

# The War's Impact and Attempts at Recovery: Armenia's Civil Society Story

The 44-day war in Artsakh had a profound impact on Armenia, touching on a variety of society's aspects, including economy, politics, and international relations. Eurasia Partnership Foundation's "Civil Society Support for Ensuring Impact on Reforms" (CS Support) project, supported by Sida, was conceived before the war. However, it was launched in November 2020, and its flexible design allowed for the immediate addressing of the consequences of the war via its sub-granting scheme. This project connected with other civil society projects in providing a very important message to civil society in Armenia, demonstrating that Sweden and in general the international community and European Union do not abandon Armenia in dire circumstances.

The project aimed to support civil society in Armenia through building its capacities and strategic positioning to successfully address the needs created by Covid-19, the post-revolutionary, as well as the post-war events; specifically in the areas of human rights, anti-discrimination and non-violence, anti-corruption and conflict of interest, the environment, as well as urban planning and development, along with several others.

The war resulted in a significant loss of life and displacement of people. Many soldiers and civilians were killed or injured, and thousands were displaced from their homes. The war also caused emotional distress and trauma among the country's population. The conflict also had a negative impact on Armenia's economy. The disruption of trade routes and infrastructure, as well as the destruction of key economic assets affected industries and businesses. Also, it hampered foreign investment and tourism, further straining Armenia's economic situation.

Of all the affected areas, the impact on civil society has been profound and multifaceted. CSOs were struggling to operate effectively due to limited resources, security concerns, and shifting priorities. The humanitarian crisis diverted the attention and resources away from long-term development initiatives. The war also led to the erosion of trust among citizens, making it difficult for CSOs to foster collaboration and collective action.

However, in the midst of adversity, some civil society organizations demonstrated resilience and determination to address pressing issues. Local organizations and individuals stepped in to fill gaps in essential services, advocate for human rights, and promote peacebuilding efforts. These efforts showcased the potential of civil society to drive positive change even in the most challenging of circumstances.

Thus, the impact of the war on civil society has been a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. While it severely disrupted the growth of civil society, the resilience and determination of individuals and organizations also fostered positive change even in the most adverse conditions. Rebuilding and nurturing civil society in the post-war period have been essential to achieving a return to normalcy. EPF and its beneficiaries are very grateful to Sida for supporting that effort.

As a part of the *CS Support*, EPF announced an open call for sub-grants. During the whole period of its implementation, EPF received more than 120 project proposals from Yerevan-based and regional organizations. In total, 46 projects were implemented, out of which several addressed issues that arose directly after the war. Below are descriptions of some of these projects.

### **Visual Innovation Studio: Post-war stories**

Those who experienced the war - particularly young people - were given the chance to share their stories, as well as receive post-war trauma therapeutic sessions. A contest for short documentaries and video stories was announced for novice content creators. Video products reflecting on human stories that were absent in public discourse in the year-and-a-half after the ceasefire or addressing well-known stories from a new angle, through the eyes of young people, were created.

The commencement of the first academic year of Hetq Media Factory coincided with the war. Factory's students Susina Khachatryan and Karin Manukyan met and started filming a story about young men from Artsakh, however events in the region caused the filming<sup>1</sup> to be stopped. The contact with the people whose story journalists were telling was interrupted. The story was not published. A year-and-a-half later, Karin and Susina went to Stepanakert to follow up on the story.

*For 25 years the family of Abgaryans lived in Artsakh. After the end of the war in 2020, they left for a village in Armenia, Shinuhayr. Brothers Abgar and Norayr were beekeeping in Artsakh. During the conflict, most of the bees flew away and never came back. The Abgaryans brought the remaining 30 beehives with them to Shinuhayr, and now they have 120 beehives. The brothers clearly divided the work between them. Abgar prepares the hives, which are also for sale, whereas Norayr is a "bee expert" and knows the secret of getting good honey.*

### **Aghasi Tadevosyan: The 44-day war according to participant's stories: An anthropological research**

War is one of the most extreme manifestations of human activity, and it is extreme in that one person kills another in a supposedly meaningful and justified way. The shocking feature of war is that it represents a legitimate act of collective killing. This is a unique form of human behavior that renders the issues of life and death extremely tangible.

This research has been an attempt to study and present the war through the stories of participants. The study not only describes the course of the war, but also other phenomena typical of armed conflicts; such as perceptions of heroism, patriotism, betrayal, life and death, the image of the enemy and the description of self-image, the role of defeat and victory in making sense of and redefining identity, new technologies and human helplessness, manifestations of fear and horror, the process of transformation caused by war, and other such issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> Returning to Native Shinuhayr: The Beekeeping Brothers, <https://fb.watch/mWUxLNUwPK/>

The most characteristic feature of this particular war was the unequal confrontation of humans versus technology.

*That war did not last very long, it wasn't really very long at all. Forty-four days, if you compare with world history – what war ever lasted just 44 days, if you think about that? But probably there's never been such a war on the face of the Earth, where from one side only technology fought; this was a new war, it was a real 21st Century war, where weapons were fighting, not men.*

Conscript, 22 year-old, male

The war is also described as having been very intense or “dense.” The Azerbaijani side kept up a quite intensive schedule of bombing and offensive operations. The amount of shelling and drone attacks were also intense.

*Well, our task was to eliminate the enemy's drones and planes, but it didn't work. It was impossible, because so many shells were raining from the sky, you just couldn't. By the time you'd got it in the cross hairs, to shoot down the drone, it was too late... There were too many tanks, too many drones, too many shells. No one imagined it would be on such a large scale.*

Former conscript, 21 year-old, male

This project has received co-funding by the EU. You can find the extended version<sup>2</sup> of the research in Armenian on our website. Additionally, a five-page brief of the research in English is available in the EPF Annual Report 2020, accessible through this link<sup>3</sup>.

## **Open platform: DOK & THEATER. A platform retelling modern text**

docuTHEATER's goal was to create a platform for documentary plays, where through various types of performing arts (dramatic performance, various media plays, etc.) a wide range of artists would have an opportunity to reflect on the events (the 44-day war, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Velvet Revolution in 2018, etc.) taking place in Armenia. A platform, where the play's content engages its performers' and the audience's life. The purpose of the platform was to move the modern text, the active public discussion on current issues, from the online space to a real place of imagery and interaction.

*What was the reason for my defeat?*

*The Endgame is an experience to transmute the post-war depression, the shameful pain of defeat, into a conscious analysis that the volunteer of war named Alone experiences through chess.*

ENDSHPIL - multidisciplinary media performance  
Author, director and performer: Garik Hovhannisyan

---

<sup>2</sup> The war according to participant's stories. anthropological research, Aghasi Tadevosyan, [https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Tadevosyan\\_Anthropology\\_of\\_War.pdf](https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Tadevosyan_Anthropology_of_War.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The 44-day war in the stories of participant's anthropological research. Brief Summary, Aghasi Tadevosyan <https://epfarmenia.am/documents/The-44-day-war-in-the-stories-of-participants-anthropological-research>

*Modern reality separates A Person from A Person, offering chaos instead. The play is a solo performance based on memories, associative images and comparisons. Depicting the past, present and future through body sensations and images.*

CONTACT - pantomime, mummery  
Author, director and performer: Hamlet Chobanyan

*The play addresses the need for coexistence and peaceful living with neighbors. It is about two enemy soldiers who, obeying the state of things, seek a relationship. In case of having equal status and will, there can be certain interactions that will lead to a peaceful life for two nations.*

PEACEFUL LIVING - drama  
Author and Director: Mher Asatryan  
Performers: Mher Asatryan, Arshak Aloyan

#### **4Plus Documentary Photography Center: Post-war, post-truths**

The project<sup>4</sup> “Post-War Truths” is a collective effort, the determined work of six photographers who have carried their own pain with them as they seek to define the narratives that must not be forgotten, the narratives that will help light the way forward. They understand that aftermath is the next chapter; that aftermath is, in fact, the prologue of the future. These are narratives that must continue to be written and to be seen.

It’s something that many people around the world know only too well – war is only half the story. And it’s something the people of Armenia have known for a long time.

Photos of the war depict various stories: a displaced family seeking to rebuild a sense of normalcy and security; a villager living on a newly defined border struggling to maintain the way of life that has been handed down by ancestors from a generation to a generation; a soldier trying to forget the war. Everywhere there is the memory of war – and the echoes of conflict long gone. Longing, loss, love, life.

#### **Haverzh: Rethinking the code of conduct in media covering war and post-war crisis**

The project team analyzed media articles covering issues related to soldiers and their families in the war and post-war situations. They developed a methodology of the analysis and identified media outlets to observe the quality of their production from the perspective of sensitivity. Based on the media analysis, a guidebook was developed and published. The guidebook offers ethical norms that should be followed by journalists and media outlets to properly work with conflict affected soldiers and their family members.

---

<sup>4</sup> 4Plus documentary photography center, Post-War Truths, <https://www.4plus.org/post-war-truths>

## **Public Agenda: The Mechanism of Distortion of Peace Messages and How to Combat it**

The war in April 2016 was a very important and unequivocal signal that the situation around the conflict of Artsakh had radically changed and its previous frozen status was no longer acceptable to the new situation in the region and the balance of forces. However, a question arises as to whether the active segment of the Armenian public, the political groups and the media realized this with sufficient clarity. In particular, whether in the aftermath of the war in 2016, various segments of the Armenian public (political forces, NGOs, business actors, etc.) publicly discussed the possibility of a new large-scale war and what to do to prevent it.

Within the project, surveys with media experts were conducted in order to assess the quality and content of media outlets in Armenia that operated before the 44-day war. The final research, along with other findings, concludes that narrow party propaganda prevailed in the media sector when it came to the discussions about a possible war, and this propaganda was particularly waged by the supporters of the former authorities who used the war as an important opportunity to try to regain power. Apart from this, external influence was visible in the media sector, and the association of that line of propaganda with such groups was clear, especially with an aim to annihilate or discredit the paradigm of peace. Discussions on the possibility of a large-scale war were not of a profound nature and not accessible to the broader public.

*From time-to-time there were predictions on the possibility and even inevitability of war. However, the reasonings were not of a profound nature and didn't stimulate serious discussions among the diverse segments of the population.*

Boris Navasardyan, Yerevan Press Club

*I do not recollect any broad and in-depth discussions on the subject. They were largely event-dependent, very few and not intended to involve the public in them. It should be stated that even Armenian-Azerbaijani joint projects were holding this discourse in a limited manner in view of the restrictions existing in Azerbaijan and other important events taking place in Armenia.*

Nune Sargsyan, Media Initiatives Center

## **Civilitas Foundation: Raising public awareness and promoting participation in the electoral and post-election period**

The aim of the project was to raise citizens' awareness of political processes, so that they are well informed and participate in elections by considering the content of the programs the candidates offer. There was an urgent need for balanced and verified coverage of political process to ensure that the public receives unbiased information on political parties, the ongoing developments in the country and election-related developments.

Civilnet actively covered the summer 2021 election campaign and developments in the country before, during and after the elections through several formats. Interviews were conducted with ruling and opposition parties, experts and activists, aimed at presenting the agendas of the parties, and their approach to the priorities of the country. Before the elections, Civilnet initiated public discussions covering the topic of border security.

Before and after elections, Civilnet also organized debates between political parties and alliance representatives. One topic of the debate was the hate speech and environment before the elections, as well as the Nagorny Karabakh issue and its future. Another topic was the request to the Constitutional Court submitted by the opposition to cancel the results of snap parliamentary elections. Participants were discussing the post-electoral situation in the country, political developments, the new parliament and the challenges of the country for the coming years.

In addition to the elections and security issues, Civilnet also covered ongoing reforms in the country, such as: judicial, public administration, the economy etc.

### **Boon foundation: Policy and policies: BOON talks**

The project aimed at increasing the effectiveness of public policy development processes through triggering constructive dialogue between civil society and state representatives on the issues of public importance in the aftermath of the 44-day war. The project's need was underlined by the fact that the war interrupted proper communication between civil society and freelance experts, on one hand, and the governmental officers on the other hand. Rebuilding of trust has also become a very urgent need.

At the beginning of the project, closed discussions between civil society and state representatives were held, based on the 'Chatham House Rule.' Within this confidential setting, participants engaged in conversations covering a range of vital subjects. These included Armenia's sovereignty in the context of international relations, the efficacy of state institutions and the vision for state development, demographics in Armenia with a focus on trends, challenges, and potential actions, the media's role in societal dynamics, constitutional reforms, as well as the need for judicial reforms..

Each event engaged eight to twelve participants representing civil society, expert community and state representatives. The closed format of the meetings allowed participants to discuss the most sensitive issues and point out major problems that existed in the field. After each meeting, the project team developed brief minutes from the discussion with no names and references and disseminated it among the participants. Based on these materials, open public broadcasts were later broadcasted via the Boon TV channel.