



## **Civil Society Against War by Rethinking Past Memories**

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## Introduction

In 2023, the Civic Education Teachers Forum (CETF) implemented the project "Civil Society Against War by Rethinking Past Memories" which was funded under the Eastern European Network of Citizenship Education - EENCE's CE idea program 2023 by the German Foreign Office in cooperation with The Federal Agency for Civic Education ( Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung/BpB).

The goal of the program was to put the Russia-Ukraine war on the agenda of the societies of Georgian and EENCE member states and increase their awareness and sensitivity towards the current war in order to prevent future wars or conflicts. The project involved partners Nazarii Boiarskyi - Democratic Initiatives Incubator from Ukraine, Stepan Grigoryan - Analytical Center on Globalization and Regional Cooperation from Armenia, and Azar Ramazanov - Adult Education Association from Azerbaijan. They contributed to the implementation of the project goal with the corresponding functional load. This policy paper has a recommendatory nature and is intended for actors working in the field of formal and informal education and for all interested parties.

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## Introduction

After the collapse of the soviet union, former soviet republics started to develop their statehood. One of the main challenges on the road was empowering citizens and creating a civil society. Those challenges became the hardest ones to overcome. These challenges were diversely severe for the newly independent countries. This character was determined by complex factors, including the duration of being a USSR member, having a direct border with the EU or Russian Federation, Social Cultural character Border type, Foreign policy priorities, etc. (Gachechiladze, 1996). One of the chosen ways of the problem solution was strengthening the civic education component. With the support of international and national donors, governments started to develop a civic education curriculum.

According to the comprehensive view, civic education promotes civic engagement and democratic involvement (Crick, 1998). In this view, education aims to increase knowledge, promote citizenship interest in politics and public affairs, and reinforce the individual's sense of efficacy (Whiteley,2005). Civic engagement "makes a difference in our communities' civic life and develops the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivations to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes " ( Ehrlich, 2000).

By analyzing civic education literature, we could reach various theoretical frameworks. In the paper, we use a structural-based explanation. It sees citizenship participation as individuals being socialized into the norms, values, and behaviors of the social groups to which they belong and those of the wider society. From this perspective, individual engagement is seen as the product of social forces and institutions, which mold behavior and attitudes (Whiteley,2005, p. 6). We see formal and informal education as a socialization process; correspondingly, the civic education priorities in the countries determine collective and organizational memory patterns.

Many countries have invested significant resources in civic education programs designed to promote an understanding of the institutions, practices, and norms of democratic government (Torney-Purta et al., 1999). Across all contexts, citizenship education aims to develop 'knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable [young people] to participate in the communities of which they are a part' (Arthur et al., 2008: 5). However, the origin and nature of citizenship education varies across cultural contexts, as school systems develop curricula rooted in local historical concepts and responsive to particular societal challenges (Arthur et al., 2008; Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2002). Strengthening civic competencies has its agenda and mostly fits stable/peaceful societies. However, the conflicts and "troubles" change the agenda. The stage of conflict in a society affects the stability and quality of education and is also related to the types of organizations that work with education in that society.

Civic education transformation in times of war is not among the scholarly well-developed concepts. Most research papers cover the theme of civic education in post-conflict societies based on the Transitional justice processes in the western Balcan region or Ruanda. However, this omission is notable because post-conflict situations offer distinct challenges to instilling democratic norms and a sense of social cohesion to ensure democracy and social justice in the future (Quaynor, 2011).

According to our assumption, the civic education agenda changes into two main directions: (1) skills for surviving during the war, preparation for the after-war processes, and (2) development of collective memory, resilience, or transitional justice processes.

All forms of education deliver messages to the students about norms, values, and how they should act in their community. In countries experienced conflict, ideas about nationhood and violence are often embedded in the curriculum. For example, Davis (2002) writes about mathematics textbooks used in Afghanistan in which students completed mathematics problems regarding the speed of bullets as they flew toward Russian soldiers. Students completing these problems are learning about mathematical calculations and belonging to a national community that must be defended from outsiders (Quaynor, 2011).

Collective memory refers to how individuals and societies choose to remember (or forget) certain moments and events from their past or contemporary. Memory and history can be misused to reflect a mirror of pride and pain. On the one hand, a trauma – or pain – is chosen that exists of horrors of the past that are influencing the future. On the other hand, instances of glory – or pride – that form myths about a glorious future as a kind of re-enactment of a glorious past are chosen. Together, these form essential elements in the forming of group identity. A key component is formed by this connection between a common past and a desired shared destiny legitimized by creating a master commemorative narrative. Memory and history do not coincide without problems. This has become more evident in the last decade, with protests spiking on contested memories (Geerling, 2018). Experience shows that political and ethnic conflicts arouse the use of history and launch the wave of narrative revision (Karaia, 2017).

When we speak about the war, we mean the Russian-Ukrainian ongoing war. This war was followed by enormous resonance and solidarity throughout the world. This war and its arguments for the former post-soviet countries, dealing with the past and planning the corresponding future becomes the motivator.

Another significant mark of this war is the specific attitude toward the narrating history of the Russian Federation. In this regard, the Russian Federation did not accept any interpretation of the Soviet version of history. It declared the other countries as history falsifiers (once Georgia, Estonia, and Poland were declared among such countries). Correspondingly, civic education is the sphere interacting in the process.

## Research Design

This paper aims to analyze the influence of the conflict on the civic education agenda. Another goal was to fill the gaps in the scholarly literature and develop recommendations to promote the problem-solving process.

The paper analyzes the experiences of four countries. They are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. Selection of these countries is based on the following criteria: all these countries were part of the soviet system and started developing independent statehood in the early 90th of XXth; correspondingly lack of participatory experience; intervention of Russian politics in the internal affair; varying attitudes toward the neighbor and Russian federation; all four countries are enrolled in ongoing or frozen conflict with neighbor.

The policy paper is based on qualitative research methodology. At the initial stage, desk research was conducted to review scientific literature and social media data. Based on the collected materials, a semi-structural guide was prepared, the main instrument of round tables implemented in all the above-mentioned countries.

The next stage was round tables. In all four countries approximately 20 representatives of civic education/history teachers, psychologists, journalists, historians, and NGO participants. All round tables, except in the case of Ukraine, were implemented face-to-face. In Ukraine, it was held via Zoom due to the existing situation in the country. In the paper, we have used the data of three public lectures conducted within this project and led by the Georgian and Ukrainian Experts.

In-depth interviews (10) were conducted with the civic educators of all the above-mentioned countries who were directly involved in the civic education teaching campaigns as teachers/lecturers or students.

All the transcripts of the meetings were coded. Identifies codes that highlight civic education content during the stability of pre-war and war periods, as well as its topics, priorities, achievements, and challenges.

### Civic education in the conflict period:

Civic education before the war in all countries covered standard topics; however, its needs changed later. Based on the country's peculiarities, the changes were specific: In the case of Ukraine, we see an attempt to develop skills that are essential to survive; in other countries, we have this topic in a moderated manner; however, we see the dominant narrative development process, where Russia, Ukraine, and Neighbors have their significant place. War in Ukraine became the provoker of the starting discussion on the soviet legacy.

## Ukraine

Once, Charles Tilly said that collective trauma consolidates nations (Jones S., 2016). This quote explains the developments in Ukraine after Russia launched a full-scale attack from multiple directions on February 24, 2022.

All the social spheres were transformed to correspond to these conditions; the same was in the case of civic education, which acquired two main directions. They are (1) preparation for the victory and reconstruction of the country after the war and (2) construction of the collective memory, which should both consolidate the nation and create a basement for the developed country.

### 1. Preparation for the victory and reconstruction of the country after the war

One of the main goals of the wartime Civic education curriculum is to actualize topics oriented to surviving in war, taking care of the community members, and preparing for the post-war reconstruction processes. The teaching process and even extracurricular activities must be planned in a manner that includes the listed topics; these topics are:

- First medicine aid;
- Energy efficiency and survival in the shortage of energy supplies
- Self-organizing and self-mobilisation
- Psychological support
- Re-location and re-integration;
- Media literacy, cybersecurity, and survival in the military environment
- Voluntarism and capacity building
- Fundraising and project development skills;
- Promote education to support EU integration
- Multicultural education and soft skills
- Strengthening diaspora networks
- Social entrepreneurship

According to the experts, all the aspects mentioned above influence civic education as they support strengthening the civil society development process through self-mobilization, self-development, and self-monitoring. Rising resources will awaken questions of proper management and make these skill works determine the aid effectively.

## 2. Construction of the collective memory

The "properly "constructed politics of memory for the country is crucial because it is somehow a response to the Russian Federation's disinformation and the resource to consolidate and mobilize citizens around the common ideals and goals.

Collective memory should bring to the citizens *"A person's place of residence, social environment, belonging to a certain generation, personal experience and family stories, as well as information obtained from books, films, and the media"* (Round Table Participant University lecturer). This is important in both conditions: being in the war and recovering after the war. Collective memory is also vital for each type of community: both internal and external.

Russian Federation has already written a history textbook for high school students from scratch: they have completely rewritten the sections on the period since the 1970s and added a new one covering the "special military operation" (SMO) in Ukraine. The textbook shapes the narrative from the perspective of a broader government effort on how young generations of Russians think about the war and Russia's place in the world (The Washington Post, 13.08.2023). The conflict is increasingly being presented to young Russians as part of Moscow's historical mission (The Guardian) ."

This type of "history war "is crucial when there is broad interest in the country's past. According to the current survey of the International Institute of Sociology, about 80% of respondents rated their interest in the history of Ukraine as relatively or very high. An absolute majority (85%) of Ukrainians believe the state policy in historical memory is necessary. According to the majority (55%), the state needs to deal sufficiently with historical memory (www. Kiis.com.ua).

The war brings its correctives during the history teaching process in Ukraine as well. On September 20, 2023, Minister of Education and Science Oksen Lisovyi said that teachers would receive methodological materials on how to teach students about the war in two weeks. By the beginning of the next school year, textbooks on the history of Ukraine would be republished, with a section on the current hostilities. *"In two weeks, we will have a package of methodological materials for teachers. How to tell children of different ages about the war, how to explain events, and what historical events should be covered,"* the minister said. He also added that an important aspect is to revise the overall approach to teaching history in schools: *"teaching history at school should be based on different principles. It should be narrative teaching and encourage a meaningful perception of historical events"* (Ukr-live24.com 2023).

The primary resources that people interested in the history of Ukraine use to learn about it are YouTube videos (53% of those interested in the history of Ukraine have used this resource in the past year), social media posts (37%), television programs (35%), and books (29%) show ho critical civic education

extracurricular activities are, to prepare citizens for the proper selection of information and involve in its spreading process (www. Kiis.com.ua).

## Georgia

Civic education covers all educational levels in Georgia: school, vocational, and higher education institutions. All these levels include the original topics for the subject, such as political systems, human rights, civil engagement strategies, etc. However, the war in Ukraine initiated a new agenda for the course by setting two main topics: (1) It raised questions about the civil security and crisis management skills development; (2) awake collective and personal traumas from the early 90s of XX and the war in 2008;

The CE's new agenda listed solidarity, fundraising, resource-raising, tolerance, etc. All these topics were mirrored in the civic campaign for fundraising to support Ukraine after February 2022. Usually, the leaders of the campaigns were civic education teachers, lecturers, students, or representatives of CSOs. These campaigns can be discussed as an informal learning and skill development process in civil security and crisis management. *"We knew how to collect money but needed to know what was necessary for the Ukrainians then. Then we get a list from the Ukrainian embassy; we find a distributor to purchase the first medical aid kits for cheaper prices. Properly pack them and send them to the corresponding address"* (Interview with the MA student of public administration program).

However, one of the main umbrella problems of the civic education curriculum is the limited coverage of memory topics. As identified during the round table, the collective memory construction process should be driven in two directions in the Georgian CE curriculum: first, to deal with the Soviet past. This process is essential in the absence of the lustration and screening process, promised to be implemented from the early 90th, after gaining independence. Dealing with the past is seen as a way to prevent future influence from external sources and the supporter of integration in EU institutions. The second direction is the preparation of new generations for communication with their peers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

War in Ukraine actualized the topic of living in occupation. Arise questions when the occupation started; why do we still have nostalgia of the soviet union, etc. The condition of being in the ongoing occupation of the part of the territory and the „borderization“ process create an option for the sharing of the experience.

The main narrative of the process was that „we went through the war with Russia several times<sup>1</sup> and we have much to speak about“. The most widespread campaign was named "Before Bucha in Ukraine, There was Abkhazia in Georgia". According to the campaign initiators, the idea came from the request of a Ukrainian journalist searching for Russian war crime cases during the 2008 August war in Georgia. However, due to the very short time of the battles (only five days), there were not such massive crimes as they were in Kherson or Bucha. However, similar cases were in the case of War in Abkhazia in the 90th of XX. Correspondingly, the main aim of the newly launched campaign was to raise awareness of the case internally (academia, schools, youth, and entire society) and make the voice heard internationally (in-depth interview with the campaign organizer 18.07.2023).

One of the crucial inventions of wartime in the Georgian civic education curriculum was the lack of information on the developments in the 90s. This shortage raises discussion on the teachers' responsibility (including the broad areas of disciplines, especially civic education, history, and literature) to deliver additional information to the students. This shortage can influence future reconciliation processes. According to the teachers, "students must be equipped with the information on relationship experience of the conflict sides, its positive and negative aspects, mistakes, attitudes, conflicted “narratives”(Civic education teacher from the rural area), and "the main goal- to rise well among the new generation to start communication with the Abkhazian and South Ossetian peers "(interview with the political science student).

## Azerbaijan

According to the country profile on [www.bpb.de](http://www.bpb.de), the Azerbaijanian educational system turned out to be one of the deeply embedded social/economic constructs. The existing social-political situation influences the civic education teaching peculiarities as well.

Civic education curriculum was established based on the two internationally initiated civic education reform projects, including the Civic Education Curriculum Development and Teacher Training Project, which were implemented by Montana State University and Deliberating in a Democracy (DID). both projects were funded by the United States Department of State and implemented in the 2000s (Kazimzadze, Silova, n/a). However, it seems that this effort is not enough, and correspondingly one of the crucial aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> the occupation process started in 1801 by annulling the Georgian kingdom by the Russian Tsar; Then it was in 1921 when Red Army troops annexed the Georgian democratic republic. In the 90th of XX Russian federation provoked conflicts in Abkhazia and south Ossetia, and in 2008, started a war with Georgia.

scholarly and expert debates in the case of Azerbaijan is the teachers' capacity building, textbook updating, and collective memory development process.

The main pillars of the Azerbaijani collective memory are the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the establishment of modern independent Azerbaijan. These topics influence civic education on the entire educational system from a broader perspective.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, which coincided with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, led to a dramatic reconstruction of Baku's memory landscape. The events of the Nagorno-Karabakh war gave momentum to the discourse of Soviet oppression and antagonism with it. As a result, everything Soviet was declared alien and subject to demolition and distancing. In a new Azerbaijan, the Soviet symbols were perceived to embody the crimes towards the Azerbaijani people and the loss of independence.

However, attitudes toward the soviet system do not mirror attitudes toward the Russian Federation. According to the experts, the country has to take into account that Russia is a great power that has a nuclear weapon and is powerful in the Caspian Sea. All the above-mentioned determined the country's so-called balanced politics.

Correspondingly, in the case of Azerbaijan, When we speak about the influence of the war, we have to pay attention to the developments in Karabakh and Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. We have to look through the textbook (especially history), which according to the round table participants in recent years have seen significant changes in a progressive manner, however things could still be improved. According to the participant „The history of Azerbaijan taught in secondary schools creates a military history effect on a person, as there is much talk about wars. Little space is given to the socio-economic development and culture of the states. As to other country's history, if you look at the general history books, the students learn the history of other nations in depth“.

The question of the Nagorno Karabakh was based on the establishment new course named "History of Victory," which is taught separately in secondary schools and creates images of „self“ and „others“ and determines the main direction of the dominant narrative.

In spite of balanced foreign policy priorities, in the Russian-Ukrainian war Azerbaijan "supports Ukraine as a friendly country, while the Azerbaijani government has not recognized the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. During the conflict, Azerbaijan repeatedly sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Azerbaijanis showed their dissatisfaction with the war. When the war started, hundreds of Azerbaijanis gathered in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Baku with Ukrainian flags". One of the influences of the war was Azerbaijan did not participate in the May 9 celebrations in Moscow in 2023 (The official statement was that the president could not attend the event in Moscow due to Heydar Aliyev's 100th anniversary.

Nevertheless, the society also accepts the non-participation of the Azerbaijani leadership in the Moscow parade as support the truth and takes a fair position on Ukraine).

Scholars have compared the Second Karabakh War with the Russian aggression on Ukraine. However, there is also a solid difference: Ukraine has more international support than Azerbaijan manages to allocate, which can be explained by the various reasons among them are the perception of Ukraine as a European country; Development of the social media instruments; better communication strategies. Etc.

## Armenia

In the Armenian educational system, civic education is taught as a part of a subject called "Social Sciences," or as more widely known in Armenian հասարակագիտություն (hasarakagitutyun). Social Sciences have been integrated into the curriculums since 2008; As established in the subject criteria, "The democratization processes in the Republic of Armenia demand the upbringing of civic qualities such as awareness and realization of one's rights and responsibilities, positive participation leadership of a democratic society (the highlander.aua.am)".

Speaking about being in war conditions is an unusual topic for the Armenian educational system. Correspondingly, when we discuss the major topics that appear on the surface are collective traumas and efforts for their healing. The collective memory is formed under the influence of political, military, cultural, and other major turning events in a particular historical period. According to the experts, these cases are developments of the XX-XXI centuries: 1915, the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian-Turkish war of 1920, the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in 1988-1990, the restoration of Armenia's independence in 1991, and the three Artsakh wars.

The conflict's consequences and traumas are often highlighted in textbooks, accentuating the need to maintain a strong national unity and identity among the Armenian population. The round table participants identified problems regarding the textbooks, seeing them as one-sidedly, embellishing and exaggerating achievements and victories, and trying to reduce the significance of defeats. Historical events are often presented without the necessary criticality. However, after the Velvet Revolution in 2018 and follow-up reforms, significant changes were brought to the educational sphere and textbooks as well.

In Armenian discourse, images of opponents and friends are often shaped by historical events and narratives.

Russia is generally seen as a friend due to historical ties and support, while Turkey is often perceived as an opponent due to the Armenian Genocide. These images are reinforced through educational curricula, media

representation, and public commemorations, contributing to a collective memory that influences how these relationships are perceived in Armenian society.

The events described in the history textbooks are analyzed primarily under the prism of a permanent friend or a permanent enemy, as well as the reproduction of the image of the Armenian people as victims of historical holes, noticeably avoiding the in-depth analysis of mistakes and shortcomings of Armenian figures.

According to the round table participants, the war in Ukraine also influenced the friend-enemy conception. These developments have prompted a re-examination of historical narratives, particularly regarding the Soviet Union. As Ukraine faces aggression from Russia, there is a growing recognition of the Soviet legacy's complexities. The war has led to a shift in attitudes, highlighting instances where Soviet influence may have contributed to vulnerabilities or adverse outcomes. It has also underscored the significance of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, redefining its relationship with its past and neighbors, especially Russia. The war in Ukraine broke the stereotype of friendship between peoples existing in the post-Soviet space and demonstrated the real colonial essence of today's Russia. The Kremlin openly demonstrates its claims to all "brotherly, equal republics" and positions itself not even as the successor of the USSR but as the legal successor of Tsarist Russia, in which these republics were its colonies. The Kremlin's colonial claims need to be resisted by us, all the former republics of the USSR, through joint efforts.

Russian-Ukrainian war, according to the experts, for Armenia was the source of remembering the pains of victims. Another source of the pain is that the Russian Federation, a strategic ally of Armenia, has never fulfilled its obligations under bilateral or CSTO agreements, but anyway, it is an ally; however, getting involved in the war with Ukraine weakened its influence in the South in the Caucasus.

## **Conclusion and recommendations:**

- The creation of the dominant narrative and spreading of incorrect information is one of the most highlighted issues during the round tables; correspondingly, developing critical thinking and raising media literacy skills is seen as one of the crucial aspects of CE in the future;
- History education, conscious or non-conscious, is one of the critical determinants of the citizen's identity. It also influences the civic education teaching process. Avoiding sensitive history topics and lack of interdisciplinary debates create a shortage of information and make students vulnerable to disinformation and radicalization. Correspondingly, our recommendation is to raise awareness toward sensitive aspects of our and other histories;

- Since Round Table representatives agree that the characters of the soviet union determined the difficulties after regaining independence, studying the experience of decommunization in other countries and implementing Eastern European experience in order to overcome the negative consequences of the communist regime is crucial. This process will also promote getting rid of the stereotypical thinking imposed by Soviet historiography. In Germany, the denazification process was gone through civic education; civic education has the potential to support delayed decommunization as well;
- Images of "we "and significant "others "are observable in every above-discussed society. It is essential to develop a dialogue between different segments of the population as internally as among the neighbors by promoting the idea of joint peaceful coexistence; it is essential to promote widespread cases of mutual understanding and cooperation; create space for meeting and dialogue;
- To avoid complications, civic education must cover topics of civic defense like first medical aid, being energy effective, and being a resource saver. These types of neutral topics can become a starting point for sharing experiences and cooperation among neighbors;
- Cross-national research data is one possibility for being informed about the issues and advantages. In the case of the South Caucasus, there is a valuable source: the Caucasus Barometer, which is free annual data that is easy to find and use.

## Aknowlegement:

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The round table facilitators made an important contribution to the paper preparation process. They were Maka Bibilaishvili (Civic Education Teachers Forum, Georgia); Nazarii Boiarskyi (Democratic Initiatives Incubator, Ukraine) , Azar Ramazanov, (chairperson of Adult Education Association, Azerbaijan); Stepan Grigoryan (Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation, Armenia)

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