

# SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

ARMENIA'S YOUTH PERCEPTIONS  
OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE  
AND ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES





# **ARMENIA'S YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE AND ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES**

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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## RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

To discover the geopolitical orientation and opinions of the Armenia's youth (henceforth "youth", "young people") regarding Russia's war in Ukraine in the context of regional security issues, a sociological study was conducted in Yerevan and Armenia's provinces in 2022. It was carried out by specialists from the Faculty of Sociology of the Yerevan State University, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation office in Armenia.

The study aimed to discover the youth's perceptions of the reasons for Russia's war in Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, and its possible impact on the region, including Armenia.

The research was carried out from October 22, 2022 to November 22, 2022 with youth (18-35 age group) residing in Yerevan and all provinces of Armenia, using the focus group discussion method.

The research tried to address some issues via the focus group discussions, including:

1. Find out which are the most preferred information sources for the youth regarding foreign political events and why.
2. Present the ideas of the youth about
  - the Russian-Ukrainian conflict dynamics, including the direct and indirect parties in the conflict, its causes, and the interests of the participants involved,
  - the reasons for starting the military action on February 24, 2022,
  - the positions of regional and international organizations (NATO, EU, CSTO) as well as the states of the South Caucasus towards the war.
3. Assess the youth's concerns regarding the probability of the expansion of Russia's war in Ukraine and especially the probability of a Third World War.
4. Discover the perceptions of the youth regarding other countries being "friends" or "enemies" of Armenia, evaluate the place of Russia and Ukraine in that context, and understand the reasons for the respective attitudes of young people.
5. Assess the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and especially the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on the life of the youth, including:
  - What changes has Russia's war in Ukraine had on Armenia's society?
  - How does Russia's war in Ukraine impact Armenia's economy, and people's lifestyle?
  - What is the effect of the significant influx of Russians and Ukrainians who moved to Armenia during the war?
6. Find out the opinion of the youth about the possible impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Russia's war in Ukraine on the security of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and on the current state of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
7. Discover the youth's opinions about the possible consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine.
8. Find out, according to the youth, what Armenia's position in the Ukrainian conflict is, and what it should be. Including:
  - What are the reasons for Armenia's position regarding Russia's war in Ukraine?
  - Who should Armenia support, and why?
  - What are Armenia's interests and what necessary actions should it take?
  - Who would the participants of the focus group discussions support?

The focus group discussions were conducted via questionnaires. The discussion participants were initially informed about the purpose of the research, the objectives, the organizations implementing the research, the rights of the discussion participants, and the protecting the privacy of opinions and

answers they provide to the questions. Also during the focus group discussions, a short quantitative survey questionnaire was utilized. The aim of this short survey was to extract some quantitative data about the foreign political orientations of the youth, and comparing it with the results of a previous research carried out during March-December of 2021 by the Faculty of Sociology of the Yerevan State University and the Socies Expert Center, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation office in Armenia. The 2021 research aimed at identifying Armenian society's perceptions regarding the foreign political priorities of Armenia after the "Velvet Revolution" and the Karabakh War in 2020. Notably, an emphasis was put on the extraction, explanation, and evaluation of public perceptions of "friendly" and "enemy" states, preferred and undesirable political directions and relations, the development of Armenia's foreign relations paths with Russia, Europe, and the US (Western) and several other foundational issues.<sup>1</sup> The 2021 research was conducted via a mass survey, which particularly helped sketch the views on foreign policy issues of various age groups (including the youth) in Armenia. In the context of those results, the focus group discussions with representative of the youth demographics allowed detailing their ideas, to bring out the objective and subjective factors influencing those ideas, and focus in detail on the issue of Russian-Ukrainian relations as an important factor of contemporary regional security.

The number of youth (18-35 age group) participating in the quantitative survey of 2021 was 587, which made up 38.4% of the total number of respondents, while the number of youths participating in focus group discussions organized during this research was 198. The aim of this report is not to compare the opinions expressed in the 2021 quantitative survey with those of expressed in the focus group discussions, rather it is to use both to understand the underlying reasons behind the general and thematic foreign political perceptions of the youth, as well as the principal trends of the perception change(s). This comparison is presented in the first part of this analysis.

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1 Atanesyan A., & Mkrtichyan A. (2022). *Armenian Society at a Crossroads. Foreign Political Orientations, Priorities, and Perceptions*. Sociological research /collective monograph/, p. 96. Yerevan. Armenian branch of "Konrad Adenauer" Foundation. Retrieved January 3, 2023 from <https://www.kas.de/documents/269781/0/Armenia-at-the-Crossroad.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0I7sqEkCljyPFJUH4ItZ0QLagL1xhBSaCDNlbGFI-ATwEvjuHaxVMqe8>

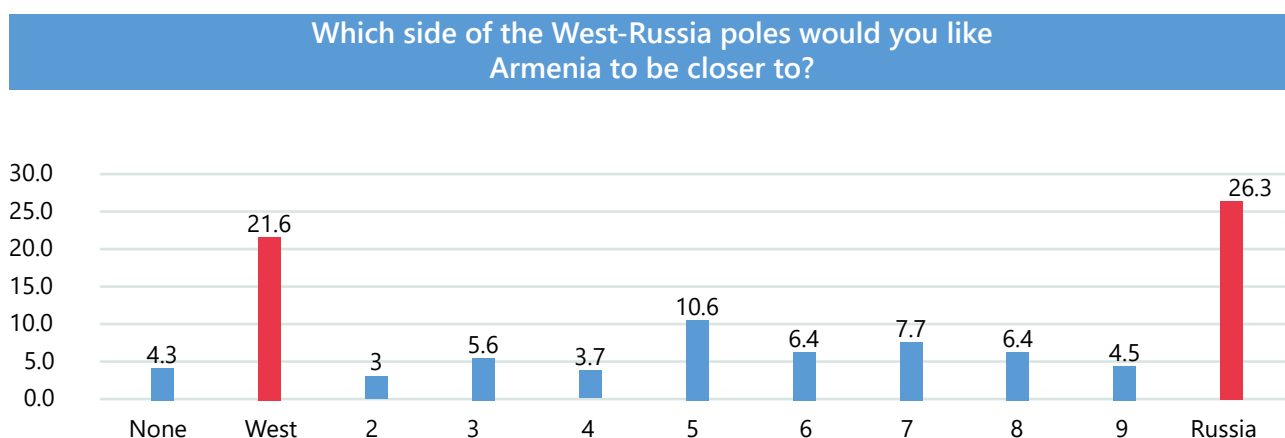


## RESEARCH RESULTS

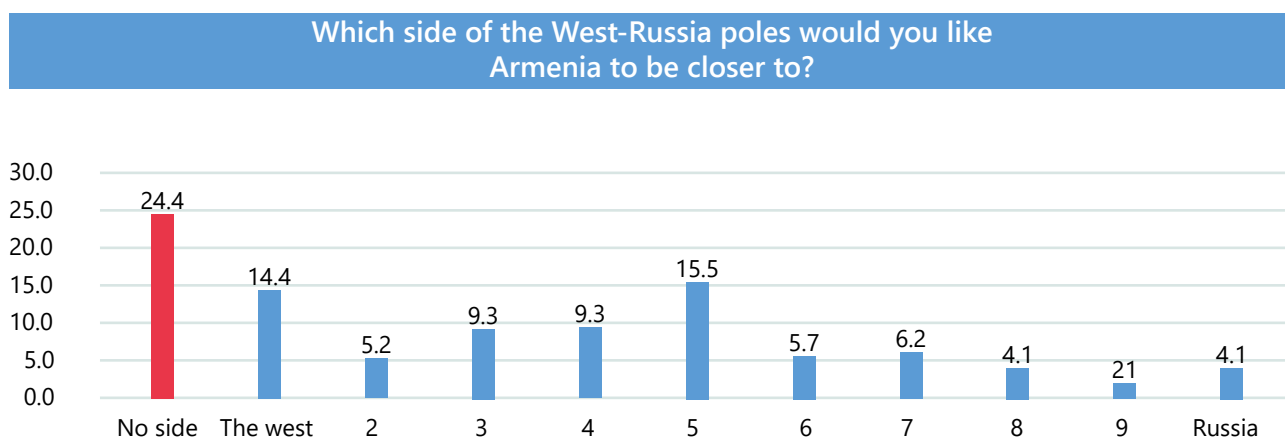
### Implemented survey's quantitative results

First of all, to understand the trends of the common foreign political sentiments of the young people, they were asked, which side of the West-Russia poles they would like Armenia to be closer to. Below are comparisons of the answers received from the focus group discussions with the results of the survey conducted in 2021 (Graphs 1, 2, 3).

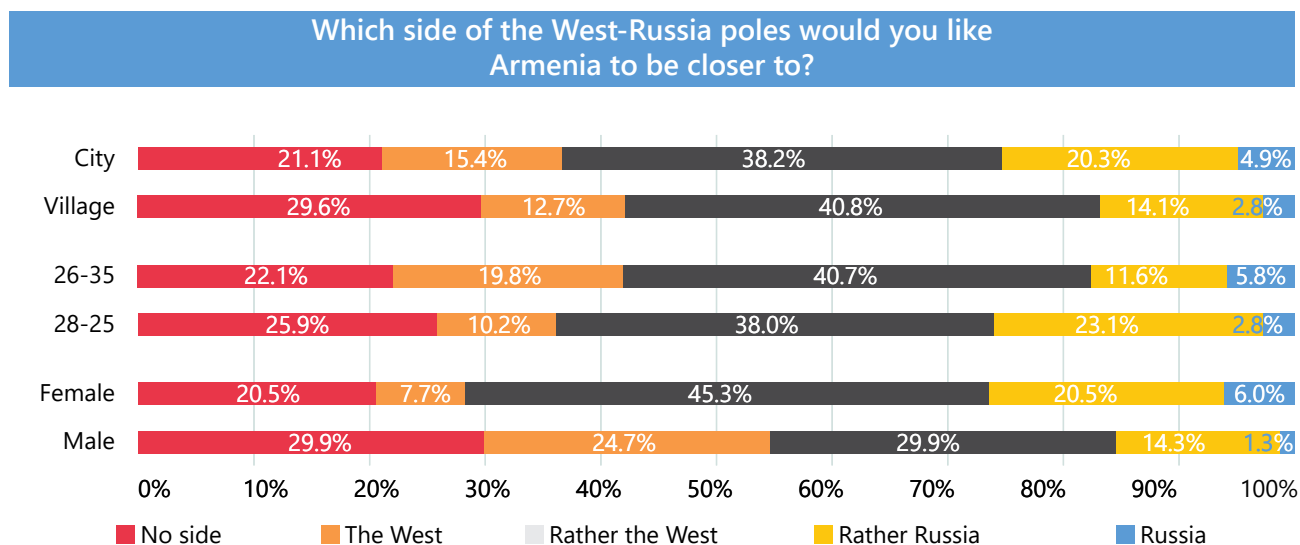
**Graph 1:** Which side of the West-Russia poles would you like Armenia to be closer to? (The opinions of the young respondents to the 2021 mass survey, %)



**Graph 2:** Which side of the West-Russia poles would you like Armenia to be closer to? (Participants in the 2022 focus group discussions, %)



**Graph 3: Which side of the West-Russia poles would you like Armenia to be closer to?**  
(Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, according to the place of residence, age, and gender of the respondents, %)



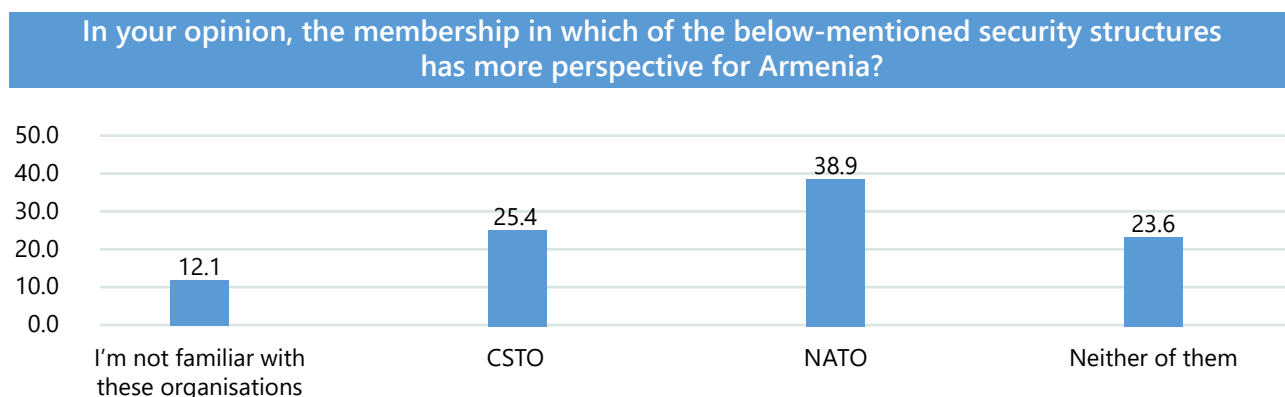
Among young people, the following trends of changing foreign political orientations are noticeable:

1. Certainly, the pro-Russian and pro-Western sentiments are weakening, and the number of supporters for both orientations is in decline. This could be explained by the West and Russia not meeting the expectations of the society, in protecting Armenia's national interests and security (including the protection of the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia). Undoubtedly, the pro-Russian sentiments are decreasing faster than the pro-Western ones, which could be explained by the higher initial expectations (and hence the steeper rates of disappointment) of the Russian role compared to the West's.
2. In parallel, one of the significant trends in foreign political orientation among youth is not relating to any pole (West or Russia). Compared with the results of the research conducted in 2021, among the young participants of the 2022 focus group discussions, not relating to any pole (24%), as well as balanced interests between the West and Russia (being in between 15.5%) are among the main approaches.

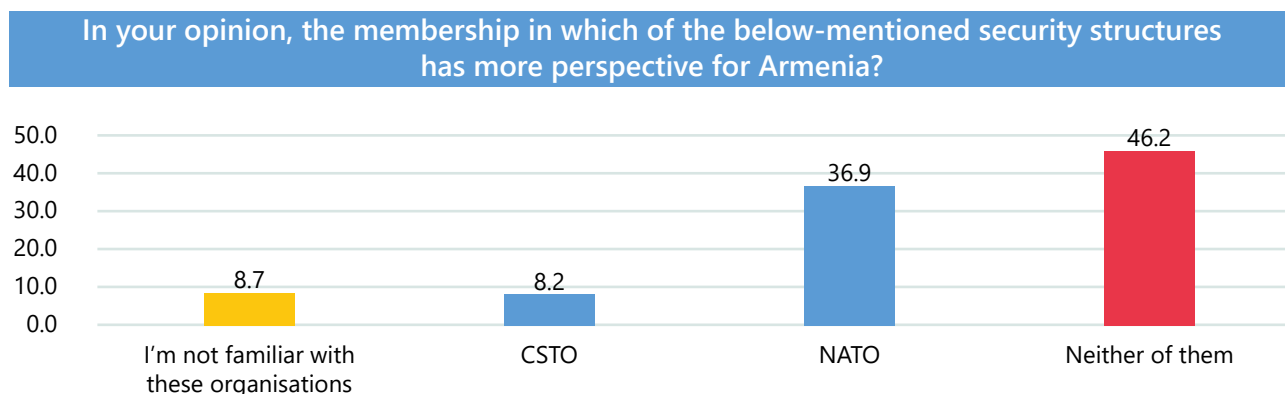
It was also observed that pro-Western orientation is significantly more evident among males in the focus group discussions and in more mature age groups (26-35 age group). An unequivocal positive attitude towards Russia is less common and has transformed into a "rather" positive attitude.

The participants of focus group discussions were asked the following question: the membership in which of the below-mentioned security structures has more perspective for Armenia? The received answers were compared with the answers given to the same question during the research conducted in 2021 (Graphs 4, 5, 6).

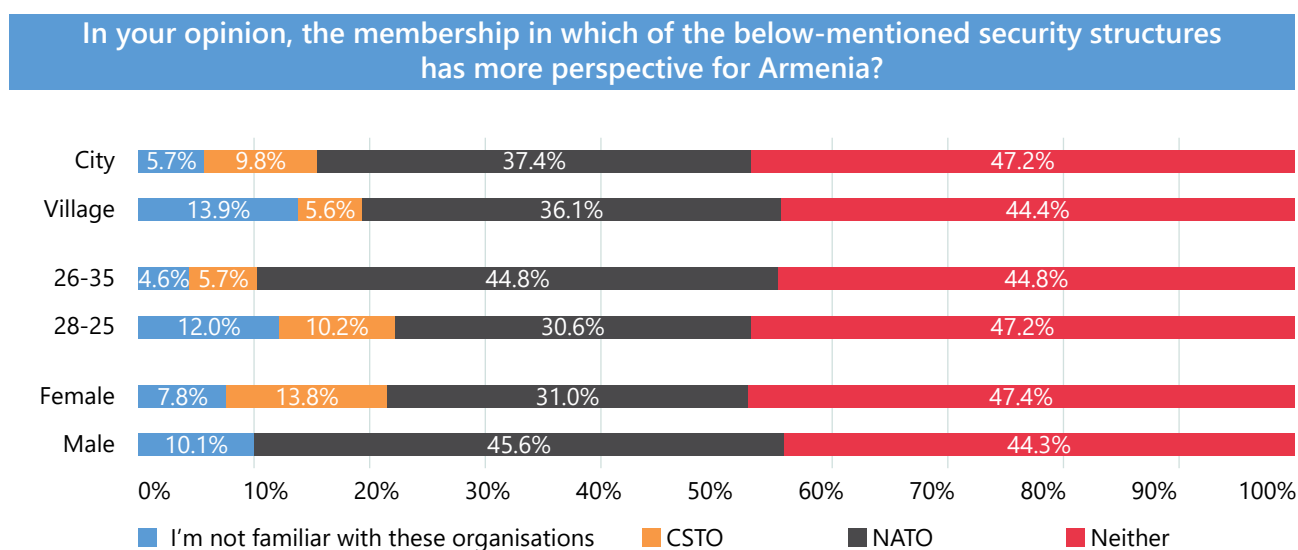
**Graph 4:** In your opinion, the membership in which of the below-mentioned security structures has more perspective for Armenia? (Young respondents of the 2021 mass survey, %)



**Graph 5:** In your opinion, the membership in which of the below-mentioned security structures has more perspective for Armenia? (Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, %)



**Graph 6:** In your opinion, the membership in which of the below-mentioned security structures has more perspective for Armenia? (Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, according to place of residence, age, and gender, %)



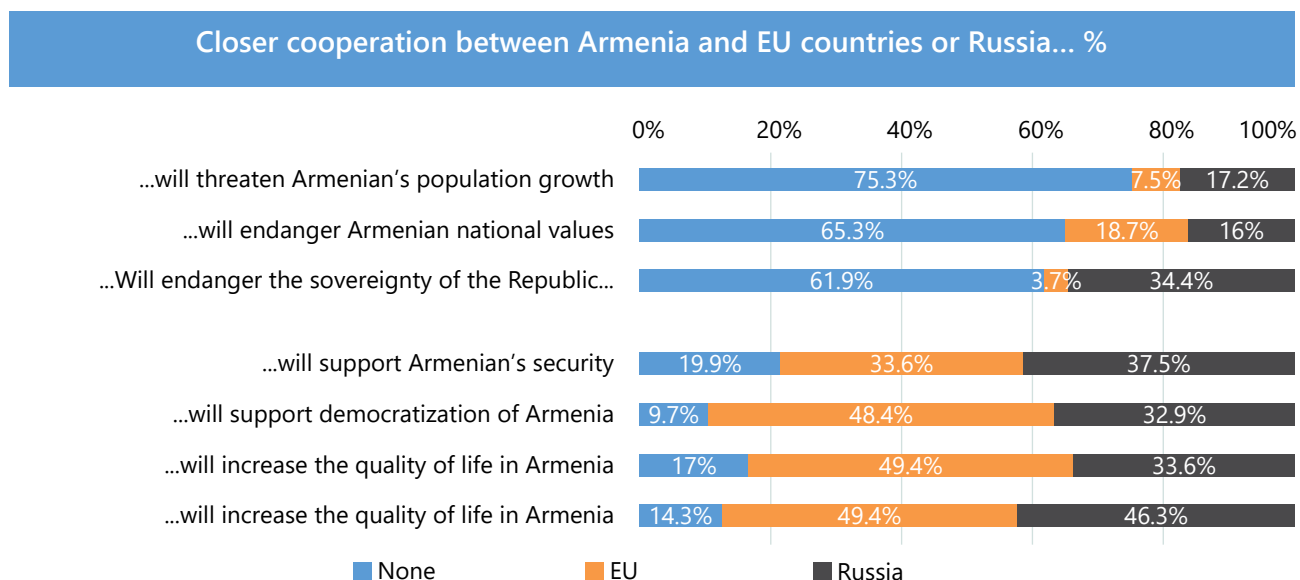
Compared with the 2021 mass survey results, the opinions of the participants in the 2022 focus group discussion express a decline in confidence in both the CSTO and NATO. Moreover, the decline is more significant towards the CSTO, and there are also notable trends of not joining any regional security structure as a result of disappointment in all security structures.

The research conveys a higher trust towards CSTO among young women respondents, while young men prefer either joining NATO or not joining any security structure.

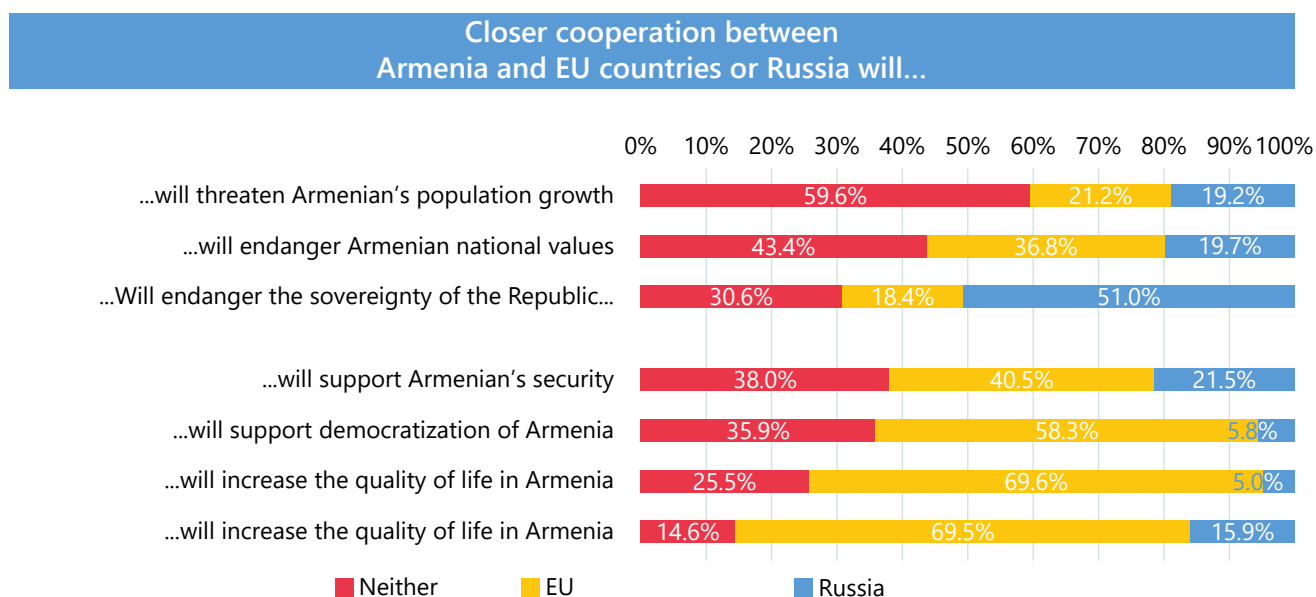
The discussion on trusting the CSTO should be considered in the context of widespread public discourse that after the 2020 Karabakh War membership in the CSTO does not offer any benefits to Armenia and that Armenia should withdraw from its membership in said organization. However these sentiments have not echoes in official government level despite calls voiced by some political forces. On an expert analysis level, the issue of leaving the CSTO membership is approached from a cost-benefit analysis that Armenia could have in the event it withdraws from the CSTO. The perception is that leaving the CSTO is tantamount to “declaring war” on Russia and that it could significantly increase the threats to Armenia. Parallel to this discussion the main question asked is what level of support Armenia would have from the West in case it leaves the CSTO? Answering this question is beyond the scope of just making political statements. Within the expert community, there are reasonable doubts that leaving the CSTO and closing down the Russian military base in Gyumri would practically solve any security problems. Without developing domestic security capacities, it is impossible to have a security mechanism by antagonizing Russia, a major geopolitical pole. As such, expert opinion seeks the answer (incompletely) to the security concerns within the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, where the West plays a significant role.

The answers provided by participants of the focus groups to the question regarding the preference for closer cooperation between Armenia and EU countries or Russia were compared with the answers to the same question given during the survey conducted in 2021 (Graphs 7, 8).

**Graph 7:** Closer cooperation between Armenia and EU countries or Russia... (Young respondents of the 2021 mass survey, %)



**Graph 8: Closer cooperation between Armenia and EU countries or Russia will...** (Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, %)

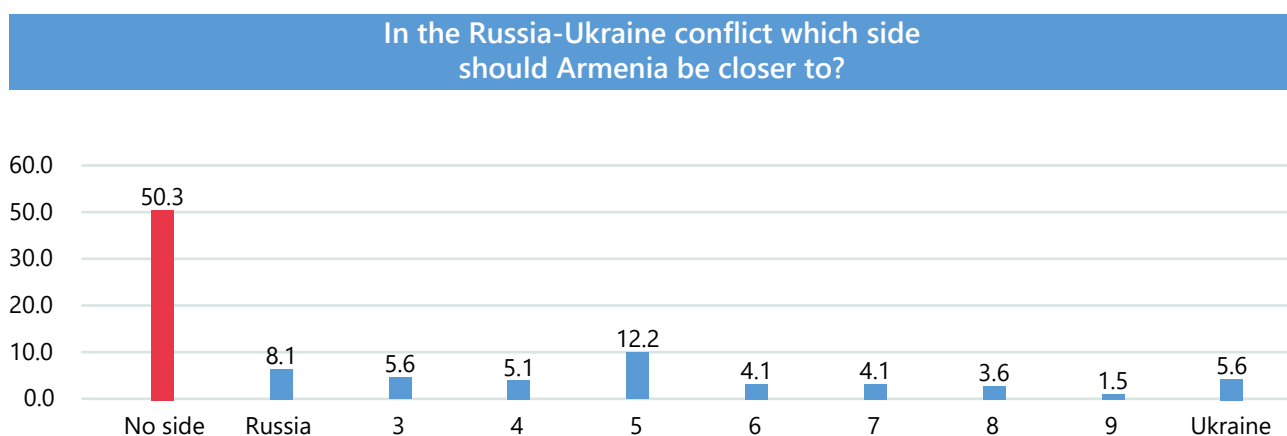


Comparing the results of the two above-mentioned questions, the following trends were registered in the perceptions of the youth:

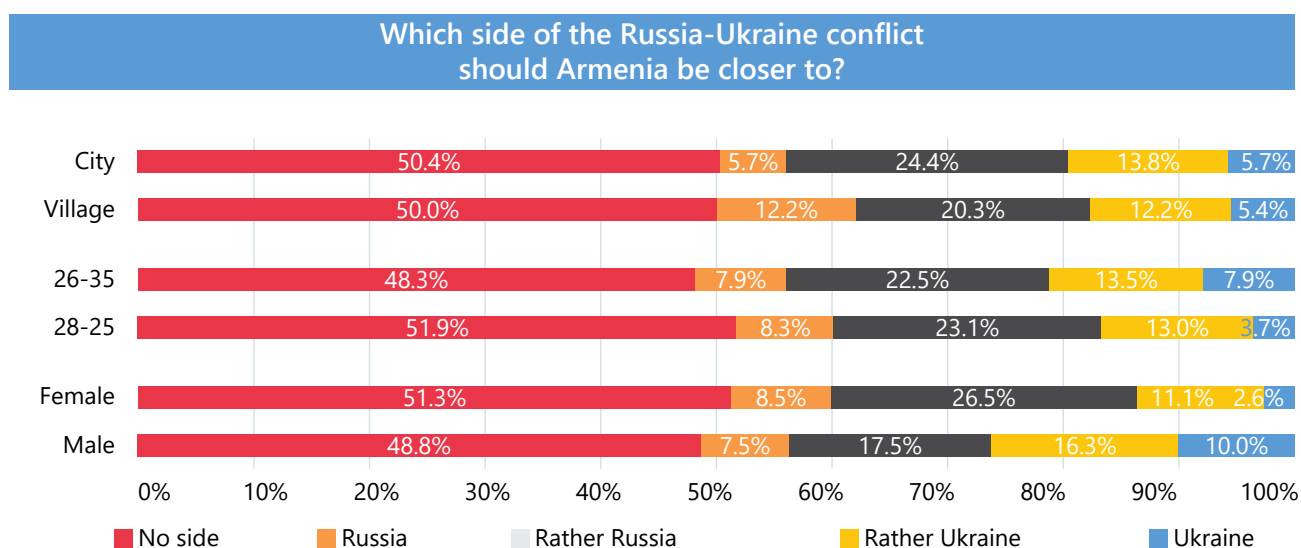
- Compared to Russia the attitude towards the European Union as a factor threatening the Armenian national values is substantially significant.
- The perception of Russia as a threatening factor to the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia is significant.
- Compared to the results of the 2021 survey results, in the perceptions of the young people who participated in the 2022 focus group discussions, the EU is more favorable for ensuring the security of Armenia than Russia.
- In the perception of the youth, the EU is significantly more favorable than Russia for increasing the quality of life, economic development, and democratization in Armenia.

The final question of quantitative nature to the participants of the focus group discussions was: which side of the Russia-Ukraine conflict should Armenia be closer to? The following answers were given (Graphs 9, and 10).

**Graph 9: In the Russia-Ukraine conflict which side should Armenia be closer to?** (Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, %)



**Graph 10:** Which side of the Russia-Ukraine conflict should Armenia be closer to? (Participants of 2022 focus group discussions, according to place of residence, age, and gender, %)



Among the participants of the focus group discussions, the main trends were mainly in favor of not aligning with any pole followed by pro-Western sentiments (coupled with a decline in pro-Russia sentiments). Within the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, the majority of the respondents (50%) were in favor of not taking any side. The desire by respondents to have a balanced approach between Russia and Ukraine is also evident (12% of respondents), however among the smaller groups of respondents, Russia is supported more (about 8%) than Ukraine (about 5.6%).

Ukraine is more supported by young Armenian females, as well as slightly more by urban residents. The rural residents who participated in the focus group surveys are more pro-Russian. This was also recorded in the mass survey conducted in 2021 and was explained by the presence of seasonal workers from the regions in Russia (sending remittances to their families back in Armenia) motivating the respondents to root for stable Armenia-Russia relations.

The next section of the report looks into the foreign political approaches of the youth regarding Russia's war in Ukraine, presented during the focus group discussions.

## Focus group discussions analysis results

### Results of focus group discussions with Yerevan-resident youth

As mentioned, six focus group discussions were conducted in Yerevan, with the following participants:

	Date	Number & sex of participants	Age of participants
1.	06.11.2022	3 women, 4 men	18-25
2.	09.11.2022	8 women	18-25
3.	10.11.2022	7 men	18-25
4.	12.11.2022	8 women	26-35
5.	13.11.2022	5 women, 2 men	26-35
6.	15.11.2022	8 men	26-35
	In total:	45 participants	

#### *Changes registered in Armenia during the recent years, processes and trends*

Yerevan-resident youth has mentioned several phenomena and processes, which, in their opinion, characterize the transformation of Armenian society in recent years. These phenomena can be grouped into economic, political, and socio-psychological types.

The following were mentioned among the economic phenomena and characteristics of recent years:

- overall inflation
- partial elimination of corruption
- sharp increase in apartment rental costs, especially as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine

***"The house rent has increased. It must have increased by 50% especially due to the Ukrainian events, and before that because of Artsakh [Armenian name of Karabakh-Ed.] events [2020 Karabakh War-Ed.]. Taking advantage of the situation, landlords are increasing the rent. This has forced more money to be put into the rent while cutting other things."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

The following were mentioned among the political characteristics of Armenian life in recent years:

- the "Velvet Revolution", the universal excitement and the subsequent disappointment
- the 2020 Karabakh War, the losses, other political defeats and concessions following the war
- fragmentation of political forces of Armenia, domestic political conflict.

The following were mentioned among the socio-psychological characteristics of Armenian society:

- polarization and division of the population due to internal political conflict
- internal political apathy, disappointment, indifference

- loss of traditional values, targeted devaluation
- issues related to homosexuals being raised more openly (noted in a negative sense).

The social polarization and conflict due to internal political contradictions were mentioned in all focus group discussions:

*"The social polarization has gone too far; people have become intolerant. If someone defends a particular political position, they instantly receive a hostile response. In a political sense, there is too much of that disagreement, and it immediately moves to a personal level. I know people who have cut off ties with their relatives because they were anti-Nikol [Prime-minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan-Ed.], and the relatives were pro-Nikol."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"It's been five years since I've been living in Armenia. In the past when I was visiting as a tourist, people were happier. Now they are not happy, they are more aggressive."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

In such conditions, young people have expressed a desire of emigrating from Armenia and making attempts to do so, including learning foreign languages, and traveling abroad (mainly to EU countries and USA) for the purpose of studying.

*"If a couple of years ago people were optimistic about the country's future, now there is one large segment that doesn't have any hopes about the future of their country. A lot of people are already leaving. Many others would, had they had the opportunity. However, they don't, for whatever reason, and those who do not leave say they will stay and "Whatever will happen, will happen."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"Now everyone hopes to move out. The bad thing is that it's everyone's goal. I am sure that 70% of the people sitting here want to move, and the remaining 30% are probably thinking about it."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

Along with the desire to emigrate, explained by current economic, political, and socio-psychological factors, there is also an expressed to stay in Armenia, protect and strengthen.

*"No matter how bad it will be, I see my future here, and the best I can do is to serve the state with my education and profession. I have intentionally chosen my profession (Turkish studies) to work for the state in several spheres."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

### *Preferred means of receiving information about public events*

During the focus group discussions with Yerevan-resident youth, it became evident that the most common sources of information for public events and processes are online media and social networks, followed by interpersonal communication. Media consumption through Telegram and TikTok channels is especially widespread among the younger age groups of youth. There were fewer mentions of the social network Facebook. "Zartonq" club<sup>2</sup> was mentioned in different group discussions as a source of political information. It should be noted that young people separately mentioned Vardan Ghukasyan's (a.k.a. Dog) online channels<sup>3</sup> among the sources of information,

<sup>2</sup> An Armenian patriotic-political platform on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/zartonqakumb/>

<sup>3</sup> A YouTube channel of a former police officer Vardan Ghukasyan, who left Armenia and is regularly and critically commenting on important events in Armenia from abroad: <https://www.youtube.com/@vardanghukasyan>



which the young people use to learn about political events.

Television lacks both credibility and reach in this age group, it is considered biased and politicized:

*"I don't follow much, because generally every channel in Armenia belongs to a certain political party and speaks in their favor. I don't listen to the news; it's a bad theatrical performance and I'm probably waiting for a miracle for something good to come on. I communicate more with the people who have an idea about politics and know more things."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"Since every TV channel belongs to some oligarch, it only talks about them. That's why I don't follow much on the TV."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

It's interesting to observe the low level of trust among young people regarding the Armenian media. Foreign language speakers prefer to follow foreign media. Especially the older representatives of youth are used to combining different media and sources in order to have balanced information, to avoid bias:

*"First, I check which news media it is, then I check who has shared it from friends. Then I check their news feed. We have studied media literacy at the university, so I am quite well-informed on that aspect, that's why I am able to understand what's what."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

#### *The dynamics of Russia's war in Ukraine in the perceptions of Yerevan-resident youth* *Conflict reasons*

Among the reasons for Russia's war in Ukraine, young people have mentioned Russia's actions (offensive, aggressive, preventive), as well as the West's (provocative, world-dividing) and Ukraine's politics (aimed at the unification with the European Union, treacherous from Russia's perspective). Particularly, the reasons mentioned for the conflict are:

- Russia's desire to show off its power and superpower status to the world (it's also an attempt to restore the Soviet Union)
- the war was Russia's reaction to the NATO-states' unified policy against Moscow (NATO provoked Russia)
- another process of world division is taking place, the territory of Ukraine being one of the targets of that division
- Ukraine attempted to get out of Russia's traditional influence and move towards the West, which Russia considered as a threat to itself and tried to prevent it.

*"Ukraine is trying to develop and does not see Russia as a source of development, and is trying to get out from under it, and that is not in Russia's interest, that is why the war has started."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"European values or democracy were established in Ukraine; it was harmful to Russia and it could not control it."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

The discussion in all groups demonstrated sufficient awareness, in-depth knowledge analytical

skills, and approaches, of the youth. The following statement is an example of a thought that concisely expresses the opinion of many participants about the conflict dynamics:

***"It started from Ukraine's orientation, which wasn't in Russia's interest as a superpower, and for that an excuse was needed to strike preemptively or use the guise of the rescuer, to save Lugansk and Donetsk. It was initially planned that Putin would occupy Ukraine, to bring the government to a pro-Russian, instead of a pro-Western orientation. But when that was unsuccessful, it went with its heroic, superman costume to free those two cities from the so-called "Nazi Ukrainians". It seems to me that the main reason [for the war-Ed.] are the interests of the superpowers and the threats they perceive."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

During the discussions, one widespread opinion was that Russia acted preemptively to prevent further NATO's expansion. According to this perspective, Russia has tried to control Ukraine's foreign policy to prevent its rapprochement with the West, trying to prevent NATO from engorging on Russia's immediate border, and was met with retaliatory actions:

***"They [NATO-Ed.] wanted to put Russia in the same situation as Iran is in – economic blockade, sanctions, etc., and Ukraine was a good tool to turn these brotherly nations against each other and to weaken Russia. We see the consequences now, how they are arming Ukraine, but not including it in NATO so that they don't send troops to Ukraine. In fact, there is no Russia-Ukraine problem, it's mainly a Russia-West problem, which is the logical continuation of the Cold War."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

***"I think if this war had been avoided, the clash would have happened in a different place at a different time, it would have been inevitable. I look at this from the perspective of the Russia-USA conflict, I give very little importance and role to Ukraine."***

***Female 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

The explanation of Russia's actions as being reactive, and responsive, also contained criticism, connected with the idea that it aimed at harming and causing losses to Ukraine as a very close nation to Russia. At the same time, it's noticeable that evaluating the situation from various perspectives, instead of just direct accusations against Russia, observations were also made about the provocative actions of other parties in the conflict, including Western states, along with systemic problems:

***"Brzezinski's The Grand Chessboard<sup>4</sup> tells that there is one superpower in the world, which is the US, and it decides the pace at which life goes on in the world. And now Russia has appeared, with ambitious Putin who, with his ideas and thoughts, has the history and the reality of the Soviet Union being a powerful state, and is trying to bring it back, so now that struggle is happening. Realizing it, the US will never let another power rise and take everything into its hands, and Russia is trying to counteract in every way. And in all of this, third world countries, ourselves and Ukraine, are suffering in that conflict. Russia and the US are fighting in Ukraine against each other."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

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4 The discussion participant refers to: Zbigniew K. Brzezinski (2006). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. [Repr.] ed. New York NY: Basic Books, whose name he mentioned in the Russian translation, by which this book is most popular in the post-Soviet region.

### *Direct and indirect participants of the conflict*

In all discussions, Russia and Ukraine, then Russia and the West (USA, NATO) were mentioned as direct participants in the conflict. In cases where Ukraine and Russia were mentioned as direct participants, the European Union, USA, and NATO from Ukraine's side, and individual CSTO countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan) from Russia's side, were mentioned as indirect participants or parties. Armenia wasn't mentioned in any discussions as a direct or indirect participant or party to Russia's war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Republic of Armenia has its own interests, which define Armenia's reaction to the conflict (more on this below).

In cases, where Russia and the West were mentioned as direct parties to this conflict (in the context of a global conflict, including for the purpose of dividing Ukraine and Western presence in the Ukrainian territories), and USA, EU, United Kingdom, and Israel were mentioned as active representatives on the Western side.

*"I think that everything is being controlled by England and Israel. England is in charge, at the heart of everything is England with its plan. But I am in favor of Russia because Ukraine is a Slavic nation and there was no point in joining the West. What connection did the USA have with Ukraine? Russia has been on their side their whole life. And now the US is building a nuclear power plant in Ukraine, it's building toxic laboratories. I've heard that Russia was angered because the nuclear power plants built in Ukraine by the USA were to be operational, and Russia was against it because if something happened, it would spread into its country as well. In fact, the leader of Ukraine is weak, just like in our country, he is like a puppet. See, the US provides weapons but doesn't do anything certain. It's like a show because if the US was really against this, this war would have been stopped long ago."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

Those participants of the discussions, who considered Russia's war in Ukraine in a global context, as a manifestation of the superpower struggle, drew parallels between this conflict and other modern conflicts in the post-Soviet space (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh) and in the Middle East (Syria). From this perspective, Turkey was mentioned as an actively involved third party in Russia's war in Ukraine, and, according to the participants, actively taking advantage of this conflict under the guise of a mediator:

*"Currently, Turkey is one of the only Western countries that doesn't use sanctions. On the contrary, it is developing good relations and the South Stream gas pipeline. Turkey is profiting, it transits the gas, which will ensure both its economic performance, as well as be a leverage on Europe. Like, look, the transit is ours, we will close it, if we want to, we will open it, if we want to. They can also increase the gas prices. It's now presenting to be the state that can be the mediator to keep the connection between Russia and Ukraine."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

China was also mentioned as a state with certain involvement in the global context of Russia's war in Ukraine, guided by its own interests:

*"It's China, but China is supporting Russia because NATO is the second enemy for them."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

Russia's war in Ukraine has had direct and indirect impacts on the South Caucasus region. The three republics of which, according to the participants of the focus group discussions, have different interests in this conflict, and have diverging approaches towards it.

Georgia, considers Russia as a threat, does not support it, and follows the West's lead. However, according to young people, this hasn't necessarily made Georgia pro-Ukrainian.

Azerbaijan, according to the participants of the discussion, has adopted a dual approach: on the one hand, it ostentatiously presents itself as closely cooperating with Russia, but on the other hand, indirectly supports Ukraine. That support is mutual: in 2020, during the Karabakh War, Ukraine supported Azerbaijan and congratulated them afterward:

*"Following the Azerbaijani press and news media, I can say that Azerbaijan is extremely anti-Russian. It has sent enormous amounts of medical aid to Ukraine and has expressed through statements that it stands by Ukraine. Lately, a number of Azerbaijanis have provided assistance to the Ukrainian army."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"Ukraine's president, who officially congratulated Azerbaijan that they won, called them a brotherly state, etc. I don't know how they can be a brotherly state. In this case, it would be shameful for us, if, knowing this, we expressed some kind of a positive attitude [towards Ukraine-Ed.]."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

Armenia's position regarding Russia's war in Ukraine is defined by several circumstances. On the one hand, according to young people, since Armenia is essentially dependent on Russia, a pro-Russian position should be expressed on this matter as well. Among the reasons for Armenia's pro-Russian positions are the cooperation between Azerbaijan and Ukraine and Georgia's anti-Russian stance, from which Armenia's position, as Russia's ally, should differ.

*"Perhaps Armenia has expressed a more or less neutral position in our region, but it has more of a pro-Russian direction, because Georgia is exclusively pro-Ukrainian and it doesn't hide its enmity with Russia, and well, Azerbaijan is arming Ukraine."*

*Female, 26-35 group, Yerevan*

*"In fact, Russia's influence is so great in our region, that no one will oppose Russia out of their own interests. For example, everything is connected with Russia."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

On the other hand, Armenia is trying to not worsen its relations with the West, to balance out the influence of Russia and the West in the region, which is connected with Armenia being a cross-road, with scarce resources, a serious security threat, which force Yerevan to take an ambiguous position:

*"Since the US has started to be interested in our region, we have also started to please the East and the West in some way, to sell a territory, in metaphorical sense. Geographically, we are a very bad but an important link, we are a link between the world and Iran, a tiny country between Turkey and Azerbaijan, which lies in the middle of the Great Turan and blocks it. And everyone understands it, not that Russia has set up a base here because they like us very much. It is for its Southern security. We should be able to "sell" our important geographic position to someone. Nobody in the world says they are in favor of someone, and that's it."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

Thus, in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine, Armenia's position is not considered unequivocally pro-Russian. At the same time, according to young people, it is more pro-Russian, than the position

of other states, and is second only to Belarus. In addition, as mentioned, if Armenia's position on this matter is more pro-Russian than anti-Russian, then the attitude of the Armenia's society to this conflict is less pro-Russian than that of Armenia's authorities. Despite Ukraine's pro-Azerbaijan stance, Armenia also tries not to worsen relations with Ukraine:

***"We should support Russia as a state, although as an individual I support Ukraine. These days only Russia does something [good-Ed.] for us."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

During almost all discussions, the idea was expressed that during Russia's war in Ukraine, together with the increase in the price of real estate and apartment rent in Armenia, the market and tourism became active, which was seen as a favorable factor for Armenia's economy:

***"Russian citizens have come to Armenia more than Ukrainian citizens. They opened so many new organizations, they pay taxes, and they spend so much. I, as a hotel employee, see that the traffic has grown this year. Last year the hotel was on the verge of closing, and now that the war has started, until recently we have not had a day when there would be a free room. So much money comes in, and if the government uses it wisely, it can cover a very large part of the foreign debt."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

### *The course of the war and possible developments*

In all focus group discussions, Russia's war in Ukraine was evaluated from the perspectives of the military-economic potential of Russia and Ukraine, the possibility of EU and NATO intervention, and the possibility of the Third World War.

The views can be divided into four groups. The representatives of the first group discussed the issue of Russia's military actions, noting their duration, losses, and the low effectiveness of the Russian military not foreseen at the beginning, which, according to the young people, could be due to the overestimation of the capabilities of Russian armed forces, and the underestimation of the Ukrainian potential, the significant importance of the support provided to Ukraine by Western allies, as well as by the inadequate calculation by Russia's ruling elite of their own capabilities.

***"A simple truth I know is that the strong are not being attacked. If you don't want war to happen, you must be so powerful and represent something out of yourself, so that others fear attacking you. Likewise, if it was possible to balance the Russian-Ukrainian war through negotiation, there would be no war if Ukraine had a very powerful army or was a very powerful state, and Russia was afraid of it. Apparently, the Russians did not expect such a counterattack. I am deeply convinced that Putin was given false information about the Ukrainian army and their readiness, and the Russians thought that they would enter in a couple of days, do their job, and this topic would be closed, while it has been going on for several months."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

The second set of opinions of the participants refers to the fact that the war was the personal error by Russian president Vladimir Putin, and if he prevented it on time or didn't start it, but used other possible means, the war could have been avoided.

***"The conflict could have certainly been avoided, but only if there was a president with a different mindset instead of Putin. I mean, if that president was more democratic and didn't act like an aggressor."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

The third group of opinions concerns the actions of the Ukrainian president Zelensky, which, according to the opinions of young people, together with the Western support ignited Russia's actions, and provoked them:

***"On the one hand, Ukraine didn't act properly either, knowing that Russia has a bad relationship with the US, and elected a former comedian as prime minister, who lost control of the situation and did whatever he wanted. On the other hand, Russia is also to blame, because it openly created this situation, although the US also understood it well and used its resources in Ukraine, and Ukraine agreed to it. Ukraine was more to blame."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

***"In general, Russia also makes statements against NATO, and if Sweden and Finland enter the "borders" of the USA, so to speak, then these "borders" with Russia will increase, and the probability that there will be clashes is not small."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

The fourth group of opinions concerns the inevitability of Russia's war in Ukraine. According to this position, this is a part of a global conflict, a manifestation, and is connected with another division of the world into spheres of influence, the emergence of new forces in the international arena attempts to influence the weak states and competition amongst them.

***"I think if this war has been avoided, the clash would have happened at a different place a few years later, it would have been inevitable. I look at this from the perspective of Russia-USA conflict, I still give very little importance to Ukraine. In my opinion, hadn't been Ukraine the point of the clash, it would have been a matter of years to decide where these forces would clash."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

According to the young people, the probability of a Third World War is lower than the ongoing regional wars between Russia and the West in the "third world" (Ukraine, South Caucasus, and the Middle East).

### ***Armenia's friends and enemies in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine***

In almost all group discussions, Yerevan-resident youth mentioned Armenia as having no friendly states and many enemies. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Israel, and Pakistan were mentioned as enemy countries:

***"Israel and Pakistan are among the enemies because they are supporting Turkey."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

France and Iran were mentioned among the few friendly states, over which there were almost no disagreements. France is considered Armenia's traditional friendly state, which, according to the opinion of the young people, actively supports Armenia today as well, including in the Karabakh conflict. These days, Iran has taken a more unequivocally anti-Turkish and anti-Azerbaijani position, which contributes to the protection of Armenia's interests. The role of Western countries, including the USA, in regional issues derives exclusively from the interests of the USA, and the support expressed to Armenia is more of a lip-service. This is also how young people also explain the visit of the former speaker of the House of Representatives of the US Congress, Nancy Pelosi, to Armenia:



*"At the moment, only Iran is a true ally, because it is only in Iran's interest that Armenia does not become a part of Russia, and especially, of Turkey. On the other hand, I don't equate our war with the Russia-Ukraine war, because if I look at it from Russia's perspective, it is normal, because it's like if Karabakh had a separate president now and was separated, but it's still Armenia, and as if Karabakh now announced, saying, "Armenia, I don't want to help you, I am now going to help the Turks."*

*Female, 26-35 group, Armenia*

*"De jure we have allies, there are treaties, but de facto we don't. I consider Nancy Pelosi's visit [to Armenia-Ed.] as an act against Russia."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

In this sense, some of the participants, comparing Western countries' and Russia's role in Armenia's security issues, prefer Russia:

*"Why do I emphasize the role of Russia, not liking them that much? So many times during the war it became clear that there was no response to the calls of different countries: the US, France, etc., but just as Russia urged them [Azerbaijan-Ed.] not to shoot, it happened immediately."*

*Male, 26-35 group, Yerevan*

*"If, for example, I had to choose between the US and Russia, I would definitely be in favor of Russia."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

The role of Russia as Armenia's ally is not certain in young people's perceptions and is being strongly criticized. Despite Russia's war in Ukraine being the main subject of the discussions, criticism of Russia was mainly due to the provision of improper support to Armenia, pursuing its own interests, and, in young people's opinions, with the regular past and contemporary attempts at sacrificing Armenia. According to them, the relations with Russia can be called "forced relations".

*"Well, we should not forget that Russia is the largest supplier of everything to us, from food products and gas to other things. And it's also our ally, at least officially."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"For Russia, we are a Southern buffer, that's the extent of their alliance, that's why there is a base in Gyumri, etc."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"I definitely consider Russia to be main enemy, because I have recently entered the university, studied Armenian history and all our defeats I only connect with Russia, we are just a toy in its hands. It's obvious that our real enemies are Azerbaijan and Turkey."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

While Russia-Armenia relations are mostly described as rather friendly, according to all discussions Armenia has no grounds for friendly relations with Ukraine. Ukraine was not a friendly state during the Karabakh conflict and especially during and after the 2020 war, including arming Azerbaijan and providing diplomatic and information support. This was mentioned during all group discussions:

*"Ukraine was the first to congratulate Azerbaijan after our 44-day war."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"We should not forget that Ukraine was selling weapons to Azerbaijan, including phosphorus, which is banned for use during wars."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"4-5 years ago Ukraine was one of my favorite states, but I was disappointed when they helped Azerbaijan during the war. Well, they didn't care about our war. And when their war started, in the beginning, they were indifferent towards us, then they thought that as now it's happening to them, we have to sympathize. I was very disappointed by that."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

Despite the sentiments mentioned above, young people do not want to use that as a foundation for anti-Ukrainian stance in Russia's war in Ukraine. At the same time, they consider pro-Ukrainian slogans and certain attempts to support Ukraine in this war inappropriate:

*"I have never seen a relationship between us [Armenia and Ukraine-Ed.], and it's strange that we have become very Ukrainian-loving now. We have considered them the same Slavic nation. The change occurred after 2020 when it was said that Ukrainian phosphorus was used in the war, and our children died. Everyone said that Ukraine is protecting Azerbaijan, and one year later we suddenly forgot about the phosphorus, them helping Azerbaijan, and became peace-loving, kind teddy bears who think, "Oh no, the Ukrainian people are being massacred!"*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

### *Changes in Armenia as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine*

Young people participating in the discussions fear or express fears about a number of phenomena, including:

- Armenia's security situation, the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and other Armenian territories, and human casualties
- Armenia being divided by other states
- the threat of another war, but this time in the territory of Armenia
- uncertainty of the future
- possible influx of Turks
- losing the country
- emigration
- Third World War

*"I'm afraid that this tiny piece [of Armenia-Ed.] too, which was saved somehow, half of it will go to the Russians, and the other half to the Turks. After the loss of Artsakh, I thought I shouldn't be afraid of anything else, but turns out it was not the end. We are falling so fast, that in the end, only a core will remain, a province called "Russian Province", as it was back in the time, Yerevan province."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*



*"It frightens me that the role of Russia has significantly decreased in the region, and from the other side, Turkey's and Iran's appetites have increased. After the recent incidents, 140 hectares of our territory have been occupied, and Russia is not able to respond to it in any way. It's not the Russian-Turkish brotherhood, it's the fact that Russia is not in a good condition, and as a result, we are suffering, as its domain of influence."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

The negative impact of Russia's prolonged war in Ukraine on Armenia's security was manifested in the Karabakh conflict, including in 2020, with Armenia's defeat in the Karabakh War and the emergence of further security problems. Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine, and Moscow being sanctioned by Western countries, and then the military actions taking place in Ukraine did not allow Russia to provide proper support to Armenia.

*"It seems to me that Azerbaijan took advantage of the situation, saw that Russia is busy taking away territories from Ukraine, so they didn't miss the moment and invaded our borders."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"The more Russia is busy with Ukraine, the less it is involved in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which gives Azerbaijan the opportunity to unleash further attacks. Azerbaijan says, get the Russian army out of Artsakh, it doesn't want Russia to be present here and is against Russia providing help to Armenia."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

As a result of the issue discussions with Yerevan-resident youth, the following main phenomena, and changes were also brought out, which are connected with Russia's war in Ukraine, but are related to Armenia's internal situation:

- increase of real estate costs, and apartment rent
- development of hotel services
- increase in the volume of essential goods and food consumption, due to the large influx of Russian and then Ukrainian immigrants/tourists

All of this, according to young people, has both positive and negative manifestations. One of the positive manifestations is the increase in the income of certain groups of Armenians as a result of the above. Among the negative ones is the inaccessibility of renting apartments for locals, for which, according to the opinions voiced in the discussions, immigrants are often blamed, which, however, is wrong, because the rent is raised by the local people. It should be noted that during all focus group discussions, talking about the citizens of Russia and Ukraine who moved into Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine, the participating young people used the generalized, collective, stereotypical term "Russians".

*"I assess the Russians' arrival rather positively because they are more productive, they even have more knowledge in the IT sphere."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"Then they also brought money to Armenia, which is also a good thing. With their arrival, an increase in prices was recorded in the real estate market. If before those events I was going to buy a house with a certain budget, now I have to revise my budget up because the prices have increased significantly. The same is with rent, which has increased 5-6 times. Nowadays, if you want to rent an apartment, two rooms cost at least \$700, you could rent that for 100-150 thousand drams [\$2-300-Ed.] before."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"When they [Russians-Ed.] came, another bad trait of us, Armenians, also revealed itself - when they kicked people with families out of their rented apartments, threw them out, and left them on the street, just because a Russian has come and was ready to pay twice the price, especially when the people that came before them were from Artsakh and in very poor conditions."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

There is also a large emotional response in public perceptions to the co-existence of a significantly larger than usual number of collective "Russians" in the same physical and social space. This response was divided into two parts – positive and negative. The positive emotional response of the young people was connected with the collective "Russians" being esthetically pleasant and polite:

*"Yes, many Russians currently work in cafes, and delivery services and they serve very well."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"I think that Russians brought many things into our city, for example, increased demand for various professions. Then they started their companies, opened new cafes, they blog, and discovered such places through Instagram pages that we have never heard of. And those are very interesting, cultural sites, there are also museums in those lists. They even provide information about sites around Yerevan. Other than that, they contribute to the improvement of Russian language levels in Armenia, which in turn implies development both at the level of people and the country. I have made new friends. They curse a lot, it's true, but with time they will understand that it's different here and cursing is not accepted here. But as a girl who lived in Russia, I can say that they behave better here, more discreetly than in Russia."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

The negative responses of the young people about those who came to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine are connected with the newcomers' deviation from the rules of behavior acceptable in Armenia, with them breaking those rules. Emotional-nationalist opinions were also voiced, which could be attributed in the same way to the behavior of hundreds of thousands of Armenians who emigrated to Russia and Ukraine before the war, which, however, was not mentioned in the focus group discussions. Without distinguishing between Russians and Ukrainians, some young people who expressed negative opinions towards all of them spoke from the position of hosts, seeing the newcomers as dependents on them.

*"Russians in our streets get on my nerves. They walk on our streets and talk Russian, they are not going to integrate in any way, if there is no communication on a personal level, we are not going to receive anything from them. They are just showing off walking on our streets, and I don't know why they are getting on my nerves."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

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*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"They get on my nerves because they make themselves feel like they are at home. I walk with my child and see them in their shorts the size of underwear, and it's unpleasant to me. They don't respect my country's customs. For example, in our culture, there is no such thing as drinking beer in a park. Now we see them sitting on a bench, drinking beer, leaving the bottle, and leaving."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"I have seen a video where they went to Khor Virap [a cultural site outside Yerevan-Ed.] and behaved very badly. I can't say if they were Ukrainian or Russian."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

It should also be noted that the new culture brought to Armenia by those who immigrated during Russia's war in Ukraine creates an alternative perspective on reality, creating both interest and anxiety among Armenia's youth. In this sense, the following is an interesting example:

*"They brought change into the culture as well. Probably, all Armenians are already following the Telegram channel "Настя, эмо где?" (eng. "Nastya, where is that?"). That blogger is visiting different places, about which we, as residents, haven't known all these years. I have come across a couple of cultural sites through that channel. They have founded contemporary theaters; they are organizing performances, which are not suitable for Armenian society at all with their format and contents. Particularly, I went to the performance called "The Cherry Orchard", where the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war runs like a red line. They were trying to show everything through a girl's fate. During the live performance, a girl takes her clothes off and appears to the audience from a very close angle, and then they film us, our shocked faces during that scene, and in the background, you listen to 18+ sounds through headphones, etc. In a sense, I am afraid of that bad propaganda, because either we are not ready to approach that kind of art, or it is not art. On the other hand, I have noticed that since Russian girls are wearing revealing clothing, it promotes risky behavior among our girls."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

### *Armenia's security, interests, and necessary position in the conditions of Russia's war in Ukraine*

One of the main subjects of the focus group discussions was Armenia's necessary position regarding Russia's war in Ukraine. According to young people, it is neutral.

*"Our official position is that we are like-minded with Russia, but we also don't treat Ukraine that bad, we are neutral."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

*"Our official position is as neutral as possible. They show a bit that they are pro-Russian, but still are as neutral as possible."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*

At the same time, Armenia shouldn't be wary of a possible Russia defeat, because that might strengthen the positions of other states in the region, including Turkey and Azerbaijan, with their

anti-Armenian policies.

***"How ready are we to have a neighbor like Turkey in the region without a strong Russia?"***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

***"Since the Russian troops are guarding our borders, it wouldn't be wise to go against it."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

***"In my opinion, Ukraine is more right in this conflict, but if Russia won't stand at our side, we will face bigger problems, that's why we must support Russia, as much as they are wrong."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

Russia's defeat in its war in Ukraine, according to young people, could be situational, but a complete defeat is hard to predict.

***"If Ukraine wins, it means that the US wins, and Russia's influence will weaken to some extent. But it's too powerful to go down, even if these sanctions are not affecting it. Even Europe is weakening itself to some extent by closing and moving out many businesses. But Russia is able to deal with it in such a way that they won't have a large-scale effect on it. No matter how much Russia weakens, its influence will remain in the region anyway."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

***"If Russia loses, in my opinion, its reputation as a serious superpower with a strong army will suffer in the world and in the region. It will lead to the appetite and the programmed aggression of Azerbaijan toward Armenia increasing because there will be nothing to restrain them. I think if Russia loses, we, Armenians, will have much harder consequences."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

According to young people's opinions, it's difficult to draw parallels between Russia's war in Ukraine and the Karabakh conflict. Some tried to see a similarity between Armenia and Ukraine fighting in a war to defend their respective territories, some denied this similarity, because, in their opinion, no one supported Armenia during the 2020 war, while Ukraine is supported by all Western countries.

***"If we look at it more simply, one side is fighting to keep its homeland (Ukraine), and the second side is fighting to occupy the other's homeland. The same is in our case, we fight to keep our historical lands, our sovereignty, and Azerbaijan fights to occupy more lands or their imaginary lands."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

In addition, the difference between the statuses of Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh was mentioned. If Ukraine is defending its territorial integrity, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were defending their right to self-determination. In this sense, the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is more similar to the regions that want to leave Ukraine and join Russia.

***"From the perspective of international law, Ukraine is a state with a separate government with its own borders, and Artsakh as a state with its borders is not internationally recognized. It's just that it's Armenia and there is an issue of self-determination, and it was different from Ukraine's fight."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

## *Young people's forecasts about the future*

Various forecasts—ranging from pessimistic to optimistic—were made about the future in the focus group discussions. It can be observed that pessimistic forecasts are the majority and are defined by both regional political processes and Armenia's internal political situation, while the optimistic ones were few and not always substantiated:

***"Armenia will become a luxurious country, like Monaco. They will pass through Armenia from all over the world. Armenia will be a rich country."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

***"Armenia's condition will become very good in a couple of years. Not that it's bad now, but only if the war didn't happen, it would have been better. At the moment Armenia has normal police, a stable economy, we have mines, water, and other capabilities, we have good roads, we have patrol."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

Pessimistic forecasts refer first to the unresolved Karabakh conflict as well as to Azerbaijan and Turkey preparing military operations against Armenia; the escalation of conflicts in the region, and only then to Russia's war in Ukraine. These are all manifested by the discussions of the young about their insecurity, fears, and uncertainty of their personal lives:

***"You can't be sure, that you are safe in your own country. You can't be sure, that if you build a house, or buy a house, it will be there in a couple of days, that another war won't start. It's a matter of seconds before Armenia could implode and cease to exist. It's mainly connected with other countries. Armenia's current government is not powerful, the general decisions about its future depend on other countries' interests, it's not sovereign."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan***

***"Honestly, I don't see a future for Armenia, which is very painful to me. We wake up every day, watch the news, we see that someone was wounded, or killed, and it's constant."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

Young people noted the situation caused by the consequences of the 2020 war, which is dangerous for the future of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In this context, talks and plans to end blockades (by Azerbaijan and Turkey) instill more concerns than hope:

***"I don't see a good future. If they provide the corridor, we will become like Syria's north, meaning there will be so many acts of terrorism, that people will voluntarily leave the area through which the road passes. But it's the worst-case scenario."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan***

The pessimistic forecasts of young people towards the future are also related to the internal political situation of Armenia, including the restriction of rights and freedoms, internal political threats to democracy, and widespread hostility and hatred in the society, which, in their opinion could lead to defeats and losses on the foreign policy front:

*"For me, Armenia is not a democratic country, it will never become one. Authoritarianism remains, and we might gradually turn become totalitarian, because more and more laws are passed and I don't think such a thing happens in a democratic state. The insult [on insulting public figures-Ed.], for example. Or, another example, a number of structures attached to the Prime Minister's Office are going to be created, such as the National Guard, which will be a power structure and will protect his individual, personal, and physical existence. In addition, the state system is slowly collapsing, and when they appoint every random person to be a chief of the general staff or don't appoint one for half a year, or some historian becomes the Minister of Defense, or when a person unrelated to that field becomes the head of the field."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"It seems to me that if this government remains in power, our lands will decrease again in a year."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Yerevan*

*"If the majority of our nation votes for the same government again, it won't achieve anything good."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Yerevan*



## Results of focus group discussions with province-resident youth

The analysis of the focus group discussions' results with the province-resident youth is presented according to the subgroups of residents of the provincial cities and villages, which allowed us to compare the perceptions of the provincial urban and rural residents within these subgroups, as well as with each other. In addition, the perceptions of urban and rural residents of the province were also compared according to the principle of being close to the border and far from the border with Azerbaijan and Turkey considered to be threats for Armenian security, which could impact the security perceptions, fears as well as the situation on the ground of the residents. The comparison showed not only minor specific differences in the views of urban-resident and rural-resident youth but also significant similarities with the opinions of Yerevan-resident youth on some issues. The similarity of the opinions of young people living in cities and villages of Armenia's provinces is because of the universal impact of key events on residents through Armenia. As a result of the "Velvet Revolution" in 2018, the management personnel of both central and local self-governing bodies changed, and in 2020, residents of all provinces of the Republic of Armenia participated in the Karabakh War (first of all, conscripted youth), whose relatives and friends were directly or indirectly involved in the course of the war and continue to be impacted by its consequences. The perceptions of the resident of cities and villages of Armenia's provinces more or less differ on issues concerning those who moved to Armenia during the 2022 Russian war in Ukraine. Since residents of Yerevan and certain other urban residents of Armenia have directly dealt with newcomers, their opinions are based on their first-hand experience with them. On the other hand, the opinions of residents of some provincial cities and villages is based on second-hand information from their relatives living in Yerevan and other urban areas, about the "Russians" (generalized, stereotypical and most commonly used term) who moved to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine. In the analysis, in case of particular differences in the views of urban and rural residents, they will be highlighted and also distinguished through quotes from the opinions of young people.

### *Changes registered in Armenia during the recent years, processes and trends*

Speaking about recent years, young people distinguish among three periods: before the 2018 "Velvet revolution"; after the "Velvet revolution" until 2020 Karabakh War; and since the 2020 Karabakh war.

In almost all group discussions the participants have described the 2018 "Velvet revolution" as a unique "liberation". They started living more freely, business relations and investments in new projects no longer depended on the state regime, clans, separately ruling individuals' interests, influence, and restrictions.

***"After the revolution, the people's freedom was very obviously felt here, it was very noticeable. At the time, not every person had the right to build something, there were restrictions, and people were living in an atmosphere of fear. I'm not talking about security, that moment passed after 2018. Extensive construction began in Syunik, especially in Goris. To our surprise, people were walking in the city until 10 in the evening, which was not accepted in the past. The freedom among the people was greatly noticeable. This was obvious in the first year."***

***Female, 18-35 age group, Goris***

***"Our people probably loved each other twice – after the victory in the 90's war, and then in 2018, when the people allegedly or actually changed something. I have seen people smiling those days, but not anymore since."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri***

In one of the group discussions, the reforms implemented in the field of school education were also mentioned, which the participants evaluated positively:

***"The only positive change – the latest teacher certification procedure is really admirable to me because the educational system and school are the basis on which our children should receive education and become useful to our society and state. I think that this initiative, which now has a voluntary nature, should be made mandatory. It is seen very positively, especially by the parents."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni***

At the same time, during another group discussion, the reforms of the education system were considered a threat to national values. At a group discussion in Vayk region, participants said that educational programs are becoming "more democratic". For example, sex education is being included in school curricula, it is planned to include 18+ literature in educational institutions in the coming years, the teaching hours of the Armenian language are being reduced and universities are growing in enrollment numbers. Consequently, the educational system is on track for complete destruction. (26-35 age group, Vayk).

According to province- resident youth, the situation worsened as a result of internal and external political processes: conflict, security threats, and ineffective decision-making. After 2018, Armenia was aspiring to be more democratic. In the first year after the "Velvet Revolution", "some democracy was observed", but after a year the process became anti-democratic. Disappointment in the modus operandi and approaches of the post-revolutionary authorities is noticeable among young people. The rural youth particularly points out the lack of knowledge and professional approaches in the field of post-revolutionary management:

***"For example, before the 2018 government change, we were just saying that the current government wasn't good, and a new government should be formed. I, in particular, was on duty, but if I was here, I would have joined the protests, because I hadn't deeply analyzed it. But now I understand, that every civilian should know their history, know what is happening, analyze and only then make a decision. Today's authorities make things worse."***

***Male, 18-35 age group, Getashen vil.***

Talking about the 2020 Karabakh War and its severe consequences, using personal and family examples was characterized the youth in both border areas as well as those living in other provinces in Armenia. The war irreversibly changed their lives, and it affected their perspective on other issues.

***"And the 44-day war added up to the latest events in our country, which was devastating from the psychological point of view. Every time when I was hearing those names and the music on the TV, I deeply felt that it was really affecting me, it would put me into a severe emotional and psychological state. Also, that overstressed psychological state would lead people to inactivity, and negligence, and people would start to look at life in a different way."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni***

***"I started to perceive this war probably starting from January 2021 when I realized the losses around me and the people who have lost family members, who are really dear to me."***

***Female, 18-35 age group, Hrazdan***

The province-resident youth continue to relive the consequences and the images of the war. This is especially true for the residents of the border provinces who live in constant anxiety. Speaking about their feelings, rough memories, and negative expectations, the residents of the provinces also note that people in Yerevan do not feel or perceive everything like they do. Accordingly, the actions of the Armenian government especially in terms of the protection of the border provinces, are not well-addressed:



*"They [Yerevan residents-Ed.] haven't seen it. We have particularly felt it on ourselves, that our house could be destroyed in a moment and we could lose everything, just like it happened in the 2020 war, when people lost their businesses, their income, and their only way to earn a living."*  
Female, 18-25 age group, Goris

*"When the person sitting at the Cascade in Yerevan says, 'What can I do? Vayots Dzor and Syunik are far from me.' They are completely wrong, there is no such thing."*  
Female, 26-35 age group, Vayk

*"Especially us and the people who have heard the sound of drones on the day of September 12 (which fell in Martuni) – that sound only is enough for you to give up everything and dream that you never have to hear it again."*  
Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni

It is worth mentioning that while on domestic political issues, Armenian society was divided into camps, fighting and impeding each other, in everyday life, they expressed important human qualities, such as mutual support, mutual attention, care, and unity. Since it was particularly province-resident respondents who talked about the above-mentioned qualities, those qualities could be attributed more to the residents of the provinces rather than those in the capital.

*"During the shootings, if someone had a safe basement, many people would go and stay at that basement for the night. But there was less contact during COVID – for example, we haven't talked to our neighbors for almost two years. But during the war it was them who were calling us, asking how the situation was, etc. That is, the experience showed that we became close again during those periods. I'm not saying it goes on the same way, but those days it was like that."*  
Female, 18-35 age group, Goris

*"I had little contact with my relatives, but after the war, I want to know more about how they are doing, probably because before I wasn't thinking that you could lose your brother or other close person. And when they are on the frontline, you understand that they are more important to you, you have become more sympathetic to everyone."*  
Female, 18-35 age group, Goris

*"After the war, all of us have started to value our time, we are afraid of losing it. That's why it leaves good things too so that we can at least value and respect ourselves and the feelings of others."*  
Female, 18-35 age group, Hrazdan

The post-war situation, especially among the province-resident youth, has created feelings of depression, uncertainty towards the future, and pointlessness of everything, including learning, which makes young people demotivated:

*"People don't know now. They think, is doing something worth it? Should we create something here? Because of this state of indifference people seem to be zombified – they go to work, go back home, eat, sleep and then go to work again... Our society is in a very indifferent state at the moment, it's like that almost everywhere."*  
Female, 18-25 age group, Goris

*"We do not have more prospective plans connected with this place, because we don't know if we will be here tomorrow, or not. Or what will happen in general."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

*"There was an idea, I read it a long time ago. It said, people cannot have permanent dreams if they live in a conflict zone, so the word "dream" has become a dream for me. When you have personal dreams, after the war, thinking about that type of thing makes you kind of feel guilty, that you want something for yourself, but you feel kind of guilty that you want something for yourself."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

Among some of the young people, in all discussions, a lack of long-term planning was observed: it is impossible to make plans over a few months, because "everything is in ruins". This, in turn, "breaks" people; they no longer know whether it is worth spending money on, for example, renovating a house, or saving that money because they may need it if they have to flee the country. It is painfully noted that after some time, people find themselves adapting to the existing reality and seem to live without a purpose. People and human life, which were valuable, have become worthless, and casualties have become a common phenomenon.

*"People's mindsets have changed; they think in a different way. After the war, people seem to be tired of everything. I lost my brother during the 44-day war and I'm proud of what he did, and I'm sad that he is not by my side now. There is pain, but the way I see it, I talk with my mom, and she says, "Well, we should be grateful that we have woken up today, these days it's possible we go to sleep and never wake up."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni*

*"In the past when we were wishing something to a person, we used such words as, health, happiness – there was no meaning in them, they were regular words you used, but now when you say them, you sincerely wish that person health, because these days nobody is healthy, starting from our children."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Alashkert vil.*

The sense of uncertainty, indifference, and disorientation of the village-residents towards the future is manifested in giving decreasing importance to their main occupation, farming, with trends in changing practices and thereby, changing lifestyles.

*"In the past, for example, people would take land and cultivate it. But now they are searching for easier ways – leaving to work in Russia or finding a small job in the city, meaning, a job that is not related to farming. The main reason that brought it was the war – people understood that they are already losing the land, and so they don't want to build anything on it. We think, will this land be ours after a certain amount of time, or not?"*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

The indifference and apathy, as a result of losing the war, losses, and internal tension, are manifested not only in politics but also in terms of not reacting, ignoring, or even accepting the negative phenomena that occur in everyday life:

*"Other habits have become accepted in the society. Drugs, for example. In the past, they would say, "Oh, he is smoking!" And now it's, "Well, he smokes, that's ok."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Ijevan*

Young people's opinions were divided into two: one group is still trying to sort out some health-related and financial issues as soon as possible and have children to contribute to the population growth, while the other group considers it pointless, in particular, noting the lack of security of the army and the problems there along with the issue of being surrounded by enemies, which are the main reasons to worry about their children's future.

*"Now everything has changed. We should produce more offspring, raise our children the way we believe an Armenian should be, we should take care of their social needs, and give worthy children to our country. Now when you see the situation that we are in, it would be shameful to leave everything and go."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

Emigration is particularly noticeable in rural communities:

*"People are closing their doors and leaving. Armenia's population is decreasing on a daily basis."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

According to the province-resident young people, one of the characteristic processes taking place in Armenia in recent years is a cultural revolution, pro-Europeanism, as a result of which some national values, habits, and customs are disappearing. Armenia is gradually trying to become more like "other countries". According to young people, this trend has always existed, but in recent years it has become even more accentuated. This change is especially characteristic of the post-revolutionary period. In the opinions of the province-resident young people, pro-Europeanism has brought indifference, inattention, and selfishness toward the public interest. This opinion is characteristic of both village and city residents.

*"If in the past people cared about the life of others, now they only care about their own. There is indifference, and selfish behavior – myself, in my house, with my own problems to take care of, especially after COVID. Something could happen at your neighbor's house, and you won't even know what happened."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri*

*"Europe and the US always had and now do have tendencies of destroying national values, starting from homosexuality. Besides, the strong will never choose the side of the weak, it always strives for the strong."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri*

In addition, according to young people, the new value system created along with Europeanization, including liberal values, was misused in the Armenian context, perceived, and used in a destructive way. In particular, freedom of speech turned into irresponsible actions, and actions against each other:

*"Our people's legal awareness is at such a low level that they confuse freedom with anarchy."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni*

*"In Armenian reality, it turned more into anarchy than into freedom of speech. As much as we aspire to act according to the European way of thinking, European law, it's the same anyway, it does not exist in our roots. And an Armenian can never think and act like a European. This means that the European approaches are not that realistic for us."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

One undesirable change taking place at the level of values is the demonstrative activeness and prevalence of sexual minorities, which, according to the province-resident youth, contradicts both the national way of life and moral values, as well as affects the unity and health of the society, which are very important, especially in the conditions of external threats:

***"I'm not saying, "Well done for being a homosexual!" If the person is not bothering, harming me, is not stealing or killing – I will be indifferent towards them."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni***

Despite the critical rather than optimistic sentiments of the province-residents towards Europeanization, as well as talking about the preservation of national values and traditions, the need to change and revise the adopted worldview, approaches, and self-esteem was also mentioned, which is due to the inconsistency between words and reality, especially in the conditions of the last war:

***"We were not what we have been told. We need to change our values, in order to start everything from zero. Until the war, we've been fed with the thoughts that we are the strongest in the region, and our enemy is a sheep, but after the war, we got into that situation."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

The Covid-19 pandemic was also one of the most important phenomena of the mentioned period, which, according to young people, tested the interpersonal relationships of people in Armenia. During the pandemic, the requirement to maintain social distance, not having direct contact with each other for a long time, divided people from each other and in a sense separated them:

***"For example, there is no Covid now, but there are things that are not the same anymore. The everyday neighbor-to-neighbor, relative-to-relative talks, for example, the social communication has stopped."***

***Female, 18-35 age group, Goris***

After the pandemic, according to young people, health problems appeared, which together with the 2020 war brought instability, a tense atmosphere, and internal anxiety. People are now stressed, depressed, miserable, and in a down mood, which interferes with the normal course of life. As a result, some people try to find a safe place for themselves, while others try to "do something for the motherland, no matter what." The positive impact of the war is that life is considered more precious today, it is important to use every second now. In general, according to young people, not only in Armenia but globally, the elimination of human feelings, "humanity" is noticeable: the world is prone to indifference. It is important to preserve the "global culture" of human treatment and human communication, as well as the preservation of national values. In addition, as mentioned, "the main dream of everyone is peace".

### ***Preferred means of receiving information about public events***

It is interesting to observe that in terms of attitudes and preferences towards sources of information, the opinions of the province resident young people (including those living in villages) did not differ from those living in Yerevan. A preference for online information over traditional media consumption was recorded, as well as a general low trust in any official or unofficial information.

Among the sources of information, young people have mentioned social networks, online media, and channels: Telegram, News.am, Azatutyun radio station, Tert.am, Civilnet, Aurora Media, official Ministry pages, H1 [State TV channel-Ed.] (digital platform), Infocom Telegram channel, Hetq, Zone Positive website, Zartonq Media, Politic.am, 168.am, opinions of various analysts (on

YouTube), Facebook, Twitter. Of the online sources, almost all group participants mentioned Telegram channels, which have recently become preferable over receiving news through Facebook. Facebook is considered a platform for the active dissemination of fake news.

A source of information for young people is also interpersonal communication with people who have authority in their circles or have had first hand experiences in the locations where some of the events took place and are more objective. However, even in this case, young people mentioned the possibility of any source of information being unreliable.

***"I think these days we do not trust any information 100%. Particularly I live in Goris in this military situation, and people would come and tell me that in this or that village, the situation is really bad, all the houses have been shelled, etc... And three days later I pass through that village and nothing has happened there. So, there is artificially fueled panic for no reason."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

***"During the war, you read one thing on the news, and your relatives tell you entirely different things. You read on the news that there is no shooting, but when you talk to the relatives, you find out that there is. And you start to not trust what you read. You just hear them to be aware."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

***"We follow the news on TV, but all channels have some kind of political orientation. I don't know a channel that's particularly unbiased. The same is with, what is called, media websites. I think the only option for me is the Telegram channels."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Armavir***

Comparing the official and unofficial information, some of the participants in the discussions indicated that they trust the official information, while others did not consider it reliable. In particular, after the 2020 war, the official information of the RA Ministry of Defense and other state TV channels became less reliable than before, because, according to young people, it did not correspond to reality. At the same time, it was noted that if the entire picture of the war had been presented on official channels, it would have created panic in society:

***"After 2020 there is a distrust regarding the border situation because we had what we had, but you would never be able to learn about it from an official media or from any other news page, or from a newspaper."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Ijevan***

***"We are approaching it adequately because if everything was absolutely accurate, there would be panic and chaos, and the situation in the country would be even worse."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

Distrust in local information sources makes the youth follow foreign including Azerbaijani media.<sup>5</sup> Young people who do so are aware of its dangers.

***"I admit that checking the Azerbaijani media makes me quite stressed psychologically, however, I keep checking them because the articles they post are closer to reality."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

Using Azerbaijani information sources to get an idea of the events taking place in Armenia

<sup>5</sup> For propaganda purposes, some Azerbaijani news websites and online mass media are being broadcasted in languages understandable to Armenians, in Russian, and even in Armenian (ed. note)

shows the low level of public trust in Armenian mass media and other sources of information, which is one of the threats to the information security of Armenia.

Being exposed to a variety of information sources, constantly using them, and at the same time not trusting most of them, young people also try not to follow the news too much, because negative information is constantly heard: “war, casualties”, the psychological pressure is rising.

### *The dynamics of the Russia’s war in Ukraine in the perceptions of province-resident Armenian youth*

#### *Conflict reasons*

Discussing the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and especially the reasons for Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine, young people residing in cities in Armenia’s provinces mentioned the following reasons:

- Russia’s desire to strengthen its borders, returning part of the past Soviet Republics under its influence
- Russia’s attempt to stop NATO expansion, including Western policy to include Ukraine in anti-Russian activity
- Russia’s response to threats (NATO’s fleet approaching Russian borders, US laboratories being created in Ukraine and covert activities were mentioned)
- Ukraine’s pro-European policy
- the personal provocation factor of Ukraine’s president
- the attempts by Russian president Putin to revive Russia’s global heavyweight role and importance
- Putin’s “demented” ambitions

The dynamic of focus-group discussions demonstrated individualized and systematic approaches to explaining the reasons for Russia’s war in Ukraine. Individualized explanations emphasized the roles of Russian president Putin and Ukrainian president Zelensky. During discussions, there were attempts to both justify and criticize, and disparage both leaders. While in the case of Russia Putin’s coordinated plans of a strategic nature were being mentioned (restoration of the Soviet Union, prevention of NATO’s future expansion, strengthening the domain of influence etc.), Zelensky’s actions are defined by anti-Russian and pro-Western sentiments.

***“The war was started by Russia, but the reason was Ukraine’s, especially Zelensky’s orientation towards the West, the desire to become a NATO member, his statements. In that context, Russia’s actions as a superpower are logical.”***

***Female, 18-25 group, Hrazdan***

***“In my opinion, everything comes from the president, I believe Zelensky is planted and works for the West on purpose, if there was someone more pro-Russian in his stead, I believe it wouldn’t have got to this.”***

***Male, 18-35 age group, Vayk***

In one of the group discussions the conflict between Russia and Ukraine was compared to the separation between North and South Korea, the same nation, but freedom on one side and an atmosphere of fear on the other. In a different discussion, the emphasis on the Russians and Ukrainians being one nation in two states was compared to Armenians in Armenia and in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russia’s war in Ukraine was seen as a result of an artificially created separation.



*"The motivation of the Ukrainian population, their participation in the draft and Russia, where thousands deserted, were even convicted. People strive for freedom of speech, life, thought, and rights. Same thing with North and South Korea."*

*Male, 26-35 group, Ijevan*

*"As if Armenians and Karabakhis had a conflict, same thing there."*

*Female, 18-25 group, Hrazdan*

*"Just as Armenians pay the blood price holding their ground, the same way there, I think, Ukrainians hold theirs."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Alashkert vil.*

One abovementioned explanations stood out, explaining that this conflict is between Russia and Western powers, while Ukraine's territory is simply a battlefield. That explanation was the most widespread.

*"Russia was feeling that its borders are being approached, and attempted to strike preemptively, rather than waiting for it to get to its border and only waking up then."*

*Female, 18-25 group, Goris*

*"When we say that there is a third side, Turkey, and Azerbaijan are small figures, compared to the USA-Russia conflict we have here, this isn't even NATO-Russia, it's USA vs Russia, and there is a third country hidden here: China, which strives to enter Europe by any means, while USA isn't interested in Europe being independent, USA needs a Europe that depends on it."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

#### *Direct and indirect participants of the conflict*

Russia on one side and Ukraine on the other were obviously mentioned as the direct participants of the conflict. The latter is supported by NATO states (USA, United Kingdom, Poland, and Germany) while France still attempts at taking as neutral a stance as possible. It was also frequently mentioned in group discussions that NATO, the EU, and the United Kingdom are the direct participants of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict while the conflict is taking place in a USA vs Russia, West vs East format, in Ukrainian and other territories.

While the Western factor in Russia's war in Ukraine, according to young people is the most active and the most important one (both positively and negatively), the most active participants on NATO's side are the USA and the United Kingdom, the most passive is the European Union. According to young people's perception, the EU is controlled by US and UK's political agenda, while also suffering from Russia's war in Ukraine and also having a hard time overcoming its own problems.

*"They (Ukraine) want to break free from Russia. There is such sentiment in Armenia, to reject Russia, get into Europe, all warm and fancy... But as we can see Europe isn't even warm. Winter is coming soon, and Europe's situation will..."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vayk*

*"As of right now Europe doesn't have gas because they have applied sanctions to Russia, while Russia was the main gas supplier to Europe. This means that the people will now have to face reality: how to stay warm during winter?"*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

Turkey is believed to be an indirect side to Russia's war in Ukraine, standing at Russia's side. An opinion was sounded that Ukraine's victory can be advantageous for Turkey in the context of implementing its pan-Turkism (pan-Turanism) plans.

***"If Ukraine wins this war, for example, takes some territories from Russia, Turkey will benefit from that, to realize its plan (pan-Turkism)."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

***"Azerbaijan is the child of Turkey. What Turkey does, Azerbaijan does the same."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Hrazdan***

***"Azerbaijan and Turkey will benefit from Ukraine's victory, Russia is, in quotes, on Armenia's side, and when Russia grows weak, Azerbaijan and Turkey will be able to apply force on Armenia, but if it's the opposite, and Russia wins, Russia may become the dominant country."***

***Male, 18-35 age group, Vayk***

It is also mentioned that the issue of Crimea is more important for Turkey, as it belonged to Turkey at some point. Turkey desires for Crimea to join Ukraine (it's mentioned that it's the goal Turkey pursues by helping the Ukrainian side with weapons) and if Crimea joins Ukraine, then Turkey will have open access to Crimea, for example, deploying Turkish peacekeepers in and strengthening Turkish strategic presence in the peninsula.

According to the opinion of the majority of province-resident youth, it was impossible to avoid Russia's war in Ukraine, just like the Karabakh War was impossible to avoid, this is where global interests collide. At the same time, it was possible to avoid the 2022 Russia's war in Ukraine if the leaders of Russia and Ukraine would compromise, while, according to some young people, Russia would continue to cooperate with the EU and the USA.

Armenia's position on Russia's war in Ukraine is "as neutral as possible, and must be neutral". According to young people Russia remains Armenia's ally, which, according to the presented opinions, is a mostly objectively defined reality, which is not dependent on Armenians' desires.

***"It can be said that Armenia's whole economy is in Russia's hand, and a very complicated process must be done if we want to strive towards the USA."***

***Male, 18-35 age group, Goris***

***"Between two evils, Russia is better."***

***Female, 18-35 age group, Gyumri***

### ***The course of the war and possible developments***

Young people believe that Russia's war in Ukraine will last for a while, probably in a different format, because, according to the majority opinion, it is a global conflict between Russia, the West (primarily the USA) and other countries for spheres of influence.

***"For me, it's a very anxious situation brewing, as Russia is essentially facing defeat in Ukraine, and Russia doesn't like defeats, it has nuclear weapons that it can use against Europe and Ukraine. And Russia's interest is to keep its domain of influence and to have as much influence as possible"***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor***

***"I feel that Russia is a country that won't be stopped by anyone."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Goris***



During the discussions, the abrupt decline in trust towards international security organizations was obvious.

*"If in the past we would say that the UN must defend human rights, we believed that, we saw that it's not being done in practice, I simply don't trust anymore. They exist only for themselves, not for the people."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri*

According to young people, NATO or the CSTO will not participate directly in the war. NATO will not participate because that organization is already indirectly participating on Ukraine's side, and the CSTO cannot participate, because "it has expired as an institution a long time ago" (Female, 18-35 age group, Gyumri).

As for the possibility of a Third World War, according to the majority of the youths' opinion, it has already started and is ongoing in various regions of the world, on military, economic and informational levels. They also believe that the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons by Russia would be higher if Russia begins to lose the conventional war.

*"We are permanently used to believing that a World War is wide scale, but why are we ignoring that the Third World War is already happening, there are hybrid wars, and I believe that this war will not bring to involvement, but rather institutional decay."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

*"What else the Third World War is supposed to be like? There is war all around."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Alashkert vil.*

*"If Russia feels that it's losing the struggle against Ukraine, while as of right now it's fighting not just against Ukraine, but against the whole world, therefore if Russia starts to lose in the war with Ukraine, it won't lose, it will use nuclear weapons."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

### *Armenia's friends and enemies in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine*

In all discussions with the youth residing in urban provinces the opinion that "Armenia has no allies" was underlined. This opinion was based on the notion that no state is ready to significantly assist Armenia, matching their approach and actions to Armenian interests. Any pro-Armenia policy conducted by another state is motivated by that country's self-interest.

*"Because despite the fact that we're a small country, we have a great significance for these large countries, Iran, USA, Russia, Turkey, everyone wants to have influence here. Everyone has the same desire, their own state's interests, because we know that there are no friends etc. there is simply interest".*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

*"First of all, we need to be allies, the country mustn't be weak internally in governance, financial, national and principal aspects."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri*

Azerbaijan and Turkey were mentioned in the first place as Armenia's enemies, followed by their ally Pakistan, and Israel, which supported Azerbaijan before the 2020 Karabakh War, supplying weapons and military technology and provided diplomatic support during the war. In some discussions

it was mentioned that Georgia is not being friendly towards Armenia too, viewing Armenia as an ally of its enemy, Russia, while being significantly economically dependent on Turkey. Georgia was recently criticized, especially for closing the land border with Armenia during the 2020 Karabakh War.

*"Well, if your only friendly state can close something for you during wartime, for me they automatically start to become a state that can betray you first, rather than, let's say, an enemy."*  
Female, 18-25 age group, Armavir

*"Georgia is an enemy by its silence, simply staying out of everything, and this has a centuries-long history."*  
Female, 26-35 age group, Vayk

Despite the mismatch between the actions of the countries friendly to Armenia and young people's expectations, Russia, France, Iran, and, in some cases, Greece (as an enemy of Turkey) were mentioned as friendly states. It is also interesting that while in the opinions of Yerevan youth Russia, despite its flaws, mistakes, and criticism towards it, was presented as the main ally, province-resident youth mentioned Russia at the end of the list of countries friendly to Armenia. It can be presumed that province-resident and especially border populated area residents have seen and perceive external threats more acutely and more directly, thus reaching to more radical and extreme conclusion unlike the residents of Yerevan. Apart from that, criticism towards Russia is defined by Armenia's subordinate status. Armenia "is under Russia", "cannot do anything without Russia's permission" etc.

The main emphasis on Russia as an ally of Armenia during province-based discussions is disappointment. Recently people in Armenia have grown disappointed in Russia, especially during and after the 2020 Karabakh War.

*"For the first time people are confident that the idea that if not for the Russians, then the Turks would have come and eaten us, well, that's not an option anymore, because we can see that it's not the Russians. It's for the first time that all the people of Armenia do something like that, that Russians are not a guarantee, and we need other guarantees, and it's the first case when even pro-Russian people are expressing themselves, saying that there is no salvation in the Russians. Second: it's the first time that people in Armenia are saying that it would be good if the Russian army leaves Armenia, this idea is also being discussed by a wider audience, and we know, speech, when unrestricted, becomes reality."*  
Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor

Naming Russia as Armenia's "friend in quotes", discussion participants still specified the inevitability of a strategic relationship with Russia.

*"We have a greater inclination towards Europe, and that's exactly what created the issue, despite the fact that we had the war in 20. Russia had a great effect and tried to bring back the inclination towards Russia. We're in this region and it would be the right thing to have an inclination towards Russia."*  
Female, 18-25 age group, Goris

*"We're not openly saying it's bad, but internally it is very bad. We are showing the world as if Russia is our friend and ally, but everyone understands that's not true."*  
Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri

Evaluating Russia's role in Armenia's security aspects, especially in the context of the 2020 Karabakh War, many youths mentioned the CSTO, all comments about which are critical.

*"Armenia was simply a member for the CSTO, when it sees that the USA is trying to find some interest here, it comes quickly."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

*"CSTO, it simply exists, it doesn't do anything."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Hrazdan*

*"Armenia has a serious chance; the West has come to Armenia. We need to leave the CSTO, it's not fighting for Armenia, nor is it doing anything else."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Ijevan*

In discussions in the provinces there were also attempts at acknowledging the importance of Russia's role in Armenia's security issues, but compared to the criticism directed at Russia, there weren't many of them.

*The 44-day war happened, right? In the end, it was stopped with their [Russia's] intervention, now if even they weren't there, what situation would we be in, what would we do?"*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

Armenia's cooperation with Iran and the positive influence of that state was particularly mentioned in the province of Syunik but also mentioned in all other group discussions.

*"Economically Iran is our best ally, because it is currently important for Syunik, but it's not even preparing for any activity in the military sphere, even if it deployed it's forces on the border next to Meghri, it didn't do so for Armenia, it did so to hold its own borders, in the end, it's a Muslim country, as much as it's supporting us, Islam and Christianity don't have much to do with each other today, while not on the surface, they have an internal conflict with one another."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

It is interesting to note that during the discussions Iran's role was emphasized more than that of France's. Even though the latter is viewed as traditionally friendly state but which needs to be more proactive and supportive of Armenia.

*"France may be feeding us croissants on paper, but in reality, it isn't doing anything for us apart from giving statements. But de facto it was Iran and India that assisted us during the 44-day war, because before we purchased weapons from the latter, there were very serious talks about a road through India and Iran, towards Europe, and the only ally these two states were seeing was Armenia, hinting, that we will help you, Armenia."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

*"In my opinion France is the ally because during the 44-day war and during this last war it was reacting quite well. But it's not just reacting that's needed it's a bit more..."*

*Female, 18 -25 age group, Armavir*

During discussions it was mentioned, that India could be Armenia's ally because it can gain access to Europe via a trade route through Armenia. Apart from that, India has a conflict with Pakistan, therefore the development of military, political and economic relations between the Islamic states of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan is not in India's interests. Also, according to participants in the discussions, Armenia is getting ready to purchase weapons from India.

It was also mentioned that political cooperation with China is not absolute, as there are Turkic

language speaking nations residing within China, who can play a dominant role in some issues.

The USA tries to establish a relationship with Armenia based on certain interests but is hindered by Armenia's relationship with Russia.

*"The USA had its own interests, of course, when coming here before the war they offered many projects, smart livestock building projects, intensive garden projects, but they were rejected by Armenia because it's under Russia's auspice, so to say".*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

### *Changes in Armenia as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine*

Both Yerevan and province residents primarily noted the growth of rent prices, which, according to young people, is not only because of the strong flow of immigrants to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine but also because of Armenian landlords raising rental prices.

*"Unfortunately, there are people who benefit from the situation, evicting Armenians and renting to Russians at a very high price. What about our problem of self-preservation that we have? Russians are here temporarily, even if they stay here for 10 years, they're still going back to their country."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri*

Province-resident youth is less bothered by the growth of rent in their cities rather than in Yerevan, where most universities are located, and being students, province-resident young people have now encountered unprecedented difficulties renting in Yerevan.

*"For example, a student going to study to Yerevan from a village had to pay 50-70 thousand drams back then, now they have to pay more than 200000, Russians can pay that much, so how are our students going to pay that much?"*

*Male, 18-35 age group, Getashen vil.*

Another issue mentioned was the competitive advantages of the immigrants (stereotypically generalized and referred to as "the Russians") in Armenia's limited employment market, as a consequence of which Armenians lose their jobs in favor of the immigrants. At the same time, it was mentioned that it's the immigrants themselves that create jobs and take them (IT, service industry in particular) or occupy a sector of the market that was vacant and isn't attractive to locals.

*"Talking to friends, many are complaining that restaurants started hiring Russians whose Russian is much better and they service their customers better, so an Armenian, who spoke worse Russian and had a job, is being replaced by someone who speaks better Russian to push their business forward."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

*"I haven't visited Yerevan for a while, I rarely go there, but I have acquaintances, and I found out that there are service sector jobs that people I know rejected, while Russians take these jobs with pleasure."*

*Male, 18-35 age group, Vayk*

The observations of the young people on the integration process of those who moved to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine are interesting. In particular, it was mentioned that the newcomers are trying to adapt to the new circumstances, creating their own cultural space and spending time with each other, rather than with local Armenians.

*"In Vanadzor there was a unique pub, it belonged to one of our friends, they sold it last year for completely different reasons and as a result a Russian-Ukrainian couple bought it, and now, if you go to that pub, 95 percent of people are Russian-speaking, the atmosphere changed completely. They come every Friday and party. They created their community that way and are trying to integrate on their own, but not among people."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

Young people who participated in the discussions rated this approach rather negatively, essentially not taking into account the fact that at least the first generation of Armenians who moved to Russia and other countries prefer to follow the same principle of residing and spending time with relatives and compatriots, not even just compatriots, but rather people from their own province.<sup>6</sup>

Financial investments and the created economic possibilities were mentioned as a positive effect of the large influx of "Russians" into Armenia.

*"I believe this is very good, the more people come the better it will be. If it doesn't influence your sovereignty, let them come, they are right to do so, and you shouldn't see it negatively, they come and establish businesses, even if they come to do menial labor, it develops the economy, it's a human resource."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Jrvej vil.*

*"For example, it affected our family very well, I'm being sincere, my brother is a Russian citizen and his family lives there he owns a hardware store and as now Russians cannot leave Russia, they do construction work, he already bought approximately half a hectare of land, he's now building a store on it, it's very good for us."*

*Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

It is also interesting that of non-Yerevan urban-resident youth have more fears about arriving foreigners "changing our culture" than Yerevan-resident youth. It is noticeable that when talking about those who moved to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine, part of the province residents have an indirect perception of them: they have heard about them from others or have seen them when visiting Yerevan. At the same time, the fears of province-residents towards the immigrants are obviously stereotypical, often unverified, and strongly emotional.

*"For example, I visited Yerevan several days ago and saw a huge lot of Russians in town. I had the impression I'm in Russia and not in Armenia, and it affects your emotional state when you see more Russians in your country than Armenians."*

*Female, 18-25 age group, Goris*

*"I was walking in Yerevan recently and at some point, I heard people speaking Armenian, I'm being sincere, I was so happy, it made me so happy."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

While the discussion participants from Yerevan split into two groups, with the majority seeing Russians and Ukrainians who moved to Yerevan during Russia's war in Ukraine as interesting carriers of alternative culture, well-mannered and often exemplary in behavior, the province youth shares the opinion and the fears of the minority of Yerevan-residents that the immigrants are a threat to the Armenian lifestyle, culture, and traditions. During the discussions, the looks and behavior of immigrants were frequently mentioned, them being significantly different from locals and them not

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Mkrtchyan A. (2015). *Armenians Around the World: Migration and Transnationality*. Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt am Main

finding a place in Armenians' (province residents in this case) habits and perceptions of morality.

***"We were going to a store, some girl was going there, wearing short shorts, a cigarette in her hand, she has already left an impression on everyone... she put out her cigarette and entered the store..."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri***

The possible negative effect of the immigrants on Armenian children is mentioned in particular. It is interesting to notice that the "the children" argument is frequently used by young people from the 18-25 age group, which seems, should be less concerned by the effect on children than other age groups.

***"Now we are judging and we're saying that nothing good is going to come out of it, but 10 years later we will consider it to be normal for our 14-year-old children to be using drugs and living an underage sex life."***  
***Female 18-25 age group, Goris***

***"The freedom-loving youths will fall for it; oversight will weaken and it will be much harder to properly raise our young generation."***  
***Female 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

There were fewer positive or realistic opinions.

***"In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you can't keep your borders closed to another nation, another culture, it's even embarrassing."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri***

Also, during discussions in the provinces it was mentioned that the "Russians" who moved to Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine have had a somewhat positive effect of publicizing and promoting Armenian cultural sites becoming known. They actively visit cultural sites, participate in events, cover them on social media and advocate for Armenia (26-35 age group, Vayk).

Young people's concerns are related to the criticism towards oversight of individuals arriving in Armenia during Russia's war in Ukraine, as a result of which people who have anti-state [Armenia-Ed.] goals can come and be active in Armenia freely.

***"Turks come here with Russian passports and then go home. I accidentally sold houses to two Turks without knowing that they're Turks."***  
***Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

Some participants are concerned that the influx of Russians into Armenia can have future impact on Armenia's political system. They believe that if that influx continues it can contribute to the inclusion of Russian businessmen or politicians in government agencies. One of the participants was concerned that Russians' arriving in Armenia can result in "putting Armenia in the same situation in which Ukraine is right now" in the future.

***"For me there is a scary fact related to the Russian migrants, they arrived, they're living for themselves, they're not living at my expense, but a lot of these people coming here and their involvement in our political life can be catastrophic in several years in my opinion, they will be able to have a political representation, for example in the National Assembly and other places."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor***



## *Armenia's security, interests and necessary position of Armenia in the conditions of Russia's war in Ukraine*

According to the opinion of province-resident youth, Russia's actions in Ukraine are justified as Russia is "struggling as a superpower against Western powers engorging on its borders". Ukraine's actions are justified by people struggling for "their land", "their homes", so that "their subsequent generations have a place to live".

Drawing a parallel between the Russia's war in Ukraine and the Karabakh conflict, some of the province-resident youth have compared Armenia to Ukraine in the structure of these two conflicts. According to young people's opinion, both are defending their territory, while Azerbaijan and Russia are playing the role of aggressors. There was also a different opinion, according to which the reasons for starting the war are different for Russia and Azerbaijan. In Russia's case, it was to prevent the expansion of the West and Ukraine from joining the enemy camp, while in the case of Azerbaijan; it was to conquer historic Armenian land.

*"Russia attacked Ukraine, despite everything, just like Azerbaijan attacked Armenia. Donetsk, Luhansk, etc., were on the line, here it's Artsakh. This means that Logic and morality say we should be at Ukraine's side, but can we? In that case, Russia will put pressure on us (gas, military base, electricity)."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri*

*"They are different from each other; I think the problem is that Ukraine is moving towards Europe. In our case it's a territorial problem, Azerbaijan always wanted to take NKR territory..."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vayk*

The collective opinion of both Yerevan-resident and province-resident youth is that it is necessary to not interfere and avoid picking sides in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. According to discussions, Armenia is doing exactly that, and, despite alignment with Russia, Armenia has taken an essentially neutral stance.

*"In some places when there is a vote to apply sanctions against Russia, or doing something for Ukraine, Armenia is amongst the three-four countries to abstain from voting. This means that we can say that it's not that pro-Russian."*

*Male, 18-25 age group, Armavir*

Russia's participation in the war is perceived in two aspects. On one side, according to young people, Armenia can be perceived as Russia's ally in Russia's war in Ukraine, as a result of which it could be sanctioned by Western countries. At the same time, if not for the war in Ukraine, Russia would have been freer, and would probably take a more pro-Armenian stance in the Karabakh conflict. Also, while not assisting Russia, Armenia shouldn't interfere at all.

*"There is a sad fact, that the world perceives Armenia as a region under Russia's auspices, and whatever happens, we won't be supported as much as Ukraine."*

*Female, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor*

*"At the moment of the end of the war Russia will calm down and will be able to make a decision for our nation."*

*Female, 18-25, Gyumri*

***"If we consider it from the viewpoint of humanitarian values, we should obviously support Ukraine. But if we consider it from the viewpoint of our present-day political, military and security situation, it seems that while we shouldn't support Russia, at least we shouldn't go support the other side."***  
***Male, 18-25 age group, Armavir***

Province-resident youth mentioned that Azerbaijan and Turkey are using Russia's war in Ukraine, reaping benefits as mediators and taking advantage of Russia's preoccupation in the war and its possible weakening.

***"Now Azerbaijan is waiting for Russia to weaken to attack again, using the convenience of the moment."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri***

***"In September, when the Syunik events<sup>7</sup> began, it was a heavy time for Russia and Ukraine, and we saw the enemy use that, I think that isn't in our interest, because Turkey and Azerbaijan always activate in the period when they see the Russians busy with their region and they launch small attacks."***  
***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

There is not only compassion and indifference towards Ukraine, but also a negative attitude, defined by Ukraine's pro-Azerbaijan policy during the 2020 Karabakh War. It was mentioned that Ukraine supplied Azerbaijan with weapons and ammunition and congratulated Azerbaijan on its "Victory". Meanwhile, according to young people, Armenia's official attitude towards Ukraine is not just neutral, but even supportive in some aspects."

***"During the 44-day war Ukraine wasn't talking about anything, wasn't talking about Karabakh, assisted Turkey and Azerbaijan. But during this war (Russia's war in Ukraine – editor's note), I don't know why, Artsakh gathered aid and sent it to Ukraine..."***  
***Female, 18-25 age group, Goris***

***"Then it became clear they're not at our side... They were confessing their love to Azerbaijan."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri***

***"There was a time when same Ukraine openly... the rain of phosphorus that came down on Qubadli was openly provided by Ukraine. If Armenia would have a pro-Ukrainian stance today, it would be somewhat absurd, the people won't take it well."***  
***Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni***

It was mentioned that Armenians have become desensitized and indifferent after the 2020 Karabakh War and the losses it incurred, which is why they are more indifferent towards Russia's war in Ukraine now rather than picking a side. Young people's opinions reflect dissatisfaction with the indifference of international community's toward Armenia's problems. From a justice point of view, one should act toward others the same way they have acted toward them. In that sense, understanding the suffering and the difficulties of the Ukrainian side, province-resident youth finds that the Ukrainian side was uninterested in the suffering of Karabakh residents during the Karabakh War, explaining the reciprocated indifference.

***"The people around me are indifferent, which can be explained by the fact that when we were in a war, they didn't care. Now the Armenian society is showing the same treatment."***  
***Female, 18-25 age groups, Gyumri***

<sup>7</sup> This refers to the attack of the units of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan on the territory of the Republic of Armenia on September 13, 2022. See: "As a result of the Azerbaijani attack on September 13, 29 people went missing". (2022, October 19). *Azattyun*. Retrieved from <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32091450.html>



***"We saw worse things than Ukraine did. When we had a war, no one cared about our 18-year-old kids, while almost the whole world is at Ukraine's side."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

### ***Young people's forecasts about the future***

Just as the Yerevan resident, province resident youth's perception of Armenia's future and the perspective of the processes happening in the region is undefined and mostly pessimistic. They speak of positive developments as of hope and of negative ones based on facts and the current situation.

***"In reality we have dreams and those are national dreams to return life to its natural flow."***

***Male, 26-35 age group, Vanadzor***

In case of positive developments, it is expected:

- Nagorno-Karabakh territories' return to Armenia
- international recognition of Azerbaijan as an aggressor
- a change of power in Armenia
- establishment of peace

As for the results of Russia's war in Ukraine, the aforementioned positive results are more probable if Russia wins the war rather than loses it, in the opinion of both city residents and village residents, in case of Russia's defeat Armenia will be defenseless.

***"Russia's defeat will weaken Armenia as it is currently under Russia's influence, and in the case of the latter's defeat Turkey will be more daring in starting a war because the world will not be afraid of Russia anymore. Azerbaijan and Turkey will speed up the beginning of the implementation of their idea of their Great Turan project."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri***

***"The Russian-Ukrainian war is bad for Armenia because if Russia could do something for Armenia, now it cannot because it's in a war, this is why we don't need this war at all."***

***Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.***

***"If there is no Russia, there won't be an Armenia."***

***Female, 18-25 age group, Hrazdan***

***"It is not in our interest if Russia weakens. If Russia weakens, our situation will get worse by the day."***

***Female, 26-35 age group, Alashkert vil.***

According to province-resident youth, the development of the current situation can result in more difficulties and problems. One of the worst results observed for Armenia in that event is loss of statehood, and mass emigration as a result of Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression. It is important to note, that everyone perceived the opening of the Turkish-Azerbaijani "corridor" through Armenia's territory—presented under road unblocking in the trilateral agreement on November 9, 2022—as a threat, as a result of which it is conceivable that all of Nagorno-Karabakh ending up as part of Azerbaijan, the separation of Syunik and Vayots Dzor provinces from Armenia, and loss of Armenian's statehood.

***"Azerbaijan's military actions are mostly directed at us providing the corridor so that we are belittled and submit and provide the corridor, when we provide the corridor, we'll lose the connection with Iran, we will lose three of our main towns, Goris, Kapan, and Meghri will automatically go to them."***

***Male, 18-35 age group, Vayk.***

*"Worst scenario is if Armenia is not on the map anymore, Armenians will scatter around the world as a diaspora, but if that territory is gone, who needs the diaspora?"*  
*Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri*

*"My concern is that we're about to lose Armenia, the war essentially took place in three stages. The first stage was us losing a certain part of Artsakh, second is them constantly firing at us like that, forcing us out, so that whoever is capable leaves the country, the third is us slowly being surrounded, slowly losing our land, now even Martuni is a frontline (Gegharkunik province), this is the pan-Turkism project."*  
*Male, 18-35 age group, Getashen vil.*

The security and existence of the Armenian-populated province of Nagorno-Karabakh is directly related to the presence of Russian peacekeepers in that region. One of the scenarios, concerning the youth is the future of Nagorno-Karabakh after the expiration of the service term of the peacekeepers [in 2025-Ed.]. During the discussion, young people expressed their desire that Nagorno-Karabakh's population could become part of Russia after the end of the peacekeepers' mission.

*"The agreement was signed with the border guard forces and it expires in 5 years, which creates a negative perspective."*  
*Female, 18-25 age group, Gyumri*

The province resident-youth does not express any hope for a positive future with intervention and assistance by Western countries, explaining it with both historical precedence and the current reality.

*"British ships didn't come to Armenian mountains."*  
*Female, 26-35 age group, Gyumri*

*"For example, some people say that Russia supports Armenia, some people say that it did steps that are bad for Armenia. It may come to the USA coming in at some point and being our friend, an ally country, but in my opinion, one day it will do even worse things to us than Russia did."*  
*Male, 18-25 age group, Getashen vil.*

Despite the mostly pessimistic expectations of the future and its uncertainty, province-resident youth believe in their own strength and have a certain drive to recover from the losses of the 2020 Karabakh War. They feel obligated to those who gave their life defending their homeland. Young people who participated in the discussions mentioned that it is necessary to be optimistic, and expect positive expectations and changes. At the same time, they mentioned the necessity for change and fixing their own shortcomings.

*"If we have to live at the expense of someone else's lives, that is a great load to bear, we need to get out of this situation while understanding that you need to live for several people."*  
*Female, 18-25 age group, Hrazdan*

*"I will draw a somewhat extreme parallel to this situation, however bad one's child may be, the parent always tries to see their future in a positive way... However extreme of a situation may our country be in, if we have a negative attitude towards building our future, I think that's what it's going to be like."*  
*Female, 26-35 age group, Martuni*

*"Depends on our society, there must be a change in generations, those who are littering today should stop."*  
*Male, 26-35 age group, Ijevan*

## CONCLUSIONS

The perception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (including Russia's war in Ukraine launched on February 24, 2022) by Armenia's youth is conditioned by several factors, including:

- information about the conflict coming from various, mostly online information channels
- the perception of the warring sides in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the attitude towards those states
- political processes taking place in the region
- the process of the Karabakh conflict (including the consequences of the 2020 Karabakh War) which is currently relevant for Armenians and principally significant for the security dynamics of the region
- forecasts of the consequences of the influence of Russia's war in Ukraine on the security of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh

Young people's level of trust towards all sources of information is low, but the youth in Yerevan and provinces trust traditional media less than online media and channels. Young people mention the sharp drop in trust towards media, particularly in the context of the 2020 Karabakh war, when the provided information on issues important to the state and society was not consistent with reality. Same with public information about Russia's war in Ukraine, which the youth have little trust in, hence combining different new sources, and compare personal interactions and experiences to draw their own conclusions.

The perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by Armenia's youth can be split into two groups. In one group the conflict is geographic in nature; it is a manifestation of yet another historical stage of division of the world, a struggle between superpowers and alliances for spheres of influence. In particular, some post-Soviet countries (Ukraine and Armenia in particular) are in the modern stage of geographic transformation, as well as some countries of the Arab world (Syria in particular), while Russia, the West (NATO, EU, USA), Turkey, compete with each other to bring these countries into their spheres of influence. From this point of view, Russia's war in Ukraine is a battlefield, a manifestation of the Russia-West conflict.

In the other group, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and war are explained by the personal qualities, aspirations, approaches, and issues of the leaders of Russia and Ukraine.

According to the generalized opinion of Armenia's youth, Armenia should remain as neutral as possible in its stance on Russia's war in Ukraine, independently from its alliance obligations, the nature of the conflict, and its manifestations. At the same time young people's opinions on the immediate parties of the conflict—Russia, and Ukraine—are ambivalent and are determined by the positions of Moscow and Kiev in the 2020 Karabakh war. The current disappointment in Russia, Armenia's strategic partner is related to the defeat of the Armenian side in the war, while the negative attitude towards Ukraine is based on Ukraine's position in the Karabakh War, with military and diplomatic support towards Azerbaijan and Turkey. Again, according to the generalized opinion of Armenian youth, Armenia preserving its neutrality in the current situation is the most appropriate approach, independently from subjective and objective factors.

Opinions on the possible developments of Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as general forecasts by Armenia's youth are mostly pessimistic. The new security threats that emerged after the 2020 Karabakh War and the events that followed it are hard to overcome, while the instability of the region and the possible globalization of the crisis can create unprecedented difficult conditions for Armenians. Looking for relatively stable side to adhere to, young people note the probable destabilization of Russia and the escalation of the conflict not just with Ukraine but with all countries

of the expanding North Atlantic Alliance. At the same time sanctions directed at Russia hurt EU countries, which may push the relationship of Brussels with Armenia further down on the EU agenda. Apart from that, Armenia's youth is concerned with Turkey's and Azerbaijan's strengthening, which contributes to the prolongation of Russia's war in Ukraine. Turkey and Azerbaijan, by playing both sides in the conflict, are able to reap benefits from both Russia and Ukraine, while at the same time achieving their strategical goals to rebuild a security system in the South Caucasus in their benefit.



