

Caucasus: July/Aug '07

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Nagorny Karabakh NGOs say IWPR reporting helps them understand conflicts in other parts of the region. Journalists from across the region took part in a special reporting assignment in the unrecognised republic Nagorny Karabakh in July, generating a great deal of interest from the local authorities, NGO activists and local journalists.

During the five-day mission, seven journalists from Armenia, Nagorny Karabakh, North Ossetia, Georgia and Abkhazia got acquainted with the situation in the entity and reported on the presidential election both for the IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service and their own newspapers.

The mission was organised as a part of Cross Caucasus Journalism Network Project, a 3-year programme funded by the European Union and other donors.

An IWPR special report on the elections was republished in Demo newspaper in Nagorny Karabakh and on the website of A1+ TV channel in Armenia. The journalists involved in the assignment also reported widely in their own newspapers in Georgia, Armenia and North Ossetia.

In addition, the participants wrote lively diaries based on their experience in Nagorny Karabakh, and one of these diaries was republished in Azerbaijan, on the website of Baku Sun newspaper.

Emil Samanyan, Washington editor of the Armenian Reporter newspaper, who flew over to Nagorny Karabakh to report on the elections, said IWPR reporting is a very important source of information for Armenians abroad.

“Some of the IWPR stories on Karabakh and Azerbaijan are unique - you cannot find such reporting anywhere else. Over the years, I have grown to rely on IWPR objective reporting from the Caucasus. In Karabakh, there are only few journalists writing regularly from different locations, and many of them do it through IWPR,” he told IWPR in Stepanakert

Representatives of local NGOs said IWPR reporting helps them with their own work, providing the sort of information they need to understand other conflicts in the Caucasus.

“IWPR reporting helps me to keep track of the real issues in the Caucasus, especially concerning the conflicts of the South Caucasus (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Many media report these conflicts in an unbalanced way, supporting only one side,” said Albert Voskarian, director of human rights NGO Centre for Civic Initiatives in Stepanakert.

“This is why I have grown to trust IWPR and its representatives.”

Naira Airumyan, director of NGO Open Society, appreciated the presence of foreign journalists in Karabakh during the elections. An IWPR-organised round table meeting, during which supporters of the various presidential candidates were invited to analyse the results of the elections, was the first of its kind in

Nagorny Karabakh, according to Airumyan

“I think the IWPR mission was very important for us here, because this time the election observers did not do a good job - they only legitimised violations during the elections,” he said.

It is hoped that the successful assignment will lead to a greater IWPR presence in Nagorny Karabakh. Bako Sahakian, the newly elected president of the entity, told IWPR that he would be prepared to back the Institute’s activities here.

“I will be happy to support any work that develops a free and independent media in Karabakh, including the work of IWPR,” Sahakian said just days before he was elected president

Karine Ohanian, a journalist from Demo newspaper in Stepanakert, and a member of CCJN, helped compose this project impact report.

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