Situation in Armenia on implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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**Caucasus Center of Human Rights Monitoring (CCHRM)**

**Human rights monitoring group of national minorities «MRMG»**

**Public Association for Human Right Protection**

Caucasus Center of Human Rights Monitoring (CCHRM) is a non-governmental

organization established in Georgia. Objectives of the organization: to facilitate the

development of a tolerant civil society and the advancement of knowledge in the field of

human rights and fundamental freedoms, to protect the rights and freedoms at the

Caucasus. The activity of CCHRM is based on the organization of events with experts in

the field of human rights.

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1. Caucasus Center of Human Rights Monitoring (CCHRM), is a non-governmental international organization, registered in Georgia is an independent oversight and monitoring bodyspecialized in questions relating to racism and intolerance. It is composed of independent and impartial members appointed on the basis of their moral authority and recognized expertise in dealing with racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance on South Caucasus.

2.In the framework of its statutory activities, CCHRM conducts in Caucasus countries monitoring work, which analyses the situation of three member States of the Council of Europe regarding racism and intolerance and draws up suggestions and proposals for dealing with the problems identified.

3.The working methods for the preparation of the reports involve documentary analyses, a visit to the country concerned, and then a confidential dialogue with the national authorities.

4. CCHRM ‘s reports are not only the result of inquiries or testimonial evidence. They are analyses based on a great deal of information gathered from a wide variety of sources. Documentary studies are based on a large number of national and international written sources.

5.Regarding the fight against racism and intolerance, Armenia takes an active part in the Council of Europe’s HELP assistance program. This initiative has helped to improve the ability of justice professionals to respond effectively to racism and racial discrimination issues.

6.However, the criminal, civil and administrative legislation suffers from numerous shortcomings with the result that it is not possible to combat racism or racial discrimination comprehensively.

7.In cases of racial discrimination, the lack of any mechanism for sharing the burden of proof makes it difficult to establish evidence. This undermines the Human Rights Defender’s ability to gather information on cases of racial discrimination submitted to him.

8. CCHRM notes a rise in hate speech leading to acts of violence. The main targets of this are members of the LGBT community and non-traditional religious groups. This situation is all the more worrying given that there is a high level of under-reporting of racist and homo/transphobic crime and that the effectiveness of the criminal, civil and administrative law provisions dealing with hate crime or discrimination is seriously hampered by the shortcomings in legislation. In addition, political discourse frequently contains statements stigmatizing these vulnerable groups, which helps simplify racist and intolerant attitudes within the population.

9.In the field of integration, CCHRM notes that Armenia has not yet adopted a comprehensive integration policy. CCHRM further notes that the equality statistics fail to provide a clear picture of the situation of vulnerable groups with regard to the discrimination of which they are the victims.

10.In the report of ECRI has also noted recurrent instances of hate speech against (members of) non-traditional religious groups. On 9 September 2013, in a widely covered press conference, Armenian Apostolic Church clergy member Komitas Hovnanyan, together with the head of an organization called United Youth League, criticized religious minorities. According to K. Hovnanyan, there were more than 215 “sects” in the country, which received millions of dollars from abroad and aimed to destroy Armenia.”*32* On 20 September 2013, the United Youth League and “Menk” (We) initiated a campaign to collect signatures calling for a government investigation into the activities of all registered and unregistered religious organizations and for a ban on their “destructive” influence on Armenian society. The groups called for the government immediately to stop the activities of what they referred to as the Word of Life, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Reima, Altar, and Great Grace “sects”.*33* In September of the same year, a high-ranking member of the Apostolic Church made statements stigmatizing religious minorities and two youth organizations circulated online petitions accusing “cults” of conspiring against Armenia and receiving foreign money and calling on the government to investigate and close such “cults” down. This led to attempted assaults on a pastor of the Evangelical Church and his secretary (see §58). In October 2013, the United Youth League published a list of pop artists, claiming that they were “sectarians”. Few of the above-mentioned artists defended their views or their right to privacy. Most of the artists publicly denounced “sects” and tried to prove that they were members of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

11.With regard to non-traditional religious groups, ECRI understands that the media have published a significant number of reports stigmatizing minority religious groups as “sects” and propagated fear of religious minorities. Various television stations broadcasted discussions and news coverage presenting minority religious groups as enemies of the state, without providing minority religious groups with the opportunity of responding or participating in the debate. Several articles were published in newspapers, portraying religious minorities as criminals and spies; while these did not refer to particular religious groups, their combined result was an atmosphere of intolerance towards all religious minorities. Religious groups also reported increased intolerance and threats on social networks.An incident involving a Jehovah’s Witness illustrates these tendencies: on 10 November 2010, several media outlets, including the Armenian Public Television, reported that a young man belonging to the Jehovah’s Witnesses community had been charged with the murder of his parents. In addition to containing derogatory and insulting comments about Jehovah’s Witnesses, one of the broadcasts suggested that viewers should resort to physical violence against them.

12.In its 3rd report, ECRI had already noted the authorities’ considerable efforts in the field of ethnic-minority education and culture. It welcomes the additional efforts made in recent years and notes that most of the associations representing these minorities that ECRI’s delegation met during its contact visit said that they did not feel discriminated against by the authorities and that they received sufficient support from the State.

13. It must be noted with regret that the authorities don’t take proper attentions of kindergarten facilities in communities with ethnic-minority children lacking the necessary linguistic skills for attending elementary school. In their report CERD expressed the same concern, calling upon Armenia to “provide language support in pre-school education for minority pupils”. Also in his report CERD refers to other sources which notes the facts to the insufficient availability of pre-school education and that pupils from ethnic minority background, such as Assyrian and Yezidi, do not therefore have the opportunity to learn Armenian before they go to primary school and so risk falling behind from the start.

**Hate speech and hate crimes**

1.In our monitoring period it was revealed dangerous tendencies in human rights protection policies and practicesnamely, the rhetoric of intolerance towards minority groups and the notion of gender inequality increased.

2.The practice of human right protection organizations on the ground has shown that the hate speech and aggression toward human rights defenders escalated. The most common rhetoric was denouncement of the West, particularly of the European values of liberty and endorsement of nationalistic approaches presented as traditional family centered culture attributed to the Eurasian states. Also, the Coalition of organizations noted that intolerance towards vulnerable groups continues, without an adequate response or investigation by the authorities. Widely-controlled media continues is used as a tool for instigation of intolerance and hatred, specifically on religious grounds. Despite the widespread issue of discrimination, authorities yet do not fully acknowledge the need of autonomous legislation that would safeguard equal rights and opportunities for vulnerable groups.

3.Religious hatred and calls to violence continue to be commonplace and still do not receive adequate attention from authorities. The media continues to play an important role in the instigation of religious intolerance by spreading false information about religious organizations. Newspaper articles, television, and radio programs repeatedly produce hateful and offensive content towards those who are not members of the Armenian Apostolic Church (henceforth AAC). Street walls are covered with leaflets with hostile messages and even calls for physical violence against religious minorities. However, authors of those articles and programs are never held accountable by state authorities.

4.Schools and kindergartens are commonly used for religious propaganda and prayers services by the AAC91. Most widespread problems in educational sector include incitement of hate speech and preaching against religious organizations and denominations other than the AAC, indoctrination of the AAC’s belief system in the educational contents and absence of alternative teaching mechanism for students of other beliefs, as well as strong linkage and association of the AAC with the Armenian national identity in school educational content.

5.Unfortunately many facts still remain without adequate timely response to cases of incitement to religious hatred; there are very few facts when the authorities identified and prosecuted those who spread and inciting interethnic hatred.[[1]](#footnote-1)

6.One of the main problems which derives from not having a proper standalone anti-discrimination law, is that people who perform acts of hate speech try to defend themselves by claiming freedom of speech. “An anti-discrimination law is the basic document that enables a clear distinction to be made between freedom of expression and material that preaches intolerance and hate, and that makes accountability for the latterpossible.”**[[2]](#footnote-2)**

7. As the ombudsman’s deputy Tatevik Khachatryan stated: “Cohesive anti-discrimination legislation would benefit everyone, since the various laws that touch on the matter are disjointed and not applied properly.This kind of law is not passed in order to protect one specific socialgroup”[[3]](#footnote-3).

8. In general, a climate of tolerance and understanding between national minorities and the majority is perceived in the country. However, certain kind of discrimination is widespread, particularly in areas such as health, education, and labor settings. A widespread societal and institutional discrimination, intolerance and harassment, victimization and stigmatization of certain groups exists in Armenia. And the authorities take little proactive action to fight discrimination.

The tensions and intolerant attitudes between Kurds and Yezidi people have yet not been solved and continue to be a problem.

9. Children belonging to ethnic minority groups could not recall any cases of discrimination against them. In fact, they believed that they benefit from the same rights and freedoms as any other children in Armenia. However, ethnically Armenian children pointed out some cases of discrimination against ethnic minorities by other children.

10. One of the possible reasons of this distinct perception could be that children from national and ethnic minorities they already have the discrimination so intrinsic than they don’t perceive it as such anymore.

11.Children who belong to ethnic or religious minority backgrounds often suffer mockery or an unfriendly attitude from their classmates. Moreover, there is an veiled belief among them that being part of the minority is an expression of being unprotected and weak. This unkind behavior frequently occurs at school, some of those times with the silent approval or permission from other classmates, their parents and staff of the educational centers.

12.Nevertheless, the headmasters have resolved in a positive way those disagreements with children by defending the rights of minorities. In comparison with religious minorities, the cases affecting ethnic minorities are way less frequent. Being the isolation that characterized the way of living of these communities the most probable cause.

13.The Armenian Helsinki Committee elaborated a study related to child abuse in the schools, where they were discovered cases of intolerant treatment of children from families following any other religion or denomination.

14.The Yezidi minority group is a target of intolerance and stereotyping.Some sub-ethnic peculiarities become a cause for aggression from their fellow classmates, in addition to minor violence like permanent harassment by other kids. For instance, when Armenian boys and girls intend to offend or accuse each other of poor taste, they ask:“Are you a Yezidi?”[[4]](#footnote-4). Yet, this is not the only example.

15.More cases of disdain and intolerant attitudes by children towards their Molokan or Yezidi classmates have been accounted.

16.For instance, one of the pupils from the Vanadzor Evangelical Church pointed out that he had defended a Molokan child from harassment by others:“I protected the Molokan from our class though at that time I was not yet spiritual. They treated him badly, made various comments behind his back and called him a potato, a cabbage, i.e. things that Molokans sell”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

17.Yezidi children have some Armenian friends, even though the quantity of those friends is rather small compared to their friends inside the Yezidi community. Meanwhile, Molokan children are more isolated and reserved. They do not get much involved with their Armenian classmates and, in general, they do not consider to have any Armenian friends.

18.Cases were teachers were using or promoting violence against students belonging to the Yezidi community have also been reported “This is your elder brother; whoever misbehaves, will be punished by the elder brother”. This kind of behavior suits the prevailing opinion among ethnic minority children, specifically among Yezidi children, that corporal punishment has applied only with positive motives both by parents and teachers.

19.These children are far from being aware of their own rights. According to their perspective, punching is a normal practice and only children are to be blamed. Furthermore, some children consider this the only possible way to educate a child.

20.Children following the Armenian Apostolic Church living in the capital city appear to be more tolerant towards other nations and religions. This also includes children who follow the credo of the Islam.

21.However, some children pointed out that there is a prevailing negative attitude towards foreigners who practice Islam, specially in the case of Iranians. For example, there was a teenage girl, studying in an Armenian school, whose family had emigrated from Iran and who had been taught to be modest and not to respond to rude behavior by boys. “There is an Iranian girl in our school who is under pressure from boys in our group; they even hit her. But when they ask her why she allows this she says: he is my brother, what can I do? She is obedient to the situation.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

22.One study[[7]](#footnote-7) showed that pseudo-nationalism is prevailing among Armenian society. A kind of nationalism where religious and ethnic identity are considered to be equivalent. According to the report, people are not just intolerant to members of other religious communities because they think that their views are not right, but they are as well perceived as treason to the national religion and ethnicity, lead by the interpretation of those constituting a threat to national security or, at least as treason.

23.The most probable cause of this intolerance is considered to be the lack of multiethnic coexistence, so typical to monoethnic societies. Hence, any phenomenon that is outside of the traditional and the widely-accepted is perceived as a danger or a threat.

24.The respondents had the same considerations concerning to the types of intolerance predominant in Armenia nowadays. The discrimination are on the grounds of religion, national-ethnic belonging, sexual orientation, disability and, being HIV-positive.

25.On 16 April 2012[[8]](#footnote-8), the organizers of The Azerbaijani film festival “Stop”[[9]](#footnote-9) made an announcement of their plans to change the location of the festival from Gyumri to the Vanadzor Office of the Helsinki Citizens’Assembly (HCA) in northern Armenia.

26.The next day, a crowd of 200 people gathered in front of the HCA office to protest against the event. The protestors, among the ones you could find students, political activists, former military personnel and representatives of the local administration, were led by a union of veterans from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict called Yerkarapah. Among the reported attacks, the activists denounced that they were called traitors and Turks, and the crowd threw eggs and rocks and forced their way into the HCA office where they damaged office equipment and threatened the employees.

27.The local administration representatives and at least four police officers who were present during the incidents but did not take any proactive actions to protect the organizers and stop the violence against the HCA staff. And even though the festival organizers asked for increased police support, the help did not come until the crowd had already dispersed.

28. On 17 April 2012, the Lori regional prosecutor was quoted in the press as saying that “throwing stones and eggs is a form of civic protest”and that the attack on the NGO did not constitute public disorder or an action that would merit police intervention.

29. The authorities did not bring criminal charges against any of the attackers. No investigation was conducted into the rightness of police performance or their decline to ensure the safety of the activists organizing the festival. HCA Vanadzor appealed to court against the decision of the investigator but the appeal is in court since 2012[[10]](#footnote-10). One person, the mother of a soldier who died in the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict, was subsequently fined for throwing stones.

**Hate Speech and the Media**

30.Hate Speech is frequently used by some media outlets which support chauvinistic ideas and are embrace the nationalistic leitmotiv“one nation, one religion, one culture”. It is certain that even though the number of these media outlets is rather low, the level of hatred expressed by them is high[[11]](#footnote-11).

31.A significant role is also played by the lack of professionalism and knowledge of journalists covering issues related to religious and ethnic minorities. Thus, it turns out as a source of misleading information, contributing to the propagation of hate speech. A study elaborated by the Collaboration for Democracy Center[[12]](#footnote-12) proofs the negative media coverage.

32.As it was already mentioned above, the manifestations of hate speech in Armenian media are far from being numerous. For example, linguistic and racial hate speech is not typical in this sphere. little bit more that the 2% incorporates expressions of national and ethnic intolerance (2,2%[[13]](#footnote-13)).

33.The authors of statements of this nature are mainly journalists. On the contrary, the amount of politicians, public officials, and others was way behind. The percentage of expressions of hate speech pronounced among the public opinion, figures experts and scientist, or representatives of international organizations and religious structures it is even smaller.

34.Examples of the manifestation of racial discriminations can be found in the use of expressions such as nigger, narrow-eyed,… Examples for national discriminations are also obvious in: “person of the caucasian nationality,”“kurd’s son”, “smells of a kurd”,…And even linguistic: “don’t bark in Russian, English (or another foreign language)”, in addition to describing certain terminology as chinese or another foreign language,…

35.According to the study, the main platform which spreads racial or national hate speech is the online media, followed by print media. The position of the media is important since it can play an important role in minimizing intolerance and hatred in the society.

**Representation**

36. Ethnic or national minority representation in the Armenian Parliament (National Assembly) is not ensured by any special provisions in the Armenian law or any of the government bodies. Members of minority groups they are never elected in a higher level, just as local councillors at municipalities, sometimes. Facts that consequently lead to a low participation and lack of representation among them in the national sphere.

37.However, some changes may be about to be inculded, like the introduction of “the right of foreign citizens and stateless persons resident in Armenia to vote and stand in local elections, and a quota for ethnic minorities in the parliament”[[14]](#footnote-14).

38.During the local elections that took place in the year 2008, members of national and ethnic groups participated and ended up being elected local councillors and community chiefs. Fact that proves the strong interest of national minorities to be involved in public affairs. For example, in some villages predominantly inhabited by communities such as the Assyrian, the Kurdish or the Yezidi make up the majority among the elected representatives.

39.However, at the moment there is only one political party formed along ethnic lines and is the only one that primes the work on behalf of the protection of ethnic minorities (in this case the Yezidi), the Yezidkhana Party. Nevertheless, this party does not have any representation in the higher level neither in the National Assembly nor in the government.

40.Per contra, a similar trend is observed in other aspects of the Armenian reality. For example, the National Commission on Television and Radio, the body in charge of ensuring the independence and diversity of television and radio, which is also partly elected by the Government does not have any minority representatives among its members, with a consequent neglection of minority issues in the media.

41.The Department of the Government of the Republic of Armenia for Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs and the Coordinating Council for National and Cultural Organizations of National Minorities, which is composed of representatives of two representatives of eleven national minority groups, are the main bodies in charge of the implementation of the Government’s policy on national minorities.

43.Both bodies help to raise awareness on issues which involve national minorities,as well as to solve some of the problems concerning them through dialogue. In addition, the Council elaborates recommendations to the Armenian authorities on minority issues.

44.However, its influence in the decision-making process it still shows big limitations. Moreover, the people belonging to national minorities which lack of representation in the Coordination Council, do not benefit on an equal basis with those other minorities which are. This turns specially important when referring to the consolation process and the allocation of funding. And, in spite of the increase of state financial means for the Council, the funding is allocated among the different communities equally, without taking into consideration their real needs or size.

45.Another important body for the defense of ethnic and national minorities is the ombudsman or the Office of the Human Rights Defender (the ombudsman), which enjoys of a great deal of public support. Having as its main goal the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms from abuse by the national, regional, and local governments, its effectiveness has been limited in a number of occasions due to lack of resources.

46.The Office of the Human Rights Defender receives and important amount of complaints (3,924 in 2015)[[15]](#footnote-15), yet it does not show specific information about the ones concerning national or ethnic discrimination. In the annual report published by the Office, the allegations made by representatives of national minorities were presented as violations of rights,“mostly of common nature”, with no connection to their national or ethnic origin (such as housing problems, difficulties encountering in the field of social services, complaints on judicial acts made by the judicial authorities of the Republic of Armenia, etc.). The argument is based on the fact that similar due to the fact that they have a socio-economic base.

47.The reform of local self-governancewith a view to economizing and mainstreaming administration aimed at merging small municipalities into more viable larger ones was stagnant in the year 2015. Furthermore, the draft constitution has a chapter on local self-government that it has mostly not included any changes from the previous version. Yet, the new version incorporates the provision that the parliament must take into consideration the opinion of residents when deciding to merge communities.

**Media**

48.Television and the Internet are pointed out as the main sources of information for religious and ethnic minorities (in addition, to the majority). In the regions, the access to certain TV channels is not granted, on the contrary, the people inhabiting these areas can only access the media which provides them of “purely official information”, putting them in a clear disadvantage. Thus, minority children confirmed that they have certain reservations towards the information offered by television.

49.The Law on TV and Radio regulates the media in the Republic of Armenia. The enforcement is borne by the State TV and Radio Commission, which consists of four members elected by the government and four by the members of the Parliament. The article 24 of the Law on TV and Radio prohibits to inspire national or religious hatred or discord. Moreover, according to the aforementioned article, the Public Television and Radio Company has an obligation to offer television and radio programmes concerning the national minorities. These programmes should cover the history, education, culture, language and rights of the minorities. Essentially, the representatives of national minorities state that issues concerning ethnic and national minorities are covered in a fair and a balanced way, like in the “Haylur” public television new program. Article 28, on the other hand, establishes no time limits for ethnic minority languages.

50.However, in practice, minority languages are rarely, if at all, heard in television broadcasts. The situation with respect to radio broadcasts is more positive. Regular broadcasts are aired in Russian, and both Kurdish and Yezidi language programmes are broadcast for 30 minutes per day. A less frequent radio programme is transmitted in Assyrian.

51.Newspapers and magazines are published in Russian languages, but for the other minority languages there are no weekly newspapers. There are publications in Yezidi and Kurdish, also co- funded by the government, but as already mentioned before, published on a more occasional basis; the latter of which is only published monthly due to a lack of finances. There are no equivalent ventures in Greek or Assyrian to date. That is why, there is a urgent necessity to ensure an appropriate presence of minority languages on radio and especially television.

52.The body which is in charge of ensuring the independence and diversity of television and radio (the National Commission of Television and Radio), neither comprises representatives of the national minorities, nor specifically deals with their interests.

53.Armenian Public Radio broadcasts in Assyrian for 15 minutes every day. Yet, there are no public or private television programmes in Assyrian, as well as no no private radio programmes. the same can be said about newspapers. Various representatives of the Assyrian community showed their interest in television programmes and the publication of a newspaper in their language.

54.Nowadays, there are no radio or television programmes in Greek, neither published newspapers in a weekly basis. And in spite of the existence of a partly state funded publication (the Byuzandakan Ozhandakatyun publication), it is not published in Greek but in Russian.

55.Public Radio broadcasts in Kurdish 30 minutes every day. However, there are no any private radio programmes in Kurdish. Even though some Kurdish speakers have shown their interest in television programmes in their native language no public or private television programmes are broadcasted in Kurdish. Moreover, no weekly publication can be found in Kurdish, despite the fact that two newspapers “Rya taza” and “Zagros” continue to be published in Kurdish in a monthly basis.

56.Even though public and private television programmes are broadcast periodically in Russian and three companies carry out re-broadcasting of television programmes in Russian, there are no private radio programmes which broadcast in Russian and the Public Radio now broadcasts for 15 minutes daily in Russian, an insufficient amount of time taking into account the number of speakers of Russian language.

57.Armenian Public Radio broadcasts for 30 minutes daily in Yezidi. Nevertheless, there is no public or private television, neither private television which broadcasts in Yezidi. Furthermore, there is no newspaper published in Yezidi.

58.Financial support is provided by Armenian authorities for news bulletins of the Georgian, Polish and Ukrainian minority associations. Thus, a bulletin is published partly in Georgian a quarterly in Polish, Armenian and Russian and a monthly bulletin is published in Ukrainian and Russian. All of these publications offer news on the educational, social and cultural life of the national minorities in Armenia. There are no news bulletin in German, but German newspapers and audio-visual products are accessible at the German Library in Yerevan.

59.A radio programme sometimes broadcasts in Georgian. However, there is no broadcast media in the German, Polish and Ukrainian languages.

**Anti-Semitism**

60.While the Armenian diaspora clamors for international recognition of their treatment during World War I, at the same time Armenians have a dirty secret crying for international recognition: brazen anti-Semitism and a profound hatred of Israel. This hypocritical streak runs deep within Armenian society.

61.Horrifically, many Armenians have taken to addressing Jews as “ocar,” the Armenian word for soap. This is an underhanded reference to the Nazi practice of turning corpses of the victims of their extermination camps into soap, wallets, lampshades and other “useful” things. It has taken far less obvious intolerance to destroy a political campaign, yet, incongruously, certain members of Congress support the agenda of Armenia and its diaspora.

62.In the Armenian body politic today, anti-Semitism is readily relied upon to besmirch or delegitimize political opponents. WikiLeaks cited a 2008 U.S. Department of State cable subtitled “ARMENIAN PRESS CONTINUES TO USE ANTI-SEMITISM TO VILIFY THE OPPOSITION.” Beginning in mid-May 2008, pro-government print media and state-run public television made outlandish anti-Semitic and anti-Masonic accusations against leaders of political opposition with gusto. Even a former Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, did not escape paranoid anti-Semitic diatribes against him in Armenian print media and even state-run television, simply because his wife is fabled to be Jewish.

63.According to the cable in WikiLeaks, the accusations appeared in several scathing articles in the pro-government Russian-language Golos Armenii (Voice of Armenia) and Armenian-language Hayots Ashkhar (Armenian World) dailies. The articles portray Ter-Petrossian is as a traitor to Armenia and claim his true allegiance lies to the West -- particularly to Israel and the Freemasons. Both papers also published an article entitled "Levon Hakob Ter-Petrosan or Levon Frayim Pliskovsky -- Armenian National Congress or Jewish Congress?" The author questions Ter-Petrossian's loyalty to the Armenian state by speculating on his alleged conspiratorial meeting with a wealthy Russian Jewish businessman where he presumably received $100-200 million USD for his presidential campaign. The author then claims that "the Jewish-Masonic lobby spent $65-70 million USD on the same campaign.

64.The Jewish community in Armenia is caught in a limbo between not upsetting the authorities vs. the need to raise an alarm about Armenia’s increasingly hostile atmosphere towards Jews. In a country with state-controlled media, it is almost impossible to find criticism of the current government’s anti-Semitic campaign; only the lone voice of Rimma Varzhapetian, head of Armenia's Jewish community, has raised an alarm. According to the WikiLeaks cable, Ms. Varzhapetian expressed her distress about the articles, calling them "a provocation and a kindling of anti-Semitism." She added that "I am afraid to think that this has the backing of the people in power." Varzhapetian said that she has no plans for a public response, though she believes it is incumbent upon the international community to condemn the hateful rhetoric. She noted with concern that people are starting to believe such hateful lies, including some of her acquaintances. They have reacted to her remonstrations about the anti-Semitic articles by attributing her objections to the fact that she is Jewish.[[16]](#footnote-16)

65.Anti-Semitism in Armenia is an unfortunate and little-acknowledged fact. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the country’s Jewish minority and Jewish heritage—the products of a more tolerant time—have shrunk dramatically. The end of Soviet rule removed constraint, and anti-Semitic attacks rose dramatically. That, and Armenia’s ongoing economic collapse, drive the Jews of Armenia to flee the country. In just 20 years, Armenian Jewish population has shrunk from more than 5,000 to just a few hundred.And the cultural violence has continued. Anti-Semitic books are published and TV programs aired, and the Holocaust memorial in the capital of Yerevan has been repeatedly defaced. Of course, many countries have suffered such unfortunate incidents, the product of an ignorant populace. But in Armenia such views have been espoused even by mainstream politicians and media personalities. In 2004, a pro-government radio presenter expressed anti-Semitic views for months on end. A nationalist politician was also allowed to freely make lurid slurs against Jews before public pressure forced the government to arrest him.The dwindling Jewish community in Armenia has complained about these attacks—the head of the Jewish community expressed her concern that “this [anti-Semitism] has the backing of people in power.” But appeals have fallen on deaf ears, which is hardly a surprise when such attitudes are shared by much of Armenian society. The Anti-Defamation League’s latest survey in June 2014 showed that the rate of anti-Semitism in Armenia (at 58 percent) was the third-highest in all of Europe, and the highest in all of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Thus, around 1.3 million out of 2.2 million adults in Armenia expressed anti-Semitic attitudes. Armenia’s closest comparisons were with virulently hostile countries in the Middle East.

66.Sixty-three percent of Armenians surveyed believe that Jews are hated “because of the way Jews behave;” 60 percent claimed that “Jews don’t care what happens to anyone but their own kind;” 45 percent think that “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust;” and 38 percent consider that “Jews are responsible for most of the world’s wars.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

67.European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted intolerant statements against Azerbaijanis and the Jews, and the opposition to the “gender equality” concept seen by religious and conservative leaders as anti-Armenian and untraditional. There is still no comprehensive integration policy, allegations of discrimination against migrants of non-Armenian ethnic background persist, and the assistance to migrants is not provided long enough for their social integration, the report says.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Discrimination in 2012-2014**

68. Members of religious minorities suffered from societal discrimination. Domestic violence remained a problem but largely went unreported to authorities. Human trafficking was a problem, which authorities made efforts to combat. Persons with disabilities experienced discrimination in almost all areas of life. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons were subjected to societal abuse and discrimination by military and prison authorities. Workers’ rights were limited and labor laws weakly enforced.

69. Men and women enjoy equal legal status under family law, labor law, property law, inheritance law, and in the judicial system, but discrimination based on gender was a continuing problem in both public and private sectors. Women generally did not enjoy the same professional opportunities or wages as men and were often relegated to more menial or low-paying jobs. According to official data for 2010, there was a significant gap between the average monthly salary of men and women; in addition, the average monthly salary for younger women was higher than that for older women. Women remained underrepresented in leadership positions in all branches and at all levels of government.[[19]](#footnote-19)

70.Persons with disabilities experienced discrimination in almost all areas of life. Military and prison authorities subjected lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons to abuse and discrimination; societal discrimination also was a problem. The government limited workers’ rights and weakly enforced labor laws.

71.The constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. The government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions.

72.Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is a criminal offense and carries a maximum sentence of 15 years; authorities prosecute spousal rape under the general rape statutes. According to official statistics, they registered 14 cases of rape and three of attempted rape during the first nine months of the year, none involving spousal rape. Such crimes continued to be underreported due to social stigma, as well as the absence of female police officers and investigators.

73. While the law provides penalties for domestic violence that are the same as for other forms of violence, authorities did not effectively prosecute domestic violence. Spousal abuse and violence against women appeared to be widespread. Law-enforcement bodies reported 532 cases of domestic violence during the first nine months of the year, of which 337 involved abuse by a husband, wife, or a partner. Women’s rights NGOs reported that, in the period from July 2012 to August 30, domestic violence caused the deaths of eight women and serious injuries to more than a dozen others. Most of the cases occurred in small towns and rural areas.

74.According to a review of services provided to victims of domestic violence released during the year, there were several ad hoc and permanent shelters in Yerevan and in the regions, all run by NGOs using private or international funding.

75.According to local observers, most domestic violence continued to go unreported because victims were afraid of physical harm, apprehensive that police would return them to their husbands, or ashamed to disclose their family problems. There were also reports that police were reluctant to act in such cases and discouraged women from filing complaints, especially outside of Yerevan. The majority of domestic violence cases were of low or medium gravity. In such cases a victim can decline to press charges, and perpetrators often pressured victims who reported domestic violence to withdraw charges or recant previous testimony.

76.According to media experts and women’s rights NGOs, locally produced soap operas, popular and frequent on all television channels, appeared to legitimize violence against women and spread intolerance toward homosexuals.

77. On October 31, member of the Republican Party and president of the Armenian Football Federation, Ruben Hayrapetyan, stated in a press conference that no Armenian man would allow his daughter to play football (soccer), that a man has to lead the family, and Armenian men and women “should not be equal to each other.”

78. In 2012 the NGO Women’s Resource Center in Goris published a report on bride kidnapping based on interviews with 150 married women from the southern Syunik region. The report concluded that bride kidnapping was common practice and assumed a variety of forms, ranging from romantic elopement to coercive abduction. One in five respondents was barely acquainted with or did not know their kidnapper. According to the report, 9 percent of respondents were forced to have sex the day/night of their kidnapping. The majority of kidnapped women married their kidnappers. While most of the respondents were in love with the persons they married, others married due to shame, despair, or because their family did not allow them to return home. During the year there were reports of prosecutions of bride kidnapping cases.

79. Sexual Harassment: The law does not specifically prohibit sexual harassment, although it addresses lewd acts and indecent behavior. While there was no public data on the extent of the problem, observers believed sexual harassment of women in the workplace was widespread.

80. Men and women enjoy equal legal status under family law, labor law, property law, inheritance law, and in the judicial system, but discrimination based on gender was a continuing problem in both the public and private sectors. Women generally did not enjoy the same professional opportunities or wages as men, and employers often relegated them to more menial or low-paying jobs. While providing all parties in a workplace relationship “legal equality,” the labor code does not explicitly require equal pay for equal work, and according to official data for 2010, there was a significant gap between the average monthly salary of men and women, and the average monthly salary for younger women was higher than that for older women. Women remained underrepresented in leadership positions in all branches and at all levels of government.[[20]](#footnote-20)

81.According to local observers, most domestic violence went unreported because victims were afraid of physical harm, apprehensive that police would return them to their husbands, or ashamed to disclose their family problems. There were also reports police were reluctant to act in such cases and discouraged women from filing complaints, especially outside Yerevan. A majority of domestic violence cases qualified under existing legislation as cases of low or medium gravity. In such cases a victim may decline to press charges, and perpetrators often pressured victims who reported domestic violence to withdraw charges or recant previous testimony. According to the Women’s Rights Center, from January 1 to September 1, the center’s hotline service received 1,044 calls, 875 of which were about domestic violence.

82. Discrimination based on gender was a continuing problem in both the public and private sectors. Women generally did not enjoy the same professional opportunities or wages as men, and employers often relegated them to more menial or low-paying jobs. While providing for the “legal equality” of all parties in a workplace relationship, the labor code does not explicitly require equal pay for equal work. In its July report, the CESCR reiterated its concern over the disproportionately high level of unemployment among women. The committee was equally concerned about the prevalence of vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the economy and the concentration of women in low-paid sectors of the economy, despite equality between women and men before the law. Additionally, the committee expressed concern about the significant gender pay gap, with women earning approximately 60 percent as much as men in 2012 (see section 7.d.). Women remained underrepresented in leadership positions in all branches and at all levels of government.

83.Some groups continued to disseminate misinformation about the law, enacted in May 2013, on equal rights and opportunities for men and women. The groups targeted women’s NGOs and rights defenders, manipulating the wording of the law to associate “gender equality” with homosexuality, propaganda, and pedophilia. They labeled women’s rights defenders “traitors to the nation,” “destroyers of families,” and “threats to Armenian values.” Some materials disseminated by these groups reportedly called for violence and destruction of property targeted at women’s organizations.

84.Antidiscrimination laws do not apply to sexual orientation or gender identity. There were no hate crime laws or other criminal judicial mechanisms to aid in the prosecution of bias-motivated crimes against members of the LGBT community. Societal attitudes toward LGBT persons remained highly negative, with society generally viewing homosexuality as a medical affliction. Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity negatively affected employment, family relations, and access to education and health care.

85.In April the NGO Public Information and Need of Knowledge published its annual review for 2013. According to the NGO, many officials regarded defenders of LGBT rights as traitors, and the media presented LGBT persons as enemies of the state. According to the review, LGBT persons experienced physical violence and threats of violence, blackmail, and harassment. Police were unresponsive to reports of such abuses and at times mistreated LGBT persons themselves. The review reported instances of police responding to an LGBT person who filed a complaint about an anti-LGBT crime by moving to prosecute the complainant for allegedly filing a false crime report. As a result some LGBT victims avoided reporting abuses to police.

86.In a 2013 survey of the attitudes of 500 individuals in service professions (lawyers, doctors, nurses, psychologists, and teachers), toward LGBT persons, 45.4 percent of respondents (including 57 percent of the doctors and 47 percent of the nurses interviewed) considered homosexuality a disease, while 12.6 percent of other respondents (mostly teachers) considered it immoral. The survey, sponsored by the Open Society Foundation Armenia, covered four major cities, including Yerevan. It also indicated high levels of intolerance and ignorance about the issue. According to another NGO survey issued in August 2013, the personnel of human rights organizations demonstrated a low level of awareness and mostly negative attitudes toward LGBT persons, with some respondents expressing the view that homosexuality was a disease and the best way to help LGBT persons was to “cure” them.

87.In the most recent demographic and health survey 86.1 percent of women and 84.4 percent of men reported discriminatory attitudes towards those with HIV/AIDS.

88.The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its June 2013 concluding observations, reported de facto discrimination against certain categories of children, including those with HIV/AIDS. According to human rights NGOs, a school principal dismissed two children from a village school after learning the father of the children was HIV/AIDS positive.

89.According to human rights groups, persons regarded as vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection, such as sex workers (including transgender sex workers) and drug users, faced discrimination and violence from society as well as mistreatment by police.

90. Nonetheless, there were no effective legal mechanisms to enforce these regulations, and discrimination in employment and occupation occurred based on gender, age, presence of a disability, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, and religion .

91.Many employers reportedly discriminated against potential employees by age, most commonly requiring job applicants to be between the ages of 18 and 30. Such discrimination appeared to be widespread, and authorities did not take any action to mitigate it. Unemployed workers older than 40, particularly women, had little chance of finding jobs appropriate to their education or skills[[21]](#footnote-21).

92.Participation of Women and Minorities: The strong hierarchical and patriarchal nature of society inhibited participation by women in political life and in decision-making positions in the public sector. At year’s end there were 13 women in the 131-seat National Assembly, three in the cabinet of 18 ministers, and no female governors in the country’s 10 regions. Only 10 of the 65 elected Yerevan City Council members were women, and no women headed any of Yerevan’s 12 administrative districts.

93. In its July 2014 report, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed concern about the absence of a comprehensive legal framework against discrimination covering all of the grounds for discrimination enumerated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Right.

94.Spousal abuse and violence against women appeared to be widespread. In its July 2014 report, the CESCR expressed concern about the persistence of high levels of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, as well as the absence of a specific law on the subject. Authorities did not effectively prosecute domestic violence.

95.Spousal abuse and violence against women continued to be underreported due to social stigma, “victim blaming,” the absence of female police officers and investigators, and, at times, police reluctance to act. According to local observers, most domestic violence went unreported because survivors were afraid of physical harm, apprehensive that police would return them to their husbands, or ashamed to disclose their family problems. There were also reports that police, especially outside of Yerevan, were reluctant to act in such cases and discouraged women from filing complaints. A majority of domestic violence cases qualified under the law as offenses of low or medium gravity. In such cases a victim may decline to press charges, and perpetrators often pressured survivors to withdraw charges or recant previous testimony.

96.Education: Although education is compulsory through grade nine and free, in practice it was not universal. According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), children with disabilities and from socially vulnerable families continued to face systematic disadvantages in access to school and to continuing use of education services (see Persons with Disabilities, below). Enrollment and attendance rates for children from ethnic minority groups, in particular Yezidis, Kurds, and Molokans, were significantly lower than average, and dropout rates after the eighth grade were higher. UNICEF expressed concern about the integration into the local community of the increasing number of refugee children from Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine.

**Intolerance in 2012-2014**

97.There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of minority religious groups experienced societal discrimination and intolerance, including in the workplace. Many media outlets demonstrated bias against minority religious groups.

98.The law governing religious groups does not explicitly mandate registration of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but only registered groups have legal status. Unregistered groups may not publish more than 1,000 copies of newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor visitors’ visas, although individual members may do so. To qualify for registration, religious groups must “be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature,” have at least 200 adult members, and subscribe to a doctrine based on “historically recognized holy scriptures.” The registration requirements do not apply to the religious groups associated with national ethnic minorities, although most have chosen to register. The Office of the State Registrar registers religious groups. The Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities oversees religious affairs and consults in the registration process.

99.The constitution and the law establish separation of church and state, but recognize “the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church as a national church in the spiritual life, development of the national culture, and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia.”

100.The law grants privileges to the Armenian Apostolic Church not available to other religious groups. For example, the church may have permanent representatives in hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, military units, and places of detention, while other religious groups may have representatives in these places only upon request.

101.The law prohibits but does not define “soul hunting,” a term describing both proselytism and forced conversion. The prohibition applies to all religious groups, including the Armenian Apostolic Church.

102.The law mandates that public education be secular. However, courses in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church are part of the public school curriculum and are taught by public school teachers. The church has the right to participate in the development of the syllabus and textbooks for this course and to define the qualifications of its teachers. The church may also nominate candidates to teach the course. The class is mandatory; students are not permitted to opt out of the course, and no alternatives are available to students of other religious groups. In addition, the law grants the Armenian Apostolic Church the right to organize voluntary extracurricular religious classes in state educational institutions. Other religious groups may provide religious instruction to members in their own facilities.

103.There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including detention. Most registered religious groups reported no significant legal impediments to their activities.

104.In July the Center of Collaboration for Democracy (CCD), an NGO, published a report on religious education in public schools, concluding that the curriculum and textbook of the course on the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church focused on the belief system of the church rather than on its history. According to the report, the classes included some elements of religious rites of the church, as well as hate speech against other religious groups, and were designed to indoctrinate students. The report quoted interviews with public school principals and teachers of the class, some of whom stated the purpose of the class was to mold students into “correct” Christians, keep them away from “sects,” bring them closer to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and teach them that other religions divide the nation.

105.On October 23, the former editor-in-chief of Iravunk, a current member of parliament, made statements in parliament referring to the Word of Life Church as a “totalitarian sect carrying out illegal and anti-social activities.” The newspaper maintained a link on its Web site called “Stop Word of Life.”

106.The city of Yerevan made some efforts to remove leaflets and posters denouncing religious minority groups from walls and poles throughout the city. The materials, posted by a group identifying itself as “One Nation Party” continued to re-appear, and the group reportedly distributed the leaflets in person at subway stations and residential buildings.

107.There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of minority religious groups reported experiencing societal discrimination and intolerance, including in the workplace, although few filed reports with the authorities. Many media outlets demonstrated bias against minority religious groups.

108.Many media outlets continued to label minority religious groups as “sects” and promulgated fear of religious minorities. Various television stations broadcast discussions and news coverage in which participants characterized minority religious groups as enemies of the state. Most broadcast media outlets were owned by politicians in the ruling party or politically connected businessmen. Media outlets published inaccurate articles portraying religious minorities as criminals and spies. Local observers and religious groups stated, however, that media reporting on religious minorities was less virulent than in the past.

109.Some minority religious groups criticized the behavior of some Armenian Apostolic Church priests as overly aggressive. On July 31, a priest attacked Jehovah’s Witnesses who were discussing the Bible in a house in the village of Ozdun. The priest reportedly gathered together a group of men who verbally harassed the Jehovah’s Witnesses. When other Jehovah’s Witnesses arrived to mediate, the priest took off his cross and physically assaulted them. Following police intervention, the priest apologized for his actions and expressed willingness to pay compensation for damages.[[22]](#footnote-22)

110.The constitution protects religious freedom; however, some laws and policies restrict religious freedom. There were reports of obstacles faced by religious organizations in building places of worship and discrimination in schools against religious minority children. The law grants privileges to the Armenian Apostolic Church not available to other religious groups. Most registered religious groups reported no significant legal impediments to their activities. In May 2012 the parliament approved changes to the alternative service law establishing civilian control over alternative labor in lieu of military service. Following these amendments the government released all Jehovah’s Witnesses serving sentences for refusing on religious grounds to perform mandatory military or alternative labor service.

111.In May the government approved changes to the alternative service law that institute civilian control over the alternative labor service, one of the two available types of alternatives to military service. The amendments reduce the duration of alternative (non-combat) military service from 36 to 30 months, and the alternative labor service from 42 to 36 months. Evasion of alternative service remains a criminal offense.

112.There were reports of obstacles faced by religious organizations in building places of worship. In February the Yerevan mayor’s office refused to permit Jehovah’s Witnesses to build three places of worship, stating that building places of worship in “inhabited areas” led to complaints from neighbors. The organization appealed the decision in court as arbitrary and discriminatory. There were reports of other minority religious groups, or those perceived as a religious group (e.g., those practicing yoga) having difficulties with renting space for gatherings.

113.Human rights observers broadly discussed the growing presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church in public education. The church’s Christian Education Center of the Mother See had a primary role in developing and approving the textbooks and vetting the teachers of a course on the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church offered in the public schools.

114.The Council of Europe commissioned a study of the rights of children of ethnic and religious minorities. It identified public schools as the place where discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes of children of religious minorities were formed. The study cited numerous reports that teachers and principals discriminated against religious minority children. According to the study, teachers of the course on the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church customarily inquired about the religious affiliation of students at the beginning of the year, thus singling out the children of religious minorities and creating potential problems with their peers. The study also found that some teachers of this course started their classes with prayers.

115.On April 18, the website “Freedom of Religion” reported the February 28 dismissal of Armine Davtyan, a professor at the Armenian State Pedagogical University. Davtyan claimed that she had been dismissed on religious grounds following the rejection of her doctoral thesis on peculiarities of spiritual education in high schools. According to the media report, the university claimed she had been removed as a result of general layoff. Davtyan noted that, while not a member of any religious group, her views differed from those of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and this had become evident during her doctoral thesis defense. Davtyan claimed she had been dismissed for these views.

116.There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of minority religious groups reported experiencing societal discrimination and intolerance, including in the workplace, although few filed reports with the authorities. Many media outlets demonstrated bias against minority religious groups.

117.Many media outlets continued to label minority religious groups as “sects” and propagated fear of religious minorities. Various television stations broadcast one‑sided discussions and news coverage in which participants characterized minority religious groups as enemies of the state. According to minority religious groups, those stations did not provide them with an opportunity to respond to the criticism nor to participate in television debates to present their side of the story. Most broadcast media outlets were owned by politicians in the ruling party or politically connected businessmen. Media outlets published inaccurate articles portraying religious minorities as criminals and spies. Many inflammatory statements did not specify a particular religious group, but instead aimed to create general intolerance toward all religious minorities. Religious groups also reported increased intolerance and threats in social networks.

118.In September Pastor Levon Bardakjian of the Yerevan Evangelical Church reported three physical attacks on his church. Media reported that on September 11, a young man carrying a bloody knife entered the premises of the Yerevan Evangelical Church looking for Bardakjian. Bardakjian also reported that on September 13, three unidentified young men tried to kidnap Bardakjian’s secretary, Judy Mussah. On September 18, Bardakjian reported that his car was fired upon near the town of Sevan, though he was not driving the car on that day. All these cases were under police investigation at year’s end; however, Bardakjian complained that police officers were slow to act and to protect him and members of his church.

119.On September 20, the “United Youth League” and “Menk” (We) movements against “destructive sects,” initiated a signature collection campaign calling for the government to investigate the activities of all registered and unregistered religious organizations and to ban their “destructive” influence on Armenian society. The groups called for the government immediately to stop the activities of what they referred to as the “Word of Life,” “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” “Reima,” “Altar,” and “Great Grace” “sects.”

120.In October the “United Youth League” published a list of pop artists, claiming that they were “sectarians.” Few of the mentioned artists defended their views or their right to privacy. Most of the artists publicly denounced “sects” and tried to prove they were members of the Armenian Apostolic Church.[[23]](#footnote-23)

121.The law allows the Armenian Apostolic Church free access or the right to station representatives in hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, military units, and places of detention, while other religious groups may have representatives in these places only upon request. The law prohibits, but does not define, “soul hunting,” a term describing both proselytism and forced conversion.

122.The law mandates that public education be secular, but courses in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church are a mandatory part of the public school curriculum from grades 5-11. The church has the right to participate in the development of the syllabus and textbooks for these courses and to define the qualifications of their teachers. The church may also nominate candidates to teach the courses. Students are not permitted to opt out of the courses. The law grants the Armenian Apostolic Church the right to organize voluntary extracurricular religious classes in state educational institutions. Other religious groups may provide religious instruction to members in their own facilities.

123.The law, as amended in 2013, provides for two types of service for conscientious objectors as an alternative to regular military service: alternative (non-combat) military service with a duration of 30 months or alternative labor service with a duration of 36 months. Evasion of alternative service remains a criminal offense.

124.Government actions affecting minority religious groups included baptisms of new military conscripts, discrimination in the army on religious grounds, obstacles to renting space for religious gatherings and building places of worship, and continued discrimination against religious minorities in the school system.

125.Religious groups reported that in several cases the Armenian Apostolic Church pressured military conscripts to undergo baptism together into the Armenian Apostolic faith. According to observers, in some cases new conscripts were reluctant to refuse to be baptized out of fear of being isolated and singled out. In other cases, army chaplains of the Armenian Apostolic Church and some, but not all, commanders were reportedly inquiring about the religious affiliation of conscripts and putting pressure on adherents of religions other than the Armenian Apostolic Church and on atheists to pray with Armenian Apostolic Church chaplains and attend religion classes. The government reportedly did not allow chaplains from other religious groups to visit the army.

126.On April 26, the Ministry of Defense hosted a “Scientific-Practical Conference on Destructive Sects and Vicious Street Habits as Threats to Defense Capacity.” In his opening remarks, Minister of Defense Seyran Ohanyan said for the protection of Armenia it was important that everyone believe in the same values, including in the Armenian Apostolic Church. In his concluding remarks, the minister thanked the participants for joining the struggle against “destructive sects.”

127.While the police protected and allowed some religious organizations, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, to disseminate their literature in public, other groups reported the authorities arbitrarily denied them this right.

128.Throughout the year multiple religious groups reported difficulties with renting space for gatherings and building places of worship. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, representatives from local governments obstructed the group’s attempts to obtain approvals of the required architectural planning studies and building and occupancy permits for land they owned. An appeal by the Jehovah’s Witnesses of a 2013 decision by the Yerevan mayor’s office refusing permission to build three places of worship because of “complaints from neighbors” was ongoing. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious groups, they were more successful in obtaining building permits if this was done under the name of private individuals, or if the building was not intended to be a church.

129.Religious groups and civil society representatives continued to urge the government to remove the legal gaps, unclear provisions, and contradictions in the existing legislation on religion; to guarantee freedom of conscience, religion, or belief to everyone regardless of citizenship; to recognize the freedom to change religion or belief; to guarantee the freedom to manifest religion or belief in public or private; to clarify if religious organizations were entitled to legal personality and had access to it; and to make more precise and clear the scope of application of the law, as repeatedly recommended by the Venice Commission for the Council of Europe.

130.Human rights observers continued to express concern over the growing presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church in public education.

131.The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Collaboration for Democracy was denied permission to observe pilot classes of a new course on the “History of the Armenian Church/Christian Education” developed for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders by the National Institute of Education of the Ministry of Education and Science and beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year. According to a ministry official, the pilot course was an “ethics class with spiritual direction.” Local observers viewed the course as a religious instruction class with subjects including, but not limited to, the divine creation of the world, study of the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, and prayers. The NGO reported difficulties in obtaining additional details about the course content and the list of schools where the course had been introduced.

132.While addressing the National Assembly on May 21, Minister of Education Armen Ashotyan said the government had no intention of following the 2013 recommendation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to revise school curricula to reflect freedom of religion and eliminate the compulsory “History of the Armenian Church” course. The minister also said the government planned to begin new programs to strengthen the “patriotic upbringing component in the education system” and that 3,000 students in elementary classes had already taken the new Christian education course.

133.On April 22, a group of experts supported by the Open Society Foundations-Armenia (OSFA) presented at a round table a research paper entitled “Content Analysis of the Armenian Church History Textbooks and Its Influence on Young Generations.” According to the experts, the course went beyond the history of the Armenian Church and focused on presenting the faith system, history, values, and rites of the Armenian Apostolic Church as the only acceptable religion. According to the experts, the course materials, which equated Armenian identity to affiliation with the Armenian Apostolic Church, cast doubts on other religious groups. For instance, the course materials presented Protestant movements as threats to the unity of the Armenian people. The report said the mandatory nature of the course and the exclusive role played by the church in shaping its content contradicted the secular nature of the state. According to the National Institute on Education, it had never received complaints from parents about the course.

134.A study published by the Council of Europe identified public schools as a place where discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes of religious minorities were formed. The study cited numerous reports that teachers and principals discriminated against religious minority children, saying they singled out the children of religious minorities, potentially creating problems for those students with their peers. Most of the objections to the course on Armenian church history reportedly came from students and parents from families affiliated with but not practicing the Armenian Apostolic faith. Children of minority Christian groups reportedly did not object to taking the class as long as their rights were respected.

135.According to reports from multiple religious groups, discrimination against individuals who were not members of the Armenian Apostolic Church continued to be a problem in gaining employment in the public sector, especially in the public education system.[[24]](#footnote-24)

136. Minority religious groups faced obstacles in obtaining building permits for places of worship; discrimination in education, the military, law enforcement, and public sector employment; government preferences for the AAC; and negative commentary from government officials. Representatives of minority religious groups associated with ethnic minorities, unlike those associated with ethnic Armenians, reported better relations with the government. The government sponsored an increased presence for the AAC in public life and required courses on the history of the AAC and on Christianity in public schools.

137.Jehovah’s Witnesses reported some incidents of physical and verbal harassment while proselytizing, although they said police generally responded promptly to stop such incidents. A report from the European Commission covering events in 2014 stated that, despite some progress, societal acceptance of religious minorities was low and discrimination against minority religious groups in the workplace and the media continued. During the year, media continued to report negatively on minority religious groups, often referring to them in a derogatory manner as “sects” or “enemies of the state.” According to several minority religious groups and civil society organizations, media were less critical of minority religious groups than in previous years.

138.There were reports military conscripts faced pressures favoring the AAC. Religious and civil society groups urged the government to clarify laws pertaining to religion. Minority religious groups faced obstacles in obtaining building permits for places of worship, discrimination in education, the military, law enforcement, and public sector employment, preferential government support for the AAC and its continued presence in public life, and negative commentary from government officials.

139.According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious groups, conscripts beginning their service in the army were required to fill out a questionnaire at the military commissariats, where they had to indicate their religious affiliation. Reportedly the formulation of this question was whether a person was a member of the AAC or a “sect.” According to a Helsinki Committee report published during the year and covering events in 2014, there were instances when military clergy subjected members of minority religious organizations to “explanatory and moral instructions.” The report cited one instance when a religious minority member performing mandatory military service was forced to say prayers under the guidance of an AAC priest and pressured by his commanding officer to abandon his church. According to the report, the recruit took part in AAC religious ceremonies against his will for eight months.

140.There continued to be media reports of AAC group baptisms occurring regularly during service in the army with the support of the army command. The media reports cited groups of four or more conscripts or other soldiers undergoing baptism at the same time. Unlike previous years, however, minority religious groups did not report any specific instances of members being pressured into undergoing baptisms. A January report in the privately owned Aravot daily cited a report by the father of a young evangelical man, who felt he had been pressured into being baptized in the army by the AAC in 2014. The same report quoted an AAC clergy member who denied that anyone was pressured into baptism or that there was discrimination in the military against minority religious groups. According to the clergy member, the mission of the AAC in the army was to make everyone acquainted with the Church and with the country’s history and to give soldiers spiritual knowledge; within this program, if there were soldiers affiliated with “sects,” “we do not discriminate, but considering them our lost soldiers we keep them in more warmth and try to keep them away from the wrong road.” In November the Ministry of Defense (MOD) announced the establishment of the Center for Human Rights and Integrity, with a mandate to promote and protect human rights – including minority rights and religious tolerance – in the military.

141.Religious groups and civil society representatives continued to urge the government to remove the legal gaps, unclear provisions, and contradictions in the existing legislation on religion; to clarify if religious organizations were entitled to legal personality and had access to it; and to make more precise and clear the scope of application of the law, as repeatedly recommended by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. Religious minority and civil society groups also expressed concern with the amended constitution, particularly its provision permitting restrictions on religious practice for reasons of “state security,” rather than just public safety.

142.Representatives of several Christian minority groups reported that, due to past difficulties in renting spaces, religious organizations relied on their own facilities – new and existing – for holding gatherings. According to a number of religious groups, representatives from local governments obstructed attempts to obtain approvals of the required architectural planning studies and building and occupancy permits for houses of worship on land religious groups owned. Representatives of several minority faiths reported building permits for places of worship were only granted with the approval of the leadership of the AAC, and the AAC exercised a de facto veto on the construction by minority faiths of any new places of worship.

143.On July 29, the Cassation Court (except for constitutional matters, the highest judicial authority, responsible for ensuring uniform application of the law) rejected the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ final appeal against the refusal of the Yerevan mayor’s office to issue permits for building three places of worship because of “complaints from neighbors.” According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious groups, they were more successful in obtaining building permits if this was done under the name of private individuals, or if the stated purpose in applying for the permit was to use the building for a different purpose than as a place of worship.

144.Yezidi community representatives continued to report their dissatisfaction with the mandatory nature of the AAC history course, which they stated they considered to be religious indoctrination. NGOs, religious organizations, atheists, and nonpracticing members of the AAC continued to voice similar concerns. Religious minority groups did not report any complaints from their members about discriminatory treatment by teachers of their students during this class during the year. There were reports of some AAC clergy teaching this class.

145.In a report the Jehovah’s Witnesses issued during the year, despite a legal provision that any donations to religious groups are tax free, the government required the Witnesses to pay “tens of thousands of euros” (tens of thousands of dollars) in value added tax (VAT) on imports of religious literature they had received as a donation and distributed free of charge within the country. According to the report, the Jehovah’s Witnesses filed eight applications between 2010 and June 2015 with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), seeking a VAT exemption, after they had exhausted legal remedies within the country. The report added that the government had lowered the VAT rate in July but that the Jehovah’s Witnesses were still obliged to pay the tax at the new rate. Private businesses and secular NGOs have reported similar difficulties, but they did not have the legal avenues available to religious groups. Other religious minority groups have also reported being required to pay VAT on donations that were imported from abroad; however, they have opted not to pursue legal action.

146.According to a report by the NGO Collaboration for Democracy, the government could use the provisions of the law prohibiting membership of law-enforcement employees and other public service employees in religious organizations, to limit the rights of those employees. Collaboration for Democracy also reported that, given the privileged role of the AAC in various state bodies, those provisions prohibiting membership in religious organizations were in practice interpreted to mean that affiliation with any religious group other than the AAC was prohibited. Collaboration for Democracy and a number of religious groups stated that the government used systematic discrimination in the military and law-enforcement bodies to remove employees who held religious views other than those of the AAC. Representatives of religious minorities reported members employed by the government who were asked to choose between their job and their faith.

147.NGOs and representatives of religious minorities stated government officials often referred disparagingly to religious groups other than the AAC as “sects,” though the officials did not define the word.

148.According to a news report in the Aravot daily, on September 12, an AAC church in the city of Ararat organized a march against “sects” during the celebration of a Church holiday, with the participation of the leadership of the Ararat municipality and Ararat village administration, a local military unit, a local hospital, a number of schools, and others. According to the news report, approximately 1,000 people participated in the three-mile march.

149.On June 10, the Armenian Youth Foundation, a government-funded foundation with activities coordinated by a member of parliament from the ruling Republican Party (RPA) and chaired by Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, announced a series of lectures for youth it organized with the Yerevan municipality youth council and NGOs on the subject of The Destructive Activities of Nontraditional Religious Organizations. According to the announcement, the lecturers, which included priests from the AAC, aimed to teach youth about “the faith of the AAC and those of other religious organizations, the peculiarities of their influence on people, and the goals they pursued.” According to one of the organizers, they wanted youth to be able to understand what “sects” were and to work with others who were at risk of joining “sects.” Organizers also announced plans to print brochures on “religious safety” and distribute them in Yerevan and the regions, as well as use social media to raise awareness about “destructive sects.” Government officials and others referring to “sects” did not cite any organizations by name, but NGOs and others said the term was understood to mean minority Christian groups. An article in the Medialab online news portal referring to the program stated “hatred and intolerance towards religious organizations were being spread at the government level.”

150.High-ranking members of parliament made negative statements during speeches at the national assembly about what they called “sects, the dangers they presented for the country and the preservation of national identity, and the need to take actions against them. For example, on October 7, the deputy speaker of the national assembly urged public television and radio to increase programs where representatives of the AAC could talk about the Church’s history within the context of the fight against “sects.” The head of the RPA parliamentary faction made similar remarks, saying that a significant amount of money entered the country to hinder “our national values, our traditions, the strength of our families, our Church…these foreign sums have a serious impact on our belief…today serious money is put on sects in order to split our Church.”

151.Religious groups affiliated with national minorities, such as Jewish and Apostolic Assyrians, reported better relations with government institutions than did minority faiths practiced by ethnic Armenians.

152.According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, there were some incidents of physical and verbal abuse towards their members while they were engaged in proselytizing. Individuals overturned Witnesses’ literature carts, which sustained minor damage. The group reported that police typically responded promptly to complaints and had fined several perpetrators for their repeated misconduct. In some cases, the offenders had offered an official apology and had not interfered with the Witnesses’ activity again. The Jehovah’s Witnesses did not provide an estimate of the number of incidents directed against their members during the year.

153.According to a European Commission report issued in March on the progress made in 2014 in implementing the EU-Armenia Neighborhood Policy Action Plan, despite some progress, society’s acceptance of religious minorities remained low, and discrimination against minority religious groups in the workplace and the media continued.

154.The Helsinki Committee report for 2014 cited a number of instances of negative reporting of minority religious groups by online media. For example, mamul.am published an article titled “Sectarians, or the Seed of Satan,” in which the author likened non-AAC religious groups to “prostitutes.”

155.According to several Christian religious minority groups and NGOs, while media outlets continued to label minority religious groups as “sects” and broadcast discussions and news stories with unverified and biased information about religious minorities, media were less critical of minority religious groups than in previous years and more willing to include the perspective of those groups in their stories. Representatives of religious groups said some journalists used their reporting to advocate religious tolerance, but the representatives expressed disappointment in the lack of media coverage their activities received.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**Protection of the rights of children from religious and ethnic**

**Minority groups in Armenia**

156.Minority groups, including religious minorities, are subject to pressure, sometimes unconscious, from mainstream society and from within the community; children and young people from minority groups can be doubly affected and experience double discrimination. On the one hand, they are vulnerable and easily discriminated against and stigmatized, and on the other hand, the isolation inherent in the minority groups they belong to reinforces these discriminations.

157.This study is a first attempt to look into cases of discrimination which children from ethnic and religious minority groups face in Armenia in the sphere of social, family, church and community life, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

158.The study also reveals certain differences in characteristics inherent to ethnic and religious minority groups. Thus, ethnic minorities who are mainly living in compact communities situated in remote regions of Armenia rarely become deliberate subjects of intolerance in the media, or targets of discrimination in schools or other public institutions. At the same time, because of their remoteness from large centers, they have less access to education, public services and goods. However, it should be noted that, frequently, social conditions transcend religious or ethnic minority status, and rural dwellers are more likely to experience social exclusion as a result of poverty-bound obstacles, such as a lack of access to infrastructure, and fewer opportunities and/or a desire to pursue education, which are specific to the majority of other rural inhabitants of Armenia. What is more important is that, due to their conservative values and traditional lifestyles, children from some ethnic and religious minority groups, especially girls, are often affected by multiple discrimination that is driven by the local community and/or family.

159.Another important finding of the study is that public schools are the most significant institutions where discrimination towards minority children occurs and, as a rule, younger children are more vulnerable to any manifestations of intolerance. In this respect, both negative and positive roles of teachers as well as parents cannot be underestimated.

160.Detecting and revealing cases of intolerance and discrimination is important for the implementation of Armenia’s international commitments and the improvement of the protection of the rights of minorities and their children in Armenia. The issue has been examined from a number of perspectives, for instance social exclusion, lack of access to educational and medical services, lack of the right to opt out of certain educational subjects, and the existence of discriminatory and intolerant attitudes by different layers of the society including schools, early marriages, and other important areas.

161.Hate speech is frequently used by some media outlets which support chauvinistic ideas and are adherent to the rather nationalistic concept “one nation, one religion, one culture”. They are few, but the level of hatred expressed is rather high. Insufficient professionalism of journalists covering issues related to religious and ethnic minorities also plays a significant role and often becomes a cause of misleading information, and implicitly contributes to the propagation of hate speech. Evidence of negative media coverage is indicated in the media monitoring report conducted by the Collaboration for Democracy Center.

162.The only difference mentioned by children from religious minority groups is their spiritual nature, which differentiates them from the ‘secular’, ‘nonbeliever’ majority. By saying ‘secular’ the children refer to the nominal followers of the AAC who are not active in spiritual practices and limit themselves to traditional, non-regular ritual activities.

163.In the case of the two ethnic minority groups mentioned, the isolation comes from an internal creed, since in this way ethnic minorities try to prevent assimilation and preserve their national identity. Children from ethnic minorities in rural communities do not have a certain view on whether it is worth continuing education in higher or vocational educational institutions. The small number of students and limited number of teachers have a negative impact on the quality of education and, consequently, on the children’s motivation. In many cases there are no local teachers in those villages mentioned and very often, for various reasons, there are also very few from neighboring towns or villages who are willing to travel every day and work in those schools. The children find it difficult to describe their future educational perspectives or goals. Their vision is focused on setting up and supporting a family rather than on receiving additional education in the future.

**Access to education**

164.In the case of both religious and ethnic minorities, the state carries out its commitments by providing free elementary and general secondary (9 years) as well as vocational education. From this perspective, Yezidi community children are to a certain extent an exception since they do not have high school in their village, and if children want to continue education in high school, they have to attend school in the neighboring village, which is costly and not feasible for many families.

165.Some teachers display an obviously disrespectful attitude towards the religious beliefs of children. This is what one of the children told us: “When the teacher entered the classroom for the first time, she asked whether there is anybody of a different religion. We stood up and said that we are Jehovah’s Witnesses. Then she insulted us, said that we go and pray with old dull people. We did not say anything. On the next day I asked whether it would be ok if we did not pray and she told us to pray but not make the sign of the cross. I did not pray and did not make the sign of the cross. The teacher told me to learn The Lord's Prayer, I learned from the Bible but she said ours is in old Armenian and yours is in secular Armenian. She said: ‘learn ours’.”

166.Children from ethnic or religious minority backgrounds often experience mockery or an unkind attitude from their peers. Such things often happen at school, sometimes with silent approval or permission from other peers, teachers and parents. One of the children from the Jehovah’s Witness organizations told us that the teacher instigated an attitude of hostility and hatred towards the child as a result of which one of the aggressively-disposed boys attacked him and tore his shirt.

167.It should be noted that children from Jehovah’s Witness Christian organizations are considered to be the most vulnerable group because the media and other information sources accuse them of different vices. In particular, in the case of suicides, the first version that is usually circulated in the media is that the suicide belongs to a religious organization, most frequently, and to a Jehovah’s Witness organization. This argument is obviously rejected by religious minority children, and does not usually correspond with the facts.

168.There were also cases of despise and intolerant attitudes by children towards their Molokan or Yezidi classmates. It is worthy noting that when Armenian children want to offend or accuse each other of poor taste, they say, “Are you a Yezidi?”[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Islamophobia**

169.The integration into society of Armenians converted to Islam is a threat to the security of Armenia. The Armenian identity has already been formed, and to call the generation of Islamized Armenians "Muslim Armenians," is not acceptable, there is no such a notion, historian Tamara Vartanyan said at a press conference in Yerevan.

170. “Today we are facing a challenge to of blurring national identity. The integration into Armenian society generations of Islamized Armenians, who do not consider themselves Armenian, Christian and are followers of Islam, represent a serious threat to the national security of Armenia” – she said.

171. At the same time, Vardanyan noted that a small part of the generation of Islamized Armenians returned to Armenia and returned to and visit Holy Etchmiadzin and again convert the Christian religion.

172. “Islam is - a world view, lifestyle and Armenian converted to Islam is alienated from Armenian national values and roots. In some cases, they are devout Muslims. Here the following question plays an important role: Do these Armenians consider Armenia as their homeland or not” - she noted.

173. According to Vardanyan, today there is no accurate data on the number of Armenians, whose ancestors converted to Islam, but the number of Armenians wishing to come back to Christianity, is very small.

174. On 14 July 2014, Azerbaijani citizen Dilqam Ahmadov and Russian citizen Sahbaz

Guliyev were illegally arrested by the Armenian armed forces on the generallyrecognized territory of the Azerbaijan Republic in Kalbajar District, while Azerbaijani

citizen Hasan Hasanov was killed. These people do not directly participate in hostilities

against Armenia, are not members of the armed forces of the Azerbaijan Republic and

are civilians. However, these persons were arrested. The purpose of their visit to the

occupied Kalbajar District was to visit their native village and the graves of the detainees’ relatives buried in the occupied territories of the Azerbaijan Republic.

175. We should note regretfully that representatives of the Armenian armed forces in fact deprived the representatives of another nation - Dilqam Ahmadov and Russian citizen Sahbaz Guliyev of human treatment whiledetaining them.

**Intolerance in Armenian textbooks**

176. Textbooks (particularly history books, but not only) demonstrate the way that the state portraits itself highlighting or condemning to oblivion certain aspects that form part of the identity, past and present of the nation. As sources of official knowledgee, they can also also consist of one of the most important means to follow up the way that people of other race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin are portrayed and perceived, specially since they posses a big formative and educational mission.

177. In Armenia, the selection of textbooks for schools is regulated through competition, since the year 1998. Under the auspices of the Minister of Education, two commissions manage the competition. the Commission on Contentand the General Commission, which are responsible for assessing the quality of the textbook content and organizational issues. The textbooksand teacher manuals are evaluated according to the general education standards and program guidelines elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia. The different instructional institutions are allowed to choose any materials that have been approved in the list provided by the Ministry of Education.

178. Some of the above-mentioned documents state that the history lessons should inculcate in pupils “a sense of tolerance and respect towards human rights, which mitigates possible aggressive and intolerant attitude towards any nation”.

179. In consonance with the guidelines for Armenian history teachers, raising citizen consciousness, increasing the respect and tolerance for human rights and universal values is the main objective of teaching national history. Imparting this course is seen as as a means of inspiration to contribute to the protection of the sovereignty of the nation and as a way to connect future citizens with their motherland. The narration of heroic events, self-sacrificing acts,… is envisioned to provoke in children love for their motherland “even at the expense of their personal lives.[[27]](#footnote-27)”

180. In addition, it should be underlined the fact that political propaganda in schools is totally prohibitedby the Armenian Law on Education “engaging in political activities or carrying out political propaganda in educational institutions shall be prohibited” (RA National Assembly, article 4.8).

Armenian students are taught about the Post-Soviet period in two occasions: during the end of the ninth grade (last year of basic school) and in the twelfth grade, the last year of high school.

181. The way that external forces in the history of Armenia are portrayed in contemporary textbooks it is subject to wide variations. The role of “enemy” is most frequently occupied by forces external to the Caucasus, either empiresorconquerors who arrive on Armenian land in order to surmount in and expel Armenians from their own territory: Persians, Romans, Byzantium, Arabs, Tatar-Mongols, and Turks. The only exception is the Russian Empire whose role in some historical situations is viewed positively.

182. However, in most of the cases, the perception of these conquerors does not depend on any ethnic or religious markers. Thus, when derogatory terms such as “cruels” or “perfidious” are used in the descriptions of events they are primarily referring to political figures and not directly related to ethnic or religious categories[[28]](#footnote-28).

183. In the case of Turks, unlike the approaches which characterize the nationalistic discourse, the textbooks designate as responsible for the Armenian extermination either the “authorities”, “young turks[[29]](#footnote-29)” or specific heads of the Turkish government and not the entire Turkish nation.

184. In referring to the posture of Russia and the Russian rule period in the Armenian history, is a long way from being exclusively viewed as positive. For example, the inclusion of Armenia into the Russian Empire is perceived as a relative good. On the one hand, there is an emphasis of it is negative influence during the so-called “Armenian-Tatar clashes” of the 1905-06, since it was an instigating “inter-ethnic and inter-religious discords among the nations of the empire to distract them from participating in the revolution”. On the other hand, school materials describe the sovietization of Armenia as an imperative move that was made by the Armenian government facing the occupation by Turkey. Defending as a learnt lesson the need of a “flexible external policy”, maintaining close relations with Russia while seeking relations with other countries[[30]](#footnote-30).

185. A survey conducted in the year 2016[[31]](#footnote-31) shows that the impact of textbooks and the school history education is not that significant in the prevailing negative attitudes towards Azerbaijani people in the Armenian society. As stated in the study, these negative opinions and attitudes have not been formed in school. One of the arguments which supports the results, is that pupils are not taught about Azerbaijanis until the ninth grade, as well as the little quantity of topics in the school curricula dedicated to Azerbaijan and the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. In coherence with the national logic where the state of Azerbaijan was created only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the people before that were called Caucasus Tatars and were spread throughout the Caucasus.

186. The most depicted terms are neutral, war-describing words like threat, provoke/initiate or military agression. Nevertheless, the same study showed that in the Armenian history textbooks, concepts such as brutal, vandalism are used todescribe Azerbaijanis.And, moreover, their actions involve the anti-Armenian propaganda; the killings of Armenians; massacre and ethnic cleansing.

187. As another study shows[[32]](#footnote-32), the tone utilized in the narration of the war and its consequent events is “relatively clam, without emotionally charged language or hate speech”, even though the perspective used for the description of the military campaign is definitely pro-Armenian.In fact, the description does notaims attention atthe victimization of the Armenian people at the hands of the adversary (even though it is still present in the narration), but at the military and politicalleaders for the victory achieved.

188. As it has already been underlined, no negative ethnic stereotypes or hate speech regarding the enemies is used in the textbooks. In spite of not showing any kind of empathy on the other’s point of view in the conflict. No attempt is made to show the “enemy’s” perspective, not even in a critical way.

189. However, the survey showed that even though distrust and negative attitudes towards Azerbaijanis are dominant in the Armenian society, other sources of information such as family, media or university have a higher impact on shaping these.

190.Withal, textbooks and other instructional materials do not just give a certain image of the “other” but also of the “self”, or in other other words, which are the prerequisites for “Armenianess”. A study published in the year 2012[[33]](#footnote-33),analyzing the ‘aybenarans’ or early literacy textbooks used by Armenian infants to learn how to write and read provides a great overview of the way that Armenia and Armenianshave to be so that they are included.

191. The author concludes that even though the Western education discourses have started to permeatethe educational fieldof the country ethnonationalism has still a huge weight on it, being outlasted by textbooks along symbolism and mythology. In this manner, continuous references to “our fatherland” are made, national heroes are glorified, underlining their significant additions to the development of Armenia and religion it is shown as a noteworthy marker of the Armenian national identity. Besides religion (which occupies a meaningful space with its symbols and images covering its pages), language has also a predominant position since Armenian ‘lezu’ (language) is directly linked to the being an Armenian and the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrob Mashtotz, is praised for his contribution. In its narrow and homogeneous perspective, this portrayal of the Armenian identity does not consider all the Armenians that may not share the religion or do not speak the language. On the contrary, the textbooks end up obviating the existence of people belonging to different religious beliefs or with different ethnic origins. Therefore, cultural or linguistic minorities are neglected and doomed to oblivion.

192.Moreover, in the Post-Soviet ‘aybenarans’ there is no reference to other countries. In the first place, they are oblivious to its physical neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan) on the maps that are shown. On the second, it is really interesting how the books don’t fail to show parts that are beyond current Armenia’s political borders as part of the “unattainable historical homeland”, the “Fatherland” that it has already been mentioned in previous paragraphs. In this case, Mount Ararat or Nagorno Karabakh.

193. Armenian diaspora is present in the history textbooks of the ninth and twelfth graders. Each subchapter discusses a major country (such a the United States of America, France or Russia) is followed by some sentenceswith reference to its diaspora communities.

As in other cases, when the textbook touches upon issues of Armenia’s foreign policy, it follows almost word for word various Armenian government representatives’ official position.

194. In conclusion, the projected image of post-Soviet Armenia in school textbooks and other educational materials shows that the main goal is to build a sense of pride among the students, focusing mainly in heroic episodes of their history. The discourse that permeates the manuals (not just history textbooks as we saw in the case of the ‘aybenarans’ is imbued with ethno-nationalism or at least an ethnocultural perspective, where the Armenian language or the Armenian Apostolic Church have a central point on the construction of the Armenian identity or self. Despite the fact that some civic or state-based perspectives are starting to be allocated in the curricula, as it was reported in the Report of the Committee of Experts on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages[[34]](#footnote-34), the general trend is still the one that promotes an ethno-nationalistic view of the Armenian history and identity, where ethnic, racial or other kind of minority groups within the Armenian state can have no place.

1. Partnership for Open Society Perspective www.partnership.am [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Avagyan P., Arakelyan L., Hate Speech vs. Free Speech in Armenia, IWPR, CRS Issue 777, 15/05/15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Council of Europe: Protecting child rights of religious minority groups in Armenia, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eurasia Partnership Foundation: Tolerance in Armenia Today: The Perspectives of Religious Tolerance ; Occasional Policy Brief, Fall 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: No Space for Difference, 2013. (p.9) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The festival is an Armenian civil society initiative that seeks to educate Armenians about Azerbaijani culture in an attempt to bridge the divide between Armenia and Azerbaijan. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Helsinki Citizens ́ Assembly – Vanadzor and Norwegian Helsinki Committee [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Council of Europe: Protecting child rights of religious minority groups in Armenia, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In Armenian:  [www.religions.am/files/3247/documents/comments/p13.pdf](http://www.religions.am/files/3247/documents/comments/p13.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. CPFE: MANIFESTATIONS OF HATE SPEECH IN THE ARMENIAN MEDIA, July 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ISKANDARYAN, Alexander: Nations in Transit 2016: Report on Armenia, Freedom House, 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/armenia> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www.ombuds.am/en/statistics.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/227301-anti-semitism-in-armenia [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.jns.org/latest-articles/2014/12/8/anti-semitism-in-armenia-a-clear-and-present-danger [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Library/PressReleases/ARM-PR-V-2016-224-EN.asp [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204468.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220461.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236708.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208286 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=222187 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dlid=238352 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dlid=256161 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. http://www.epfarmenia.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/2014\_Field\_Study\_Rights\_of\_Chidren\_en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. HAKOVYAN, Anahit: State propaganda through public education: Armenia and Azerbaijan, Caucasus Edition, Journal of Conflict Transformation, April 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. ZOLYAN, Mikayel and ZAKARYAN Tigran:.The images of ‘Self’ and ‘other’ in textbooks on history of Armenia, Contemporary History Textbooks in The South Caucasus, (ed. Luboš Veselý), Association for International Affairs, Praha, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. ZOLYAN, Mikayel: Writing the History of the Present: The Post-Soviet Period in Armenian History Textbooks, (ed. RUMYANTSEV, Sergey ) The South Caucasus and Turkey: History Lessons of the 20th Century,  Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tbilisi, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. PALANDJIAN, Garine: TheABCsofBeingArmenian: (Re)turningtotheNationalIdentityinPostSovietTextbooks, LehighUniversity, Pensilvania, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. According to the third periodical report, the general education programmes include topics relating to the history and culture of the national minorities. In particular, the curriculum of the subject “Sociology" and its textbooks cover “The rights of national minorities”.Report of the Committee of Experts on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 3rd monitoring cycle, January 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)