

# The role of the media following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: The cases of *AzadlıqRadiosu* and *MeydanTV* news sites in Azerbaijan

## *İkinci Dağlık Karabağ Savaşı sonrası dönemde medyanın rolü: Azerbaycan'daki AzadlıqRadiosu ve MeydanTV haber siteleri örnekleri*

İlgar SEYİDOV<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Assoc. Prof. Dr., Atılım University, Faculty of Business Administration, Public Relations & Advertising Department, Ankara, Türkiye

ORCID: I.S. 0000-0001-8420-1413

### Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:

İlgar SEYİDOV,  
Atılım University, Faculty of Business Administration, Public Relations & Advertising Department, Ankara, Türkiye  
E-mail/E-posta: ilgar.seyidov@atilim.edu.tr

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### Abstract

As the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, also called the '44-Day War' (between 27.09.2020-10.11.2020) ended, and the ceasefire agreement was signed, the surrounding Armenian-occupied areas were ceded back to Azerbaijan except for the Khankendi-centered area in Nagorno-Karabakh region. This area is predominantly an Armenian-populated region and is internationally recognized as a part of Azerbaijan but is under the control of the so-called de-facto Artsakh Republic. Although the problem is seen as solved in terms of building peace in the Caucasian region and specifically relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the status of the Armenian-populated region, and social cohesion between the communities remain still problematic. In this context, the study aims to find out how the Azerbaijani media reflect this post-conflict situation. In doing so, the most-followed two online media platforms, *MeydanTV* and *Azadlıqradiosu*, were selected for the sampling, and topic-oriented framing analysis was employed to scrutinize the news posted during the one-year post-conflict period (between 10.11.2020-10.11.2021). According to the findings, construction/negative peace was the main theme in both news sites. One of the main differences was about framing of rehabilitation phase. While the stories from both Azerbaijani and Armenian people were mentioned in *AzadlıqRadiosu*, only Azerbaijanis were emphasized on *MeydanTV*.

**Keywords:** Post-conflict, Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, media, framing analysis

### Öz

İkinci Dağlık Karabağ Savaşı ya da diğer adıyla '44 Gün Savaşı' (27.09.2020-10.11.2020 tarihleri arasında) sona erip ateşkes anlaşması imzalandığında, Dağlık Karabağ bölgesindeki Hankendi merkezli bölge hariç, Ermenistan işgali altındaki diğer bölgeler Azerbaycan'a geri verilmiştir. Hankendi merkezli bölgede ağırlıklı

olarak Ermeniler yaşamaktadır ve uluslararası alanda Azerbaycan'ın bir parçası olarak tanınmaktadır. Ancak Artsak Cumhuriyeti isimli bir de-facto yapının kontrolü altındadır. Kafkasya bölgesinde barışın sağlanması ve özellikle iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler açısından sorun çözülmüş olarak görülse de Ermenilerin yaşadığı bölgenin statüsü ve toplumlar arasındaki sosyal uyum hala sorunlu olmaya devam etmektedir. Temel neden, geçmişteki kötü deneyimler, çatışmalar, savaş ve trajik olaylar sonucunda iki ülke arasında oluşan güven eksikliğidir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma Azerbaycan medyasının bu çatışma sonrası durumu nasıl yansıttığını incelemektedir. Amaçlı örneklem aracılığıyla

daha fazla takipçisi olan iki çevrimiçi popüler haber sitesi (*MeydanTV* ve *Azadliqradiosu*) seçilmiş ve çatışma sonrası bir yıllık dönemde (10.11.2020-10.11.2021 tarihleri arasında) yayınlanan haberler analiz edilmiştir. Bulgulara göre her iki haber sitesinde de yeniden yapılandırma/negatif barış en fazla öne çıkan tema çerçevesi olurken, rehabilitasyon çerçevesi konuları farklılık göstermiştir. Bu anlamda *AzadliqRadiosu*'nda her iki taraftan hikayelere yer verilirken, *MeydanTV*'de sadece Azerbaycan ile ilgili hikayeler bahsedilmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Çatışma sonrası, Azerbaycan, Dağlık Karabağ Savaşı, medya, çerçeveleme analiz

## Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union starting in the late 1980s brought about many conflicts and disjunction. As a result of this process, fifteen countries became independent. Azerbaijan is one of the post-Soviet countries that gained its independence in 1991. However, during this period, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven provinces were exposed to heavy attacks by Russian-Armenian armies, and at the end of it, 20% of Azerbaijan was occupied. Only in 2020, following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (27.09.2020-10.11.2020), Azerbaijan has taken back its lands excluding some parts of Nagorno-Karabakh (Khankendi and its nearby areas) where predominantly the Armenian population exists. This area is internationally recognized within the official territories of Azerbaijan, however; is under the control of the de-facto structure- the so-called Artsakh Republic. Following the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the sides, the Lachin corridor has remained the only access to Armenia under the control of the Russian peacekeepers. The mentioned Khankendi-centered area is still the main barrier to the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Most importantly, there is a very deep distrust between the Armenian community in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the Azerbaijani people. In this context, both the future of peace agreements and the problem of social cohesion between those nations have become important in the post-conflict period.

The name of the Karabakh region has been also a controversial issue for both Azerbaijanis and Armenians. In Azerbaijani, it is called 'Qarabağ' which comes to mean 'black garden.' In Armenian, it is 'Artsakh' that refers to 'the gardens of Aran' (Cornell, 1999). There are many discussions about the reasons for the Azerbaijani-Armenian

conflict. The origin of this conflict has been always controversial. For Souleimanov (2013, p. 98), the origin of the conflict lies behind the dissatisfaction of Azerbaijani nobility/intelligentsia about the dominance of Armenian element within Baku's economic and public life during the Soviet period, and the growing Armenian revolutionary nationalism which was rooted in the Ottoman Empire's 1894-96 programs that evaluated to create a collective image of the enemy in the form of 'Azerbaijani Turk.' However, it shouldn't be forgotten that those are only two of the various assumptions.

Tracing the history of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijanis, Karabakh Armenians, and other minorities had lived peacefully for a long time until the beginning of the 20th century. For many centuries, Azerbaijanis and Armenians coexisted in peace; they celebrated common holidays, built friendships, etc. Starting with the Soviet period, mutual mistrust started to emerge between the two nations and small-scaled ethnic conflicts happened (Souleimanov, 2013, p. 94-95).

In 1922, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia became Socialist Republics of the Soviet Union. In 1936, the Soviet Union established Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region within the territory of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Following this formation, several ethnic conflicts and clashes occurred between 1948 and 1953. As a result of it, more than one million Azerbaijani people were forcibly displaced from their lands (Aghayeva, 2018, p. 31). By the late 1980s, the hostility started to escalate; both Azerbaijanis and Armenians were forcibly migrated from the Nagorno-Karabakh region between 1988 and 1994. In 1992, the Armenian parliament declared the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. In the same year, the 'ethnic cleansing' was done in Khojaly by Armenian-Russian armies. Many Azerbaijani people were killed and taken as prisoners (Najafizadeh, 2013, p. 165). The invasion spread into the nearby regions as well. Between the years 1988 and 1994, 25.000 people were killed and more than one million people were forced to leave their homes and become refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Linderstraus, 2015). During the war, many violent acts were recorded, and mass expulsions took place. At the end of this war, not only the Nagorno-Karabakh region but also the surrounding Azerbaijani districts were occupied by Armenia (Krüger, 2010, p. 22). Until 2020, six significant attempts were made for mediation and problem-solving. First was done by Boris Yeltsin and Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1991, then Iran played as the mediator in 1992. In the same year, Nazarbayev re-intervened in the problem, and then the Organization for Security and Co-operation Europe (OSCE) created the Minsk Group including 9 countries to deal with the conflict. Following the

inconclusive mediation of Russia between 1993-94 years, the OSCE decided to execute the co-chairs mediation (Russia, France, and the United States of America) in 1994 (Mooradian & Druckman, 1999). None gave conclusions until 2020. Then the long-time tense environment reignited, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War started and lasted 44 days. When the Azerbaijani army took control of Shusha, where is one of the two main centers of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Russia intervened diplomatically, and the ceasefire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia through Russia's mediation on 10 November 2020. According to this agreement, the rest occupied lands were given to Azerbaijan excluding the Armenian-populated area in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The status of Khankendi and its nearby areas has remained problematic for the peace agreement between the two countries. The negotiations are still ongoing.

In this context, this study aims to find out how the Azerbaijani media framed the post-conflict situation in the online news. Considering the ceasefire agreement as the beginning of the post-conflict situation, based on purposive sampling, a one-year period (between 10.11.2020-10.11.2021) was selected for the analysis.

The literature review showed that there are some studies (Yavuz & Huseynov, 2020; Gamaghelyan & Romyantsev, 2021; Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021; Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022) that focused on the Second Karabakh War from political review. However, no study has been conducted about the analysis of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War -related news. This research can be one of the initial studies. To see the reactions of individuals and ratings in terms of dissemination, the two most followed and popular online news sites were included in the sampling: *MeydanTv* (954.000 followers) and *Azadliqradiosu* (742.000 followers). The word *MeydanTv* comes to mean 'town square television.' It is a Berlin-based non-profit media organization sharing news in Azerbaijani, Russian, and English online, and is founded by former political prisoner and dissident blogger Emin Milli.

*Azadliqradiosu* is Prague-based and known as the US Global Media Agency-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast with 23 editorial offices. It produces programs in 28 languages. It has been officially running in Baku since 2004.


## **Media in the post-conflict period**

The research on media and propaganda during conflict dates back to the Second World War. In more recent times, efforts have been made to comprehend the special problems

of media reform and peace transitions in conflict- and post-conflict-affected nations (Schoemaker & Stremlau, 2014, p. 185). In general, two ways of communication's role in conflicts are identified: elite-level communication and mass-based appeals. The first type includes diplomacy, tactical communication by political leaders, pressure groups, rebel groups, and military commanders. The latter is related to the propagandist role to control the narratives and manipulate mass communication tools to coordinate mass behavior. The emergence of new media technologies has restructured those impact levels on political behavior due to its interactive nature. Such characteristics as accelerating the flow and dissemination of information, providing alternative sources, using strategic interaction (propaganda and persuasion techniques), and generating new data and information allow different contributions of new media technologies to conflicts (Zeitcoff, 2017).

In line with conflict theories, Galtung (1969, p. 183) categorized violence as positive and negative in the definition of peace and peace research. While positive violence refers to the absence of personal (direct) violence, another is the absence of structural (indirect) violence which is about social justice. To comprehend the conceptualization in a more detailed way, Galtung (2007, p. 31) prepared a table that characterizes negative and positive peace types under three components: direct, structural, and cultural. While there is absence of ceasefire, exploitation in negative peace; cooperation and equality are promoted in positive peace. The other main difference is the presence of a culture of peace and dialogue in positive peace unlike the negative one:

**Table 1:** Negative, positive, direct, structural, cultural

	<b>Direct peace (harming, hurting)</b>	<b>Structural peace (harming, hurting)</b>	<b>Cultural peace (justifying harm/hurt)</b>
Negative Peace	[1] absence of = ceasefire; or a desert, cemetery	[2] absence of = no exploitation; or no structure = atomic	[3] absence of = no justification; or no culture = anomie
Positive Peace	[4] presence of = cooperation	[5] presence of = equity, equality	[6] presence of = culture of peace, and dialogue
Peace	negative + positive	negative + positive	negative + positive

Source: J. Galtung, (2007, p.31)

For Gilboa (2009, p. 93-95) the conflict period has four phases under critical conditions which are (i) onset-prevention, (ii) escalation-management, (iii) de-escalation-resolution, and (iv) termination-reconciliation. The first stage is about the beginning of disagreements and the growth in hostility between the enemies. Therefore, prevention measures are

needed to stop the conflict. Conflict management is related to an attempt to take the conflict's control such as a ceasefire. The third and fourth phases are the phases of the post-conflict period. While the resolution phase refers to attempts and negotiations for an agreement to end violence; reconciliation is beyond the conflict resolution. It addresses various psychological and cognitive challenges and obstacles to stable peace. Being both process and outcome, reconciliation is not related to formal peace agreements; it aims to change the motivations, goals, attitudes, emotions, etc. of the society members towards conflict. Consequently, it seeks friendship and harmony between the adversaries. In parallel with Galtung's approach, resolution can be understood within 'negative peace,' and reconciliation in 'positive peace.' Negative peace is only about the non-existence of violence, however; positive peace includes building relationships.

For Galtung (1998a) there are two ways of reviewing the conflict: 'the high road' and 'the low road.' The low road is dominant in media and portrays the conflict as a battle, a sports arena in which the parties are reduced to two combatants. The high road asserts conflict transformation. Conflicts are identified as also an opportunity to find new ways for human progress. In this context, while a war frame is shaped by expressions of grief, anger, sadness, distress, and such, a peace frame is based on two different roles: the people-oriented image of the demonstrator and the elite-oriented image of the negotiator. The first role relates to the promotion of ceasefire, reconciliation, citizens protesting for peace etc., the second role is about showing the international actors engaging with a conflict solution. In general, peace journalism focuses on acts of '3R' which are reconstruction, reconciliation, and resolution (Neumann & Fahmy, 2012). Reconstruction covers rehabilitation, healing of traumatized humans, rebuilding and repairing the material damage, restructuring, and reculturation. Reconciliation is about ending hostilities, healing the relationships between the sides. In relation to the two phases, resolution becomes possible between the sides as to end violence and develop the relations (Galtung, 1998b, p. 53-98).

Media can be used both as a positive and negative tool throughout the conflict phases. Media coverage can pave over the conflict's 'real' causes by constructing different narratives. It depends on how to use its functions. On the other hand, new media technologies have transformed conflicts into global spectacles. No matter wherever you are, it is now possible to see and watch various images and scenes of different conflicts from all over the world. Therefore, it is more than reporting. Media platforms or activities can be also used as weapons that measure the conflict in terms of framing,

visualizing, elaborating, narrating, and promoting (Braucher, 2020, p. 296-297). For Golcevski et al. (2013, p. 121) media plays a significant role in shaping public discourse on conflict-related issues. Wolfsfeld's research (2018, p. 112-117) on the Israel-Palestine conflict reveals that social media use is effective in terms of visibility as it goes beyond the dominant view and allows for antagonist views. In particular, videos and images disseminated during the conflict process have the potential to reflect alternative views on the extent and content of the violence, but they can also create negative attitudes toward the achievement of peace. The extensive research on the coverage of the four Asian conflicts by Lee and Maslog (2005) pointed out that all the analyzed newspapers were dominated under war journalism principles. Only a little consideration of long-term peaceful solutions was revealed. The news focused on mainly knee-jerk, unreflective kind of coverage. Regarding the role of media, the study (Saleem & Hanan, 2014) argued that media is able to play roles of either escalation or de-escalation. If it is escalation, it triggers tensions and sensationalizes the happenings. On the opposite role, it encourages the conflicting parties, government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), etc. to produce solutions. It only reflects the actual facts and events without taking any position. By analyzing the two cases of Studio Ijambo in Rwanda and Bosnian Media Campaigns, Bratic (2008) suggested that well-organized media activities can significantly impact audiences during conflict periods. However, it doesn't mean it can single-handedly end the whole conflict. Regardless of its limitations, the media can contribute to future peace operations. In doing so, it is necessary to integrate several media channels and platforms to increase the success of the practice. In addition, the negative impact of media on the audience can be reduced by reducing the level and amount of hate messages during the conflict. In this context, Manoff (1998) suggested working on the positive impact of media during and post-war situations. Therefore, he asserted that the news-framing effect of media can create a discussion and negotiation platform for the conflicting parties and thus can contribute to the formation of confidence building.

## Aim and methodology

As the aim of the study is to analyze how the issue was framed in the news, four main questions were identified:

**RQ1.**What are the main themes of the news?

**RQ2.**Which concepts were emphasized in the news' contents?

**RQ3.**Which actors or powers were referred to in the news?

**RQ4.**How the post-war period was framed in all selected news?

Based on those research questions, framing analysis was selected as the research approach due to its both qualitative and quantitative characteristics that allow us to analyze the selected news in a detailed way.

The concept of 'frame' has become a phenomenon by sociologist Erving Goffman. It is being also used widely in psychology starting with Bateson's works. Being both a research paradigm and approach, framing analysis started to be used in social sciences by the late 1980s. Framing theory is evolved within Constructivist paradigm. In this context, 'frames' are identified as cognitive and cultural mechanisms (Goffman, 1974). They are tools that allow individuals, institutions, and structures to communicate with each other. At the social level, institutions and structures produce content that their target groups and the public can interpret. At the same time, this is a socialization process in which social reality is constructed (Hertog & Mcleod, 2001).

In general, framing analysis prioritizes the identification, problematization, and evaluation of the selected topic. Based on interpretation, framing analysis assumes that the specific content of the text has a 'clear' message. The approach focuses on how this message is interpreted. It is oriented toward defining the constructed reality and analyzing its structural features (Van Gorp, 2007). In this sense, it aims to understand the context within the text and to reveal the 'implicit' information within the specified 'boundaries' (Gurevitch & Levy, 1986). It allows research to analyze and reveal the 'hidden' knowledge within the story (Entman, 2007, p. 164). To be more precise, the framing approach, with its quantitative and qualitative aspects, is a method that interprets the message in its 'frames' by focusing on clues such as 'selected' and 'emphasized' words, stereotypes, visual materials, information sources, etc. in the text (Entman, 1993, p. 52).



The quantitative dimension allows for the measurement of language use in texts. Frequently used words, definitions, the number of emphasized concepts, expressions, highlighted discourses, and sources are used within the scope of quantitative analysis in this sense. The qualitative dimension helps us to understand and interpret the 'message' framed in the text with quantitative data. In the research, neither just quantitative nor just qualitative analysis is sufficient in the context of the framing approach. Both dimensions of analysis should be used together to reveal the 'implicit' message (Hertog & McLead, 2001, p. 153-154). There is no standard typology of the framing approach. What is common is the effective and balanced use of both qualitative and quantitative dimensions in the context of the sample (Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 24). In this vein, Vreese, Peter, and Semetko (2001, p. 108) suggested two different framing approach: topic-oriented specific and general news frames. Specific news frames are the framing of a particular topic in detail within a specific time frame. General news frames are based on how all different topics and events are presented in a general framework. The fact that the framing approach can be shaped according to the sampling and purpose of the research and that there are no mandatory principles allows a researcher to do analysis by revealing the relevant frames in different ways. In this study, based on case-study research methodology, a topic-oriented specific framing analysis was used to analyze the selected news.

Through purposive sampling, the one-year periods of both two news-sites were scrutinized manually. More clearly, the author read all the news that was published within the given period. As a result of it, in total 434 news, which is related to the topic (245 from *Azadliqradiosu*, and 189 from *MeydanTV*) were included in the sampling. Based on the research questions, the main themes, the most-emphasized words, references to other actors, and statements of the leaders were analyzed to identify the specific frames of the post-conflict period. Following the analysis, to find out how the online news sites framed the issue, common frames were identified based on the conflict categorization by Galtung (1998a, 1998b) and Gilboa (2009). Those frames are 'danger of conflict,' 'reconstruction' with sub-frames that are 'restructuration and rehabilitation,' 'resolution,' and 'reconciliation.'

For the reliability check of coding and categorization, the inter-coder reliability formula was implemented to the findings. Inter-coder reliability formula helps the researcher to obtain the coefficient reliability of the findings (Chadwick et al., 1984; North et al., 1963). The formula of inter-coder reliability is calculated as the dividing of numbers in the same category into the total number of units coded (Prasad, 2008). In

doing so, first, a small sample (20%) of news was selected and the formula was calculated through two researchers' coding ( $R=2(C1+C2)/C1+C2$ ). The conclusion was 86% which is valid for reliability.

## Findings

The findings were interpreted based on the four research questions which allow us to find out the sub-frames and frames of the news starting with specific details to the general portrait. In the scope of the first research question, the main themes of both news sites were identified and categorized separately in order to find out the differences between:

**Table 2:** News framing on *Azadliqradiosu*

Frames	Themes	Number	Percentage	
Restructuration	Views from the Liberated Areas	41	16.73%	32.65%
	Rebuilding	26	10.61%	
	Minesweeping	13	5.31%	
Resolution	Disputes over Border Demarcation	12	4.90%	14.29%
	Peace settlement	23	9.39%	
Reconciliation	Stories of Armenian Villagers	23	9.39%	19.19%
	Martyrs & Veterans' Stories	24	9.80%	
Rehabilitation	IDPs' Conditions	23	9.39%	22.04%
	Concerning Armenian Loss	18	7.35%	
	Memorial Day	13	5.31%	
Danger of Conflict	Breaking f ceasefire	13	5.31%	5.31%
	Other	16	6.53%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>245</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

Table 2 shows that half of the news framed the reconstruction phase (54.69%) of the post-conflict period. In this context, two sub-headings- restructuring (32.65%) and rehabilitation (22.04%) were mainly framed. The main themes in the restructuring frame were views from the liberated areas (16.73%), rebuilding (10.61%), and minesweeping operations (5.31%); in rehabilitation, the news covered Azerbaijani IDPs' conditions (9.39%), the information about Armenian loss (7.35%), and Memorial day (5.31%). Tragic conclusions such as the statistical information about the losses of both

sides, IDPs' expectations following the victory, Memorial day activities in both countries, etc. were mentioned in the rehabilitation frame along with dramatic images and videos. On the other hand, the reconciliation frame was formed through the news focused on the peace settlement negotiations (9.39%), stories of Armenian villagers (9.39%) which are about their concerns or expectations for social cohesion, and the stories of war victims (9.80%). The shared suffering of both countries was portrayed in that news. The resolution phase was framed through two themes which are disputes over border demarcation and peace settlement. Only 5.31% of the news drew attention to the still unresolved conflict situation through the news about frequent ceasefire breakdowns. Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of frames and themes of *MeydanTV* below:

**Table 3:** News framing on *MeydanTV*

Frames	Themes	Number	Percentage	
Restructuration	Rebuilding	33	17.46%	25.40%
	Views from the Liberated Areas	15	7.94%	
Rehabilitation	Severe Losses of the War	18	9.52%	13.75%
	IDPs' Conditions & Resettlement	8	4.23%	
Resolution	The Status of Armenian-Populated Karabakh Region	19	10.05%	34.92%
	Disputes over Border Demarcation	13	6.88%	
	Peace Settlement	34	17.99%	
Reconciliation	Martyrs and Veterans' Stories	22	11.64%	11.64%
Danger of conflict	Breaking of Ceasefire	12	6.35%	6.35%
	Other	15	7.94%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>189</b>	<b>100%</b>	

As can be seen in Table 3, two main frames were prominent in the news shared via *MeydanTV*. Those are reconstruction (39.15%) and resolution (34.92%). While rebuilding activities were mainly mentioned in 17.46% of the news within the restructuring frame, 9.52% of the news addressed the severe losses of the war in the rehabilitation frame. The resolution phase of the post-conflict period was framed through three main themes based on peace settlement negotiations (17.99%), the status of the Armenian-populated Karabakh region (10.05%), and disputes over border demarcation (6.88%). The reconciliation frame was seen in 11.64% of the news in which Azerbaijani martyrs and veterans' dramatic stories were mainly mentioned. Similar to *Azadliqradiosu*, the news of *MeydanTV* addressed the danger of conflict (23.28%) less.

Based on the second research question, the most-emphasized words were also analyzed in both news sites to understand the portrayal of the issue in the news. As comparatively demonstrated in Table 4 below, Shusha, where is one of the main centers of Nagorno-Karabakh and was reclaimed by the Azerbaijani army during the Second Karabakh War, was the top word used in both news sites. Shusha was so important to Azerbaijan due to its strategic location and cultural background. Therefore, it has become one of the main symbols of victory. While the word Martyr (13.76%) was the latter mostly-used one in *Azadliqradiosu*, peace (13.67%) was in *MeydanTV*. In general, the dramatic scene (47.09%) was mainly reflected in the news of *Azadliqradiosu* through the concepts of martyrs, killed, veterans, prisoners, and IDPs which addressed the tragic conclusions of the war. On the other hand, the victorious liberation scene (52%) was portrayed in *MeydanTV* through the concepts of peace, liberated, negotiations, victory, mine, and rebuilding which also pointed to success and future development.

**Table 4:** The most emphasized words

<i>Azadliqradiosu</i>			<i>MeydanTV</i>		
Words	Number	Percentage	Words	Number	Percentage
Shusha	31	16.40%	Shusha	59	15.82%
Peace	15	7.94%	Peace	51	13.67%
Liberated	22	11.64%	Liberated	42	11.26%
Killed	22	11.64%	Negotiations	23	6.17%
Negotiations	6	3.17%	Victory	14	3.75%
Victory	1	0.53%	Veteran	25	6.70%
Veteran	14	7.41%	Prisoner	25	6.70%
Prisoner	8	4.23%	Martyr	11	2.95%
Martyr	26	13.76%	IDPs	25	6.70%
IDPs	19	10.05%	Killed	30	8.04%
Mine	15	7.94%	Mine	42	11.26%
Rebuilding	10	5.29%	Rebuilding	26	6.97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Based on the third research question, first, it was revealed which external powers were referred to in the news. According to the findings, while five countries' approaches were covered in *MeydanTV*, four were in *Azadliqradiosu*. Russia was the most frequently referred actor in both news sites. However, while the second most mentioned country was Türkiye (19.05%) in *Azadliqradiosu*, Iran (23.57%) was in *MeydanTV*. Table 5 demonstrates all below:

**Table 5:** Reference to other powers

<i>Azadliqradiosu</i>			<i>MeydanTV</i>		
Countries	Number	Percentage	Countries	Number	Percentage
Türkiye	8	19.05%	Türkiye	25	17.86%
Russia	23	54.76%	Russia	58	41.43%
Georgia	7	16.67%	The United States of America	6	4.29%
İran	4	9.52%	France	18	12.86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	Iran	33	23.57%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Regarding the attitude of the powers towards the post-war situation and the unsolved area in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Türkiye's supporting stance was promoted on both news sites. Russia was reflected in a neutral position and in seeking for ensuring peace and stability in the region. On the other hand, the pro-Armenia support of France, and Iran were criticized.

The statements of the leaders about the period were also analyzed. According to findings, *MeydanTV* covered 14 statements by Armenian leader Pashinyan, 41 of Azerbaijani leader Aliyev. The necessity of peace (42.86%, n=6), the controversial Zangezur Corridor (28.57%, n=4), and war victims (21.43%, n=3) were the main points of Pashinyan's statements. As to Aliyev's statements, rebuilding in the liberated areas (34.15%, n=14), the necessity of peace (19.51%, n=8), the status of Khankhendi and Integration (12.20%, n=5), and the controversial Zangezur Corridor (9.76%, n=4) were revealed as the focal issues. In *Azadliqradiosu*, only eight statements of Aliyev and three of Pashinyan were given. While the necessity of peace was the focal issue of Pashinyan; the necessity of peace, and rebuilding in the liberated areas were of Aliyev. As can be seen from the discourses of both leaders, a peace settlement was the top issue.

Based on the final research question, the research focused on the analysis of general frames of all news. In this context, Table 6 was prepared to draw the general portrait of news framing holistically:

**Table 6:** News framing of the issue

Frames	Themes	Number	Percentage	
<b>Reconstruction</b>	Views from the Liberated Areas	56	12.90%	<b>29.26%</b>
	Rebuilding	59	13.59%	
	Minesweeping	19	4.38%	
<b>Resolution</b>	Disputes over border demarcation	25	5.76%	<b>23.27%</b>
	The Status of Armenian-Populated Karabakh Region	19	4.38%	
	Peace Settlement	57	13.13%	
<b>Reconciliation</b>	Martyrs & Veterans' Stories	46	10.60%	<b>15.90%</b>
	Stories of Armenian Villagers	23	5.30%	
<b>Rehabilitation</b>	IDPs' Conditions	31	7.14%	<b>18.43%</b>
	Memorial Day and Severe Losses	49	11.29%	
<b>Danger of Conflict</b>	Breakdown of ceasefire	25	5.76%	<b>5.76%</b>
	Other	25	5.76%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>434</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

As demonstrated in Table 6, almost half of the news (47.69%) was shared within the reconstruction frame including two sub-frames which are reconstruction (29.26%) and rehabilitation (18.43%). The latter main frame was resolution (23.27%). Under this frame, the diplomatic efforts for peace settlement (13.13%), negotiations on border demarcation (5.76%), and the status of Khankendi centered region (4.38%) were revealed as the main themes. The phase of reconciliation was framed in 15.90% of news. The tragic stories of martyrs and veterans and concerns of Armenian villagers living in the border areas were mainly mentioned in the news. On the other hand, 5.76% of the news addressed the ongoing tension and the danger of re-conflict between the sides. The main theme was the breakdown of the ceasefire.

## Discussion and conclusion

Based on the idea that communication has been always essential and critical for conflict resolution and peace, as Zeitcoff (2017) stated, new mass communication tools have reshaped the role of communication in terms of its technological and interactive structure for providing opportunities for public discussions, reactions, and suggestions.

In this context, it has become necessary to analyze content shared via new media tools during conflict and post-conflict periods by taking into account individual reactions such as likes, shares, comments, etc. As Wolfsfeld's (2018) research revealed that the social media provides platform for both dominant and antagonist views by visualizing violence and war situation, in this case it was also possible to analyze the news based on the reactions of audiences. This study aimed to find out how two popular and the most-followed news sites in Azerbaijan framed the problematic Nagorno-Karabakh conflict following the Second Karabakh War. Four research questions were identified for the research; specific-topic-oriented framing analysis was employed.

Comparing the news sites, the construction phase of the post-conflict period was the main frame of both news sites. Under this frame, two sub-frames restructuration and rehabilitation were mainly framed in the news. In particular, there was a difference in the themes of the rehabilitation frames of the news sites. While the theme of the conditions of IDPs and resettlement issues was the common theme in both news sites, other themes differed from each other. Severe losses of the war were also mentioned in *MeydanTV* in the rehabilitation frame. While only statistical information on the Armenian side was given, tragic stories of the Azerbaijani side were mentioned in that news. However, in *Azadliqradiosu*, there was also news reflecting the tragic stories and losses of the Armenian side. Also, the theme of Memorial day included the views and events from both sides. As Galtung (1969; 2007) differentiated between negative and positive peace based on their structures, resolution can be understood within negative, and reconciliation in positive peace (Gilboa, 2009). In this context, the difference was revealed in the distribution of positive and negative peace frameworks. While the resolution frame was higher in *MeydanTV* with 34.92%, lower in *Azadliqradiosu* with 14.29%. The negotiations on peace settlement principles, the problem of the Armenian-populated region in Karabakh, and the disputes over border demarcation were discussed in the resolution-framed news. Regarding the reconciliation frame, *MeydanTV* covered only the stories of the Azerbaijani Martyrs and Veterans, *Azadliqradiosu* mentioned not only similar stories but also concerns of the Armenian people (9.39%) living in the border areas. The danger of conflict was mentioned less in both news sites compared to other frames.

When examined more discursively specifically, it was revealed that Shusha was the top word used in both news sites. Shusha can be understood as the symbol of victory and liberation. However, the frequency of use of words showed that such notions as

martyrs, killed, veterans, prisoner, and IDPs supported the formation of the tragic scene in *AzadliqRadosu*, the most-used concepts of peace, liberated, negotiations, victory, mine, and rebuilding created the victorious liberation scene and success in *MeydanTV*. Focusing on the powers or actors that were referred to in the news, Russia was the most-mentioned country in both news sites. Türkiye and Iran were the other regional powers referred to in the news. While Russia was reflected in a neutral position, Türkiye in supportive and an ally, however, Iran was portrayed as a biased country.

In general, the construction phase of the post-conflict period was dominantly formed in all selected news. The latter one was the resolution phase. Consecutively, reconciliation and danger of conflict were framed. Based on all those findings, by Galtung's (2007) categorization, the research can infer that negative peace was mainly framed in all news in which the violence was totally avoided, the peace was promoted, and the restructuration works, and rehabilitation process were predominantly mentioned. Based on Saleem & Hanan's (2014) perspectives on the role of media during the post-conflict period, it can be alleged that de-escalation was targeted in the news. However, in the framework of positive peace, there were few mentions of issues or proposals to improve the hostile relations between the two countries in the future. It is still the main barrier to social cohesion and the sustainability of peace in the region. There is a strong distrust between the two nations. As Manoff (1998) asserted, it should be better to focus on communication and the media's role in confidence building. More research and projects needed to be implemented by including specialists, researchers, academics, and related persons from both countries.

As stated before, no study has been conducted about the role of media following the Second Karabakh War in Azerbaijan. In this context, this study can be a directive study in the literature. This research was limited to the analysis of two news sites' news for a one-year period. It cannot be generalized. The findings should be evaluated within its sampling. In the future, comparative research can be conducted in both Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this context, pro-governmental and other independent media outlets can be compared for more different and comprehensive research.



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