

LIBERTAS



LIBERTAS: a fight for the release of Armenian state hostages interned in Azerbaijan

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LIBERTAS¹: a committed collective

Although the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) war has ended, human suffering continues, particularly through the fate of Armenian prisoners. Indeed, with the signing of the ceasefire agreement, which provided for the exchange of all prisoners of war on an "all for all" basis, Armenia quickly released the Azerbaijani prisoners. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, not only refused to release Armenian prisoners, but also continued its military incursions until 2023, capturing new Armenian civilians and soldiers. These prisoners have since been used as a means of political pressure, compromising Armenia's security and stability.

In response to this situation, the LIBERTAS collective was founded in 2022 to defend the cause of Armenian prisoners through a campaign of individual sponsorships in France and Europe. Three human rights NGOs have joined this initiative:

- The COVCAS Center for Law & Conflict Resolution, an association created in 1991, whose purpose is to support the principles, objectives, and actions of the United Nations, particularly in the field of peaceful conflict resolution and the promotion of human rights.
Contact: Hilda TCHOBOIAN, email: hilda.tchoboian@libertas2020.com
- **Hyestart**, created in 2016, is committed to democracy and human rights in Armenia and Turkey. Its honorary members include publisher and human rights activist Ragip Zarakolu and Pen Vice President Eugène Schougin.
Contact: A. NAVARRA, email: contact@hyestart.org web: <https://www.hyestart.org/>
- **The Observatory of Armenophobia**, created in 2020, aims to identify, qualify, and quantify Armenophobic content, and to combat denialism, misinformation, and anti-Armenian hatred.
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X: <https://twitter.com/FreeArmenianPOW>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/2020libertas>
Instagram: [@libertas2020](https://www.instagram.com/libertas2020)

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LIBERTAS is currently working:

- to secure the **release of 20 Armenians**, 9 soldiers, 8 politicians, and 3 civilians, who were captured and illegally interned by Azerbaijan.
- For an **independent international investigation into the fate of 80 to 200 Armenians**—both civilians and military personnel - **who have been forcibly disappeared** during various Azerbaijani attacks since 2020. A person who has been forcibly disappeared is someone for whom there is tangible evidence that they were captured while still alive, but whose fate remains unknown to this day due to a complete lack of information from the Azerbaijani authorities.
- **To enable released prisoners suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)** caused by the violence and inhuman treatment they endured during their capture and internment **to return to normal life through a psychological therapy program**. This LIBERTAS program is being implemented by our professional partner in Armenia with INTRA, Seda Ghazarian Mental Health Center in Yerevan. This implementation is realized thanks to a technical collaboration between INTRA, also supported by the International Committee of Red Cross Delegation in Armenia (ICRC), and the ICLC (International and Comparative Law Center), through a program tailored to the needs of each patient. The families (mainly women and children) of prisoners currently interned in Azerbaijan also have the opportunity to benefit from a psychological therapy program tailored to their situation.

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LIBERTAS attended the Oslo Freedom Forum in May 2025.

BACKGROUND

When LIBERTAS launched its campaign for the release of prisoners in December 2022, Armenia had already released Azerbaijani prisoners captured during the conflict, including perpetrators of inhumane crimes captured before the 2020 war. This was a bilateral commitment made by the signing of the tripartite ceasefire agreement (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia) on November 9, 2020. The same was not true of Azerbaijan, which, after committing war crimes (condemned by international courts), still held Armenian prisoners of war and civilians in prison, in flagrant violation of the principles of international law. Although it released a number of Armenian prisoners in waves, Azerbaijan continued to capture and kidnap civilian and military prisoners, with releases taking place only sporadically and being used as leverage to obtain further territorial and political concessions from Armenia. In this respect, **Armenian prisoners are effectively state hostages held illegally in prison**, and what is more, by a country notorious for its very low level of respect for human rights.

In 2022, the LIBERTAS campaign therefore aimed to secure the release of 38 Armenian hostages. To this end, LIBERTAS undertook an operation to find individual sponsors for the prisoners among cities, NGOs, and prominent figures in France and Europe.

In September 2023, the Azerbaijani occupation army completely occupied the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), taking new civilian and military prisoners and capturing eight leaders of the self-determined republic's democratic institutions. The entire Artsakh

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population was forcibly displaced to Armenia, thus crowning Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Armenian population from their millennial homeland.

On December 7, 2023, LIBERTAS welcomed the release of 32 Armenian prisoners of war and civilians, and welcomed too on January 14, 2026, the release of four civilian prisoners.

In September 2025, Karen Avanesian, a man with mental health issues who had remained in Stepanakert following the ethnic cleansing of Armenians, was arrested and convicted of terrorism.

Currently, 20 prisoners, 8 political prisoners, 3 civilians, and 9 prisoners of war remain locked up in Baku prison.

Prisoner sponsorship campaign

Prisoner sponsorship is at the heart of LIBERTAS' advocacy campaign: it aims to protect prisoners from the cruel and inhuman treatment they endure, while providing them and their families with essential moral support. Azerbaijan continues to use these prisoners as hostages to obtain concessions, as part of a policy described by the European Parliament as "systematic Armenophobia."

Sponsoring a prisoner therefore means contributing to their protection and that of their loved ones. Several NGOs (Human Rights Watch), institutions (European Parliament, Council of Europe) and European (ECHR) and international (ICJ) courts have highlighted that Azerbaijan continues to torture and subject prisoners of war to inhumane and degrading treatment.

In accordance with international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict, all detainees must be recognized as prisoners of war and enjoy the protection of the Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949, relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War².

In light of these violations of international law and the fundamental rights of prisoners/hostages, and the numerous reports of inhumane treatment and murder, we call on intellectuals, politicians, national and international institutions and communities, and human rights defenders to sponsor the 23 prisoners in order to demand their immediate and unconditional release and thus guarantee their safety, in accordance with the provisions of international conventions.

² Geneva Convention III

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Sponsor Armenian prisoners of war

Sponsoring Armenian prisoners of war means protecting them from cruel or degrading treatment in "a country that relentlessly pursues a systematic state policy of Armenophobia, historical revisionism, and hatred towards Armenians." ³

We cannot help but be concerned about the illegally imprisoned political leaders of the Republic of Artsakh. The terminology used in the media and by Azerbaijani political and judicial actors is already a verdict in itself, since the Azerbaijani Criminal Code provides for very severe punishment for "separatism, its propaganda, the recruitment of persons for this purpose, including for the detention, manufacture, use, and dissemination of symbols."

LIBERTAS renews its commitment to its mission of ending the illegal detention of all Armenian prisoners.

In the face of Azerbaijan's flagrant violations of international law, we renew our call for action and international solidarity.

**Sponsor the 20 detainees,
prisoners of war, civilians, and political leaders**

Join us in demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

Freedom for all prisoners!

³ European Parliament resolution of March 10, 2022

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Commitment to sponsor Armenian prisoners of war detained in Azerbaijan



The mayor of Lyon, Grégory Doucet, during his meeting in April 2023 with the father of prisoner Grigor Saghatelyan, sponsored by the city of Lyon

Communicate

- **by providing the logo of the community/NGO** for use on the www.libertas2020.com website and the LIBERTAS campaign's social media accounts,
- **by displaying the local authority/NGO's support for the LIBERTAS campaign** inside and/or outside its headquarters, using banners and roll-ups bearing the images of the sponsored prisoners,
- as part of a **public signing ceremony for the sponsorship agreement** with LIBERTAS (see example in Appendix 1),
- at **public events organized** to campaign for their release,
- in **interviews** given by the community/NGO to local, national, and international media, on their **website, social media, and newsletters**

Advocate

- Advocate with other sponsors to national, European, or international bodies (LIBERTAS can provide the necessary information).

Support

- Visit and/or meet with the families of sponsored prisoners of war (via video or in person).
- Participate in public events organized in support of the release of prisoners and victims of forced disappearance.
- Provide material assistance and subsidize LIBERTAS's activities.

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Psychological care campaign

At the end of 2024, LIBERTAS launched a psychotherapy follow-up campaign to help prisoners reintegrate into everyday life. After their release, these Armenian prisoners face severe psychological trauma resulting from the torture and abuse they suffered in captivity, often accompanied by post-traumatic stress disorder that is difficult to overcome alone. They also suffer from severe social stigma, sometimes being perceived as traitors or weak, which accentuates their isolation. In addition, their professional reintegration is compromised due to a lack of support or pension related to their prison experience, which increases their precariousness. To address these disabling disorders, LIBERTAS launched a psychological support program, for the Armenian State hostages returned in 2024, implemented by INTRA, Seda Ghazarian Mental Health Center in Yerevan.

This program is realized thanks to a technical collaboration between INTRA and the ICLC (International and Comparative Law Center) in Armenia.

NB: INTRA experts also cooperate with "Santé Arménie", and the Vinatier Psychiatric hospital in Lyon (France)



Hilda Tchoboian, coordinator of LIBERTAS, and Khachatur Gasparyan, director of the INTRA Mental Health Center in Yerevan. Together, they laid the foundations for this cooperation and are working on the psychotherapy campaign

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Appendix 1: List of communities and NGOs that have signed a prisoner sponsorship agreement with LIBERTAS, and example

13 local authorities and international NGOs have already signed a sponsorship agreement with LIBERTAS for 55 Armenian hostages (32 of whom have since been released and 23 of whom are still interned by the Azerbaijani dictatorship).

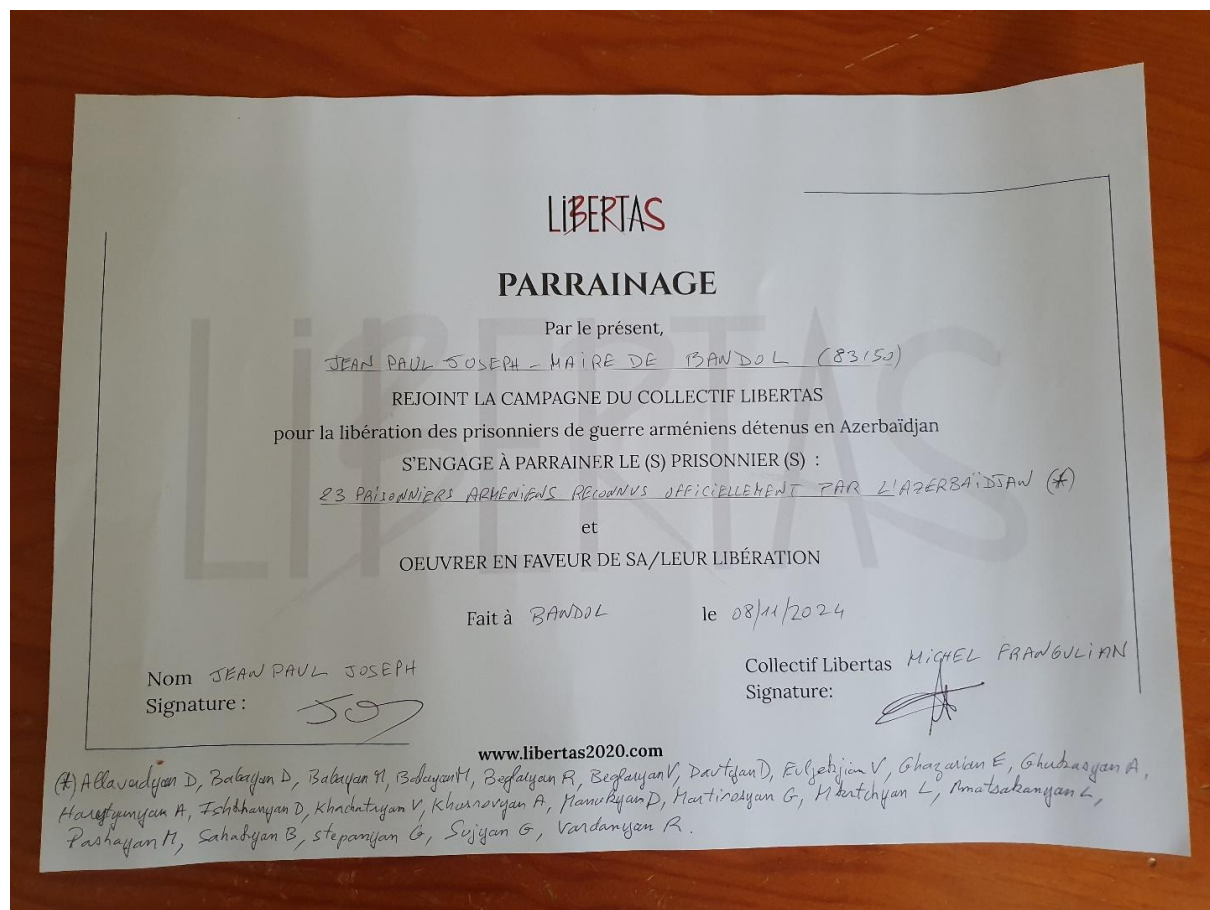
9 local authorities:

Bandol, Bourg-lès-Valence, Geneva, Lyon, Lyon Metropolitan Area, Montpellier, St Chamond, Valence, Villeurbanne.

4 NGOs:

Christian Solidarity International, Society for Threatened Peoples, Dove Tales, Scottish Peace Network.

Example of sponsorship commitment:



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Appendix 2-A - Appeal by LIBERTAS - Azerbaijani government expels ICRC: threat to the lives of Armenian State hostages



The LIBERTAS collective strongly condemns the forced expulsion from Azerbaijan of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [1], a decision with dramatic consequences for the 23 Armenian state hostages interned in that country [2].

The oil dictatorship has not forgiven the International Committee for fulfilling its mandate and humanitarian mission in Stepanakert following Baku's armed aggression against the democratic Republic of Artsakh in 2020, followed by a 10-month blockade leading to the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh Armenians in September 2023 [3].

Unsurprisingly, organizations and media outlets serving the Azerbaijani government had accused the ICRC of conducting "smuggling and espionage operations for the benefit of Armenia under the guise of humanitarian aid," accusations that were exploited by the authorities to demand an end to the Geneva Committee's humanitarian activities on behalf of Armenian prisoners of war.

Until now, regular visits by the ICRC ensured that detention conditions were monitored, guaranteeing a minimum level of respect for international humanitarian law and the fundamental rights of prisoners, such as contact with their families and the provision of hygiene products that are non-existent in the brutal prison environment in Baku.

By expelling this impartial and neutral organization, mandated by the Geneva Convention

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and its protocols, the Azerbaijani authorities are plunging Armenian state hostages, like the many Azerbaijani political prisoners, into total isolation, leaving them at the mercy of their jailers, with no outside scrutiny to curb the ill-treatment of prisoners.

"This expulsion is unacceptable: the ICRC's mission could not decently be entrusted to the Azerbaijani Red Crescent because of the latter's proven links with a government characterized by its institutional anti-Armenian racism," said Hilda Tchoboian, coordinator of the LIBERTAS Collective.

"We call on the UN Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur on Torture, as well as the Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), to assume their responsibilities and demand immediate and unconditional humanitarian access to Armenian prisoners," she concluded.

In Armenia, LIBERTAS is currently running a psychological support program for released Armenian prisoners of war suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of torture and inhuman treatment during their detention in Azerbaijan.

This LIBERTAS program is being implemented by professionals from the INTRA Mental Health Center, also supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Armenia (ICRC) and the International and Comparative Law Center (ICLC).

Appendix 2-B – Some reactions from elected officials to the above appeal by LIBERTAS:

- Letter from François Hollande, former President of the Republic, to the Quai d'Orsay, 5/3/2025

<https://www.libertas2020.com/post/fran%C3%A7ois-hollande-s-engage-pour-les-23-otages-d-%C3%A9tat-arm%C3%A9niens-intern%C3%A9s-en-azerba%C3%AFdjan-libertas>

- Written question to the government by Emmanuel Grégoire, Member of Parliament for Paris (7th district), April 10, 2025

<https://www.libertas2020.com/post/le-d%C3%A9put%C3%A9-emmanuel-gr%C3%A9goire-interpelle-le-gouvernement-et-le-quai-d-orsay-sur-le-sort-des-otages-d-e>

- Letter from Jean Paul Joseph, mayor of Bandol (83), to the government, 4/23/2025

<https://www.libertas2020.com/post/le-maire-de-bandol-interpelle-le-gouvernement-pour-exiger-un-acc%C3%A8s-humanitaire-aux-23-otages-arm%C3%A9nie>

- Written question to the government from Michelle Gréaume, Senator for the North, May 1, 2025

<https://www.libertas2020.com/post/s%C3%A9natrice-michelle-gr%C3%A9aume-au-mae-quelle-action-la-france-a-engag%C3%A9e-ou-compte-engager-afin-de-gara>

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Appendix 3: Call to condemn the Azerbaijani Parliament's racial hate speech targeting French and European citizens⁴

In the context of the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs' visit to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia (April 26-28, 2023)

Paris, Lyon, Geneva, April 27, 2023

The Covcas Center for Law and Conflict Resolution, Hyestart, and the Observatory of Armenophobia solemnly call on the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs to condemn the statement by the Azerbaijani Parliament that described the Armenian diaspora—French and European citizens—as a "cancerous tumor on Europe." The Minister would thus join the Mayor of Lyon, Grégory Doucet (EELV), and the France-Armenia Friendship Group of the National Assembly, chaired by Anne-Laurence Petel (Renaissance), who have already condemned this statement.

This offensive and racist statement targets the European Armenian diaspora, a **group descended from survivors of the genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire and Turkey** in the early 20th century, committed precisely on ethnic grounds. We recall that the history of the 20th century teaches us that mass exterminations are always preceded by calls for racial hatred in the official discourse of the genocidal group, aimed at dehumanizing the victim groups.



"Azerbaijan 2020" stamp series depicting the chemical disinfection of Artsakh: an apology for the extermination of indigenous Armenians

⁴ https://twitter.com/al_petel/status/1649652239978446848?s=20

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This statement comes at a time when the Azerbaijani head of state, President Aliyev, is making no secret of his determination to eradicate the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been living under an illegal and inhumane blockade since December 12, 2022. Furthermore, Azerbaijan chose **April 24**, the date commemorating the Armenian genocide, to complete its illegal and inhumane blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, in violation of the legally binding order of the International Court of Justice of February 22, 2023⁵.

We believe it is all the more important for the French government to condemn in the strongest terms this **"systematic state policy of Armenophobia"**⁶, which also targets its own citizens who are not allowed, for example, to travel to Azerbaijan simply because of their Armenian surname.



An emblematic example of a war crime: Anush Apetyan, an Armenian soldier who was raped, dismembered, blinded, filmed, and displayed on social media in Azerbaijan.

This description of a group of people as a "cancerous tumor," expressed by the highest authority of the national representation of a member country of the UN and the Council of Europe, clearly constitutes **incitement to racial hatred against Armenians**⁷, wherever they may be, on the basis of their ethnic origin. It violates international law, including, among others, Article 4.c of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Article 20 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

⁵ <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-PRE-01-00-FR.pdf>

⁶ See EP Resolution of March 11, 2022

⁷ <https://www.lyonmag.com/article/129423/gregory-doucet-conduit-une-delegation-ville-metropole-de-lyon-en-armenie>

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That is why we are asking the Minister to take the necessary measures to make it clear to the Azerbaijani authorities and the Azerbaijani Embassy in Paris that racism against her fellow citizens has no place in France's relations with her country, and to **condemn this incitement to hatred by Azerbaijan**, a state ranked by the NGO Freedom House among the 16 countries with the lowest levels of democracy and freedom in the world, which goes so far as to attempt political assassinations of its opponents who have sought refuge in France and Europe.

It is time for the international community to finally take action against a regime that is following in the footsteps of the dictatorships of the 20th and 21st centuries.



The "Trophy Park" in Baku, a humiliating caricature of Armenian soldiers

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FONDATION
BULLUKIAN



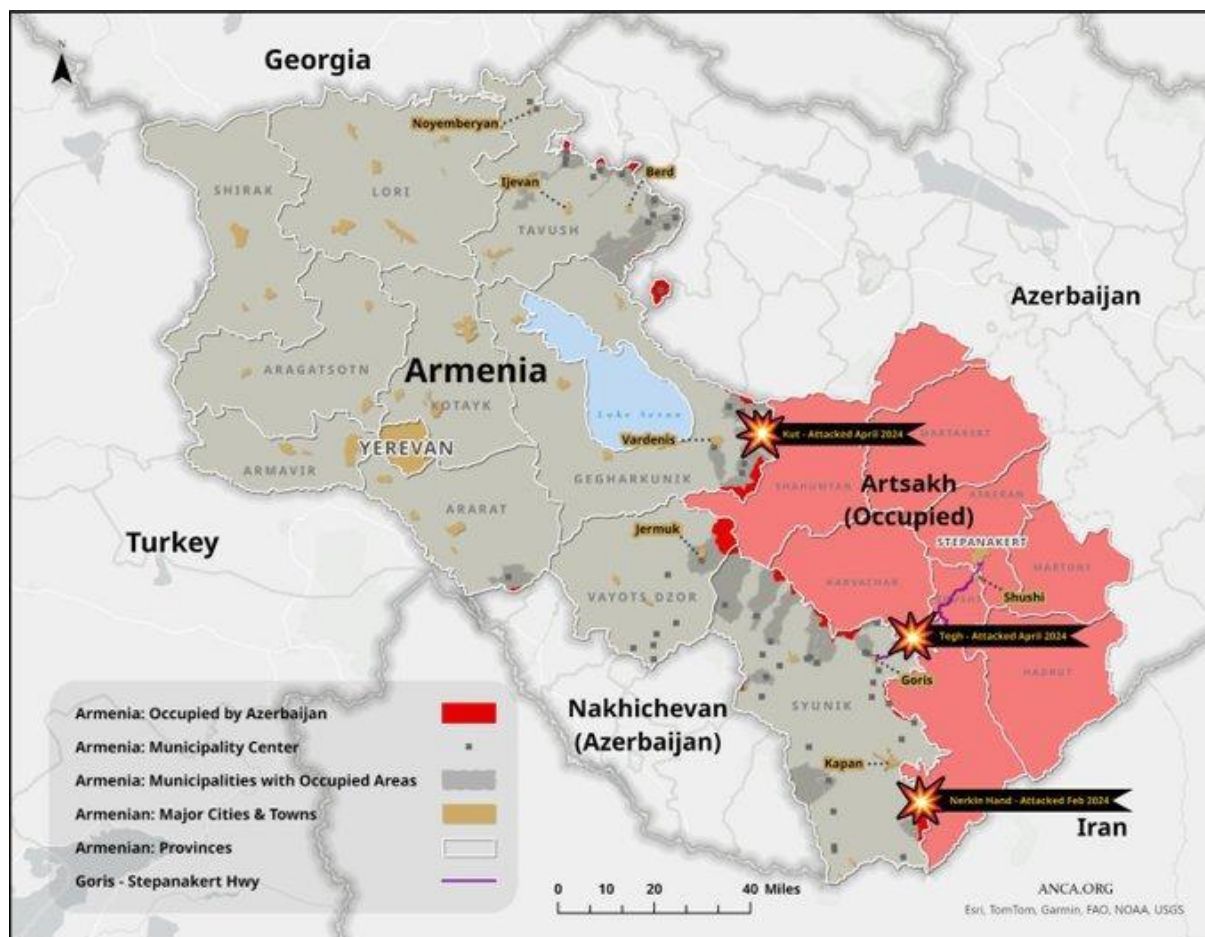
PEAALE



Centre
Covcas pour le Droit et la résolution des conflits

Appendix 4: Brief history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Artsakh, the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, can be considered one of the oldest Armenian lands, with a history stretching back more than two millennia. The aim here is not to present a complete, continuous, and exhaustive history of this region, which is considered one of the major hotspots, but simply to provide some background on its most recent history and the origins of the current conflict.



Situation on the borders of Armenia in April 2024

The modern origins of the conflict, 1918-1988

In May 1918, after Russia withdrew from the Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan proclaimed their independence. The Paris Peace Conference recognized Armenia de facto and tasked US President Woodrow Wilson with drawing its borders, while Azerbaijan's recognition was refused due to its excessive territorial claims, particularly over Karabakh and Nakhichevan, which remained unresolved.

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In 1920, Armenia and Azerbaijan were Sovietized, followed by Georgia in 1921. That same year, despite an initial decision in favor of Armenia, Stalin ordered that Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan, with their Armenian majorities, be administratively attached to Soviet Azerbaijan, forming two autonomous regions. This decision, which was political and had no legal basis, caused lasting upheaval in the region.

In 1923, Azerbaijan annexed the neighboring region of "Lowland Karabakh," thereby appropriating vast swathes of the territory of this historic province of Armenia (Kartman Canton), while fragmenting and eliminating the territorial continuity between the autonomous region and Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region thus became an enclave within Azerbaijan, cut off from Soviet Armenia.

Throughout the Soviet period, faced with discrimination and abuses of all kinds, and in particular with the deliberate economic and demographic policy of "de-Armenianization" of the region by the Azerbaijani administration, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh continually demanded to be annexed to Armenia, suffering in return successive waves of purges, deportations, and executions.

Gorbachev's "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" put to the test of history

By the time Glasnost⁸ and Perestroika⁹ came along, Nakhichevan and "Plain Karabakh" had already been emptied of their Armenian populations by the Soviet authorities in Azerbaijan. However, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, who made up 85% of the population, resisted this discriminatory policy.

On February 20, 1988, the local Soviet democratically voted to annex Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, in accordance with the Soviet Constitution. This vote was rejected by Moscow, and Azerbaijan responded with a series of anti-Armenian pogroms in several cities, causing hundreds of deaths.

The testimonies of numerous survivors, as well as high-ranking Soviet officials and military personnel, attest to the organized and systematic nature of this wave of violence. This violence, attested to by numerous survivors as well as Soviet officials and military personnel, was planned and systematic. It marked a new stage in the process of ethnic cleansing, leading to the mass expulsion of populations: approximately 450,000 Armenians were forced to flee Azerbaijan, while 180,000 Azerbaijanis left Armenia. In Baku, where 200,000 Armenians still lived in 1989, almost none remain today.

⁸ **Glasnost** (meaning "openness") was a policy launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 aimed at introducing greater freedom of expression, government transparency, and media openness in the USSR.

⁹ **Perestroika** (meaning "restructuring") refers to the series of economic and political reforms undertaken in parallel, aimed at modernizing the Soviet economy by introducing market elements and reorganizing institutions for greater efficiency.

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The "First Karabakh War"

Between 1991 and 1993, Azerbaijan bombed Armenian towns in Nagorno-Karabakh on a daily basis from its bases in Shushi and Khojaly, forcing civilians, particularly in Stepanakert, to live in makeshift shelters. From 1991 onwards, Soviet (OMON) and Azerbaijani forces launched operations to deport Armenians, accompanied by bombings and targeted attacks, such as the massacre of more than 100 civilians in Maragha in 1992.

On August 31, 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence from the collapsing USSR. Azerbaijan declared itself the successor state to the "Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan" of 1918-1920, while abolishing the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which proclaimed its independence on September 2, 1991, confirmed by a referendum on December 10.

In June 1992, Azerbaijan occupied 40% of Nagorno-Karabakh, causing the displacement of 66,000 people. However, Armenian self-defense forces managed to repel two major offensives, in 1992 and then in 1994.

In May 1993, the Armenian self-defense forces not only repelled the attacks, but also succeeded in creating a security zone around Nagorno-Karabakh, while opening up the region by opening the road to Armenia (Lachin Corridor).

The conflict ended with a victory for the Armenian side and a ceasefire was signed thanks to Russian mediation in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on May 12, 1994, by representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. This marked the beginning of a unique democratic experiment in the South Caucasus region: the freely self-determined population of Artsakh established institutions and organized some of the freest elections in the region. At the same time, a defense army was created.



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International attempts to resolve the conflict and their limitations



The Minsk Group at a summit in Vienna on May 16, 2016

In 1992, the CSCE (now the OSCE) created the Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, the United States, and Russia, to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Throughout its 26 years of activity aimed at preventing a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Minsk Group has developed its principles and mechanisms to find a solution based on both the principles of the "right to self-determination" of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and that of the "territorial integrity of Azerbaijan ."

During this time, several plans have been drafted to achieve this goal. Meetings between officials from the two warring parties took place in several countries, including France (January 26, 2001). But during this same period of "neither war nor peace," several hundred young Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers lost their lives on the front line, victims of a sniper war.

Despite years of negotiations and several proposals, no solution was found, and sporadic clashes resulted in hundreds of deaths. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan massively strengthened its armament thanks to its energy revenues and alliances. Indeed, Azerbaijan re-armed itself massively with Russia, and later also with Israel, Pakistan, and Turkey, while benefiting from numerous technical and logistical supports such as French observation satellites.

Thus, on the night of April 1-2, 2016, Azerbaijan launched a "blitzkrieg" that should undoubtedly have alerted the Armenian authorities and the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. This war, known as the "4-day war," actually lasted nearly 10 days, resulting, according to some estimates, in around 100 casualties on each side and the occupation by the Azeris of 800 hectares of sovereign Armenian territory. It was a kind of test designed to gauge the capabilities of the Armenian army and the various parties involved in this previously "frozen" conflict.

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From the "44-day war" to the total occupation of Karabakh

On September 27, 2020, taking advantage of the unstable global context (COVID-19 pandemic and US elections), Azerbaijan, with the direct support of Turkey and Syrian mercenaries, launched a major offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh. This 44-day conflict ended on November 9, 2020, "thanks to Russia's mediation," with an Armenian defeat. This war caused nearly 5,000 deaths on the Armenian side and the capture of numerous prisoners, while Baku kept its losses secret. This offensive was marked by the massive use of drones and is seen as a precursor to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Emboldened by this military victory and the inaction of the international community, on three occasions, on May 12 and November 5, 2021, and then on September 13, 2022, the Azerbaijani army again carried out major incursions, violating Armenia's borders and occupying 215 km² of the country's sovereign territory.

These acts of aggression resulted in hundreds of casualties and the capture of numerous Armenians, both civilians and military personnel. Several dozen people were victims of summary executions, including a female soldier and mother of three, Anush Apetyan, who was raped, murdered, and brutally dismembered on September 12 or 13, 2022, during the Azerbaijani offensive on the Armenian town of Jermuk. These cases have been documented by several international human rights organizations.

In violation of the ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020, on December 12, 2022, after a mock demonstration attributed to alleged "environmentalists," Baku imposed a total blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh for 10 months, which was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).



An iconic photo of the 2020 conflict, showing the violence of the clashes

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The destruction of Armenian Artsakh and its democracy

To achieve its ultimate goal, namely the total occupation of the Republic of Artsakh, on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched a final military offensive, thus completing the planned ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Artsakh.

This operation of forced displacement to Armenia drove more than 100,000 indigenous Armenians from their ancestral lands, fleeing the abuses and inhuman treatment practiced by Azerbaijan. Nearly 50,000 of them had already taken refuge in Armenia during the "44-day war." According to information from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), only 25 Armenians of both sexes remain in Artsakh, all of them elderly, some suffering from serious illnesses, who did not want to leave their homes and their land.

On September 17, two days before the Azerbaijani offensive, an informal meeting between the United States, Russia, and the European Union was held in Istanbul to discuss the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh.

At the end of this ethnic cleansing, undoubtedly the most radical and rapid in history, for the first time, the land of Artsakh, Armenian since time immemorial, was deprived of its population. Eight of its leaders were kidnapped by the Azerbaijani army and illegally detained in Baku, with charges that foreshadowed very severe sentences.

Status of the "trials" of the remaining prisoners as of March 2026: between 2021 and 2025, four had been sentenced to prison terms of 15 to 20 years. The "trials" of the other 16 prisoners took place from January 2025 to February 2026. The hearings were held in Baku before a military court, without international observers, whom the Azerbaijani government refused to allow. The charges were deemed absurd by NGOs outside Azerbaijan, and the remaining detainees were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment.

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