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Introduction

“Peaceful coexistence starts with knowledge on each other. The culture, traditions, system of political governance and ideology. This is nourished through regular contacts, cooperation, information sharing and confidence building.”

These are the words used by the participants of the project “Mimino” or “Caucasus is our only common home” initiated by “Democracy Today” NGO in collaboration with Georgian partners. The main aim of this unique and empowering project was to establish creative space for Georgian and Armenian youth to learn, share, joke and create circles of cooperative influence in both countries and beyond. The project was generously funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

This unique publication “Caucasus is our only common home” is one of the innovative ideas that group has come up with: writing impressions, opinions and visions on each country’s achievements, as well as, presenting the ways to architecture common future.

The title of the project “Mimino” is taken from the famous film “Mimino” of the great Georgian filmmaker Georgi Danelia who with the great talent of master presented the beauty and deep sense of unity, shared culture, as well as, wisdom between Armenians and Georgians. This is a beloved film of many generations both in Armenia and Georgia.

In the framework of the project, 20 young students of political science and journalism from different communities of both countries have been granted with an opportunity to travel to Georgia and Armenia. Project participants visited different communities across the counties, met politicians, NGO leaders and experts, as well as, had chance to debate, learn and discover developments in each country. The project participants discovered political, social, economic and cultural changes of Georgia and Armenia and wrote articles based on their personal experience which were collected in this publication.

The project also included public presentation of the articles, visions and debates in the communities and educational institutions, as well as, organization of online discussions. This is an excellent start of a new circle of relationships which will invest in strengthening stability in the Caucasus

and building the “only and common Caucasian home” for the youth. It is important to highlight that as the project was extended due to COVID-19, this gave chance to see how the project participants came up with many forms of creative volunteerism which they either initiated themselves or participated in. These are examples of the high responsibility of young people in a critical situation, and activities that need to be supported and encouraged, the ones that strengthen social cohesion.

Background

Armenia and Georgia, living side by side have a long history of good neighborhood, times of common history and shared culture. For epochs they lived and remained peaceful neighbors with rich multiethnic communities, exhibiting unique examples of peaceful coexistence, preserving their identity, culture and language, as well as, enriching each other and uniting in the time of difficulties.

The collapse of the Soviet Union introduced the new reality for both countries and search for identities in a globalized world. As newly established independent countries, Armenia and Georgia were not ready for radical changes. Moreover, the ethnoterritorial conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia brought new challenges. These realities that Armenia and Georgia had to face continue to have significant impact on all the aspects of countries' lives: politics, social, economic. It also has strong impact on democracy building, development of priorities in the vectors of international integration as well as political strategies in the region and the world. These unresolved conflicts had serious impact on the security architecture of the South Caucasus. The visions of both countries in terms of solution of regional conflicts, as well as, political affiliations are different, which in turn has important impact on Georgian-Armenian relationships.

Georgia was always considering as highest priority the politics of strengthening cooperation with EU and NATO, while Armenian government, due to numerous factors gave preference to Russian Federation over other cooperation vectors. These choices surely had

impact on the level of cooperation between the countries, though it is worth to mention that not always it was people's choice.

The “velvet revolution” in Armenia gave a new stimulus to Georgian – Armenian relations which reflected in exchange of visits, approximation of positions between the states and had its important positive impact on the relationship, investing in better understanding. In May 2020 during the visit of Armenian Prime Minister Mr. Nikol Pashinian to Georgia both leaders recognized the importance of sustainable long-term cooperation and peace. Georgian Prime Minister Mr. Giorgi Gakharia noted that Armenia and Georgia find themselves in a complicated region, and both countries understand that the regional stability is the key for the sustainable development. “We must first of all think of peace, and then talk about political, economic and cultural issues,”- mentioned Mr. Giorgi Gakharia. He also highlighted the democratization process in our region as a means to promote economic and cultural exchanges. His statement was echoed by Mr. Pashinian’s speech who highlighted his confidence that new factors make Georgian-Armenian friendship tighter and strengthen drive for cooperation.

The newly established Armenian government demonstrated strong intention to move toward democracy and break the authoritarian regime which was ruling the country for the recent twenty years. Due to the fact that Armenian-Georgian relations have been recently marked with positive signs, irrespective of any differences in the choice of political vector, the two countries manage to develop their partnership.

In many situations Georgia acts as mediator for relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Numerous examples of joint work and efforts can be mentioned in the areas of Track 1, Track 2 and even which is important Track 1,5 diplomacy that has important impact on the relationship between two countries. Some of them, such as institutionalized structures of civil society (NGOs), cooperation both in multilateral and bilateral formats have history of good cooperation through all of these years. There have been many situations when countries expressed support to each other in difficult situations.

Enhanced interconnections in the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) Civil Society Forum (CSF) are a good illustration

for that. Though irrespective of the results caused by these projects some sociological surveys still provide information on lack of trust and understanding between the countries, new young government of Armenia have been stressing its attention on the necessity of intensifying cooperation between different groups of society during meeting with Georgian counterparts which in turn will invest in stronger confidence and understanding.

This publication presents the visions of youth from Georgia and Armenia who in are the most important and untapped resource for cooperation and understanding with their creative visions and innovative ideas. They are the important asset for understanding, peace and strong cooperation in different fields. The project surely invested in building up confidence and long-lasting relationships between Georgian and Armenian youth as well as, communities they live in.

Chapter 1: Visiting partners and organizations in Georgia and Armenia.

In the frames of “Mimino” project very informative programs have been designed and implemented in both countries: providing views of the governments, parliaments, independent scholars, media outlets, NGOs, as well as, traveling through the countries and visiting people in rural and bordering communities. The program of the project also allowed participants to have free time to have fun, walk, enjoy the atmosphere of Georgian and Armenian cities, as well as, get to know each other better.

As in Armenia so in Georgia young people had very interesting discussions. In Armenia the youth met with human rights defender of the Republic of Armenia Mr. Tatoyan and discussed human rights situation in the country and cooperation with ombudsman office in Georgia. Students also met with members of parliament Ms. Sona Ghazaryan (member of the RA NA Standing Committee on European Integration) and Mr. Sargis Khandanyan (member of the RA NA Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs). They had very inspirational conversation which provided young people strong model of leadership.



Meeting with the human rights defender of the Republic of Armenia Mr. Arman Tatoyan, Yerevan, Armenia



Meeting with the members of parliament of Armenia Ms. Sona Ghazaryan and Mr. Sargis Khandanyan, Article 3 club, Yerevan, Armenia



Visiting at GALA media outlet, Gyumri, Armenia



Meeting at the office of "Restart" students' initiative, Yerevan, Armenia

The project participants found the meeting with young progressive parliamentarians very useful. They also had excellent opportunities to meet with film makers, politicians and scholars. Series of meetings have also been organized with various NGOs in Yerevan and Vanadzor. Moreover, the group traveled to Gyumri to meet with journalists from GALA media outlet. They also had chance to visit Saghmsoavank 13th-century Armenian monastery and learn more about local culture, as well as, enjoy the beauty of Yerevan city. On the last day of exchange visit, the students had shared their impressions during the press conference¹.

Similar, diverse and impressive program has been organized for Armenian students in Georgia. Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where students heard about the progress in regards to European integration. Meeting with the human rights defender of Georgia, where the issue on freedom of speech, situation with IDPs and the role of youth in the country's development have been discussed. Very informative and thought-provoking meeting have been organized with the historian Davit Jishkariani, representatives of Lazarus Foundation and Center for Peace and Society Development Nina Kobachidze and Rodan Jomaya respectfully. Among the important conversations can be mentioned the role of youth in peacebuilding projects in the Caucasus. Meeting with Dominik Cagara, executive director of OC Media in Tbilisi was highly commented by the students. During this meeting the work of mass media in the region was discussed. Similar to Armenia, in Georgia students also visited regions. They were very impressed by Ergneti's "Museum of War" where Ms. Lia Chlachidze presented the story of the museum's establishment. Later on project participants moved to Gori where they visited local radio station called "The Mosaic". The director of radio station Mr. Gvantsa Doluashvili and one of the journalists, Ms. Nino Chibchiuri, introduced their work, as well as, some of the specific issues they try to address. Project participants visited Tserovani IDP settlement. At Tserovani, the group was hosted by Ms. Nana Chkareuli the representative of "Tserovani Youth House" who presented the work of their organization and talked about their community. The students also visited Techpark and innovative Center and were impressed by the creative projects.

1. Press conference of "Mimino" project (https://www.facebook.com/DemocracyToday/photos/?tab=album&album_id=2529724950383149)



Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia



Visiting "Museum of War", Ergneti, Georgia

Some inputs from the students about the project are presented below:

“I would like to start with saying “Thank you” for this project.

The project was well organized and every part of it was very useful. It gave me a chance to look at everything globally and be fully engaged in every single topic. Journalism, radio, politics... Everything was very interesting and breathtaking. I really enjoyed the meetings with media outlets, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and certainly the meeting with the Director of IDP organization. I really felt pride while listening to her. Despite all the difficulties, she does everything to help people. The organization involves IDPs in many projects, exchange programs and helps them to gain important knowledge and experience. I really appreciate what they do. I should also add about the communication between the Armenians and Georgians. And it is worth to mention that every minute was full of emotions and information which is very precious for me.

Concerning my visit to Georgia, it was amazing and I obtained so much knowledge and experience, that it will definitely help me in the future. What about the changes in Armenia and Georgia, frankly speaking, it is so hard to say something about these changes, because maybe we need more time to feel the impact of any improvements on our own skin?”

*Mery Yesayan
(Armenia)*

“In the framework of “Mimino” project which was held in Yerevan in the summer of 2019, we had meetings with representatives of Armenian NGOs, human rights defender, members of parliament and journalists. During the meetings, we discussed current political, economic, social and cultural processes in Armenia.”

*Mariam Chokeli
(Georgia)*



Joint discussion with “Center for Peace and Society Development”, Tbilisi, Georgia



Meeting at the Public defender's office of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia

“Within the framework of the program it was interesting to meet with young Georgians, to participate in the discussions, to hear the opinions of Georgian politicians, historians and other officials as well as experts. The most impressive experience personally for me was the meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia where we had a truly interesting discourse. I would like this project to last longer.”

*Shahen Harutyunyan
(Armenia)*

Meeting with Armenian Parliamentarians was the most interesting part for me while being in Yerevan. It was inspiring to hear all they had accomplished to achieve that goal. Conversation about the causes and consequences of their choice as well as the choice of society presented the interests of the Armenian people. Leaders of young generation, who took part in these processes, are the main characters today.

In my opinion, if Armenian civil society becomes stronger, it will bring positive social changes to the country. Educated and active civil society is a foundation of healthy participatory democracy.

Armenia should use all their resources to strengthen civil society just because strong civil society is an independent watchdog of the government.

*Guanza Seturudze
(Georgia)*

“While participating in a youth exchange program in Georgia this summer, I had the chance to talk to the residents of rural areas and learn their opinion about the most sensitive topics towards which both Armenians and Georgians have quite stereotypical approach. During the meeting at the Human Right’s Defender’s Office in Georgia within the frames of “Mimino” program, it became clear that although Georgia is going through the path of changes and sees its future in the European Union, the majority of the residents of rural areas are still living with the stereotypical approaches which is far from being a “European” one.

And yet, the situation in Tbilisi differs from the one in the regions. There are definitely more freedoms in the capital city.”

*Knarik Karaminasyan
(Armenia)*

“During my visit to Armenia in the frames of the regional project, my group met the local political analysts and activists. We had a chance to engage in the private conversations with the experts and learn a lot. As it comes out, the political attitudes differ from party to party and there is no agreement concerning which partnership is more effective: connection to the West or to Russia. Armenian analysts keep different positions in regards to this issue. While some of them believe that Russia cannot compromise prime minister Pashinian for Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, others claim that the territorial dispute is a priority for Armenia and the government should keep ties with Russia to avoid further complications. It is worth to mention that the second group has nihilistic attitudes, which excludes belief in democracy and Western values.”

*Ruzka Epsadze
(Georgia)*

“Currently, “Mimino” is one of the best programs to develop relations between the young people of Armenia and Georgia. Due to this program youth from both countries got an opportunity to study the culture and the history of Armenia and Georgia, as well as, share their experience and knowledge. After the visit to Georgia within the framework of the “Mimino” program, both the results of the democratization of the country and the problems are obvious. In particular, after the war between Georgia and Russia, the country continues to overcome post-war psychological problems. People in Georgia continue their fight against Russian propaganda. It is necessary to organize professional seminars, reciprocal visits, which will enable youth to study and develop Armenia-Georgia relationships more broadly.”

*Mariam Revazyan
(Armenia)*

The cooperation of Armenian and Georgian youth is unavoidable and will be really successful. An important thing is that being in the same region, the cultures, beliefs and characters are not all that different between these two countries. This was one of the biggest guaranties of the project's success. It was really surprising for me to see that Georgian young people were well informed about the political problems occurring in Armenia, however, there were still some questions from their side.

I am sure it was really interesting for them to have discussion with the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia. I consider this meeting one of the most successful ones.

*Irina Davtyan
(Armenia)*



Joint walk in the city center, Yerevan, Armenia

Chapter 2: Peacebuilding starts with the knowledge

Through the last decades there have been numerous joint projects between Georgia and Armenia. These programs were trying to establish cooperation in different fields be it peace building, human rights, gender equality, environment protection, economic or tourism development. Being diverse these projects had also wide geographic and professional coverage significantly investing in confidence and knowledge building. With the of swift political processes in both countries, the need for unbiased professional systematic information flow and knowledge sharing is of vital importance to understand realities in building policy and cooperation. This need has been identified by youth as an issue of highest priority. In reality while trying to understand what are the challenges and potential pathways between Georgia and Armenia one comes across to multiple variations and potential pathways to sustain peaceful cooperation between these two countries. The distinct and divergent pathways, those seeking to encourage democratization in these countries should be ready to seek and take advantage of different kinds of openings for forward movement where they exist and emerge in these three distinct contexts. Recent successful political cooperation has justified need for such approach. Youth in both countries has that important and creative potential for democracy building through learning, discussing and joint education.

Excerpts from the articles written by the students, which are presented below clearly prove that idea.

“Why we should learn from each other? I often hear this question and there are many answers to it. I will try to answer the question based on my own observations.

Being part of exchange visits hearing this information and stories convinced me that I have very little knowledge about Armenia. I was amazed to discover that the processes in Georgia and Armenia were amazingly resembling. Similar events have occurred in both countries.

*Mariam Chokeli
(Georgia)*

March 1, 2008, Armenian Peaceful Protest

Followed by Armenian presidential elections of 19 February 2008, mass demonstrations took place in the country. The protesters were accusing the ruling regime in the electoral fraud.

The protests began in capital city Yerevan on 20th of February, and lasted for 10 days involving tens of thousands of citizens. The political elites urged that the government is going to use force to stop the demonstrations, however, the protests continued until 1st of March. After nine days peaceful protests were dismantled by force imposed by the national police and military forces. As a result, 10 people were killed and hundreds injured.



*March 1st, 2008, Armenian peaceful protests, Yerevan, Armenia**

November 7, 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia

In November of 2007, a series of anti-state protests took place across the Georgia. A number of protesters was growing day by day which reached its peak on November 2nd 2007, when around hundred thousand of people gathered at the center of the capital city Tbilisi.

** source: Photolure news agency (<https://www.photolure.am/>)*

The main purpose of the protests was the corrupt government. Protests were triggered by detention of Georgian politician on charges of extortion, money laundering, and abuse of political power. Demonstrations took place in September and November 2007 and were initially mostly peaceful. The protests went downhill by 6th November 2007, however turned violent the next day when the police, using heavy-handed tactics, including tear gas and water cannon, unblocked one of the main avenues in Tbilisi.

Demonstrations in both countries were dismantled by force.

Societies constantly struggled to elect a government and keep the political leaders accountable, which became huge obstacles for the democratic development of both countries.



November 7, 2007, protests in Tbilisi, Georgia

Today, when almost a year passed after the Armenian revolution, I ask myself as a citizen of the Republic of Armenia what it gave to my homeland. Today we deal with completely different reality and its consequences as there have been principal changes that are invaluable for the history of modern Armenia.

* source: Article by Zaza Jgharkava. "Georgia Today". 9.11.2007 (<http://georgiatoday.ge>)

Among these changes are:

- Systemic corruption that endangers state security almost eradicated in the Republic of Armenia. It is a fact that in some state infrastructures it is still manifested in one way or another, but it does not have a systemic character, it is not governed and implemented by the ruling elite, as it used to be.*
- It is an undeniable fact that the revolution has returned our people the feeling of empowerment and belief in their own power. Today, the majority of Armenian citizens are able to defend their dignity and are not afraid to voice their rights. We are dealing with a new political culture that has brought new worldviews, psychological and behavioral patterns.*
- For the first time since the revolution in the Third Republic of Armenia, the judiciary began to function independently of the ruling elite, which has become a fertile ground for the continued reduction of impunity.*
- No serious violations have been reported in any election since the revolution.*
- Significant reforms have been launched in the health sector.*
- The level of maintenance of mandatory military servicemen has been improved.*
- Salaries of military personnel, teachers, police officers, firefighters, medical workers, have been increased together with the pensions.*
- The revolution has also had a beneficial impact on our country's foreign policy. Attitude towards Armenia has improved significantly today, in particular, the country's top officials.*

*Ani Hovhannisyan
(Armenia)*

The experience gained by one country can be an example for another one. I would like to highlight the words of Artur Sakunts, a representative of a non-governmental organization "Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor" who mentioned that such small countries as Georgia and Armenia, which are neighbors, should closely cooperate

and exchange experience in various fields if they want to build democratic and developed countries.

I fully share this opinion. The exchange of experience and cooperation between neighboring countries also bring communities together to get to know each other better.

Perhaps one of the causes of conflicts in the South Caucasus is ignorance because we do not know about the processes taking place in our neighboring countries. We do not care, do not observe the development of events about each other. We do not know our neighbors' history. As we learn more, we will find that we have more similarities rather than differences.

*Mariam Chokeli
(Georgia)*

In Armenia, we wait that hopefully the situation will improve, but first of all the mentality needs to be changed. In Georgia, everyone was speaking about the political situation, every single person was suggesting a hypothesis, but in reality, nobody could feel the changes immediately.

*Meri Yesayan
(Armenia)*

Due to "Velvet Revolution" in 2018, a change of power took place in Armenia. As a result of this, Nikol Pashinyan became the Prime minister of the country. One of the major advantages of the revolution was strengthening the position of Armenia on the international arena and gaining the greater international recognition.

Unlike Armenia, in Georgia, after the Rose Revolution of 2003, many reforms took place, which in turn contributed to the democratization of the country.

To strengthen ties within the framework of newly established partnership, it is necessary to organize professional seminars, reciprocal visits, which will enable the populations to learn more about Armenia-Georgia relationships.

*Mariam Revazyan
(Armenia)*

What stages did Armenia go through before the “Velvet Revolution” and how did this process develop?! Why the country started mass demonstrations?! What caused unprecedented public unity?!

These meetings showed that the process did not begin a year ago. It was brewing for several years and the revolution was preceded by numerous demonstrations, which in some cases even ended up with victims.”

*Mariam Chokeli
(Georgia)*

After the famous events in Armenia, the society was full of hope to see improvements in our country. The majority, of course, hoped that authorities will make these “changes”. But when speaking about changes in the global context, we have to take into account some major factors. We should ask ourselves what we understand saying “change”, what “changes” does the society expect to get and is the society itself ready to undergo changes? Having a closer look at the current situation in Armenia, it becomes obvious that the main reform was the change of the government itself. We changed the government, but did we change the society?

The new government obviously differs from the previous one with its vision about the future of the country, working methodologies, the most important, with the system of values. Nevertheless, the stereotypical thinking is still present in the society. I see this as a huge obstacle which stops our country from tangible changes.

Taking all this into account, I can conclude that in some way our situation is similar to the one in Georgia: the governments change, but as a big part of the society still continues to live with the failed system of values and the “soviet” mentality. I find it essential for both Armenians and Georgians to organize this type of programs and to have more meetings and discussions in order to understand the possibility of further cooperation and the feasible ways of tackling these problems in our countries.

*Knarik Karaminasyan
(Armenia)*

Chapter 3: Peace can be sustained only with democratic governance.

Important synergies between democracy, effective peace building and resolution of conflicts have been raised by the students from both countries. They stressed that interconnectedness of peace, rule of law and democratic governance are not only closely inter-related, but also mutually reinforcing and critical for achieving sustainable peace and development. Both countries have much in common in their aspiration to build strong democratic governance based on rule of law, fight against corruption and modernization of security concept. Through recent years Armenia and Georgia registered good records in democracy building and strengthening democratic freedoms of its citizens.

“Democracy is undergoing evolution as time and environment changes, but its basic principles like freedom, pluralism, and human rights remain unchanged. We can talk about many other core values of democracy, but in this article, I want to focus on the three values mentioned above and their connection to peace building.

First, I would like to start with freedom, which includes economic, political and personal freedoms. What do we mean by that?

There is a Thomas Friedman thesis from 1996: “No two countries which have a McDonald’s have ever held a war against each other”. This means that democratic countries are establishing such close economic and political relations with each other that war is in principle impossible. Countries that have a high degree of an economic freedom, as well as a diversified export and import market, are more interested in building a peaceful environment. I want to mention a pluralism as one of the most important pillars of a democratic society.

The clearest deference between democratic and undemocratic countries are distinguished by respect for diversity and a pluralistic environment, which implies that freedom of thought and expression are protected; people can coexist peacefully and everyone is equal before the law. Maybe, someone might ask how related this is with

peace building? The answer is simple. If religious, ethnic, sexual, or other minorities have high representation and integration in society, the risks of conflict is minimal.

The third and most important factor is human rights.

Universal recognition of human rights is one of the most important steps in the history of mankind as it is the foundation of freedom, justice and universal peace. According to the simple logic, if a citizen has a feeling, that he or she will find justice in the country in a legal way, they will try to solve the problems peacefully. Peaceful coexistence is a guarantee of conflict prevention. For Georgia, this factor is twice more important, because if we create Western democracy this will be an example for our region.

Democracy is the most effective and actionable option for maintaining peaceful relationships between people and groups.

*Georgi Rivadje
(Georgia)*

Change is something multi-layered, and in order to fully understand its meaning, one must understand what a change is in a sense of the statehood, what the change is in the global sense and what it is in a broader context. I think that the change in the sense of the state, should be the re-evaluation of Armenia's ideological and value pillars, focusing not so much on internal change, but on external and international change, though it is interdependent. External relations, foreign partners, foreign policies are important. The broad masses of society are important as they shape the state power that promised changes. In order to properly assess the changes, these three aspects should be objectively studied, after which it will be possible to understand and present the changes which are taking place in Armenia.

In order to assess the changes in Georgia, I think we need to be guided by the same criterias, but to examine the status of Georgia fully, that has really taken the path of change, other conditions must also be taken into account. One must have a clear understanding of the relationship between society and state power and the visions of

state formation. It is important to know whether Georgian society is in harmony with its government about its most important issue. Georgia is in the midst of a cultural-civilization transition that is manifested by the collision of the failed values of the past and the winning system of values of the future. Common civilization and geopolitical motives may establish cooperation and common interests which will be clearly observed in future.

*Shahen Harutyunyan
(Armenia)*

Chapter 4: Neighborhood, cooperation, Caucasian community “We live so close but we do not know each other”

In the decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia and Georgia strived to maintain neighborhood relations but bilateral ties have never been particularly close despite their geographical and cultural proximity. In the recent times there has been noticed strong move towards reenergizing relations between two countries, which has led to some positive outcomes particularly in the economic and political spheres. Over the last two years, the number of high-level meetings between Georgian and Armenian politicians have risen significantly, including the most high-level meetings. Georgia was the destination of Pashinyan’s first official trip after becoming prime minister, which also bears diplomatic significance. Georgia and Armenia have now laid the groundwork for expanding economic cooperation. After a long hiatus, they re-launched the Armenia-Georgia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade-Economic Cooperation in 2019², to facilitate commercial cooperation. Plans are underway to boost trade turnover between Georgia and Armenia. There are numerous efforts to intensify relationship between both countries which needs to be intensified and made regular. The relations between civil society organizations, educational and research institutes, professional and business communities should also be intensified.

2. *Bilateral Relations*. (2019, 07 24). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Retrieved from [www.mfa.am](https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/ge): <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/ge>

“We live so close, though we do not know each other” – I often hear this phrase from my Armenian colleagues during their stay in Tbilisi and it provokes a new question in my mind: do we – Georgians, know people in our “neighborhood”? This is a challenge for our countries, hence one of the important prerequisites towards the achievement of long-lasting stability and prosperity at the national level – is a regional cooperation, as we are part of a bigger community called “South Caucasus”. Nevertheless, neighborhood connectivity is largely absent from the public and media discourse.

Two years ago, I was introduced to the short part of Armenia’s history, which described the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, adoption of independence, as well as, anti-communist leadership in Post-Soviet Armenia. New politics influenced national agenda of the country, and similar to Georgians, Armenians were happy to gain independence and stay outside the Soviet borders, embracing a new glowing future with high expectations. However, then things did not go well. Armenia faced economic, social and political problems, which was further enhanced with the antiliberal course of the country and its connection to Russia.

How are we going to get things done? This was the question Armenians could not find the proper answer for a long time. However, the velvet Revolution and arrival of the pro-Western leadership led by a former journalist and political prisoner – Nikol Pashinian showed a sign of increasing democratization of Armenian political culture. In addition to this, it was a clear signal for the observers that Armenia made a step forward to the West.

Armenia’s foreign policy has importance to Georgians, as Russia pushed the neighboring countries towards opposite directions. After the Rose Revolution the Georgians’ attitude towards Armenians has been shaped by negative perception because of the alliance between Yerevan and Kremlin. In addition, Russian backed media outlets have been disrupting strategic relations between the countries. However, there are some positive signs of changing relations between Georgia and Armenia, which was manifested in Brussels, when Armenian delegates did not vote against the

Georgian resolution on the rights of the Georgian IDPs. This action was positively perceived in Georgia and gave signal to Georgian government that sporadic effort should have been changed with long-standing vision to establish good neighboring policy.”

*Ruzka Epsadze
(Georgia)*

“Armenia and Georgia are neighboring countries and their relationships have history of centuries. After collapse of Soviet Union independent Armenia and Georgia continue their cooperation in many spheres such as culture, politics, economics and education.

Armenian revolution brought democratization of all the processes, specifically in such important fields as organization of fair and transparent elections, fight against systematic corruption, as well as, demonetization of economics.

I think it is important to understand, that connecting our two countries can be possible through youth. Even if we start from small projects, they can further expand and become a bigger topic on the agenda of our governments.

There is a noticeable eagerness and tendency to deepen relationships between the countries. I think that we need to take a strategic approach and work on sequence and efficiency of our steps. I see a great desire and potential for the cooperation.

*Irina Davtyan
(Armenia)*

Armenians and Georgians have lived side by side for centuries. We were passing through wars, having revolutions and were continuing to live on the same territory. Of course, during all these years we have acquired numerous similarities. It is essential for us to follow all the foreign and intro-political improvements. The, “Velvet Revolution” which took place in Armenia in 2018 awakened new hope among the population as it shown that positive and ongoing changes are possible in the country. Similarly, “Rose Revolution” which took place in Georgia in 2003 was unprecedented and followed by numerous improvements.

We can clearly see that both countries have passed through democratic developments and are proudly moving towards future reforms and positive changes.

*Tiruhi Petrosyanan
(Armenia)*

Chapter 5: There are more similarities rather than differences

In the South Caucasus, as well as, in larger region of Middle East, Armenians and Georgians are of those rare peoples who share common peaceful history. Except from some periods of tensions caused by internal and external factors, the history of two nations is mostly marked by cooperation and has been shaped by the common vision of reality and need to face global political, cultural and social changes and challenges. Besides the cultural proximity and long-going tradition of ties and exchanges, it is also political pragmatism and long-term geopolitical considerations that bring the friendly partnership despite external influence, which tried to drive countries apart.

There is huge Armenian community in Georgia, which has long history behind. The presence of Armenians in Georgia was described since late antiquity in the works of medieval Armenian historians and chroniclers. The similarities in historical ornaments, local cousins and even language polyphony prove that the two countries highly influenced each other. According to the official statistics in some regions of Georgia Armenians comprise more than half of the population. Of course, the Armenian diaspora is one of the main binding powers, since due to their presence in Georgia, the members of two ethnic groups have chance to learn more about each other and continue to develop common values.

Being mostly mono-ethnic state Armenia does not have big Georgian minority in the country, however, specifically during recent years Georgia became one of the most popular touristic destinations for Armenians, which in turn develops connections and encourages learning of the culture of neighboring country.

It is visible that in their papers, students have been presenting more similarities rather than differences which are present in the neighboring country.

Interconnectedness, dedication to solve problems, as well as, hard work for building future can be traced in all comments and opinions of Georgian and Armenian young people.

Trade relations between Armenia and Georgia are very important for both countries. Armenia, as important strategic partner and presents a great interest for Georgia.

In my opinion, after recent political developments Armenia has real potential to become country with a great, successful future. Geopolitical situation in Armenia reveals which direction should Armenians pay specific attention to in terms of future development. Nowadays, the only way for Armenia to become a fully-fledged part of a peaceful and stable Caucasus is European integration.

Despite the differences in priorities, relationships between Georgia and Armenia are friendly and cooperative. Although pro-Western activities faces some difficulties in Armenia due to the strong Russian influence, there is still general tendency to strengthen pro-Western orientation in the country.

Strategically, Armenia is very much dependent on Georgia since the trade the majority of trade connections physically go through Georgian border. However, it is worth to mention that relations with Armenia are also of crucial importance for Georgia.

In addition to business and commerce, there are other areas where collaboration is possible and can already be noticeable. Such areas are culture, education and science.

Gvantsa Seturidze
(Georgia)

Concerning the interdependence and cooperation of Armenian-Georgian political, cultural life, then though it is not yet at the desired level as it is today, however, it has improved considerably. Meetings are held at almost all levels of the field, with many issues being discussed, mutual agreements are reached, and

with the emerging new realities, everything is still ahead.

*Ani Hovanisyan
(Armenia)*

Georgia-Armenia similarities in history of the development after collapse of USSR

Georgia is a gateway to Europe and Asia as a united continent, which is one of the most important geopolitical and economic crossroads in the world. The function of the key to the Eurasian continent has determined our country's historical destiny. Georgia plays an important role of political, economic and cultural hub in the South Caucasus Region.

As Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts in Georgia, Republic of Armenia also has conflict with Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. While the whole South Caucasus as a region is of strategic geopolitical significance, persistent conflicts affect people's safety and become an obstacle for the economic and social development of the countries.

After Rose Revolution of Georgia in 2003 country stated to implement new policies which were mainly leading towards westernization and encouraging integration in Euro Atlantic and European organizations. These policies helped Georgia to diminish Russian influence. In 2008, Russia realized that Georgia was strongly determined in regards to its choice and its path towards NATO and EU. Following that on 7th of August a 5-day war broke about between Georgia and Russia.

In Armenia after the "Velvet Revolution" of 2018, a country started changing its political, economic and social agenda. New leader and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that the goal of Armenian foreign policy is to ensure the sovereignty and security of the Republic of Armenia, to consistently raise the level of sovereignty and security, and to create more favorable external environment for the security and prosperity of the country and its citizens. This statement created new hope to create a common regional agenda which will based on the principles of peace building.

Armenia realizes the big share of its foreign trade goes through Georgia. More than 70 percent of Armenia's cargo transportation passes through Georgia. Moreover, the gas pipeline which supplies natural gas from Russia to Armenia also runs through Georgia. This pipeline supplies 2 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually.

In case Georgia builds its new port in Anaklia, it will give a huge possibility Armenia, as the country will be able to grow its export in EU market and weaken the dependence from Russia.

We are the generation of young people who will be engaged in the development of political, economic, social and cultural policies in our countries in 5-10 years. Education must be our main value and weapon towards any kind of threats.

*Zurab Gorgodze
(Georgia)*

Mass demonstrations, which took place in Yerevan and some other major cities of Armenia in April of 2018, resulted in unexpected resignation of acting prime-minister and former president for the past decade Serzh Sargsyan.

It is worth to mention that this revaluation was different from the “classic revolutions” one can imagined. The major changes which took place in the country were unescapable, as the people of Armenia were fighting for many years to change the government. This change took place without any intervention of external forces, and it was made by the people's power to overthrow highly corrupted political elite. Any revolution brings global change in culture, political and socio-economic structures and Armenian “Velvet Revolution” was not an exception. A number of reforms either already took place or are planned for the country. Elimination of corruption, tax improvements, free and open foreign policy, creation of new working places, and the most important the change in value system.

Priorities of modern Armenian foreign policy are very serious. The current authorities are trying to establish balanced and strong relationships both with EU and Russia. They try to stick to more independent foreign policy. However, taking into account many circumstances and long-term

political connections, Russia still remains important and strategic partner for Armenia. Moreover, the role of Russian Federation in the peace settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh also plays major role.

After declaration of independence, the situation in Georgia is different, as quite soon the country started to demonstrate its eagerness to move towards Europe and West. Later on after Rose Revolution the vector changed a bit strengthening the vector Georgia-USA cooperation.

Active stage of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The current phase of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began in 1988, when in response to the self-determination claims of Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijani authorities organized ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population on the entire territory of Azerbaijan, particularly in Sumgait, Baku and Kirovabad.

On December 10, 1991 the population of NK hold a referendum and declared the establishment of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR), which in turn fully complies with both international legal norms, as well as, the general USSR laws of that time. Thus, on the territory of the former Azerbaijani SSR two states were going to be created: Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas populated by Armenians the policy pursued by Azerbaijani authorities turned into aggression and large-scale military actions against the peaceful population of Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and major injuries among the peaceful population.

Azerbaijan never followed the appeals of international community, particularly the United Nations Security Council resolutions relating to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which were calling to stop military actions and conduct peaceful negotiations.

Because of the war Azerbaijan occupied the whole region of Shahumyan, and the eastern parts of Martakert and Martuni, the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh. Neighboring districts went under the control of Nagorno-Karabakh armed forces, which played a role of a

security buffer to block the further firing from the Azeri side towards Nagorno-Karabakh settlements.

In May, 1994 Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia signed a ceasefire agreement. Peace negotiations are held in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship (Russia, USA, France).

*Hrair Tutkhalyan
(Armenia)*

Chapter 6: Perspectives of Georgian-Armenia cooperation

Students both from Armenia and Georgia mentioned important potential in deepening Georgian-Armenian relations and saw youth as key partners for the government in this endeavor.

The roots of the Armenian-Georgian cooperation go deep into the past. For many centuries the two nations lived and developed side by side. Nothing has changed in Armenian-Georgian cooperation today, however, we are expecting to have more close relationship.

“The Armenian revolution seems to bring new impetus for the political, economic and social development of our two countries.

Another point of cooperation are civil initiatives, one of which is “Mimino” project implemented by Democracy Today NGO. The project aimed at uniting Armenian and Georgian youth around the knowledge, common ideas and values. The project has achieved goal because, in addition to good friends, the participants also received information on the domestic, political and cultural life of the neighboring countries.

However, in order to deepen relationships further, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between young people of the two countries, and implement more and more joint practical teamwork.

Prospects for Armenian-Georgian cooperation are promising. In connection with favorable political conditions, we can say that

there are no obstacles for the implementation youth cooperation projects and programs.”

*Aida Hakobyan
(Armenia)*

“Although Armenia and Georgia can have different political views and orientation our countries still remain good neighbors.

Both countries have developing economic, updated political agendas and new intercultural programs. Among the assets of the development of our relationships are youth programs such as “Mimino” or “Caucasus is our big and common home” implemented by Democracy Today NGO.”

*Mariam Shachverdyan
(Armenia)*

Chapter 7: “Techno-battle”

New ideas, creativity, innovations and modern technologies are keys for the success and development of both Armenia and Georgia. Given the noticeable effects on efficiency, quality of life, and productive growth, innovation is a key factor in society and economy.

GITA's (Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency) mission is the development of modern technology in Georgia, the promotion of commercialization of knowledge and innovations, stimulation of using them in all fields of economy, creation of an environment for the growth of innovational thinking and high-tech produce.

FAB LAB (Fabrication Laboratory) is one of the amazing projects of GITA. Being successful in 3D Printing, Laser, Vinyl cutting, etc. they are showing the right path to development. If you want to join, they are totally happy and grateful. Creative mind, this is the best word to describe what is going on inside this magic building. Existing machines are appreciable for business sphere, especially for startups, who want to conquer the market.

TUMO (Center for Creative Technologies) aims to increase the level of creative Armenia due to the educational experience. The studying in special spheres like technology and design give the opportunity to

teenagers to achieve their goals in the best ways. As known, they learn because they want to. Graphic Design, 3D Modeling, Robotics, these are some of the programs TUMO-ians are proposed. Here students always level up their skills due to the tasks they are given. In this building unique ideas always become real. Notwithstanding the challenges they have, they stay sustainable to their goals and dreams.



Visiting Techpark, Tbilisi, Georgia

“This type of development in both countries is the unique way to succeed. The knowledge and the creative way of thinking of youth is an advantage and we should always use it satisfactorily. In this century, where we are the witnesses of rapid development, we should always gain advantage of what we learn and what we expect of the world. Georgia and Armenia are on the road of technological triumph, and what we need, is to continue the creation and progress and to reach the valuable position.”

*Mery Yesayan
(Armenia)*



*TUMO center for creative technologies, Yerevan, Armenia**

Chapter 8: The role of youth in fighting COVID-19

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 different countries all over the world face major challenges. In this regards Armenia and Georgia are not an exception. Countries face huge obstacles in different sectors. The government is challenged by the overload of the healthcare system, while people face enormous difficulties due to social-economic hardships. Despite all challenges and issues both countries proudly try to resist, however, there are still some gaps to be filled.

Because of the pandemic “Mimino” project has been extended, however, it gave chance to see how the project participants will try to support their communities during the pandemic, coming up with different forms of creative volunteerism, supporting the most vulnerable groups, helping communities to resist in this difficult situation.

Young people from Georgia and Armenia shared their path and unique experience to empower other young people for similar activities.

** source: TUMO center for creative technologies (www.tumo.org)*

Youth for Khulo

“The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many changes: public healthcare issues, social distancing, economic blockade all over the world.

We, six childhood friends, returned to our hometown Khulo and started thinking what could we do for our community. Currently, volunteering is highly needed all around the world to provide support to the communities mostly affected COVID-19. That is why we decided to create the initiative group called “Youth for Khulo” to give helping hand to the local community members.

In the beginning we collected our clothes, food and small amount of money. Then we asked local businesses for help and distributed products and primary medications to 5 families. After that we created a Facebook page and spread information about our work. 3 hours later we got 50 Georgian Lari and that was an amazing motivation for us! Then we got more money from local businesses, organizations and citizens. Various Georgian TV programs also reported about us and our work, which helped to share our mission and engage more people.

We have helped 119 families in 32 villages around Khulo so far. The cost of our food baskets is 100 GEL.”

*Giorgi Rijvadze
(Georgia)*

“These days it is very important to be responsible and not to look at the situation between the fingers. I am trying to do everything correctly following all the rules and legal norms imposed by the government. Every citizen should understand that in this situation their role is very important, and they can really save lives just by following the general rules of pandemic.

Due to my work and online lessons, unfortunately I cannot take part in volunteer work, however, I have a lot of friends who are volunteers. My friend Ani is a doctor and she is volunteering in the village of Aghavnadzor. Since she is a doctor, she deals with COVID. As other medical workers, she lives near the consolidation

of infection and thus she is unable to see her family for months. Ani was also infected, however, she fought the virus.

In addition to Ani, there are many volunteers who do not have medical education and are engaged in organizational issues. They deal with registration of people, food delivery, social service and other similar issues. This type of volunteering and consolidation is very important and valuable in this situation.

My friend Anushik is also volunteering these days. Her work includes other functions. She helps to register passengers of planes arriving at the airport. Anushik also does not go home not to become cause of infection for her family members. She did not see her family and friends for a while.”

*Irina Davtyan
(Armenia)*

Today I am going to talk about things me and my friends have done during COVID 19. These days are challenging and a little bit hard. A lot of people are doing an unforgettable job and now we can see the superheroes in real life. Doctors, police officers, volunteers, etc.

It was a little bit hard for me to be active because of my family. I had the responsibility to keep them safe. So, what I started with during these days was education. I learn and informed people how to be careful and safe. I was really empowered and happy with the fact that I had an opportunity to do something important!

Starting from June 20-th I was volunteering in Armenian Red Cross Society. It was a great and an important public awareness campaign. We were raising awareness about Covid-19, explaining people how to wear the masks properly, advising on sanitation rules and providing with masks, gloves and hand sanitizers to those were in need. We were raising awareness about the situation, distribution brochures and talking with pedestrians. It was an important period for me, because I felt included in doing something good and in helping people. Moreover, I learned a lot for myself as well.

One of my friends Sipan told me that he supported elders

and those who are in need. He also mentioned that his motivation is helping people. One of the most important things is that they followed every rule, that should be kept during these situations.



Photo taken during the work of volunteers, Yerevan, Armenia

I have a of friends who were also actively volunteering during these days.

Alice Sargsian was working in the high acuity response team; they were making hygienic packages. She wanted to have her contribution to help people in this situation.

Raffi Kirakosian and his friends from the Armenian Red Cross Society made brochures to raise awareness in people to follow the rules, keep the hygiene and be safe. They never stopped doing this initiative. Some organizations recognized their work and supported them with some grain, flour and other food, so they can start their initiative to help some people who lost their jobs or were in need. They started working on packaging and restoring the foods to send it as a help. They work almost every day, and there is a lot of food to give to people who live in the regions and in Yerevan.

It was a little bit hard for me to be active because of my family members. I had responsibilities to keep them safe. All I did during these days was to educate myself more and more. Learn and also inform people to be careful and safe.

I hope everyone will be safe and healthy because we all can overcome this situation only if we are together.

I am really proud and thankful to all my friends who did all this important work for the society.

*Naro Ohanesyan
(Armenia)*



*Photo taken during the first meeting of Georgian and Armenian young people
Yerevan, Armenia*

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Founded and registered in Armenia in 1994 as NGO “Democracy Today” - is union of public leaders, scholars, activists, whose aim is to support and strengthen democratic achievements and human rights in Armenia.

Through the years there have been developed four main directions of work of “Democracy Today”: Peace building and Conflict transformation, Political parties and elections, Gender studies and Research unit.



მშვიდობისა და
სამოქალაქო
განვითარების ცენტრი
CENTER FOR PEACE
AND CIVIC DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Peace and Civic Development (CPCD) was founded on March 20, 2011 by young people, with significant previous experience in

conflict transformation working with conflict-affected people. The goal of the organization is to strengthen confidence-building between conflict-torn societies through constructive dialogue and promotion of sustainable peace.