

Causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Perspective of Constructivism

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Abstract: *This article studies the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Main scope of the article is to determine the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the perspective of Constructivism – one of the influential theories of international relations. Goal of the article is to check the constructivism assumptions of determination of the causes of this conflict. Checking of these theoretical arguments in this article is carried out based on the study and analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. During the research work, a proven way – such as the qualitative research method – has been used. In order to collect and analyze the data during the research process, the secondary sources and scientific literature, existing around the subject of the study, has been analyzed as well. Another specific data collecting methodological technique, such as the in-depth interviews with the representatives of the expert circles, has been used too. The study revealed that, within the perspective of Constructivism, one of the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the existing difference of the culture, identity and religion between the Armenians and Azeris; grave historical memory existing between these two countries and resulting hatred between these nations.*

Keywords: Constructivism, ethnic violence, identity

1. Introduction

There are two major causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts: Internal and external factors. Provoking conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh was greatly influenced by external factors, particularly, the role of Russia. Russia actively tried to maintain its influence in the Southern Caucasus region, and respectively, was interested in fueling the conflicts. The Kremlin used to mobilize and manipulate the separatist and nationalist forces existing in the Southern Caucasus; Creating the tense and explosive situation was in Russia's interest. "Divide and Conquer" – is the main principle of its actions. Existence of the hostile camps in the Southern Caucasus region shall always be a source of the permanent tension, which gives Russia the opportunity to use favorably these unstable circumstances, while maintaining the influence and control mechanisms in this region. Russia's main goal is to maintain its regional dominancy, and it cannot be achieved if Russia's influence is confined only within the borders of this country (Okhanashvili, 2017). Considering the numerous publications concerning the said aspect and representing relatively less valuable news for the scientific knowledge, the article is focused on the internal level analysis of the causes of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which shall be reviewed within the perspective of the Constructivism – one of the influential theories of the international relations.

2. Main provisions of the Constructivism

Theories of the international relations take quite important place in the studies of the international relations. Explanatory abilities of the theories in the determination of the causes of the specific conflicts, play a very important role.

Political events are very complex, and considering the said, accurate political predictions are impossible without the theoretical analysis (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 3). Theory is the tool that helps us to clarify the difficulties, but according to Waltz, "Any theory leaves something unexplained" (Waltz, 2003, p. 34). One of the influential schools of the

international relations – the Constructivism – is the modern approach to the international relations. Constructivism has arisen on the basis of critics of the neorealism and has become very influential. Alexander Wendt is considered as founder of Constructivism and he is the most influential author of this theory, although, the term "Constructivism" was first used by Nicolas Onuf (Onuf, 1989, p.1). Main postulate of the Constructivism is that the human relations are dictated by the ideas and not by the material things. Constructivism states that international policy is the socially constructed givens and it focuses on the importance of non-materialistic givens, such as norms, ideas, perceptions, identities, historical memory and so on. The Constructivists recognize the anarchism of the international system, but unlike the realists, they consider that the anarchy is such, what the States perceive (Wendt, 1992, p. 6). Anarchy has no independent effects and it cannot be the cause of appearance of the security dilemma between the countries, but what is important is how the States perceive each other, as friends or as enemies. For example, let's consider that there are three States in the international system – States A, B and C. According to the realism, if the State B is stronger (Meaning the military strength) than the State C, the State B creates a priori threat for the State A. i.e. the threat assessment is done considering the material factors only. If we review the same example in the perspective of Constructivism, the State B will be considered as a threat to the State A only if (despite the fact that State B is relatively stronger than the State A) their social identities are hostile. Let's discuss another example, proposed by Alexander Wendt in his article "Constructing International Policy", published in 1995. „500 British missiles pose less threat to the security of the United States than 5 nuclear missiles of the North Korea". Unlike the Realism, the Constructivism evaluates the threat not only by the quantitative indicators of the material givens, but considering the identities existing between the countries. Military strength of the United States has different importance for Canada and for Cuba due the distinct attitude of these countries towards the United States. Also, the military strength of the Great Britain was not deemed as threat for the United States, unlike the military strength of the Soviet Union. In case the United States and Soviet Union conclude that they are not enemies, the Cold

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War is over. "These are collective indicators that create the structure and define our actions" (Wendt, 1992, p. 397). Constructivism explains what may become a cause of the ethnic conflict. The mass mood manipulation becomes possible by use of the nationalist identities, political symbols and ideologies. According to Constructivism, the Elites manage to mobilize the masses, send them the messages that are shared by the masses; on the other side, the masses interact with each other and create one idea that they tend to follow. Use of the constructivism analysis offered in this work and this theory, shows that decision of the actors concerning the adoption of the specific norm, is internally linked to the identity of the own State. According to Constructivism, the role of the person has an influence on the behavior of the State, and considering the said, it becomes necessary for the actor to develop its own beliefs and values.

3. Compatibility of the Theory Expectations and Empirical Results

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the most acute ethnic conflicts since the collapse of the Soviet union (Nygren, 2007). Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived on the same territory for centuries. Relations between these two nations with the different religions (Christians and Shiite Muslims) has never been simple. The dominating Empires (Persia, Russia) used the tensions between the mentioned nations in their own favor and in their own interests, sometimes supporting the peaceful coexistence of these two nations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the problems between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis have fueled, causing the territorial conflict (Radvan, Beruchashvili, 2011, p.70). For more than a century, Nagorno-Karabakh has become a subject of the dispute between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In 1919, first the British and later the Russians, considering their national interests, granted Nagorno-Karabakh either to Armenians or to the Azerbaijanis. On July 5, 1921 Nagorno-Karabakh was granted to Armenians, but later on this decision was reviewed and Nagorno-Karabakh was subjected to Azerbaijan. Since that period, there is a permanent dispute between these two nations. In 1988, Leaders of Armenia supported by the "Karabakh Committee", demanded that Nagorno-Karabakh joined Armenia (Radvan, Beruchashvili, 2011, p.71). In this period, they began to expel Azerbaijanis from the territories under the Armenian control, and the mass expulsion of Armenians from Azerbaijan started as well. As a result of the conflict, 100 people died and 200000 Armenians and Azerbaijanis became refugees.

On December 1, 1989 the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR supported accession of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. On August 27, 1990 the Supreme council of the Azerbaijan SSR cancels the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite that current Turkey categorically denies the historical fact of the genocide of the Armenians, a massacre of Armenians is recognized by many countries and international organizations. We are talking about crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenian population during 1915-1918, resulting in deaths of more than a million of Armenians. Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was an important part of the said process. Azerbaijanis and

the Turkish Army fought together against the Armenians. Memorial complex dedicated to the genocide of Armenians has been erected in Yerevan.

The Azerbaijani side considers that Armenia is the aggressor and international society shall give respective political and legal assessment to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. While the Armenian side considers that Azerbaijan shall recognize the defeat in the war and adapt to the reality. Armenians believe that Nagorno-Karabakh has never been and will never be a part of the independent Azerbaijan.

Within the Constructivism perspective, the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are following:

1) Historical memory

Considering the above mentioned historical past, within the Constructivism perspective, the historical experience became the cause of the conflict. Armenians consider the Azerbaijanis as the close relatives of the Turks, "History is an important factor and the historical events painful for both nations, are widely used to justify the ethnic hatred, violence and territorial claims" (Malashkhia, 2011, p. 206). Due to the historical circumstances, the Armenians have developed "The Ethnic Immunity". And because of the religious differences, the Islam and Turkish Language speakers became their "Enemy" icons. Majority of the population of Armenia and Azerbaijan considers the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh as a certain continuation of the several centuries old Armenian-Turkish confrontation. According to Constructivism, historical experience and historically developed strategic priorities had a great influence on the strategic choice.

2) Problem of the ethnicity

There were all kinds of prerequisites for the start of the ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; In the Soviet period, Armenians of the Karabakh were under the rule of Azerbaijan. Very fast, the Karabakh became the symbolic matter for both groups that had their own stereotypes: Armenian side had claims for this territory (Kaufman, 1996). Problem of the ethnic identity was present. Azerbaijanis considered that "Nagorno-Karabakh was the same Azerbaijan, but it was not yet comprehended by Armenians" (Lynch, 2012). Norms help the humans to receive what they desire and to maximally increase their benefits. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, two mutually opposite visions of the independence provided the basis for the conflict escalation. Both sides had totally different answers to the question – part of which country is the Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians considered Karabakh as their own land, and the Azerbaijanis thought the opposite. Within the perspective of Constructivism, existing ethnic differences between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, allow the possibility to review the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the wide historical context, which prevents implementation of the tolerance and mutual compromise oriented policies in both of the countries. Majority of Azerbaijanis and Armenians believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the confrontation between two nations and not between the two Governments (Malashkhia, 2011). Existing ethnic differences between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, complicate the implementation of the mutual compromise oriented

policy. Armenians do not trust the Turkish language speaker Muslims and perceive them all as “the Turks”. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict may be reviewed more as the confrontation between two nations and not between the two Governments.

3) Distinct identity

Within the perspective of Constructivism, one of the causes of the conflict was the distinct identity. According to the Constructivists, identities are very important, as proper identities develop the interests and consequent actions. The ethnic identity plays important role in the conflict escalation in the countries, direct participants in the conflict. Constructivism carries out the threat assessment with the consideration of the existing identities between the countries. Armenians consider the Azerbaijanis as the people related to the Turks and in that period, the Turkish identity was raised ahead for the Azerbaijanis. Within the perspective of Constructivism, it can be said that Armenians and Azerbaijanis had all the grounds to consider the opposite side as a threat, and act by the military intervention in order to protect own territory and population. Social identities and perceptions existing between the countries, are important for the Constructivism. The actors interrelate based on the pre-defined norms and identities.

4) Distinct culture

Main principle of the Constructivism is the cultural, political and historical cognition of the social interaction, and this cognition is formed proper in this process of interaction. The scientists that are focused on the culture, think that international and local environmental norms, institutions and other cultural specifications greatly influence the State security policy and interests. Defenders of the strategic culture state, that the leaders, socialized in the different strategic cultural environments, will take different decisions in the same circumstances. Existence of the distinct cultural traditions explains the fact that the same reality is interpreted in a different way within the different countries. Constructivism is focused on the ideas, norms and culture. Armenians and Azerbaijanis are distinct not only ethnically, but the religious, cultural and linguistic barriers are present as well. For centuries, Armenians had to protect their Monophysite Christianity, first of all, from the Muslims (Majority of the Azerbaijanis are the Shiites and Turkish speakers as well). Turks and Azerbaijanis are the related nations and the most tragic events of the history of the Armenian nation, are related with the former nations.

4. Conclusion

The fundamental principle of the Constructivism is that the humans act towards the objects based on the importance of these objects to them. Historical hatred, problem of the ethnic identity, distinct identities, religions and cultures were present between these two nations. Respectively, the integration was low between the representatives of Azerbaijani and Armenian communities; indicator of the mixed weddings was low as well. There was no common origin, shared history, culture and feeling of solidarity.

In the perspective of Constructivism, for the State A, the State B shall be perceived as a threat only if their social

identities are hostile. The hostile attitude between Armenians and Azerbaijanis gives a reason to these two States to consider the opposite side as a threat.

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