

Use of Mercenaries and Foreign Fighters by Armenia against Azerbaijan



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Foreword

Throughout the Second Karabakh War (September 27 to November 9, 2020), the government of Armenia, as part of fostering nationalist propaganda and a victimization narrative, has on many occasions called for military intervention by non-state actors in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. The following report contains information about the involvement of foreign fighters, including mercenaries, on the side of Armenia during the military operations conducted within the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. The report first provides an assessment of the legal framework governing such actions, including the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, which the National Assembly of Armenia has recently ratified. The two sections of this report then focus on the recruitment of mercenaries and foreign fighters, respectively.

The issue of the Armenian side deploying foreign fighters is, unfortunately, not new. During the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–94), soldiers of both Armenian and non-Armenian descent actively fought and committed war crimes, including the 1992 Khojaly Genocide, in the Karabakh region. A prominent example is the California-born international terrorist Monte Melkonian, imprisoned in France for acts of terror in the 1980s, who was involved in military operations against Azerbaijani civilians in Karadagly, Khojaly, and other settlements in Azerbaijan. A book published by his brother Markar Melkonian and titled *My Brother's Road* confirms some of these acts: “Monte had arrived in Martuni twenty-two days earlier, and since then he had staggered across two killing fields soaked with the fresh blood of captives and unarmed peasants [meaning in Karadagly and Khojaly],” states one excerpt from the book.¹ In 1996, Melkonian, a member of the terrorist organization ASALA and a war criminal, was elevated to the status of a national hero in Armenia.

The illegal deployment of foreign fighters and mercenaries on the side of the Armenian Armed Forces was also sustained during the Second Karabakh War. The conclusive evidence discovered of foreign fighters' active participation in the Karabakh region adds to the long list of Armenian war crimes and gross violations of international and humanitarian law committed throughout the years of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

¹ Markar Melkonian, *My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia*. London & New-York: IB Tauris, 2005, p. 213.

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Legal framework

The existence of mercenaries and foreign fighters is nothing new. People have travelled as foreign fighters to other states to fight with armed forces for centuries. However, the essence of these phenomena has become more complex in the modern world with the involvement of multiple actors and networks who recruit, use, train, and finance these groups. Moreover, greater attention is now being given to these groups owing to their scope, motivations, and further actions. As external actors, they have been intervening in armed conflicts in different parts of the world. In this context, it is worth remembering their active involvement in such devastating conflicts as those in Syria and Iraq in recent years.

According to Article 47 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions:

A mercenary is any person who: (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities; (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party; (d) is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict; (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and (f) has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.

In addition, “a mercenary shall not have the right to be a combatant or a prisoner of war.”²

The definition of a mercenary (Article 1) in the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (henceforth, the Convention)³ consists of two parts, Articles 1(1) and 1(2). Article 1(1) applies to international armed conflicts and basically reproduces the previously described Article 47 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Article 1(2) refers to “any other situations” in which persons are recruited for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of violence aimed at “overthrowing a Government or otherwise undermining the constitutional order of a State, or undermining the territorial integrity of States” and also considers them as mercenaries.⁴ The use of mercenaries can also be linked to other illegal activities, including terrorism.

According to Article 5 of the Convention, State Parties are not to recruit, use, finance or train mercenaries and each State Party shall establish jurisdiction over any of the offences set forth in the Convention (Article 9).

² Mercenaries. Article 47. Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977 – Official website of International Committee of the Red Cross. Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries - <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/470-750057>

³ International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 44/34 of 4 December 1989. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Mercenaries.aspx>

⁴ Ibid.

On the other hand, there is no internationally agreed legal definition of foreign fighters. However, in general, this term is understood to refer to individuals motivated by various factors such as religious and political ideologies, financial gain, poor economic and social conditions, etc., who leave their country of origin in order to join non-state armed groups in armed conflicts. One difference between foreign fighters and mercenaries is that the mobilizations of the former may include nationals of a party to the conflict, such as from a diaspora, while mercenaries are necessarily non-nationals. That said, it is also important to emphasize that sometimes financial incentives might not play any specific role for foreign fighters.

The UN Security Council has adopted two resolutions addressing the foreign fighter phenomenon. The first, Resolution 2170 (2014),⁵ was particularly associated with foreign fighters linked to ISIL, Al-Nusrah, and other entities associated with Al-Qaeda. The second, Resolution 2178 (2014), provides a regulatory framework for foreign terrorist fighters, defined as “individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.”⁶ At the same time, this resolution does not provide guidelines on how to interpret residency, which may have various meanings under national laws, thus leading to divergent interpretations, in particular when considering the situation of diaspora members and dual citizens. Member States should prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting, or equipping of foreign terrorist fighters in line with international human rights law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law.

Azerbaijan became a party to the Convention by ratifying it on December 4, 1997.⁷ On October 27, 2020, the National Assembly of Armenia also ratified this Convention with 71 votes “in favor.”⁸

Taking into account the above-mentioned legal framework, this study will examine whether or not mercenaries and foreign fighters as external actors have been intervening on behalf of Armenia against Azerbaijan in Karabakh.

Mercenaries

Media reports have revealed that the Armenian authorities are using mercenaries from foreign countries to fight against Azerbaijan in Karabakh. In particular, Armenia has been relocating from Syria and Iraq militants belonging to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), classified by all Western countries, including the US and the EU, as a terrorist organization, to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan to prepare for future hostilities and train Armenian militias.

According to the *Cairo24* News Agency as well as intelligence sources, “Armenia’s efforts led to the transfer of hundreds of armed terrorists from Suleymaniyah, considered to be a stronghold of the PKK in Iraq, to Nagorno-Karabakh via Iran.” At the same time, “special camps were

⁵Security Council resolution 2170 (2014) [http://undocs.org/S/RES/2170\(2014\)](http://undocs.org/S/RES/2170(2014))

⁶ Security Council resolution 2178 (2014), eighth preambular paragraph.

⁷International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XVIII-6&chapter=18&clang=en

⁸“Armenia parliament ratifies International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries,” *New.az*, 27 October 2020 - <https://news.am/eng/news/610141.html>

established by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to train the militants on Iranian soil before sending them to Nagorno-Karabakh.”⁹

In early October, the State Security Service of Azerbaijan intercepted the radio communications of Kurdish terrorists fighting on behalf of Armenia against Azerbaijan in the conflict zone. A video containing audio recordings of conversations and their transcripts is posted on YouTube. “According to the intercepted conversations, the terrorists discuss the precarious situation on Armenia’s side and numerous losses. They also talk about how the Azerbaijani side effectively uses drones and regret that they have come to the war zone being deceived by the Armenians.”¹⁰

As stated by intelligence sources, Armenia has deployed PKK terrorists to Shusha to fight against the Azerbaijani Army. According to the captured Armenian serviceman, Mikayelyan Albert Yervandi, Armenia brought 1,500 Kurdish mercenaries to Karabakh. They receive \$600 a month.¹¹

In a recent interview, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev stressed that Armenia actively used foreign mercenaries and that numerous photo and video documents, as well as the passports of foreign citizens, in particular citizens of France, the USA, Lebanon, Canada, Georgia, and other countries, are available. “Some of these citizens are of Armenian origin, some are not. But this does not change the essence of the issue, since the participation of foreign mercenaries on the part of Armenia, of course, is unacceptable.”¹²

Foreign fighters

It is no secret that the citizens of different countries, motivated by the call from the Armenian authorities, have travelled to Armenia to fight against Azerbaijan in Karabakh. One of their main reasons for joining the armed forces in Karabakh was to demonstrate their Christian solidarity to Armenians. For example, a Greek national, a former non-commissioned officer in the Greek army who fought in the wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan, explained that the reason behind his decision to go to fight in Karabakh was to help his brothers [Armenians] “because they are Christians. I am a Greek.”¹³

As stated by *Radio France Internationale*, about 30 foreign fighters arrived from Syria, Lebanon, and Latin America. In Russia, it was alleged, The Union of Armenians listed 20,000 volunteers prepared to fight for Armenia. Moreover, Armenia’s Yazidi community, which amounts to a few tens of thousands, “established a unit of volunteers to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh, many of whom have been wounded in battle.”¹⁴ These, then, were mostly citizens of different countries of Armenian extraction. It is no surprise that the strong Armenian diaspora played an indisputable

⁹James Wilson, “PKK’s Involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict would Jeopardise European Security,” eureporter.co, 23 September 2020 <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2020/09/23/pkks-involvement-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-would-jeopardize-european-security/>

¹⁰“Azerbaijanis State Security Service announces facts proving fact that PKK terrorists fight on the Armenian side against Azerbaijan,” ona.az, 06 October 2020 <https://ona.az/en/social/azerbaijanis-state-security-service-announces-facts-proving-fact-that-pkk-terrorists-fight-on-the-armenian-side-against-azerbaijan-15740>

¹¹“Armenia deploys PKK terrorists to Shusha,” Report.az, October 26, 2020 - <https://report.az/en/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/armenia-deploys-pkk-terrorists-to-shusha/>

¹²Ильхам Алиев рассказал Шойгу: «У нас паспорта наемников из Франции, Канады, Ливана... воевавших на стороне армян». Haqqin.az, 21 ноября 2020 г. - <https://haqqin.az/news/194405>

¹³“Former non-commissioned officer: ‘I’m going to Artsakh with 500-800 Greeks to crush the Turks’,” Greekcitytimes.com <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/10/03/former-non-commissioned-officer-im-going-to-artsakh-with-500-800-greeks-to-crush-the-turks/>

¹⁴Matteo Pugliese, “The Role of Foreign Fighters in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” ISPI, 8 October 2020 <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/role-foreign-fighters-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-27764>

role in this context. In addition to providing financial assistance, many members of the Armenian diaspora have expressed readiness to fight on the Armenian side in response to the “Call for Voluntary Enlistment in the Army of the Republic of Armenia” posted by the Armenian government on September 28¹⁵.

Moreover, the special military-patriotic public organization VoMA,¹⁶ which is short for *Ողջ Մնալու Արվեստ* (the art of staying alive), founded by Vova Vartanov¹⁷ and operating from Yerevan, appealed to the Armenian diaspora, calling on them to participate in accelerated military training courses with the aim of establishing a mountain rifle battalion under the command of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia.

According to information provided by the law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, citizens of Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the USA attended such training to fight in Karabakh. Most of the total of 108 people who arrived in Armenia were citizens of these countries of Armenian descent (89 persons). The remaining 19 citizens from Brazil, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Ukraine, and the USA were not of Armenian origin. However, an investigation is under way, and most probably these numbers will be increased in the near future.

By and large, VoMA preferred to keep the training regime secret, but its well-known guerrilla-style training was prepared specifically for the mountainous and forest terrain of Karabakh. A media report discussed how one squad, formed from the almost 70 recruits arriving per day, acquired, over the next 12 days (owing to current conditions; usually it takes six months) knowledge of and practice in basic fitness exercises; marching as a unit; participating in weapons exercises; combat shooting; infantry tactics; and alpinism, and underwent emergency combat medical training. On completion, the volunteers must pass a psychological evaluation and then, after advanced courses, are sent to the front line. The organization **also** covered the travel expenses, all necessary equipment, and clothing for the recruits. It seems that the vast majority of volunteers arriving in Armenia to participate in the ongoing fighting obtained their preparation trainings from VoMA¹⁸.

According to information as of October 25, VoMA had already sent three battalions to the front line, with a fourth to be sent in the following days.¹⁹ As a matter of record, VoMA initiated the dispatch of thousands of recruits to Karabakh during the fighting of April 2016. According to *Reuters*, hundreds of diaspora members from all across the world, including a student called Aghasi Asatryan who lived in Germany for more than seven years, had already joined training organized by the VoMA Survival School.²⁰ Karapet Aghajanyan, a combat instructor in Yerevan,

¹⁵ “Former non-commissioned officer: “I’m going to Artsakh with 500-800 Greeks to crush the Turks”, *Greekcitytimes.com* <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/10/03/former-non-commissioned-officer-im-going-to-artsakh-with-500-800-greeks-to-crush-the-turks/>

¹⁶ VoMA Special Training Center <http://www.voma.center/>

¹⁷ “With ropes and wooden guns, returning Armenians train for war,” *Reuters*, October 29, 2020 - https://www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-volunteers-int-idUSKBN27E24W?utm_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=facebook_k

¹⁸ “Diaspora Armenians train to protect Artsakh,” *Armenianweekly.com*, 28 October 2020 <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/10/28/diaspora-armenians-train-to-protect-artsakh/>

¹⁹ “Հայաստանում այս օրերին ակտիվ սովորում են կրակել, նաև առաջին բուժօգնությունն ցուցաբերել նազմական պայմաններում,” *Azatutyun.am*, 25 October 2020 <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30911260.html>

²⁰ “With ropes and wooden guns, returning Armenians train for war. *Reuters*, October 29, 2020 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-volunteers-int->

also told *Reuters* that around 10 Lebanese-Armenians, who arrived in Armenia from Beirut after the fighting broke out in late September to go to the front line, had received training in his camp.²¹

The activities of VoMA in the Russian-speaking segments of social networks indicate that the recruiting process included the territory of the Russian Federation. According to organizers, upon completion of all training courses, the battalion was “put into combat operations in the assigned territories” under the leadership of the Armenian Defense Ministry. However, the most interesting issue seems to be the availability of access for Russian citizens as well. For Armenians from the Russian Federation, charter flights from Moscow to Yerevan were organized on October 9 and 25 by NordStar Airlines.²² The accompanying appeal stressed that “participation in accelerated military training courses and further membership in the volunteer battalion is free.” Suffice it to say that, according to Article 208(2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, “participation in an armed formation that is not provided for by a federal law shall be punishable by restraint of liberty for a term of up to three years, or by arrest for a term of up to six months, or by deprivation of liberty for a term of up to five years.”²³ However, one of the citizens of the Russian Federation of Armenian origin, 55-year-old Vahan, believed that, unlike mercenaries, as he was not receiving any payment for his activities, he was therefore not committing the offence of being a “mercenary.”²⁴

On 28 September, the president of the Armenian Union of Russia (Союз армян России), Ara Abramyan, announced that 20,000 Russian Armenians were going to travel to Armenia and fight for the regime in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. He also mentioned that there were around 1,000 Russians who also wanted to join, but their proposal was rejected by Armenia. According to Ara Abramyan, they planned to ask for military transport.²⁵ On September 29, the Russian Armenians, including some members of ARF Dashnaksutyun party, departed from Sochi to Yerevan to participate as volunteers in military operations.²⁶

On September 30, 8,000 Armenians from Samtskhe–Javakheti region of Georgia, alongside 120 tons of humanitarian aid collected by the Armenian diaspora, left for Armenia to volunteer in the war.²⁷

By the same token, it is possible to find information posted by Armenians on the supportive attitude of Iranian Armenians. For example, an Armenian social-network user posted a photo of a “visa” for entering the occupied Azerbaijani territories (the so-called “Republic of Artsakh”) during the

idUSKBN27E24W?utm_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=facebook

²¹“Despite Lebanon’s woes, Armenians spring to action for Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Reuters*, 1 November, 2020 https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN27H157?_twitter_impression=true&s=08

²² <https://www.radarbox.com/data/flights/y79702>;

²³The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

https://www.imolin.org/doc/amlid/Russian_Federation_Criminal_Code.pdf

²⁴«Россия — моя страна, Армения — моя Родина». *Коммерсант*, 30 октября 2020 г. https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/4556494?_twitter_impression=true&s=08

²⁵20 тысяч российских армян собрались в Карабах добровольцами. *Lenta.ru*, 28 September 2020 <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/09/28/volunteers/>

²⁶«Мы не наемники, мы добровольцы, мы едем на войну. И это последняя война» - *znak.com*, 29 October 2020 [https://www.znak.com/2020-09-](https://www.znak.com/2020-09-29/armyane_dobrovolcy_letyat_iz_sochi_v_erevan_dlya_uchastiya_v_konflikte_v_nagornom_karabahe)

[29/armyane_dobrovolcy_letyat_iz_sochi_v_erevan_dlya_uchastiya_v_konflikte_v_nagornom_karabahe](https://www.znak.com/2020-09-29/armyane_dobrovolcy_letyat_iz_sochi_v_erevan_dlya_uchastiya_v_konflikte_v_nagornom_karabahe)

²⁷Telegram

<https://t.me/bagramyan26/18513?fbclid=IwAR27CtrM2jNgNjHd7bNNMzcyj5hv7RYlwEwfbtFW2Qlp1BzXwdmTETEg5gU>

war. It was stated that the purpose of the Iranian posting the “visa” photo was to emphasize “the fact of” the existence of an unrecognized so-called “republic.”

In addition to the evidence that Diaspora members themselves post on social media that actively promotes and announces the numbers of those joining the military to fight on the part of Armenia, it is also possible to come across interviews with individual foreign citizens of Armenian origin taking part in the conflict. An anonymous respondent mentioned that there are many underage people from Greece eager to fight for Armenia against Azerbaijan. According to the *Sputnik Hellas* news agency, at least 500–800 Greek citizens said they were ready to join the Armenian army “to fight the Turks.” According to the same source, during the Armenian rally in Syntagma Square in the center of Athens on September 30,²⁸ 16-year-old Armenian Greek Armen Panutaryan, who has not yet finished school, announced that he would also go to fight for Armenia.²⁹ In addition, according to Minas Hovhannisyanyan, the head of the Hayastan cultural center in Greece, Armenians there called on their compatriots to join the Armenian army voluntarily. In three days more than 100 people answered the call.³⁰ The Greek City Times has been covering a similar story, this time involving Greek citizens of Armenian descent who had moved to Greece 28 years ago. The subject of this story, who wanted to stay anonymous, said out that he personally knew “30–35 Armenian-Greeks” and another “15–20 ethnic Greeks” who were ready to go to fight in the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan.³¹

According to *BBC News Russia*, journalists met four members of the international biker club *Armenia* in the City Hall of Goris; they had come to the country from Lebanon and the United States to help their compatriots. Anonymous respondents said that if there was a need to participate in military action, they probably would.³²

On October 4, a group of French medical volunteers arrived in occupied Khankendi to help Armenian soldiers there. French nationals of Armenian descent are also heading to join the military actions of the Armenian regime in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. According to *France 24* and *Новая Газета*, several men with French citizenship actively participated in the fighting against Azerbaijan. For example, French Armenian Artur Oganisyan told a correspondent that he simply arrived in Armenia without providing any documents, received a machine gun, and joined the army. He mentioned that his two brothers are also participating in the military actions.³³ The *France24* news agency has published several video reports telling the stories of a war veteran

²⁸“Συγκέντρωση διαμαρτυρίας των Αρμενίων στο Σύνταγμα κατά της επιθετικότητας των Αζέρων – Βίντεο,” 30.09.2020 - <https://sputniknews.gr/ellada/202009308400217-sygentrosi-diamartyrias-ton-armenion-sto-syntagma-kata-tis-epithetikotitas-ton-azeron---vinteo/>

²⁹“Έλληνας πρώην υπαξιωματικός ετοιμάζεται να φύγει για Ναγκόρνο-Καραμπάχ: «Θέλω να τσακίσω τον Τούρκο,” 02.10.2020 - <https://sputniknews.gr/ellada/202010028415836-ellinas-proin-ypaxiomatikos-etoimazetai-na-fygei-gia-nagkorno-karampah-thelo-na-tsakiso-ton-tourko/>

³⁰“Հունաստանում հայկական սիյուռքը կոչ է անում հայրենակիցներին կամավոր կերպով մեկնել հայկական բանակ,” 03.10.2020 <https://www.shantnews.am/news/view/774688.html>

³¹“GCT Exclusive: “I cannot watch what is happening and not fight” – Approximately 80 Greeks going to Artsakh battlefield,” [greekcitytimes.com](https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/10/01/greeks-going-to-artsakh-battlefront/) - <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/10/01/greeks-going-to-artsakh-battlefront/>

³²“Каждый день - беспилотник”. Тысячи армян бегут из Нагорного Карабаха через приграничный город Горис,” [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54454027), 8 октября 2020 - <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54454027>

³³“Война у южных ворот. Что происходит в Карабахе: Репортаж из Шуши и Лачина,” [novayagazeta.ru](https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/10/07/87416-voyna-u-yuzhnyh-vorot?fbclid=IwAR1yXxic2Qowhq1ksTQTZSS4xKaVA5iy2qPM0YjPHWz0a2ZcuPdQ7Ab0aew), 09.10.2020 - <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/10/07/87416-voyna-u-yuzhnyh-vorot?fbclid=IwAR1yXxic2Qowhq1ksTQTZSS4xKaVA5iy2qPM0YjPHWz0a2ZcuPdQ7Ab0aew>

named Vardan³⁴ and a 28-year-old French citizen, Sipan Muradyan,³⁵ who returned to their homeland to participate in the war by joining a group of volunteers. The French *Liberation* news agency also reported on Marc de Cacqueray-Valmenier, the the notorious neo-Nazi and leader of the far-right group Zouaves Paris (ZVP), who left to fight on the Armenian side and published a photo on social media photo as evidence of his presence on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan fighting on the territory of the unrecognized, so-called “Artsakh Republic.”^{36,37}

An article in Spain’s *El Confidencial* narrates the story of Zareh, who had also fought on behalf of Armenia during the last year of the 1988–1994 Karabakh war, coming to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh all the way from Barcelona, Spain. He mentions that he has seen compatriots from Belgium and the United States. Anush, another member of the Armenian diaspora in Spain, also proudly tells the story of “brave Armenians living abroad” who were ready to be mobilized for the war on the territories not legally belonging to the state of Armenia, among them her father. The author also claims that, according to his sources, several dozen Armenians in Spain have seriously considered traveling to Armenia to volunteer, though not necessarily on the front line.³⁸ However, taking into consideration the serious need of the Armenian army for manpower and the incessant calls of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for his compatriots to form military groupings, the probability of these volunteers being sent to the front line is very high. Another source, this time from Argentina, in its headline for a report aiming to showcase the current conflict in photos from both sides, also mentioned that “Armenians are coming back home and get inscribed as volunteers or reservists.”³⁹ The headline itself, although not containing an open message, is a clear indication of the call for Armenians living abroad. Moreover, describing those who have already come back to Armenia as heroes and displaying their photos during training already encourages Armenians living abroad to consider this option and look for ways to enlist.

Hence, public sources reveal that members of the Armenian diaspora have been keen to travel and join the fight in Karabakh. According to the head of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party in Lebanon, MP Hagop Pakradounian, there was no organisation registering or sending any volunteers from Lebanon, but at least 20 people from Beirut individually left for Yerevan with the aim of participating in military action on the Armenian side.⁴⁰

³⁴“Armenian volunteer returns from France to fight for Nagorno-Karabakh,” *France24*, 07 October 2020 <https://www.france24.com/en/20201007-armenian-volunteer-returns-from-france-to-fight-for-nagorno-karabakh>

³⁵“Armenian diaspora pitches in as Nagorno-Karabakh truce crumbles,” *France24*, 27 October 2020 <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20201027-armenian-diaspora-pitches-in-as-nagorno-karabakh-truce-crumbles>

³⁶“Extrême droite: le patron des Zouaves Paris part combattre au Haut-Karabakh. Par Pierre Plottu et Maxime Macé,” *liberation.fr*, 30 Octobre 2020 - https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/10/30/extreme-droite-le-patron-des-zouaves-paris-part-combattre-au-haut-karabakh_1803962;

³⁷<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10157581350647724&set=a.10152388042547724>

³⁸“Voluntarios en Nagorno-Karabaj: ‘He viajado de Barcelona a Armenia para luchar’,” *Elconfidencial.com*, 15 October 2020 https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/europa/2020-10-15/nagorno-karabaj-he-viajado-desde-barcelona-a-armenia-luchar_2784995/

³⁹“Armenia y Azerbaiyán. La lucha se desata en Nagorno-Karabaj, los armenios regresan a casa y se inscriben como voluntarios y reservistas,” *Clarín.com*, 22 October 2020 - https://www.clarin.com/fotogalerias/lucha-desata-nagorno-karabaj-propagacion-virus-implacable_5_geX9rSODb.html

⁴⁰“Despite Lebanon’s woes, Armenians spring to action for Nagorno-Narabakh,” *Reuters*, 1 November 2020 https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN27H157?_twitter_impression=true&s=08

Conclusion

This report has shown that Armenia has succeeded in mobilizing mercenaries and foreign fighters to fight against Azerbaijan in Karabakh.

The Prosecutor General of Azerbaijan Kamran Aliyev declared at a briefing on October 30, 2020, that about 10 foreign citizens were participating in hostilities on the side of the Armenian Armed Forces in Karabakh. These mercenaries were citizens of France, the United States, Greece, Georgia, Lebanon, Syria, and Belarus. They have been included on an international wanted list. Due to the fact that these individuals participated in hostilities on the side of the Armenian Armed Forces in Karabakh, “lawsuits have been filed on these facts under the relevant articles of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan, requests have been sent to the above countries within the framework of agreements on mutual assistance in the legal sphere.”⁴¹

Thus, Armenia and its diaspora have been involved in the process of recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries and foreign fighters, locally and abroad, for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of violence aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. This is a gross violation of international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international refugee law. That said, it is also important to emphasize that Armenia, which has recently ratified the Convention, has infringed Article 5 that emphasizes that State Parties are obliged not to recruit, use, finance, or train mercenaries.

⁴¹ “Foreign mercenaries in the Armed Forces of Armenia put on the wanted list,” Prosecutor General's Office Politics, Turan.az, 30 October 2020 <https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2020/10/free/politics%20news/en/129347.htm>