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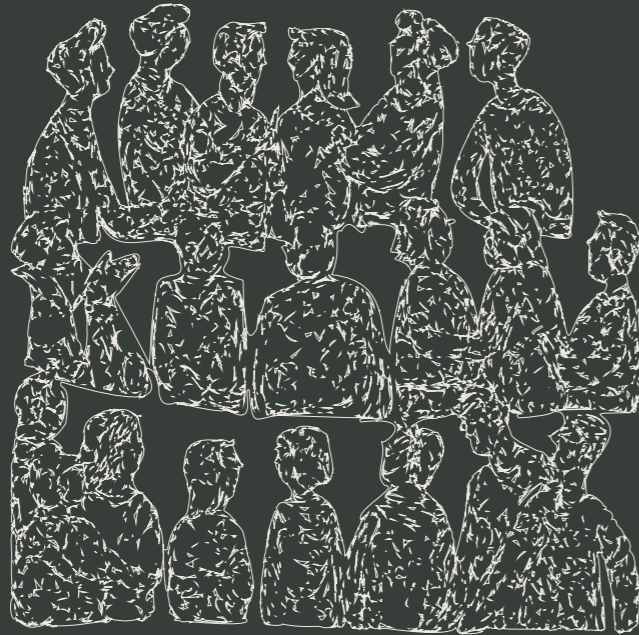
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**CONCILIATION  
RESOURCES**

The study was conducted in close cooperation with the Conciliation Resources NGO,  
with the financial support from the European Union.



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and that of the European Union.

Vanadzor, 2024

# Narratives on basic human needs, prevailing in Armenia

## Summary Report



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# About the Research

This research specifically aims at identifying the perceptions existing within the Armenian society regarding issues such as security (including peace), freedom, identity, and prosperity. The theories on basic human needs, particularly Johan Galtung's typology of Basic Human Needs shape the theoretical framework of the research.

One of the objectives of the research was to determine the narratives on the afore-mentioned issues in Armenia.

A particular objective was set forth to determine societal expectations regarding the process of normalizing the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and to identify the prevailing narratives on the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

Overall, identification of all these narratives pursues three goals. The first goal was to determine:

- what are the public moods and perceptions in Armenia regarding the quality of private life and the level of satisfaction of basic needs, and what are the basic fears, specific complaints and expectations, and desires of the people with respect to all these issues?

The second goal was to determine:

- what are the narratives that have the potential to promote the shaping of dialogue and the establishment of peace within Armenian and Azerbaijani societies or, conversely, to impede these efforts?

The third goal of the research was to determine:

- which narratives regarding the mentioned topics are dominant, relatively consensual, and which narratives are often controversial?

Focus group discussions method was picked for the research. In total, eight focus group sessions were held in October-November 2023.

Each focus group consisted of six participants, on average.

The participants were selected based on age (three age groups were identified) and education level (two groups were identified: higher and secondary education). The focus group sessions were held across Armenia.



## General summary observations

The research reveals that one of the main dominant narratives on security among the focus group participants is that Armenia's major unresolved issue and the main challenge is ensuring physical security of the State.

This narrative is supported by several interconnected sub-narratives — Armenia's major unresolved issue and the main challenge is ensuring its physical security because:

- Armenia, as well as Nagorno-Karabakh have recently faced military attacks by Azerbaijan, resulting in significant casualties and territorial losses for the Armenian people and leaving them in a vulnerable situation;
- Azerbaijan has attacked Armenians before the eyes of Russia; the latter has neither impeded Azerbaijan nor helped Armenia, thus, failing to fulfil its alliance obligations, while Azerbaijan enjoyed the support of Turkey and some other countries. This situation persists today as well, with Azerbaijan backed by Turkey, while Russia — Armenia's official ally — is not supporting Armenia in any way, what's more, it is partnering with Azerbaijan and Turkey;
- Azerbaijan, along with its allies, harbors territorial aspirations against Armenia and pursues maximalist and aggressive policy, while Armenia's official ally in fact continues to lead an anti-Armenian policy, where Armenia still lacks such allies like Turkey is for Azerbaijan. This situation indicates that Armenia's security remains compromised nowadays as well.

It's worth mentioning that when analyzing the judgements of the respondents regarding the security issue, we can also state that in their perspective the threats to the physical security of the State may not only lead to the loss of country's sovereignty, but also to direct annihilation of the people residing in Armenia.

In other words, the focus group participants are concerned that if the security issue remains unresolved, the likelihood of their annihilation is quite high.

Another prevailing narrative among the respondents was the belief that *it is necessary to change the foreign policy direction and establish deeper relations with the West, which may significantly contribute to neutralizing external risks*. A significant portion of the participants viewed the West as an entity more impartial, reliable, prosperous and with greater capability in the international arena.

It may be stated that a consensual narrative was that the current atmosphere of

hatred within Armenia, which is specifically fostered by certain circles in Russia, contributes to the deepening of security issues. The participants were in favor of the State taking specific coarse measures and restricting hate speech, speech containing insults, etc. In fact, based on a number of opinions expressed during the focus group sessions, we can as well suppose that very often when some of them believe that authoritarian governance has better impact on the country's security, they actually mean that, for example, authoritarian governance does not allow people to have hate rhetoric and behavior and they argue that it fosters stronger, more united and disciplined society that is capable of effectively resisting security challenges. It's worth mentioning that while this approach was prevailing, however, we believe it was not dominant.

It should be noted that the discussions specifically highlighted the informational and spiritual components of security as well. Ecology and a healthy environment were also considered as components of security, although all these were viewed as subcategories of the physical security of the State.

Another prevailing narrative was that although the country's security was under serious threat, within the country it feels quite safe. This thesis was supported by the fact that people do not feel threatened in their daily lives, for example, they are relaxed when their children play outside late in the evening. As a matter of fact, this is a very interesting phenomenon, where people, who think that if the security issue of the State remains unresolved, there is a high risk of physical destruction, also believe that they are currently living in a secure environment. This can lead to a presumption that if future military operations are avoided, and if the perception is shaped among many people that the external risks are at least neutralized, coupled with the widespread satisfaction with the internal security environment, the level of satisfaction with their own life can advance.

Another dominant narrative was that peace is strictly necessary, that compromises to achieve this are possible, but this should in no way compromise the territorial integrity of Armenia.

It was observed that the research participants had varying approaches towards the potential Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Treaty, and it is very difficult to determine which approach was particularly dominant. One of the prevailing narratives was that living like this is no longer acceptable and that achieving lasting peace is necessary.

However, another prevailing narrative was that there would be no Peace Treaty and even if there was, it wouldn't work out.

Importantly, one of the dominant narratives is that ordinary Azerbaijanis are also victims of Aliyev's regime. However, another prevailing narrative was that



ordinary Azerbaijanis also propagated hate speech against Armenians and did not oppose the anti-Armenian actions of Aliyev's regime. It should be mentioned that many people supported their opinions based on personal observations.

Interestingly, while a significant share of the focus group participants prioritized ethnic identity and believed that it is the ethnic identity which is first and foremost threatened, nonetheless, people mostly emphasized the need to protect the Republic of Armenia and neutralize the threats to the State. And this is in the case when a significant portion of the respondents did not mention the Armenian identity and only brought it up after specific questions were posed.

Incidentally, it is especially noteworthy that most of the respondents do not perceive threats to any other identities apart from their ethnic, Armenian and religious identities in Armenia. The imminent danger was also mainly attributed to threats from Azerbaijan. As a rule, in addition to the said identities, people mentioned valuing their universal and family identities.

Most of the respondents consider the environment in Armenia to be broadly free. Some have mentioned that in certain regions of Armenia freedom is restricted due to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, when, for example, people are unable to move freely or engage in agricultural activities because there is a risk of shelling.

The narrative proposed by several participants that a new war is necessary to achieve peace has sparked a debate.

Supporters of this thesis argued that Azerbaijan would never stop, which is evident from its aggressive rhetoric and our history, so it is necessary to think about winning the war, which will curb its appetite to some extent. We might expect that the approaches of those proposing such a narrative could at least change to some extent, if there is a change in Baku's rhetoric, and if the international community presents tangible security guarantees and mechanisms.

The participants included the following in the list of means to achieve security, peace, and prosperity:

- building a powerful army;
- conducting effective and proactive diplomacy;
- educating people to become highly skilled professionals across all sectors;
- being Armenian-centric;
- fighting against disinformation;
- demonstrating national unity;
- changing the external policy direction;
- choosing and having the right allies.

# Perceptions of security and peace among focus group participants

## What is security?

Most of the focus group participants noted that security involves protection from external threats. A viewpoint was also expressed that a secure environment is one that maintains proper distance from external threats.

“If the enemy is far away and unable to invade Armenia, it means that it is a secure environment; on the other hand, if it can invade, it means dangerous environment and compromised security”.

Many have also noted that while people can live in an environment where their physical existence is not threatened, and they are not subject to physical harm, nevertheless they would feel insecure, as they are forced to live in a manner they do not want to live. Those expressing such a viewpoint can be presumed to associate security with freedom.

However, this approach prompted opposition from other participants.

“It is not safe to move from Armenia to Artsakh when you know that there is a risk of being killed, for example”.

The following were also indicated as important security components:

- the rule of law;
- economic prosperity;
- protection of human rights.

On a side note, interestingly, most of the respondents noted that the word “security” evokes negative feelings, panic and fear. Many of them expressed their fear of potentially having the same faith as the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

“It’s crucial that the country’s borders are strong, we will then feel protected from external intrusions”. These words of one of the focus group participants can be

viewed as a narrative expressing the general approach of the focus group participants towards security. It can be observed that a significant portion of the participants classified all the issues under the impenetrability of the state borders. According to many, physical protection of the State is a crucial issue, the solution of which is one of the most important, though non-sufficient conditions for living a normal and smooth life. In fact, the respondents consider that it is impossible to have a fulfilling life when the State borders aren't impenetrable, when even seldom military operations occur along the borderline.

It also becomes evident from the participants' judgements about security that to have a feeling of security, people need to be surrounded by people who inspire confidence in them.

Many have noted that in order to enjoy a secure life, it is necessary to have relative stability and the possibility to plan one's own life more or less freely. *“Having a stable country, yeah, is when you are certain that nothing unexpected will happen in the next few days”.*

We should say that almost everyone has claimed that there is no absolute security; instead, they only spoke about relative security.

## **Security in Armenia: security environment and the main threats**

According to the focus group participants, the physical security of the Republic of Armenia is threatened.



*“Frankly speaking, I first associate the word “security” with the security of the country itself, rather than my personal security. I don't know, maybe it depends on the environment we live in. To me, it is quite a sensitive and difficult topic, since after the loss of Karabakh, Armenia is next facing security issues”.*

It should be noted that while there was a consensus on the issue that the physical security of the State is the most important component of security and the primary unresolved issue; however, it can be inferred from the expressed viewpoints that many people feel secure in Armenia. Overall, a crucial and interesting finding is that most of the respondents view the current environment within Armenia as secure. Many had noted that they felt more secure in Armenia than even in several developed European countries they had visited.



*“The security issue is very sound in our country. Perhaps, it's because of our national mentality, but I'm certain that no parent in*

*our city is afraid to let their child go to or from school alone... On the contrary, in European and Russian cities, parents accompany their children. What are they afraid of? It means there is danger. There is no such danger here”.*

“

*“I am comfortable with my children going out and coming home at 10 or 11 PM”.*

“

*“Our Yerevan is safer, as many people come here and can go for a night walk, and their lives are not threatened”.*

“

*“Here in Armenia, I am not concerned about my physical security, since I know that if I go for a walk at, say, 7 PM, nothing will threaten me. Currently, our state has provided these conditions, but in foreign countries, we were afraid of going out after 7 PM. We had to go out in a group... It’s true that our country might have some border issues, but our country can be classified under those countries, where people’s physical security is at a fairly high level”.*

“

*“I feel secure because I know the mindset and behavior of Armenians in Armenia and those visiting it. For example, I had been to Germany. I had a different and pleasant feeling in small towns, even something we could learn from, but I witnessed atrocities in big cities where different nations coexist, and you never know what and when to expect. For example, on this note, I believe it is crucial that we feel at ease on our land, because we know how we feel about this or that thing”.*

Essentially, we can conclude the following from the given responses: many people are of the opinion that they feel secure in places where there are no military operations or direct military threats. This idea is best expressed through the words of one of the participants: *“Yerevan is one of the most secure cities in the world, but on a national scale, Armenia is one of the most dangerous countries due to the threat of war”.*

Another expressed viewpoint was that this internally safe environment was primarily attributed to monoethnicity. *“...We are 97% monoethnic, we are Arme-*

*nians, we have no fear. In any European and Russian city, different nations, different religions coexist, they are more diverse. However, in our country, since the majority are Armenians, they recognize and know each other very well”.*

Incidentally, this approach could assumingly become a source of extreme right-wing manifestations and anti-migrant approaches. With an increase in the number of migrants, many can think that the secure environment, which, according to them, existed thanks to Armenia’s monoethnicity, can disappear.

It is noteworthy that most focus group participants do not feel danger from the state force structures in Armenia and view them as entities that ensure security. Whereas, to the question *“How would you feel if you saw a police officer in an authoritarian state?”*, they responded that they would be cautious.

Many of the participants claim that it is not safe in European cities either. To justify their viewpoint, they mentioned that, for example:

- *“Terrorist attacks are happening”;*
- *“You can encounter intimidating drunk people on trains”;*
- *“There are many cases of theft there”.*
- *“I was in Germany, the police stopped the car and instructed us to put our hands on our knees, and when we accidentally made a hand movement, the police officer already reached for the weapon. It is an unsafe environment for me because he could shoot me under unclear circumstances”.*

Interestingly, none of the focus group participants viewed crimes or the existence of criminal groups as a factor undermining the security environment in Armenia.

In addition to wars, many of the participants also viewed natural and man-made disasters, as well as accidents as phenomena undermining the security. However, security was not only viewed on a physical level, but discussions also included informational, digital and spiritual security. For example, it was mentioned that Armenia is under attack through various social networks and media, which also creates additional security issues.



*“I generally try to avoid watching Russian channels, but sometimes I tune in to see what is happening, what kind of propaganda is being spread. In other words, we are not protected from this kind of garbage either”.*

It is especially remarkable that many focus group participants considered the activities of certain religious organizations, which could particularly be classified as neo-Protestantism, as an issue from the informational security perspective. The participants considered those organizations as sects.

The respondents supported their approaches by pointing out that these religious organizations use manipulative technologies to attract people. It was also noted that they demonstrate anti-social behavior, such as refusing to serve in the army and rejecting state authority, etc.

“I visit villages for work, and I know that proselytism is wildly common... It is a vicious phenomenon that sects can freely carry out their activities”.

It should be noted that those holding such viewpoints did not express intolerance towards other beliefs. It seemed like they only viewed the dissemination of neo-Protestantism as an issue.

However, it should further be noted that the topic raised by some of the focus group participants regarding the activities of various religious groups has often sparked debate and opposition. Most of the participants did not agree with the critical assessments mentioned above.

Among the threats to Armenia’s security, the respondents mentioned Azerbaijan and Turkey. Many people also mentioned Russia along with these countries. One of the participants also viewed the Government of the Republic of Armenia as a threat to the security of the Republic of Armenia, stating that: “... *the State overlooks our security, which itself is a threat*”.

It has been widely common that the security environment is undermined also because the ally of the Republic of Armenia has pursued such a policy that can be considered treacherous. It was also noted that such behavior is typical of Russia. “*And Russia has been betraying us for its own interests since 2013*”. Another expressed viewpoint was that *Russia not only fails to protect Armenia, but also harms it*.

Many of the participants noted the spread of narcotic drugs among children as a threat to the security of the Republic of Armenia.

“I’m deeply concerned about this issue, I feel danger that those Telegram addresses are glued on the school walls, and I haven’t seen the Police specifically deal with it, which is their responsibility, isn’t it? Instead, my son is cleaning up all these Telegram addresses and repainting them”.

## What is peace?

Most of the participants defined peace in almost the same way as they defined security.



“

*“Peace on the border, most importantly, no shooting”.*

“

*“Peace will be achieved when the State guarantees border security, avoids internal civil wars, and creates equal social and working conditions because when people have prosperous lives, have jobs, they will not become criminals”.*

Many people have noted that peace is related to physical and mental security, that it is the greatest value, since it enables people to live, think freely, be safe, envision the future, and develop the economy.

Perceptions of peace are similar to perceptions of security also to the extent that the participants have associated it with the existence of a strong army. It has been assumed that the latter would hinder attacks on the State. However, the importance of reconciliation and establishment of normal, non-hostile relations with other countries was also highlighted.

“

*“Peace is the reconciliation between states, without losses and human casualties”.*

Many have mentioned that peace is such a condition where the environment is safe. It is commonly viewed as the absence of military operations.

“

*“When none of our soldiers die every day, and parents are confident that their child is safe”.*

Many people have associated peace with the state of tranquility and stability. Additionally, it can also be inferred that peace is considered a subjective perception and a psychological condition. *“Everything is lovely, there is nothing to disturb me, I don’t turn on the TV and try not to watch the news”.*

“

*“It’s my personal sanctuary, where I feel completely relaxed and in peace, no matter what happens”.*

“

*“For me, peace will come when I am able to freely pursue my plans, take care of my family, my loved ones”.*

Another viewpoint was expressed that the feeling of peace is also affected by environmental pollution, as it impacts health.

Although this was a single viewpoint, it is noteworthy that the participants strongly supported it.

“I can go sit in any ravine, I will feel peaceful there, but when there is garbage next to me, I will feel resistance. My peace will be disturbed there, my peace will suffer to some extent, if the area is not clean”.

A prevailing viewpoint was that although the presence of conflict does not necessarily mean absence of peace, however, if the conflict is manifested even in the form of short-term and local military and physical clashes, then we can claim that there is no peace.

It is also interesting that many have viewed peace as:

- *“overarching goal”;*
- *“the ultimate dream”;*
- *“something that brings safety and joy”.*

It was also mentioned that peace is a relative notion. At the same time, many of the participants noted that they all desire peace.

“We all understand the situation Armenia is in and we all want peace. I don’t know, personally I do want it and I believe that peace is important for us, the people residing here and for the adversary, it is important for them as well” (referring to the Azerbaijanis).

## Armenia and peace

Many participants mentioned that there is no peace on a national scale due to the conflict with Azerbaijan; meanwhile, they all said that there was a peaceful environment within the country. On this note, the approach was essentially the same during the discussions related to the security issue.



*“If we take a smaller setting than the country, since it is very difficult to talk about peace at the national level; therefore, if we consider our city, for instance, it is a very peaceful place for me, I find peace here; for one thing, I can feel harmony here, I am not anxious here, and feel protected from certain dangers”.*

In spite of this, there were other viewpoints which stated that lack of peace in Armenia is due to external and certain internal problems.



*“If this seemingly endless uncertainty and widespread indifference disappear, then I believe there will be peace. No one is undertaking or planning anything serious”.*

## **Means of achieving security and peace**

It was a common approach that security threats can be neutralized through quality education, thanks to professional, highly efficient specialists across various sectors.



*“The key is to have the right specialist in the right place”.*



*“I fully agree that the basis for everything is education, the more educated we are, the less are the opportunities to control us and, to a certain extent, to enslave us”.*

It was a dominant viewpoint that to achieve peace *“...we must be ready and armed. We must rely on ourselves”.*

Some attributed our security issues to our bad geographical location.

Many believed that the solution to the issues lies in having a strong army, being united and having reliable partners.

A prevailing approach was that in order to have a safe environment, it is necessary to change the foreign policy direction, and as a result, have a strong and reliable ally:



*“It is this unhealthy and hateful, hostile attitude, aimed to destroy each other, that undermines the peace”.*

“To have states that will also support us, as the practice has shown everything we hoped for was not lived up (amounted to zero) and I believe that changing the direction is the right move at this moment”.

“... because look at what the Russians did to us”.

A dominant approach was that in order to achieve security, it is necessary to eliminate the atmosphere full of hatred and insults triggered by some internal and external forces. As a path towards resolving security issues and achieving peace, fighting against information attacks and disinformation, improving interpersonal relationships, enhancing professionalism across all sectors and levels were considered.

Furthermore, many have noted that it is wrong to attribute the causes of all problems to external factors.

“Switzerland has created such an economy that it is impervious to external influence”.

“In my opinion, you should dictate peace and security. Switzerland, Germany are dictating peace themselves”.

Incidentally, it's worth noting that Switzerland is very often cited as an example of a peaceful country.

“Let's take Switzerland, is it a peaceful or disturbed country? Is there peace in Switzerland? There is indeed peace there, as none of Switzerland's neighboring states take the risk to attack it, nor they fear Switzerland, because simply it is not in their interests to compromise the security of even one person”.

Some of the participants noted that democracy has weakened Armenia's security and viewed democracy as opposition to “national” governance, which, according to them, can resolve security issues.

“Nowadays, Armenia's population as a nation is promoting democracy, starting from the main governing body and the coun-

*try's leader. But we must understand that we are a small nation with a small population, and we must preserve our national identity. Democracy should be the 3rd priority for us. Since 2018, when we became a democratic country, our security collapsed. I directly attribute this to democracy”.*

However, it should be noted that this approach was not dominant among the focus group participants.



*”I don't agree, as, in my opinion, democracy is not the reason for the recent war, such as the 44-Day War, for me, democracy is a tool created for people to be able to make their contribution in the State”.*

Viewpoints were also expressed that another war is needed to achieve peace. Some of the participants supported this approach by stating that others would be afraid of a powerful state and would not attack it.



*”There will be no peace without war; Offense is the best defense”.*

However, even those who stated that war was necessary to achieve peace and security emphasized the importance of initially attempting to resolve issues through negotiations.

The narrative of achieving peace through war has been frequently challenged and debated. The general approach of those challenging this viewpoint is well reflected by the following words of the two participants (one of whom, by the way, participated in the 44-day military operations).



*”If we look at it from an emotional perspective, there is a very strong desire to reclaim Artsakh, but first of all it will happen at the cost of significant casualties, and it would be very difficult for us, but if we do reclaim it, the negotiations will resume; envisioning any clear status for it, at the moment, seems unthinkable.... To wage war and again, wage war, but who desires war? 99,9% of the population does not want war, and you are also in the other 0,1%. But, in fact, the meaning of war is to improve our country's standard of living, start living a better lifestyle, but that is not the case. We aim to develop and strengthen our army, but other states are also advancing, they are also developing, and acquiring new techniques”.*

As a means to achieve peace, it was also suggested that other countries should have certain dependence on Armenia and take an interest in peace within Armenia. In response to this approach another viewpoint was expressed that in fact many countries do depend on Armenia, but Armenia is simply unable to leverage it.

It was observed that many of the participants considered certain compromises as acceptable to achieve peace, but noted that, say, the control of “Zangezur” road should firmly remain under the Republic of Armenia: *“God forbid it is handed over to Russia or Azerbaijan!”*.

A prevailing narrative was that to achieve security, it is necessary to have a society with low corruption level and high civil consciousness. This being said, some mentioned that the main problem lies within society itself. *“We need not change our leaders; we need to change our people”*.

Another expressed viewpoint was that to have a secure environment, it is essential to engage competent and knowledgeable Armenians residing in different countries. Interestingly, many of the focus group participants were skeptical about the possibility of establishing peace. It was mentioned that peace is not in the interest of some external powers, again with accusations directed towards Russia.

“Peace is not in the interests of the third power, the power that used to sell weapons to us. If in the past thirty years we had invested those funds, billions of dollars in healthcare, education, science, we could have reached the level of European countries”.

Many respondents mentioned that it was wrong to attribute the causes of all problems to external factors.

“For me, it will be peaceful when we have clever politics, things conducted in a smart manner, everyone will not be subjected to propaganda, will not sway towards Russia or towards the West. I don’t believe anyone can help us but ourselves”.

“In order to create a peaceful environment, it is essential to change the mindset and mentality of the nation, emphasizing the importance of being first and foremost pro-Armenian, rather than pro-Russian or pro-Western”.

Another expressed viewpoint was that the Armenian-Azerbaijani war in any case



occurred because *"Karabakh was an occupied territory, the whole world recognized that Karabakh was a territory occupied by Armenia"*.

Among other viewpoints was one suggesting that in order to establish peace and security, society needs to recuperate from psychological traumas. *"Armenian society is in a state of neurosis. "We, as a nation, need a serious psychologist"*.

# Perceptions about prosperity

## What is prosperity?

Many focus group participants agreed that prosperity is a very relative notion, with the dominant approach being that prosperity is related to the security and economic development of the State. Many emphasized that one of the primary prerequisites for prosperity is ensuring that the majority of the state's population is not in poverty.

*"After the war, you are unable to think... even if you have money and want to leave, you recall your fellows who have lost their spouse, and their children live in bad conditions. We are ashamed of dressing well, driving a nice car, because our fellows are struggling. Prosperity means that the general environment is prosperous; not only I, but the people surrounding me lead prosperous lives, and where everyone thinks about traveling, good education, continuing education, jobs, and new job opportunities"*

*"Yes, I wish it had a high level of economic development, so that we don't dream about having what France or another country has, and so that we could also reach a certain level"*

Many have noted that prosperity is related to mental peace, and in the case of Armenia, it is largely related to security issues; particularly, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In this regard, it's commonly believed that a heated conflict with intensive military operations hinders prosperity.

*"You know, even if I had 1 million, still, when I put my head on the pillow, first thing in the morning would be checking the Ministry of Defense website to see if there were any shootings, whether or not they will call my sons to the army.., why on earth do I need that million then? "*

A dominant narrative is that living a prosperous life allows living the way you want.



*"The State should provide jobs, so that we are able to earn enough money and create the opportunity for each of us in the family to be able to live the way we want".*

Many have associated prosperity with having a well-paid job.



*"Those who are capable of working, should all be provided with jobs".*

## **What do we need for a prosperous life?**

Interestingly, the hefty majority of participants have started to consider the level of income necessary for a prosperous life only during this discussion. The most common answer was AMD 300,000 monthly per capita. At the same time, viewpoints were expressed that it greatly depends on where exactly you live, for example, according to some participants, the income of AMD 300,000 would be totally insufficient if you lived in Yerevan.



*"When I lived in Yerevan, I lived in a 300k apartment, and 150,000 drams was too little for me. I used to go to the pool there, the children's kindergarten was 80,000+ drams, meaning that I needed at least one million drams monthly there... While in Yeghegnadzor, 500,000 is totally enough... "*

Here, we should note that many people also agreed that you can have a prosperous life with less income as well, because prosperity is very subjective, and it is related to the individual perception of life.



*"For me, prosperity is being able to sit on a bench, having a conversation with you, it's comfortable. In other words, it is relative".*



*"For example, prosperous life for me is when home is quiet, silent and peaceful".*



*"I went to the sea for vacation, I returned home and wanted to recreate the same feeling. I filled the bathtub with water, I poured myself a glass of wine, laid back, closed my eyes and imagined I was in a*

*prosperous country. The reason I am bringing up this example is to demonstrate how I adapted prosperity to myself”.*

It's interesting that many people consider having their own apartment as a very important and necessary aspect of a prosperous life. People have noted that living in a rented apartment makes them uncomfortable and unable to fully settle down in a rented apartment, they cannot feel safe about the future. Some have linked owning an apartment to the national disposition. It is noteworthy that according to many, those people who, for example, rent an apartment in a city like New York and do not own their houses, are considered not to be living a prosperous life.



*“We are Armenians and we think that having our own is more necessary. The sense of ownership is deeply rooted within us”.*



*“It wasn't my house, I always felt it was temporary. Then we got a house, now I consider myself a person living a prosperous life again, even though I am the only breadwinner in the house, I am a teacher, with a low salary”.*

Most of the respondents also considered the following as important components of prosperity: the opportunity for living a cultural life, the presence of fulfilling, positive relations with neighbors, friends and relatives, as well as having good transport communications, and access to entertainment venues.



*“I want to, say, go to the theatre, I don't just want to go to work in the morning and return home in the evening saying, ‘Hey wifey, what have you cooked?’, that is too little for me. I need to stop by my neighbor, congratulate people, attend weddings and raise my arms and feel joy; if there is an accident, why not to be there to console the relatives. A prerequisite for prosperity is when others think of you as a well-raised person”.*

## **Without peace, but prosperous**

It's also worth mentioning that while there was a consensus on the issue that the lack of peace hinders having a prosperous life, some have also noted that they currently consider themselves living a prosperous life as they are able to avoid constantly dwelling on the lack of peace and they pretend to be living a prosperous life:



*"...I believe I am living a prosperous life, it doesn't matter that my boots are worn-out, that my pants belong to another person, that I collect water in my bath-tub to take a bath. Prosperity is relative. I pour whiskey during work hours, listen to classical music and consider myself living a prosperous life".*

# Perceptions on freedom

## What is freedom?

Many focus group participants stated that freedom is a relative notion, that complete freedom does not exist anywhere. It's noteworthy that for many the fact that they must take into account the public opinion about themselves and accordingly shape their behavior has been viewed as limitation of freedom. Some have supported this approach by pointing out that they have to limit their freedom, since otherwise, for example, their friends will be offended. In fact, the approach is that their social life will be significantly complicated if they allow themselves to live a free life.



*"For example, I feel free with my family, but once I am out, even in a small village, I don't feel free".*



*"There is no complete freedom because we depend on society's opinion".*

In addition, many perceive the inability to pursue their aspirations as a limitation of freedom as well. *"If we can do what we want and what we are able to do, then it will be freedom, but there are things that are forbidden, and they are compelled by family and public opinion..."*

Yet, many have pointed out that, nevertheless, freedom means being able to do what you want without being punished, as long as it does not harm others.



*"For me, freedom is when you are free to express yourself and take any action you wish, provided it doesn't violate statutory laws".*



*"Freedom means you do not harm the rights of others".*

## Freedom in Armenia

It should be noted that the absolute majority of participants do not see a problem in terms of realizing political and civil freedoms in Armenia.



“

*“We elect whomever we want, and even in the family we have different approaches”;*

“

*“People feel free in Armenia”;*

“

*“Currently, my husband is a member of the ‘Armenian Revolutionary Federation’ (Dashnaktsutyun) political party, but I don’t want to and so I don’t elect that political party. I am an independent person, and I elect whomever I want”;*

“

*“Compared to some countries, we do not live in an authoritarian country, that is, the State does not exert any specific violence against people, but the responsibility for our actions lies with us”.*

“

*“I can move anywhere and anytime I want. I express my thoughts freely, no one forces me to withhold anything, that is also freedom, whatever I dream about, no one tells me that it won’t come true. I wear whatever I want”.*

It should be noted that many people considered a major problem that freedom of speech is often abused in order to inculcate hatred and cause internal discord.

Some stated that their freedom is limited, as, for example, some thoughts expressed could lead to losing jobs or being criticized by others. It should be noted that such viewpoints were typically expressed by employees of state educational institutions. So, when asked a clarifying question whether they were threatened by any state official, the participants responded that the threat of being fired was indirect. *“Apart from harm, from a political perspective, when I express some dissenting viewpoint against the current government, those surrounding me often target me. In other words, they exert pressure on me, saying that I am wrong, it doesn’t matter, what the leader did, he did it right”.*

“

*“...So, the Head of the Education Division rings up the inspector. The inspector comes and says you did such and such the other day and tells them not to do it again. Or they see the son and tell him to ask his father not to write such and such, but they turn a deaf ear to that. And my son comes and says that I wrote something about the*

*Education, Science, Culture, and Sports Ministry, and the governor's assistant, who read it, went on and reported it, after which the Ministry Department Head got their employee to call up my son".*

It is also interesting that some considered as limitation of freedom of speech the fact that, for example, they are not allowed to reproof children at school to deter them from watching Turkish series, or that they are unable to educate children in educational institutions with patriotic spirit, which according to them, also means that, for example, you should have the opportunity to tell children that *"the Turk is our enemy"*.



*"A teacher enters the classroom with no right to preach patriotism. Why?. The teacher is fired because a child of some parent cried when discussing the status of Artsakh... I simply conducted an interview in the classroom. I can openly say that the only enemy I have is the Turk, the Azerbaijani is the enemy of the Armenian nation, I will say it expressly, and a moment may come when it will lead to punishment... So, try to explain to the child that the Turk and the Azerbaijani are their enemies, they want to violate their rights, occupy your country. How should we instill patriotism in the child?"*

Many people associate freedom with security, noting that, for example, in many border settlements, people cannot live freely and cannot freely engage in agricultural activities, since at any time they can become victims of Azerbaijani attacks.



*"He cannot freely step onto the land and cultivate it like his fellow countrymen".*



*"For 30 years, those people have lived in insecurity and are not free in their actions. Am I truly free if I can't turn on the light without fearing a shot from the military post".*

# Perceptions about identity

## What is identity and which identity is important?

Most of the respondents consider national identity as a priority. Moreover, national identity is primarily perceived as ethnic identity, that is to say, belonging to the Armenian ethnic group is the basis of the main identity of the focus group participants: *"national identity, national values, their preservation. Those motives come to my mind. When I say identity, I imagine them first. The national element comes to my mind"*.



*"When I say we, Armenians, I specifically mean Armenians excluding national minorities"*.

After ethnic identity, people very often indicated their religious, worldview, cultural, gender and age identities:



*"When they look at me, I want them to identify me as Agapi and not Paul. The worldview, culture, religion are included in this notion"*.



*"I am a girl, a Christian, Armenian, a youngster and a mother — statuses that are part of your identity"*.

It is an interesting fact that the participants started talking about also having a national-state identity only after they were asked the question. In other words, an identity that is attributed to being a citizen of the Republic of Armenia, specific to the people of Armenia, irrespective of their ethnic belonging.

This identity is mostly expressed in the context of security issues. The respondents stated that it is the people living in Armenia that have security issues; that it is those people's army that is engaged in protecting border security, in which other Armenian citizens, representatives of other ethnic groups — Yezidis, Russians, Assyrians, etc., serve as well.

However, there is no unified approach to the issue of whether the expression **"we, the Armenians"** encompasses the people of the Republic of Armenia, ethnic Armenians residing in Armenia, or all the Armenians worldwide. While all the respondents noted that everyone who is part of the people of the Republic of

Armenia is considered as part of us, some yet noted that when referring to the Armenian people, they are referring to specifically ethnic Armenians. Many have also noted that when referring, for example, to the Armenian people's wishes, Armenian values, etc., they specifically mean the wishes, values, etc. of the Armenian ethnic group. However, there were also those who emphasized that national identity is not formed only based on bloodline.

“When we say “Armenian”, I don't infer only a kin person, you have to feel and consider yourself Armenian. What do you think, is Margarita Simonyan Armenian or not? In my opinion, if a person has not resided in Armenia they are still Armenian, but their values cannot align with ours”.

“Currently, freedom allows us to choose our religion, our identity, our gender, however, I believe that the right thing is to consider who we were born as. I did not choose to be born Armenian, Turk or Russian, I was born Armenian. I didn't choose my parents, I was born to them. My identity is to be Armenian and uphold my Armenian identity”.

“I believe that a person is Armenian — be a Russian or Turk — when they consider themselves as representatives of that nation. For example, I feel myself Armenian, so I am Armenian. If someone, for example, Yezidi, representative of the Yezidi community, says I am Armenian, then he is Armenian”.

There were also respondents who associated identity with simply being a human.

“I'd rather associate identity with the soul, which is immortal, unlike the body, which is temporary”. While we currently live in this body, we have this appearance, but what truly matters is the soul — being kind, attentive and compassionate towards others”.

## Which identity is threatened?

It was a prevailing approach within the respondents that from among their identities it was their ethnic identity that was most of all threatened, as well as

to some extent their religious and cultural identities. Azerbaijan and Turkey were indicated as subjects threatening that identity, who, according to the respondents, want to inflict huge damage particularly on the Armenian ethnic group and its Christian and cultural values. Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, Israel, which sell weapons to Azerbaijan, were also indicated among those subjects threatening the identity.



*“I could be killed if my enemy finds out that I am Armenian. But if it turns out that I am a Jew, they wouldn’t kill me”;*



*“We have left behind huge cultural heritage in Artsakh, which for sure will be relentlessly destroyed. And this harms my Christian identity”.*

Other viewpoints expressed were that their religious identity is also threatened due to the activities of other religious organizations (primarily neo-Protestant organizations).

It was a dominant approach that nothing threatens their gender or worldview identity.

# Armenian-Azerbaijani relations

## Attitude towards ordinary Azerbaijanis

A significant portion of the respondents do not perceive ordinary Azerbaijanis as a threat and believes that they also want peace to be established. *“In my opinion, they are people like us, they should think the way we do”.*

Many believed that ordinary Azerbaijanis are also Aliyev’s victims and the main problem with them is that they tolerate Aliyev’s regime. *“I believe that they are also victims of propaganda, as they have constantly presented us as enemies for the past 30 years”.*

In general, based on various approaches presented, it can be concluded that there are two main sources of discontent directed towards ordinary Azerbaijanis. Aliyev is not dethroned, and they are spreading hate speech against Armenians.

“TV series here are full of advertisements, while their TV shows are interrupted by hate speech towards Armenians. It is something that is clearly set there. Even in the elementary school biology textbook it is written that such and such disease was brought to Azerbaijan by Armenians. Armenians themselves are the virus, not the one spreading the virus. You can hear this kind of hate speech so much that it would be natural for these people to hate Armenians”.

It was also interesting to note that some of them supported their negative opinion towards ordinary Azerbaijanis by citing, say, an example of negative experience with an Azerbaijani somewhere.

## Historical memory of the Azerbaijanis

It was a prevailing viewpoint that while Armenians also carried out propaganda for creating negative emotions towards Azerbaijanis, the volume of anti-Armenian propaganda is incomparably larger. It was noted that anti-Azerbaijani propaganda also has natural foundations considering that the Armenian people have constantly suffered from the violent actions of the Turks/Azeris.

“My grandfather’s sister used to tell us about the escape, how they came and massacred them, how they lost their parents,

*and how they ended up in American orphanages. In other words, I have heard these stories directly from the survivor from a young age, it's not something I read or saw on TV, these memories of escapes, massacres, beatings, sobbing, etc. have been ingrained in my mind since my childhood”.*

It was a prevailing viewpoint that nevertheless it was possible to coexist peacefully with Azerbaijanis during the Soviet times.



*“There was friendship, trade, travelling back and forth...”*

It should be noted that the respondents had differing approaches on the issue as to how to treat the expression — prevailing among Armenians — **“a Turk is a Turk”**.

Many people agreed with that expression, mainly arguing that the absolute majority of Turks/Azeris maintain their extremely aggressive attitude towards Armenians and even today desire to massacre Armenians.

However, another narrative has often been put forward that it's not allowed to make such generalizations, for example, it is possible that only 20 percent of Azerbaijanis/Turks have such desires. During the discussions, it was also mentioned that many Turks helped many Armenians avoid massacres, sheltered them, etc. Some also talked about their positive experience of contact with Turks/Azeris in addition to their negative experience.



*Well, when they say Turk, that word already disgusts us, but I have interacted with many Turks, some of them were scoundrels with whom it wasn't worth exchanging a word, but I also interacted with a Turk, who is a better person than our neighbor Vardges. A thousand times better, you know”.*

## **How to resolve the conflict?**

One of the prevailing approaches among the focus groups participants was that the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict will persist, as Baku wants to eradicate Armenia and the Armenians. With that, Armenians should prepare for war, become strong and strike with a heavy counterattack.

However, another prevailing narrative was that the conflict is not in the interests of the peoples of the region, and that it is beneficial only for Russia.



“In other words, the conflict continues, which is beneficial only for Russia”.

“Why should the children go and die?”

“Representatives of the ordinary class, neither us nor them want war or any conflict, we want no victims, we want to live peacefully.”

## About Peace Treaty

Many of the participants expressed skepticism about the possibility of concluding the Peace Treaty. Many also noted that this Treaty is not a guarantee against a new war.

- “There hasn’t been peace for 1000 years, and there won’t be any”.
- “There can’t be any Treaty”.
- “We will not achieve peace through the Treaty”.
- “But how can you be certain that this Peace Treaty is reliable?”

Viewpoints were also expressed that the Peace Treaty will not bring true peace; instead, it may weaken Armenia’s resilience.

“I’d rather become strong myself, go and fight, than limit myself with some kind of Peace Treaty and end up in a confusing situation”.

However, there was also a prevailing viewpoint that the current situation is loaded with threats and requires compromises.

“Now that we are the defeated side, we have to somehow realize that we need to find some solution”.

“I know one thing for sure that it can’t go on like this. I kill you, you kill me, what is this?”

There were also approaches that the Peace Treaty must address the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.



*“The key and the backbone of the Treaty with Azerbaijan must be Artsakh, what will happen to Artsakh? If Artsakh ceases to exist, our 5,000 victims, the victims from the 1990s and up to 2020, the victims of the April War, the victims of the past 30 years are in vain. Let’s say Artsakh doesn’t exist... what, were they terrorists? What, is it not called ‘Yerablur’ [a cemetery where soldiers are buried], is it called a hill of terrorists?”*

Some of the respondents also emphasized the importance of putting the text of the Treaty for public discussion before signing it.



*“I would appreciate if we could have what we call public awareness, meaning that the Treaty in question is analyzed by our specialists, allowing them all to express their viewpoints. No matter what, we will find the golden mean”.*

There was a consensus on the issue that the best option would be if the Treaty addressed all the controversial points as much as possible to avoid future conflicts. Another viewpoint was also expressed that even a fragile peace is preferred over war.

Many of the participants also emphasized the importance of international guarantors for the Treaty, noting that *“in the future, if they notice violations of this Treaty clauses, the guarantors themselves must and will exert pressure on that state, so that state complies with the Treaty clauses”*.

# Conclusions

The research demonstrated that the principal concern regarding the basic needs of the focus group participants is having secure borders and peace. Most of the research participants believe that the primary factor hindering the course of “normal” life in Armenia is the military conflict with Azerbaijan.

As a matter of fact, people state that their basic needs could be fully satisfied only if stable peace was established. Thus, it’s the most critical precondition for the respondents. However, a noteworthy fact is that, for many, peace is a mere absence of war.

The research shows that despite the conviction that in the conflict with Azerbaijan, especially in the recent period, it is Azerbaijan that is responsible for the escalation of the conflict and that Armenians are victims, nevertheless, the majority of respondents tend to support all those compromise solutions that can lead to the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan, as long as it does not compromise the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia. However, there are also many who believe that Azerbaijan will continue to wage war anyway, and therefore, it is necessary to prepare for war rather than sign the Peace Treaty.

Based on the research, national identity is primary for the vast majority of the respondents. It is widely believed that the primary threat to such identity is the potential attack by Azerbaijan. This allows us to conclude that in case of stable peace, people’s concern about losing their national identity can significantly diminish.

Since the fundamental internal (domestic) issue hindering the satisfaction of basic needs for the vast majority of the respondents is the atmosphere of hatred in the media space and social networks, therefore, if actions are not taken in the near future to substantially reduce the volume of hate speech and misinformation in the media and social networks, then people will tend to believe that internal phenomena threatening the satisfaction of their basic needs have not been adequately eliminated, and the feeling of anxiety will mostly persist.

Based on the focus groups, we can conclude that a significant segment of Armenians has limited information about the Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan. The respondents noted that Azerbaijanis, influenced by Aliyev’s regime, display hatred towards Armenians. Nonetheless, most of the respondents are willing to peacefully coexist with the Azerbaijanis if they are convinced that Baku is genuinely inclined towards peace. At the same time, the research shows that people have become accustomed to living in a monoethnic State with partially closed borders. Many people even find that this circumstance has greatly contributed to

maintaining a secure internal environment. This reality can even further somewhat reinforce the protectionist discourses.

One of the interesting findings of the research is that although the respondents consider Azerbaijan as the primary responsible for the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, a significant portion of them holds the Armenian society partially responsible for the escalation of the conflict, due to its past maximalist approaches. This demonstrates the ability to assess own approaches, self-criticism, and self-improvement within at least certain segments of the Armenian society.

We can conclude that most of the respondents consider that ordinary Azerbaijanis, like Armenians, do not want war either. The focus group participants believe that ordinary Azerbaijanis have been continuously manipulated by Aliyev's regime, and that's the primary reason for their combative behavior; however, according to many of the respondents, those are also victims of that regime. In other words, most of the respondents do distinguish between the authoritarian regime and society and try not to extend their own assessments and emotions about the regime to the entire society.

Most of the respondents were convinced that Armenians were treated unfairly especially by Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia, and that Armenians are victims.

For many, the economic development of the country, which they consider crucial for enjoying prosperous and safe life, is also linked to the conflict resolution. Namely, there is an expectation that the establishment of peace, perhaps currently unachievable, as per many, could create favorable conditions for economic development, which in turn would contribute to enjoying prosperous life.

Most of the focus group participants have modest material aspirations for considering their life as prosperous.

Many consider that the primary obstacle to prosperity is the lack of stability and border security. In fact, despite the unfavorable material conditions and the presence of conflict, many are relatively satisfied with their lives. We can assume that this feeling could deepen along with the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and economic development.

Based on the research findings, we can conclude that a significant segment of the Armenian society, along with other needs, also want psychological support. Based on the observations from most of the respondents, we can conclude that the feelings of anxiety, stress, defenselessness, and injustice, caused by the escalation of the military conflict that had started in 2020, have become an integral part of many people's lives.

From the perspective of meeting their basic needs, most of the respondents

emphasize the importance of Armenia having powerful western allies. People expect that they can greatly contribute to the strengthening of the State and restraining Azerbaijan's aggressive actions. We can assume that the rapprochement of relations of Armenia with various influential states representing the West may contribute to the conviction in people that Armenia is not isolated and has at least partially overcome the existential crisis.

Some respondents' perceptions on some issues repeatedly reflected the narratives of the extreme right populist circles, especially Russian anti-democratic propaganda, whereas almost all of them expressed a very negative attitude towards Kremlin propaganda. Based on this research, we can conclude that people need to obtain comprehensive knowledge about democracy, security, their interrelation, the essence of international relations, and conflictology. Very often, their perceptions about all these issues are superficial, not comprehensive, which in turn creates a situation when they cannot envision their role in the formation of universal good, peace, and believe that the solution to the problems lies outside the country.

Based on the research, the respondents emphasize freedom. A significant portion of the focus group participants confirmed with satisfaction that they mostly feel free in Armenia. However, we can conclude from the research that many people, for example, lack clear understanding of how to embrace this freedom.

No one mentioned that they could come up with their own initiatives to strengthen and develop the peace agenda, nor did they expect similar efforts from fellow citizens. Moreover, some people perceive freedom as problematic, considering that misinformation, hate speech, speech containing insults, impunity — issues that greatly concern people — are manifestations of freedom and democracy. Such a mindset fosters, among many, negative attitudes towards freedom and democracy.

# Recommendations

The following is recommended to the Government of the Republic of Armenia, the civil society of the Republic of Armenia, and international institutions:

- Engage more extensively with the population to present the concept of peace in all its components and present all its benefits in an understandable language.
- Develop and broadcast TV programs on democracy and conflict resolution on Public TV.
- Develop and implement extensive civil and political educational programs for adults. In addition, the programs that contribute to the establishment of horizontal connections, the development of skills necessary to self-sufficiently implement certain programs can also have a significant impact on the strengthening of democratic culture within the society. We believe that such a program can best be organized through cooperation between the civil society, the European democratic community, and the Government of the Republic of Armenia.
- Develop and implement educational and cultural programs that promote multiculturalism and tolerance.
- When drafting the Peace Treaty, ensure that it is done in a manner that allows people to be certain that their national identity is respected, otherwise people will have the feeling that the conflict is not over, it goes on, and the threats to national identity are not neutralized.
- Show people the benefits that specific segments of society will directly gain from the Peace Treaty, the establishment of peace, and how the latter can impact people's prosperity.

