

Liberated Karabakh

Policy Perspectives by
the ADA University Community

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Foreword

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The Second Karabakh War, which lasted 44 days, was in many ways analogous to experiencing an amazing surrealist dream that was coming true. All eyes were glued to the television, waiting for good news from the front every day: all our attention was on the progress our military was making on the battlefield, which fortunately did not fail the hopes of an expectant nation. We fought and won a war to liberate our sovereign lands from an illegal occupation, restoring our territorial integrity. And in so doing, Azerbaijan became the happiest country in the world, notwithstanding the moment of global pestilence that has still not come to an end.

ADA has always paid much attention to the issues that make up the conflict over Karabakh, be it within academic courses or extra-curricular activities. Right after the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy was established in 2006, we took our young diplomats to refugee camps to show them the plight of Azerbaijani ethnically cleansed from the occupied territories. And we also took our diplomats to churches and synagogues to teach them about intercultural and interreligious dialogue and tolerance, which is so important for long-term peace and regional stability.

Throughout all these years, we at ADA University worked to contribute to the return of our lands, be it through academic research or diplomatic and international outreach. We organized conferences, seminars, and workshops on Karabakh, published articles and books, conducted charity

events, and undertook social projects. We lived with the Karabakh dream in our hearts and helped to make this dream a reality. During the Second Karabakh War, our students and faculty were also very active on various social media channels, informing audiences near and far about the history of the conflict, the violations of international law, the language of various UN resolutions, and the hopes, aspirations, and rights of our displaced population. Many articles were posted on the internet and social media accounts. Interviews were given to foreign journalists. And so on.

During the war, one of this book's editors was invited to join President Aliyev's assistant, Hikmet Hajiyev, and members of the diplomatic corps on a trip to Barda and Terter to survey the damage caused by indiscriminate Armenian shelling; respects were paid to the families of the civilians who perished as a result. ADA faculty and staff also travelled to army bases to deliver warm clothes and provisions to our soldiers and civilians displaced by the fighting that had been collected by ADA High School pupils and ADA University undergraduate students. Financial contributions were made to the Azerbaijan Army Relief Fund.

And perhaps most importantly, more than a dozen ADA alumni and staff members took part in the military operations, either as soldiers or volunteers. Several were wounded in the performance of their duties although, fortunately, all who fought for their country came back safely to their families. And five alumni received a total of 15 presidential medals for bravery and courage. It was a true honor to meet with these heroes upon their return: to offer each my heartfelt congratulations for playing a role in the liberation of our historical lands and to thank them personally for their service to our country.

No matter what part of the world in which we live, all Azerbaijanis call Karabakh home. All of us are keen to do our part to redevelop the liberated territories and turn the war-torn area into one of the most prosperous and sustainable regions in the world. Our country's vision for Karabakh is truly inspiring and the ADA University community is also very much eager to contribute to the process of renewal and reconstruction.

In fact, we have already started. Not long after the trilateral statement ending the war was signed, we mobilized our faculty to get involved in helping to organize a year-long, detailed national survey among IDPs—

commissioned by the Presidential Administration—to assess the needs and plans of Azerbaijani IDPs ethnically cleansed during the First Karabakh War. This flagship research project is helping the government to better understand their needs and develop proper repatriation and infrastructure development programs, as well as determine the right sort of economic opportunity initiatives and incentives. ADA University's academic team is fully committed to this project and continues to devote many hours to addressing the needs of IDPs, but also to help in drafting various documents regarding Karabakh's redevelopment.

Since the end of the war, I have been privileged to travel to liberated Karabakh several times: with the editors of this volume and other members of the ADA community, and also in the company of state officials, foreign ambassadors, and the press. Each of these journeys was a mesmerizing experience. During my tenure as Azerbaijan's first ambassador to the United States, I had dreamt of such times. Sometimes, I even felt it did not seem possible; and yet, there I was. In liberated Karabakh. Indescribable were my feelings in seeing our compatriots on the other side of the Araz river—waving and conveying messages of congratulations—as I approached the great and ancient Khudafarin bridge. So were those I experienced in Shusha: walking along the city's streets in the morning, imagining how it will all look like when the rebirth of our nation's cultural capital is completed.

I recently re-read what I wrote in the Winter 2016 edition of *Baku Dialogues*, a policy journal that we re-launched, as it happens, only a few weeks before the war began. It speaks not only to ADA's mission but also to why I initiated this book project:

The role of the university in society is to reflect, to analyze, to bring together diverse ideas, and to offer to its community a range of observations and responsible thoughts from different viewpoints and perspectives, about the issues the world faces—today and tomorrow. ADA University, as an educational institution and a home for research and reflection, is contributing to this timeless function on a daily basis through its discussions, classroom exchanges, and the many dialogues that take place here every day.

This book is part of such an endeavor. Published on the first anniversary of the end of the war, it forms part of ADA's contribution to a larger

celebration in which our nation, as one, proclaims that Karabakh is back—that we are proudly back in Karabakh and that we will never again part with those lands. New roads, railways, airports, electric stations, and towns and cities are under construction. Internally displaced persons and refugees are beginning to return. ADA University, too, will have a presence there: we too will lend our support and experience to the restoration of Karabakh's standing as an attractive epicenter of the South Caucasus through our well-educated and well-trained alumni.

It is my sincere hope that this book will be amongst the first to adorn the shelves of Karabakh's restored libraries as well as many others through our great country.