

Two States in One

Author: [IWPR](#)

An Abkhaz journalist on the elusive statehood of Nagorny Karabakh.

Although Nagorny Karabakh - or Artsakh as the Armenians like to call it - seems to be a fully self-sufficient state and has all the attributes of one, the reality of its situation is rather different.

Nagorny Karabakh is today basically a province of Armenia but its uniqueness lies in the fact that its statehood makes Armenia a state of two parts. The point is not that Karabakh has its own state bodies and organs - you could elect a president in every province of Armenia and nothing would change. The point is that for Armenians all over the world Karabakh is more than a place where people live, much more than a military victory and much more than a single idea.

It was here after all that Armenians achieved a victory for the first time since the 1915 Genocide - and not so much a military as an ideological victory made possible by a consolidation of forces and resources by Armenians from all over the world. So for Armenians, Karabakh became the foundation of a new, positive sense of identity. For the first time in a millennium, Armenians felt that they were a victorious nation.

This special status of Karabakh could not but affect developments in Armenia itself. Karabakh Armenian leader Robert Kocharian moved into the presidential chair in Armenia. The Karabakh elite has had a huge influence on the development of life in Armenia and even the telecommunications company Karabakh Telecom, the local monopoly, has squeezed the Armenian firm ArmenTelecom out of the market.

It is a two-way street. The current elite in Armenia also influences what happens in Karabakh and it can be hard to work out which is the tail and which is the dog. That is what makes Armenia two states in one in the context of the international non-recognition of the statehood of Karabakh.

The Goris-Stepanakert road looks very modern. In contrast to the roads of much of the former USSR, it is well kept and not pot-holed. This road was built after the war with the money of the Armenian Diaspora. Some rich Karabakhis are also building. Levon Hairapetian, who comes from the village of Vank, has built a series of factories, a shopping centre and a hotel in his home village - not something that can be said of many Caucasian villages.

In contrast to this, Shushi, a town that once had a majority Azerbaijani population and is now home to three thousand Armenians, is a depressing sight. There is practically no life here, just the splendid architectural heritage that survived the war.

War did not just destroy human lives. War burned houses, destroyed confidence in tomorrow and built a powerful wall of mutual hostility. You feel this keenly in Shushi. The contrast between the restored church, the hotel refurbished by the Dashnaks, an Armenian nationalist party, and the magnificent scenery on the one hand, and on the other the faces of the Armenian refugees from Baku living among the ruins is overwhelming. In Shushi, you want to believe that you are in a scene from a surrealist film and not in a current-day reality.

Overall Karabakh does not look like this. If you overlook the fairly infrequent traces of war you can feel as if you are in a pastoral idyll. Karabakh is a place which its inhabitants believe in, a place with a future.

Karabakhs are generally no different from other people on Earth. Like others, they go to work, create works of art, dress their children in nice clothes to go out for a stroll in the evening. Their desire to live a normal life has erased practically all traces of death and destruction. They want to believe in a future without war, whose lingering traces distract them from fine thoughts and make them remember with pain the tribulations of their recent history.

Akhra Smyr is a correspondent with Chegemskaya Pravda newspaper in Abkhazia.

This report is one of three first-person accounts of journalists from and visiting Nagorny Karabakh during the presidential elections as part of IWPR's Cross Caucasus Journalism Network project. Different in style from our usual reports, they give an impression of the polls and life in this remote but important territory in the South Caucasus.

Location: Caucasus
Stavropol
South Ossetia
North Ossetia

Focus: Caucasus

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/two-states-one>