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Karabakh and East Zangezur Economic Regions in Azerbaijan's Food Security Policy

Abstract

The article analyses the state of development of agriculture in the economic regions of Karabakh and East Zangezur and the level of self-sufficiency of the region in terms of food products in the pre-occupation period. It was also pointed out that the attempts to join the Armenian SSR under the pretext of lagging behind the economic development of the region and insufficient food security did not have a serious and legal basis. In addition, the efforts and difficulties encountered in the post-war period to reintegrate the economic regions into the economic life of the country were also emphasised. At the same time, the contribution of these economic regions to the further strengthening of food security in the region and the country as a whole as a result of their reintegration into the economic life of the country after the war was investigated. . The main objective of this study is to examine the contributions that the economic zones examined can make at national and regional level in the near future for both Azerbaijan and the neighbouring countries bordering these regions. The study is methodologically structured on the comparative method. In this context, in addition to the literature published in the Soviet period, current articles and internet sources were also used.

Keywords: Karabakh economic region, East Zangezur economic region, reintegration, agricultural sector, food security

Azərbaycan'ın Gıda Güvenliyi Politikasında Karabağ ve Doğu Zengezur Ekonomik Bölgeleri

Öz

Makale, Karabağ ve Doğu Zengezur ekonomik bölgelerinde tarımın gelişim durumunu ve işgal öncesi dönemde bölgenin gıda ürünleri açısından kendi kendine yeterlilik düzeyini analiz etmektedir.



<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/atdd>

Bölgenin ekonomik gelişiminin geri kaldığı ve gıda güvenliğinin yetersiz olduğu bahanesiyle Ermenistan SSC'ye katılma girişimlerinin ciddi ve yasal bir dayanağı olmadığına da dikkat çekildi. Buna ek olarak, savaş sonrası dönemde ekonomik bölgelerin ülkenin ekonomik hayatına yeniden entegre edilmesi için gösterilen çabalar ve karşılaşılan zorluklar da vurgulanmıştır. Aynı zamanda bu ekonomik bölgelerin savaş sonrasında ülkenin ekonomik hayatına yeniden entegre olmaları sonucunda bölgede ve ülke genelinde gıda güvencesinin daha da güçlenmesine olan katkıları araştırılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, incelenen ekonomik bölgelerin hem Azerbaycan hem de bu bölgelere sınırı olan komşu ülkeler için yakın gelecekte ulusal ve bölgesel düzeyde yapabileceği katkıları incelemektir. Çalışma metodolojik olarak karşılaştırmalı yöntem üzerine yapılandırılmıştır. Bu kapsamda Sovyet döneminde yayınlanmış literatürün yanı sıra güncel makaleler ve internet kaynaklarından da yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karabağ ekonomik bölgesi, Doğu Zangezur ekonomik bölgesi, yeniden entegrasyon, tarım sektörü, gıda güvenliği

Introduction

Since food supply and quality nutrition are basic human needs and essential for a healthy, productive lifestyle, this issue has always been significant, becoming especially relevant in the modern era. Today, challenges such as global climate change, economic crises, rapid shifts in international political and economic relations, and the need to balance food security with high population growth present complex socio-economic issues. Food security is fundamental to sustainable human development and the upbringing of healthy future generations, making it imperative for international organizations and specialists to address this concern. Since the second half of the 20th century, food security has evolved from a local and regional issue to a global one, prompting international organizations to actively work toward solutions. Global climate change, declining water resources, and ongoing wars and conflicts significantly impact food security at both global and regional levels. Changes in the geopolitical landscape affect food prices and trade in the world market. As a result, countries, particularly developing nations that rely on food imports, face challenges in ensuring food security. In Azerbaijan, which has experienced prolonged conflict, food security has consistently been a top priority and a key component of the country's economic security. A major concern for the government has been to provide food for the population, including 1.5 million internally displaced persons and unemployed citizens who were forced to leave their homes and have settled in the capital and other regions of the country.

In the 1990s, after regaining independence, Azerbaijan abandoned its long-standing collective farming system and established a national market economy. However, the economic and social challenges arising from aggression by neighboring Armenia and the subsequent blockade created significant difficulties in ensuring sustainable food supply for the country. In

response to this pressing issue, the head of state, under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, prioritized food security. As a result of his efforts, the UN World Food Programme began its activities in Azerbaijan in 1994, providing essential foodstuffs such as flour, powdered sugar, and vegetable oil to 130,000 internally displaced persons each month. On October 20, 1995, Azerbaijan was admitted to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Abbasov, 2013, p. 220). To improve the country's food supply, the state has taken a number of measures and implemented projects. As a result of the implementation of the "State Program for the reduction of poverty and economic development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2003-2005", the level of poverty in the country, which was 46.7%, was reduced to 15.8% at the end of 2007 (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/15399>). The problem of poverty in Azerbaijan existed also in Soviet times at a level of over 35%, but at that time, it was never discussed by anyone, as it was included in the list of closed issues (Dzhabiyev, 2005, p. 206). After the first Karabakh war, this problem became more acute and as a result of this problem, the quality of health among the population decreased significantly, vitamin deficiency, anemia, cardiovascular diseases, mental disorders and nervous system, tuberculosis diseases were observed more often.

Following our glorious victory in the Second Karabakh War, the government is focusing on several key issues to strengthen the country's food supply and reduce import dependence. These include restoring the infrastructure that was destroyed by the enemy in the region and integrating its economic potential into the overall economic framework of the country. To enhance food security, extensive measures have been implemented as part of the Strategic Road Map, with a particular emphasis on wheat production, which is considered strategically important for Azerbaijan. There is significant potential for wheat cultivation in the liberated regions.

1.The previous administrative structure of Karabakh and the influence of food supply on the political processes of that time (1979-1990 years)

For the first time, economic regionalization in Azerbaijan was carried out in 1956, taking into account the potential of agriculture and energy resources, and 10 economic regions were identified on the territory of the country. In the second economic regionalization, 8, 13 in 1980, and 10 economic regions were defined in 1990, and two of them were Kalbajar-Lachin and Upper Karabakh economic regions. Before the occupation, the economic region called Upper Karabakh included Agdam, Tartar, Khojavend, Khojaly, Shusha, Jabrayil, Fuzuli regions and the city of Khankendi (Azərbaycan Respublikası İqtisadi İslahatların Təhlili və Kommunikasiya Mərkəzi, 2022, pp.13-14). On July 7, 1923, by a decree of the Central

Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR, the status of the province of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR), formed as part of the Azerbaijan SSR, was canceled on November 26, 1991.

In 1979, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) covered an area of 4,400 km² and had a population of 160,900, comprising 71,400 urban residents and 89,500 rural residents. NKAR accounted for 5.1% of the republic's territory and 2.7% of its population, contributing 6% of the country's total industrial output and 2.5% of its agricultural production, including 12% of its viticulture. The region produced approximately 14% of the facing stone, over 30% of building stone, 9% of sawstone, 6% of clay, 35% of plasterboard, and 3% of the mineral water resources of the entire republic. NKAR had 439,100 hectares of land, of which 170,000 hectares, or 39%, were suitable for agriculture, with 77,500 hectares classified as arable land (Gosudarstvennyy komitet Azerbaydzhanskoy SSR po statistike, 1990, p. 375; Guseynov, 1980, p. 7). The industrialization and development of agriculture in the region began as early as 1923. In the same year, the State Bank of Azerbaijan allocated a loan of 1 million rubles and food in the amount of 480 thousand rubles to the region (<https://story.karabakh.center/28>). In 1979, with the average productivity of viticulture in the NKAR, collective farms and state farms collected 112.5 thousand tons from 100 quintals per hectare, or 10.5% of the national harvest. In 1980, compared to 1970, grape harvest increased more than 4 times. It should be noted that this productivity was achieved in conditions of insufficient development of the artificial irrigation network in Azerbaijan. At that time, only about 10% of territories in Azerbaijan were irrigated by artificial irrigation, while in Moldova it was 80%, in Ukraine 78%, and in RSFSR 42% (Gosudarstvennyy komitet Azerbaydzhanskoy SSR po statistike, 1990, p. 379; Guseynov, 1980, p. 10). Until 1988, Karabakh was considered one of the developed industrial regions of our republic. Light and food industries have developed in the Upper Karabakh economic region. The economy of this economic region was based on agriculture, and the food industry was mainly based on the processing of local agricultural raw materials.

At the beginning of 1987, the value of industrial production assets in Karabakh was 300 million manats, of which 140 million manats were attributed to Nagorno-Karabakh. Compared to 1980, the value of industrial production assets had increased by 55.6% by 1987, which was 46.5% higher than national averages. In that year, the population of Karabakh ranked second only to the Absheron region in terms of industrial employment per 10,000 people. From 1940 to 1987, the volume of industrial production in Karabakh surged 25 times, reaching 450 million manats. Research indicates that from 1970 to 1987, Karabakh's rate of industrial development was three times higher than the republican level. However, between 1985 and 1988, the region

experienced fluctuations, including increases, decreases, and even complete halts in production. During this period, vineyards in Karabakh were reduced by 40% under the pretext of combating alcoholism. Additionally, the rise of Armenian separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh led to the neglect and destruction of vineyards and fertile gardens. As a result of raw material shortages, wine production fell ninefold from 1985 to 1988, with some industrial sectors seeing their output drop to zero. The collapse of the USSR and the ensuing economic crisis halted trade relations, particularly in non-food exchanges among its member states (AMEA, 2021, p. 430).

In 1987, Nagorno-Karabakh exceeded the level of the republic by 2 times due to the development of social infrastructure areas. In 1970-87, the volume of industrial product production in NKAR increased by 3.3 times, electricity production by 26.2 times, agricultural products by 1.7 times, and capital investment by 3 times, taking the leading place in the republic (AMEA, 2021, p. 463). Region in the late 1980s due to the irresponsible and thoughtless actions of those demanding the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR. On February 20, 1988, the local Soviet made an illegal decision regarding the accession of NKAR to Armenia and sent the corresponding request to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Attempts were made to justify these absurd demands by citing the supposed economic backwardness of the autonomous region. As early as the 1960s, appeals had been sent to the central government regarding the region's exposure to "economic selectivity," and disagreements in the economic sphere became one of the main driving forces of the conflict (<https://story.karabakh.center/28>). Another justification put forth was that NKAR maintained commercial relations with the Armenian SSR rather than with the Azerbaijan SSR.

According to statistical data from 1987, the total turnover of interregional relations in the NKAR amounted to 260 million rubles, with 150 million rubles attributed to exports and 110 million to imports. Products worth 100 million rubles were exported to other republics of the USSR, while exports to other regions of Azerbaijan totaled 50 million rubles. In contrast, exports to Armenia amounted to only 450 thousand rubles, or about 0.3%. The value of products imported from Armenia by NKAR, which was approximately 60% self-sufficient, was 1.5 million rubles, or 1.4%. The food products imported by NKAR from Armenia consisted solely of canned fruits and vegetables (300 thousand rubles), while the remainder were non-food items. Trade relations between NKAR and Moscow were more developed than those with Armenia (<https://story.karabakh.center/28>). Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR and Chairman of the Republican State Planning Committee Ayaz Mutallibov informed "Azerinform" correspondents V. Korsh and P. Savin about the actual

economic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, the implementation of tasks, the second stage of planned reconstruction, and development prospects. He stated that Nagorno-Karabakh is a developed industrial-agrarian region that plays an important role in the economy of the entire republic. A completely normal structure of food consumption existed in NKAR. While each resident consumed 13 kg of butter in Baku, 10 kg in Ali Bayramli, 11.5 kg in Mingachevir, 10.6 kg in Sumgait, and 10.5 kg in Kirovabad (Ganja), more than 12 kg of butter was consumed per person per year in Stepanakert (Khankendi). In terms of milk and meat consumption per capita, Stepanakert ranked just behind Baku, the capital of the republic (Mamedov, 1988, p. 28-30).

Even after the occupation of the Azerbaijani khanates by tsarist Russia, the issue of food played a key role in the resettlement of Armenians, specifically in Karabakh rather than other khanates. According to S. Glinka, after the end of the Second Russo-Iranian War, 8,000 Armenian families—approximately 40,000 people—were relocated from South Azerbaijan to the South Caucasus within three and a half months. The plan was to settle the immigrants in the territories of the Iravan and Nakhchivan khanates. However, fearing that a sharp increase in population in these areas would lead to a bread shortage, the government ordered their relocation to Karabakh, which had sufficient food reserves. It should also be noted that in the palace of the Karabakh khanate, there was an “ambardaragasi”—a storekeeper (chief storekeeper)—who was responsible for food-related matters (Gadzhiev, 2008, p. 74-76). Reserve is the result of savings, and saving is an indicator of a high level of consumer culture. In this sense, it is concluded that there was a high consumption culture in Karabakh over time. The call of the international organizations currently dealing with food issues to the states of the world is precisely to raise the consumption culture and not allow wastage. The UN General Assembly's Sustainable Development Goal 12, target 12.3, includes a commitment to halve global food waste per capita at the retail and consumer level and to reduce food loss in supply chains by 2030. Estimates show that more than US\$1 trillion of food (74 kg per person per year) is wasted each year. This means the loss of more than a third of all food products produced globally, using a quarter (28-30%) of the world's agricultural land (UNEP, 2024).

2. Azerbaijan's losses as a result of the war

13 thousand km² of our country was occupied by Armenia, which started military aggression against our country in the 90s of the 20th century without any legal basis. By 2020, in the geographical division of labor of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Karabakh region accounted for 20% of the territory, up to 10% of the population, 3.0% of industrial production, 8.0% of agricultural products, 6-8% of water resources and 40% of mineral water sources (AMEA, 2021, p.18). In Azerbaijan, up to 35-40% of agricultural products, including 14.5% of

meat, 17.1% of cocoon production, 14.3% of grain, 6.3% of potatoes, 31% of grapes, 17% of milk, 3.6% of eggs, 19.3% of wool, 15.8% of cattle, including 14.9% of cows and buffalo, 19.2% of sheep and goats fell to the occupied regions (AMEA, 2021, pp. 450-51; Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti, 2022, p. 31). Historically, grain growing, fodder production, tobacco growing, viticulture, cotton growing, potato growing, horticulture, meat and dairy farming have dominated in the field of agriculture in Karabakh. In the past, fish was caught in the Kura, Araz, Khachin rivers and the upper streams of the Bazarchay (Gadzhiyeva, 2008, p. 38). In the mouths of Hekari and Bargushad rivers, abundant goldfish and rare otter were found (AMEA, 2021, p. 29). In the rivers Terter, Gargar, Khachin and Inche live 18 species of fish. 12 species of fish are distributed in the internal reservoirs of Karabakh, 7 of which, in addition to the 2nd edition of the Red Book, are included in the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (AMEA, 2021, p. 235). The food industry in the Karabakh region developed significantly, encompassing various sectors such as winemaking, mineral water production, flour milling, baking, confectionery, and canned fruits and vegetables. While wine production was prominent across all regions—particularly in five districts—it was especially concentrated in the cities of Aghdam and Khankendi. However, the occupation of Karabakh and its surrounding areas by Armenians for over 30 years has rendered 90% of the region's food industry, like other economic sectors, completely inoperative. The 120 mineral water deposits of different compositions in the occupied territories—along with mineral watering and treatment facilities based in Shirlan, Upper and Lower Istisu, Bagirsag, Keshdak in the Kalbajar district, and Iligsu, Minkend in the Lachin district, and Turshsu in the Shusha district—were also subjected to Armenian aggression (AMEA, 2021, p. 436). Only in the Kelbajar region in the Tutgunchay valley, a tributary of the Terter River, there are up to 400 healing waters that can be considered unique for a small area (Azərbaycan Respublikası Dövlət Turizm Agentliyi, 2022, p. 49). During the Soviet period, Karabakh was considered the tourism center of Azerbaijan due to its resort and recreation opportunities. A large number of resort-recreation establishments, sanatoriums and camps were operating in Shusha. The first rest house in Shusha was opened in 1936. In addition, were operating treatment-recreation centers in Shusha sanatorium-resort association of Shusha with 1316 beds, Shafa tourist base with 130 beds, 100 beds in Gulabli village of Aghdam region, 50 beds in Shelli village, and 40 beds in Shahbulag village. A sanatorium facility was operating on the basis of the Istisu mineral water field, located in the Kalbajar region, which has therapeutic-balneological effect (AMEA, 2021, p. 457). Annually about 10 thousand people from different regions of the country and other

republics came to the sanatoriums and rest houses that existed in Shusha (Guseynov, 1980, pp. 33-36). One of the main and promising types of tourism in Karabakh is medical-health tourism, which includes therapeutic-balneological tourism centers and resort-sanatorium establishments. A sanatorium with the same name was built around the Istisu spring in 1928. In terms of its chemical composition and physical properties, these waters are identical to the world-famous springs of Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) and are unique in the world in terms of many other properties (AMEA, 2021, p. 458). Resort recreation and healing sanatorium resources of Karabakh include 3 important natural grounds: climate, forest and mineral waters. In the past, each of them had its own characteristics in the creation and development of the Shirilan-Shusha-Khankendi resort complex. Professor Figurovsky in his book "Climatic Stations and Resorts of the Azerbaijan SSR," published 84 years ago, said that "Shusha is similar to Davos in climatic conditions and even surpasses it in some respects. The Karabakh group of climatic stations from Khankendi to Shusha and further to Lysogor (Turshsu region) contains all the healing properties of the Kislovodsk, Abastumani and Davos groups" (Guseynov, 1980, p. 31-32). Shirilan water contains a large amount of magnesium, which was not found in other sources of the region (Guseynov, 1980, p. 34). The speleothuristic potential of Karabakh is also great. Potential opportunities for the development of speleotourism in Karabakh include Azykh, Taglar, Zarisly, Garanlig kaha, Baygara, Hochaz, Khan, Gakhal cave, etc. (AMEA, 2021, p. 457). In addition, Karabakh has great potential for the development of cultural, ecological, religious, mountain, winter and hunting tourism. In recent years, a lot of work has been done in the direction of tourism development in our country, and a number of successful projects have been implemented. Since tourism creates the basis for high income and quick return of investments invested in it, and in a broader sense it is a sphere affecting the formation of the state budget, improvement of villages and cities, preservation of historical and architectural monuments, development of small and medium-sized entrepreneurship, currently the development of tourism in Karabakh is also of great importance. This area will also play an important role in improving the standard of living of the population.

Currently, the territories liberated from occupation present profitable opportunities for foreign investors in the tourism and agricultural sectors. If tourism in this region, particularly therapeutic and balneological tourism, is redeveloped in accordance with modern standards based on the experiences of developed countries, both the local population and citizens of neighboring states can benefit from these opportunities at more affordable costs. However, unfortunately, all existing infrastructure in the liberated territories was destroyed, and the region's natural resources and potential were ruthlessly exploited during the occupation period.

As a result of the joint efforts of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the "Working Group on the Assessment of Losses and Casualties Due to the Occupation of Azerbaijani Territories by Armenia," which began in early 2014, concrete results were achieved. It was revealed that from 1988 to 1994, 2,400 industrial, agricultural, and other enterprises, 225 reservoirs, approximately 350 bridges, 5,200 km of highways, 286 km of railways, 116 railway bridges, and 7,700 km of infrastructure were completely destroyed, along with the confiscation of 220,000 cattle (Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti, 2022, p. 31).

More than a hundred traditional kahriz underground aqueducts (Gadzhiyeva, 2008, p. 32) became silted and almost disappeared or became unusable. 180-200 thousand hectares of agricultural land has been abandoned or degraded. There was a 1000-hectare mulberry garden in Jabrayil district alone, and 15.000 trees were used for the production of 180 tons of silk per year. During the inspection of the area, it was observed that there are both grown and cut mulberry trees, and others died due to lack of irrigation (UNEP, 2022, pp. 8-9).

The total amount of damage that our country has lost and faced in the lands under Armenian occupation over the years is estimated at 265 billion 281 million 198 thousand 203 dollars (Working Group on Assessment of Losses and Casualties as a result of the occupation of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the armed forces of Armenia, pp. 173-177) (Azərbaycan Respublikası ərazisinin Ermənistan silahlı qüvvələrinin işğalı nəticəsində itki və tələfatların qiymətləndirilməsi üzrə işçi qrupu, pp.173-177). According to international laws, Armenia, as an occupying state, is directly responsible for all the material and moral damage and losses caused to Azerbaijan and sooner or later must compensate for it. Regarding the war crimes of Armenia, the state of Azerbaijan referred to a number of international human rights organizations – the International Criminal Court, the UN Human Rights Committee, the European Court of Human Rights, the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross, etc.

3.The place of Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur economic regions in the food security policy of Azerbaijan and their perspective contributions

In 2020, thanks to the solidarity of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the victorious army and the Azerbaijani people, were liberated our occupied territories and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was restored after the 44-day Patriotic War. After the anti-terrorist operation on September 19, 2023, the sovereignty of Azerbaijan was fully restored.

In order to develop the territories liberated from occupation and their reintegration into the country's economy, as well as to increase the efficiency of planning work in other economic

regions, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on new regionalization on July 7, 2021. According to this decree, the territory of the country was rezoned and divided into 14 economic regions (<https://e-qanun.az/framework/52757>). Separate regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan differ from each other in historical development, physical and economic-geographical features. According to the new regionalization, the Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur economic regions historically occupy an important place in the economy, history and culture of Azerbaijan.

The Karabakh economic region, approved in the new classification of economic regions and the largest among 14 economic regions, covers an area of 8.99 thousand km², and its population, according to the 2022 census, is 907.9 thousand people. The economic region accounts for 10.38% of the country's territory and covers 8 administrative regions – Agjabedi, Agdam, Barda, Khojaly, Khojavend, Fizuli, Shusha, Terter districts, the cities of Khankendi and Shusha. The state border of the economic region bordering Iran from the South runs along the Araz River and the economic geographical position of the region is favorable (Vəlişov and Kazımlı, 2023, pp. 481-486). The area of East Zangezur economic region is 7.47 thousand km², the population is 345 thousand people according to the census of 2022. It includes Jabrayil, Kalbajar, Lachin, Gubadli and Zangilan administrative regions. The Eastern Zangezur economic region, surrounded by the Zangezur range and occupying a large territory from Lachin and Kelbajar to Nakhchivan, is located on the border with Armenia in the eastern part of the Zangezur plateau (Vəlişov and Kazımlı, 2023, pp. 486-490). On November 16, 2022, the President of the country also signed a decree approving the "I State Program on the Great Return to the territories freed from occupation of the Republic of Azerbaijan". Currently, large-scale measures are being taken in the direction of the restoration of territories freed from occupation, ensuring their future development, creating the necessary infrastructure, and returning the population to their native lands. It is very important to carry out all the work planned for ensuring their equal development by effectively using the rich economic potential, natural resources and wide tourism opportunities of the mentioned areas on the basis of a purposeful single program. (<https://president.az/az/articles/view/52389>). Like all economic and cultural spheres, it is very important to properly and quickly integrate the economic potential of the liberated territories into the general economic system in the reconstruction of agriculture and ensuring the country's food security.

In 2023, the gross domestic product of 123 billion manats was produced in our country. In 2023, 0.4% more gross domestic product was produced compared to the corresponding period in 2022. During this period, the added value produced in the oil and gas sector of the economy decreased by 3.9%, and in the non-oil and gas sector, it increased by 4.9%. 2.6% of

the added value was allocated to agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors. Compared to January-March 2022, the total agricultural output increased by 3.4%, including livestock production - by 3.5%, crop production - by 1.3% (https://www.stat.gov.az/news/source/doklad_2023-03.pdf). At the stage of reconstruction and recovery, by taking advantage of the experience of the developed countries of the world, using modern methods and technological equipment, it is possible to achieve production exceeding the indicators of the previous period.

The development of animal husbandry plays a crucial role in supplying the country with meat and dairy products. According to data from the State Statistics Committee, in the 1980s, there were 321,000 cattle and 1.1 million small cattle in the region. In the future, these numbers could be increased to 430,000 cattle and 1.6 million small cattle. Additionally, it is possible to raise the number of cows and buffaloes to 80,000–100,000, sheep and goats to 1–1.5 million, birds to 2–2.5 million, and bee colonies to 20,000–25,000.

Thus, as a result of the development of animal husbandry in that region, it is predicted that approximately 45 thousand tons of meat and 240 thousand tons of milk will be produced, which once again shows the great importance of the region in terms of import substitution and strengthening of food security. The implementation of the specified goals can allow to increase the production of agricultural products in Azerbaijan by 8-10% every year, develop the processing industry and, as a result, improve the country's food supply (Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti, 2022, pp. 48-49). Poultry and beekeeping in economic regions also contributes to the socio-economic development of the region as a traditional developing field. There were 33,123 units of bee families in the Karabakh economic region, and 41,593 units in the Eastern Zangezur economic region (<https://www.stat.gov.az/source/agriculture/>). Taking into account the existing potential of our liberated territories, the volume of raw materials and natural resources and fertile lands, production in these regions is expected to increase up to 8 times shortly after the recovery phase. This will lead to strong economic development and, as a result, further improvement of the food supply of the country's population (Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti, 2022, p.155). As a result of the reintegration of the Karabakh economic region, it is predicted that the import of wheat in our country will decrease to 6.92%, meat and meat products to 23.64%, and dairy products to 14.08%, and the percentage of dependence on imports will decrease in 2030. Animal husbandry products produced in processing enterprises will allow meeting the food demand not only in Karabakh and East Zangezur economic regions, but also in the country as a whole.

According to preliminary studies, the arable land area in the liberated regions exceeds 150.000 hectares, and the recultivation of those lands can increase the country's wheat self-sufficiency from 57% to 65% (Azərbaycan Respublikası İqtisadi İslahatların Təhlili və Kommunikasiya Mərkəzi, 2022, p. 35-40). Calculations conducted by the Center for Analysis and Communication of Economic Reforms show that as a result of the reintegration of Karabakh, GDP will increase by 3%, including agriculture by 10.4%, mining industry by 5.3%, manufacturing industry by 4.3%, tourism by 5.5%, transport services by 4.9%. Calculations show that the opening of regional communications can increase GDP in Azerbaijan by 1.2% (<https://vergiler.az/news/economy/13385.html>). Since the territory of Karabakh has favorable conditions for agricultural development, and the agrarian sector is vital for ensuring the food security of the population, the state consistently prioritizes agriculture. Initially, the liberated territories are being cleared of mines, followed by planting activities. However, this is a challenging and long-term process, and achieving the desired results in the coming years may not be feasible. Clearing these areas of unexploded mines and ammunition could take 5 to 10 years. This is partly because the mine maps provided by Armenia are only 25% accurate, and also because these operations require substantial funding (up to approximately 1,000 manats for the detection and neutralization of a single mine) (AMEA, 2021, pp. 450-51). It should also be noted that from 2020 to today (30.05.2024), 361 of our citizens have fallen victim to mines (<https://apa.az/resmi-xeber/prezident-muharibenin-2020-ci-ilde-basa-catmasindan>). Since the clearing of unexploded mines and munitions in the areas freed from occupation will continue for a long time, it would be more appropriate to build urban (urban) and vertical farms in those areas (<https://smartagro.az/az/solutions/seher-teserrufatlari-az-27/>). As urban and vertical farms are interconnected, water use is significantly reduced (up to 75-95%), no more wastage is allowed, and hydroponics are used. The use of hydroponics in the formation and development of urban agriculture in the smart cities that will be built in the territories freed from occupation can be a novelty and a positive situation for our country in this field. This form of farming also avoids the dangers of climate risks (<https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/hydroponics>). According to the decrees of the President of Azerbaijan dated May 28, 2021 and October 4, 2021, two more industrial parks (Aghdam and Araz Valley Economic Zone Industrial Park) were added to the 5 industrial parks currently operating in Azerbaijan. In the newly created industrial parks, important work is being carried out related to the development of agriculture and the creation of infrastructure. One of the priority areas of the Aghdam Industrial Park, covering an area of 190 hectares, is the organization of packaging of agricultural products, the production and processing of canned fruits and vegetables, meat

and dairy products. In addition to the sale of manufactured products within the country, it is planned to export it to Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (<https://president.az/az/articles/view/55435>). In the Araz Valley Economic Zone Industrial Park, located on an area of 200 hectares in the Jabrayil district, plans are in place for the packaging of agricultural products, production and processing of fruit and vegetable preserves, milk and meat products, wine production, fodder, fertilizer, sericulture enterprises, and small production and service areas, including the construction of refrigeration facilities. The location of this industrial park along newly built highways and railways, as well as its favorable logistical position, are key factors attracting the attention of investors. These roads and railways will create new opportunities for transporting goods from Azerbaijan to fraternal Turkey and vice versa, as well as from Azerbaijan to Russia via the Zangezur corridor (<https://xalqgazeti.az/az/sosial-heyat/166635-araz-vadisi-iqtisadi-zonasi-bolgeye>). Our victory in the Second Karabakh War made it possible to implement the Zangezur Corridor project for the implementation of road and rail transport projects from the historical territory of Zangezur to Nakhchivan.

The fact that the fraternal Republic of Turkey has a railway network stretching from Istanbul to London will create opportunities for the export of agro-industrial products to the European markets produced in our country, including in the Karabakh economic region. This, in turn, will create conditions for our country to become one of the important actors in the field of transport logistics and will lead to the provision of a large currency flow (Azerbaijan State University of Economics, 2022, p.81) (Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti, 2022, p. 81). The comprehensive sustainable development of the Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur economic regions is a complex and multifaceted process, including not only socio-economic, but also military-political stabilization between the two countries, bringing to a high level the development of cultural, spiritual and national-ethnic relations.

Conclusion

Nagorno-Karabakh, recognized by the international community as a longstanding conflict zone, was returned to its rightful owners following a 44-day Patriotic War, marked by the sacrifices of brave individuals. However, Armenia—particularly the Armenian lobby and opposition—has struggled to accept this outcome and continues to hinder the complete resolution of the issue. Even though the war has concluded, the prospects for peaceful coexistence remain slim. Achieving lasting peace in the region requires addressing not only political negotiations but also deeper societal changes. Complete peace must be pursued across

all layers of society, fostering development for the region as a whole. To establish sustainable peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, it is essential to challenge the entrenched ideologies that have shaped Armenian thought for centuries. It is insufficient to rely solely on politicians to resolve this issue; Armenian intellectuals and scholars, who understand the truth and the realities of the situation, bear a significant responsibility. They must actively work to reshape perceptions, steering the Armenian populace away from animosity towards Turks and unfounded territorial claims, and combating negative tendencies such as separatism and chauvinism. Healing society requires collective effort from individuals in both open and frozen conflict scenarios to liberate future generations from the burdens of unresolved issues.

A crucial step is the revision of all high school and secondary school textbooks in Armenia to present the history of "real Armenia," rather than the mythical narrative of "Armenia from sea to sea." Instead of instilling enmity from a young age by whispering "The Turk is your enemy!" to children, educators should promote the idea that "You are a Caucasian citizen, a perfect example of peace and harmony." This approach would nurture a generation of citizens who respect other cultures, rather than one vulnerable to political manipulation. Currently, Armenia experiences chaos not only at the political level but also in the relationship between military forces and ordinary citizens. Armenian politicians and citizens must remain vigilant to prevent becoming pawns for external powers pursuing their interests in the region. Due to Armenia's unfounded claims against Azerbaijan, the country has been excluded from significant regional projects. However, the resolution of the Karabakh conflict through military means has opened new avenues for cooperation. One such opportunity is the potential establishment of a transport corridor linking Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan, and Turkey to Armenia. If these economic and political projects are realized, they could usher in peace and stability in the South Caucasus after years of conflict. The future of the region and the fate of proposed projects depend on the success of peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the full implementation of the November 10 agreement. Unfortunately, external forces are attempting to obstruct this process. Azerbaijan seeks to harmonize the interests of neighboring states while safeguarding its national interests, employing all available means to achieve peace. If Armenia continues its traditional policies toward its neighbors, it risks exacerbating unemployment and deteriorating economic conditions, which could lead to increased chaos and arbitrariness within the republic. This path will hinder integration and democratization efforts in the region. Conversely, if Armenia embraces regional cooperation and leverages the Zangezur corridor, it could enhance its socio-economic situation and bolster food security. Azerbaijan's foreign

policy is grounded in mutual benefit and cooperation with all regional states, and Armenia can certainly be one of these partners.

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