, Zatulin meets with Robert Kocharyan.

On August 4, 2021 Konstantin Zatulin met with the leader of the Armenia Alliance, ex-president Robert Kocharyan and so-called “representatives” of Karabakh, in particular Arkady Ghukasyan, and inspected the Armenian branch of the Institute of CIS countries⁶⁴.

In his speech on July 17, 2021, Konstantin Zatulin compared Garegin Nzhdeh, the Armenian henchman of the Nazis, with Mahammad Amin Rasulzade, the founding father of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic⁶⁵. According to Zatulin, unlike Nzhdeh, who failed to mobilize the

64 “Konstantin Zatulin met with Robert Kocharyan in Yerevan” <https://www.aysor.am/ru/news/2021/08/06/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD-%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD/1857786>

65 “Armenian lackey Zatulin dares to compare Nazi henchman Nzhdeh with Mahammad Amin Rasulzade – VIDEO”, 17.01.2021, <https://1news.az/news/20210717120428669-Armyanskii-prikhvosten-Zatulin-posmel-sravnit-prispesh->

Armenian people to fight against the Soviet Union, Rasulzade succeeded in doing so with the Azerbaijani people. Statements like this one are not only provocative, but also aimed at justifying the fascist ideology of the Dashnaks. Unlike Nzhdeh, not only did Rasulzade never command any military units, he never fought at all, let alone collaborated with the Nazis.

On February 26, 2022, Zatulin said in his interview with the Armenian Public Television that the issue of the status of the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh” is still relevant. “I personally think that Nagorno-Karabakh must get the right to independence. Of course, the Azerbaijani authorities are firmly against this and today they are trying to promote the idea that the Karabakh problem is solved, there is no problem at all and Karabakh cannot be independent or even have autonomy within Azerbaijan, as they promised before.”⁶⁶ At the end of his interview, Zatulin made threats against Azerbaijan, stressing that “if this right is taken away from them (the Armenian people), sooner or later there will be reprisals and a new war.”

On June 1-4, 2022, Konstantin Zatulin met at the Russian-Armenian Lazarev Club with all the so-called “former presidents of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”: Robert Kocharyan, Arkady Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, and Arayik Harutyunyan. He also met with Major General Andrey Volkov, commander of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Karabakh, and Alexander Bordov, the so-called “head of the Russian community of Karabakh”.⁶⁷

[nika-natsistov-Nzhde-s-Mamed-Eminom-Rasulzade-VIDEO](#)

66 “Konstantin Zatulin: Nagorno-Karabakh must get the right to independence”, 26.02.2022, <https://verelq.am/ru/node/104446>

67 “Konstantin Zatulin met with the president of Artsakh and all former heads of the republic” <https://armeniatoday.news/republicofartsakh-ru/479836/>

Conclusion

As previously noted, the numerous Armenian community in Russia is primarily the result of economic migration. Although many of them choose not to join diaspora organizations, some of them are actively involved in Armenia's domestic and foreign policies. Diaspora Armenians also sponsor Russian government officials in order to promote their own interests.

The defeat in the 44-day war greatly affected the diaspora's opinion of the authorities in Armenia. However, further attempts by Russian Armenians to interfere in Armenia's domestic politics and influence the situation were unsuccessful. This is evidenced first and foremost by Ara Abrahamyan's electoral defeat. Apart from that, representatives of Armenian organizations in other countries, including the United States, are not so radically opposed to the Armenian authorities. For example, the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party released a statement on behalf of Armenians living in the United States in response to the "Resistance Movement" initiated in Armenia in the spring of 2022. In the statement, members of the organization criticized the opposition and diaspora Armenians supporting the movement for their political intrigues and inflammatory actions. Representatives of the organization emphasized that the overwhelming majority of the Armenian population does not share the views of the opposition⁶⁸.

The transition to a bilateral format of negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, further opening of borders and the development of communications will have a positive impact on the growth of the entire region. The destructive actions of the Armenian diaspora in Russia have a negative, albeit not dramatic, impact on the process. Russian Armenians are against Armenia's developing ties with the West. Similarly, the involvement of EU representatives in the negotiations is perceived by diaspora Armenians as "pushing Russia out of the region" and a "total surrender of Armenian positions".

Apart from that, the activities of pro-Armenian Russian MPs also entail negative consequences both for Azerbaijan-Russia bilateral relations and for the peace negotiation process in the region. Diaspora Armenians must understand that their actions first and foremost adversely affect Armenia itself, as the country remains in isolation.

68 "Statement Regarding the Events Taking Place in Armenia", 21.05.2022, <https://massispost.com/2022/05/statement-regarding-the-events-taking-place-in-armenia/>



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