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FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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Abstract: *This article covers the relations of Turkey and Armenia as well as the internal and international developments of Armenia between January and July of 2018. Armenia's annulment of the Zurich protocols, the message sent to the Turkish Armenians by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the commemoration of April 24, the election of Armen Sarkissian as the new president of Armenia, the election of Serzh Sargysan as the Prime Minister, the public demonstrations as a consequence of the latter's election leading to the resignation of Serzh Sargysan and the election of Nikol Pashinyan - the leader of the demonstrations- as the new Prime Minister are the major issues that are going to be discussed within the scope of this article.*

Keywords: *Serzh Sargysan, Armen Sarkissian, Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia, Turkey*

Öz: *Bu incelemede Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde ve Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde 2018 yılının Ocak ila Temmuz aylarındaki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, Ermenistan'ın 2009 Zürih protokollerini feshetmesi, Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın Türkiye Ermenilerine mesajı, 24 Nisan'ın anılması, Ermenistan'da Armen Sarkisyan'ın yeni Cumhurbaşkanı seçilmesi, Serj Sarkisyan'ın Başbakan seçilmesi, bunun yol açtığı kitlesel gösteriler sonrası istifa etmesi ve gösterilerin lideri Nikol Paşinyan'ın Başbakan seçilmesi ele alınmaktadır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Serj Sarkisyan, Armen Sarkisyan, Nikol Paşinyan, Ermenistan, Türkiye*

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1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

The first months of 2018 passed in an extraordinarily lively and high-tempo manner for Armenia. In the international press during the beginning of January, there were news reports that societal unrest could occur in 2018.¹ The reason for these reports and concerns was that President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan's constitutional term of office was due to end, yet -in an attempt to remain in power- there was a high possibility of him being elected as a strong prime minister in the parliamentary system based on the constitutional amendment made in 2015. Likewise, there was the subject of who would become the new president.

In 19 January, President S. Sargsyan presented former ambassador, former prime minister, and businessman Armen Sarkissian as his presidential candidate of choice.² Disputes regarding the reactions of the opposition towards this choice remained on the agenda for some time.

As a result of the constitutional amendment approved by the referendum made in Armenia on 7 December 2015, there was a shift from the presidential system to the parliamentary system in 2018. The new parliament elections that were to play a key role in the shift to the parliamentary system were held on 2 April 2017 and President S. Sargsyan's Republican Party won the absolute majority.³ Thus, following the end of Serzh Sargsyan's term in April 2018, the new president would be elected not by the people but by the parliament.

Indeed, on 23 February, Armen Sarkissian was officially presented as the only candidate in the parliament for the presidency.⁴ On 2 March 2018, the new president Armen Sarkissian was elected for the first time not by the popular vote but by the parliament, for a seven-year period and made his oath of office on 9 April 2018.⁵

1 "Social Unrest Knocking on Doors in Armenia - Country's Media," *AzerNews.az*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/aggression/125154.html>

2 "Republican Party Nominates Armen Sarkissian for Next President of Armenia," *MassisPost*, January 19, 2018, <https://massispost.com/2018/01/republican-party-nominates-armen-sarkissian-next-president-armenia/>

3 "Republicans win majority of seats in Armenian parliament," *OC Media*, April 3, 2015, <http://oc-media.org/republicans-win-majority-of-seats-in-armenian-parliament/>

4 "Armenia Parliamentary Majority Nominates Ex-PM For President," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-armen-sarkisian-nominated-president/29058838.html>

5 "Dr. Armen Sarkissian Sworn in as President of Armenia," *Asbarez*, April 9, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/171551/dr-armen-sarkissian-sworn-in-as-president-of-armenia/>

President Armen Sarkissian was born in Yerevan on 23 June 1953. He is married and has two children. He is a physics professor. He has served as an ambassador and for a brief period as prime minister. After having served as Armenia's ambassador to London during the years 1991-1995 and 1998-1999, he retired, moved to the UK, acquired British citizenship and entered the business life.⁶ When he was nominated as a presidential candidate by Serzh Sargsyan, his British citizenship was criticized by the opposition and it was claimed that he had violated the Constitutional requirement that presidential candidates must be of Armenian citizenship for at least the last six years.⁷ In the explanation that A. Sarkissian made against these criticisms, he stated that he had cancelled his dual citizenship in 2011 and that he has been solely an Armenian citizen since that date.⁸ The Minister of Justice stated that the date A. Sarkissian himself canceled his British citizenship would be the basis taken into consideration. The opposition highlighted that in a British tax statement of 2014 that has his signature, he was still displayed in the records as a British citizen. A. Sarkissian explained that he had signed it without paying attention. In response to this explanation, Yelq MP Nikol Pashinyan criticized this as an “unserious attitude”, stated that A. Sarkissian “trivialized public discourse” and asked “when you become president, shall we expect you to sign other documents without paying attention and without reading the contents?”

When the new president was presented as the single candidate and elected in the parliament, it was time for the election of the new prime minister. Due to the position of the prime minister becoming the executive power of the country's new administration system because of the 2015 constitutional amendment, the spotlight was doubtlessly focused on this election.

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6 “Entrepreneur, diplomat and ex-PM: Who is Armen Sarkissian?” *News.am*, January 19, 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/431897.html>

7 Hrant Galstyan, “Does Armen Sarkissian Qualify as Armenia's Next President? British Documents Raise Armenian Citizenship Doubt,” *Hetq*, February 8, 2018, <http://hetq.am/eng/news/85625/does-armen-sarkissian-qualify-as-armenias-next-president-british-documents-raise-armenian-citizenship-doubt.html>

8 “Armen Sarkissian: I Am Only Armenia Citizen since December 2, 2011,” *News.am*, March 1, 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/438906.html>

In 2015, the referendum for the transition from a presidential system to a parliamentary system⁹ took place under the leadership and intensive efforts of S. Sargsyan. Aiming to parry the accusations that this change was occurring so that he could maintain his rule, S. Sargsyan stated in 2014 with open, clear statements leaving no room for doubt that this change in the system was not conducted with personal agendas to extend his rule and that he would not be a candidate. He repeated this pledge several times afterwards.

In 2018, after it was observed that the presidential candidate could easily be determined and chosen by the ruling party, and with the encouragement he received from his party's absolute majority in the parliament, S. Sargsyan announced his candidacy for the prime ministership.

Upon this development, on 23 March civil society representatives began their protest demonstrations. These demonstrations grew and spread with a rolling snowball effect and turned into a massive reaction that spread throughout Armenia with the leadership of Nikol Pashinyan, who was the oppositional leader of the YELQ (“the way out/the exit way”) group represented with ten MPs in the Parliament. On 30 March, Pashinyan made a statement expressing that “[S.] Sargsyan should not become the prime minister.” And when the new president A. Sarkissian assumed his post ten days later, Pashinyan declared that S. Sargsyan would leave the government and called for him to be barred from returning to his position.¹⁰

On 31 March, the protest campaign organized under the leadership of Pashinyan started in Gyumri and continued marching towards Yerevan.¹¹ On 13 April, Pashinyan and his followers reached Yerevan and began permanent demonstrations in the Freedom Square.

On 17 April, the Armenian National Assembly conducted a special meeting electing Serzh Sargsyan as the Prime Minister. The demonstrators led by Pashinyan demanded S. Sargsyan's resignation and he declared a “velvet revolution” in the name of achieving this outcome.¹² In this process, many demonstrators were arrested.

9 The executive branch in the parliamentary governmental system is two-headed. One is “president/head of state”, the other is the “cabinet of ministers”. The prime minister is the head of cabinet as *primus inter pares*.

10 Seda Ghukasyan, “Pashinyan's March to Yerevan: “We Have No Plans of Going Home,” *Hetq*, April 10, 2018, <http://hetq.am/eng/news/87276/pashinyans-march-to-yerevan-we-have-no-plans-of-going-home.html>

11 Anahit Chilingaryan, “Protests Surge in Armenia,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/16/protests-surge-armenia>

12 “Nikol Pashinyan about Likely Scenario of Velvet Revolution Development in Armenia,” *Информационное агентство ARKA News Agency*, April 20, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/nikol_pashinyan_about_likely_scenario_of_velvet_revolution_development_in_armenia/

On 18 April, the US State Department made an official statement regarding the latest political developments in Armenia. It was expressed that the demonstrations were being closely followed and a call was made for the parties to avoid actions that would create tension or violence.

On 21 April, S. Sargsyan called on Pashinyan to establish a dialogue, Pashinyan explained that they would only talk with the government about Sargsyan's resignation.¹³ On the same day, President A. Sarkissian met with the demonstrators and spoke with Pashinyan.¹⁴

The religious front did not remain indifferent to these developments. Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II and Catholicos of Cilicia (based in Antelias, Lebanon) Aram I published messages inviting the demonstrators towards peace.¹⁵

On 22 April, Pashinyan and S. Sargsyan met in front of the television cameras. Pashinyan immediately demanded from S. Sargsyan his resignation.¹⁶ Sargsyan, however, stated that this was not a dialogue but an ultimatum, that it constituted blackmail against the state and legal authorities, and that Pashinyan should learn a lesson from the events of 1 March 2008. Pashinyan stated in response that threats would not deter the demonstrators, that the situation had changed, that Sargsyan did not have authority, and that the power in Armenia was in the hands of the people. In response, S. Sargsyan left the meeting, while Pashinyan invited the people to continue with the protests.¹⁷ Pashinyan was arrested on the same day right after the meeting.

On 23 April, Pashinyan was released, and shortly after S. Sargsyan announced his resignation.¹⁸ President Armen Sarkissian approved the government's resignation on the same day.

13 "Серж Саргсян о митингах в Ереване: Сложно понять, как дальше будут развиваться события," *News.am*, April 19, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447274.html>

14 "Президент Армении пришел на площадь Республики," *News.am*, April 21, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447607.html>

15 "Католикос всех армян: Призываем всех не терять трезвость и разум," *News.am*, April 19, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447191.html>

16 "Armenian Protest Leader Pashinian Says PM Serzh Sarkisian Agrees To Meet," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 21, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-protests-pashinian-sarkisian-yerevan/29184296.html>

17 "Political Crisis Deepens in Armenia, Protest Leader Pashinyan Detained," *Daily Sabah*, April 22, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/europe/2018/04/22/political-crisis-deepens-in-armenia-protest-leader-pashinyan-detained>

18 "Armenia's Prime Minister Sargsyan Resigns Amid Opposition Protests," *Sputnik International*, April 23, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201804231063824234-sargsyan-resignation/>

Pashinyan considered S. Sargsyan's resignation as the first step. He explained that "The second step is for the National Assembly to assign a candidate of the people as a prime minister. This will be done in a week. Until then, a temporary government should be organized, afterwards, extraordinary parliament elections should be conducted."¹⁹

The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia that had been closely following the developments in Armenia, evaluating the latest developments, stated; "People who have been strong during the toughest times of their history, that have respected each other despite disagreements represent a grand community. Armenia, Russia is always with you."²⁰ Pashinyan expressed his gratitude for this statement and stated that support was expected from the international community for the "clean Armenian velvet revolution."²¹

The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of Armenia made a sudden visit to Moscow on 26 April. It was reflected in the press that high level meetings were held during the visit. It was reported in the Russian and Armenian media that President of Russia Vladimir Putin stepped in and met with Deputy Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan. It was indicated that Putin's main message was ensuring an immediate conclusion for the political crisis in Armenia in the framework of the current constitution and within the scope of the authorities of the parliament formed by the April 2017 elections.

Pashinyan, who had declared that he would not shy away from the responsibility if the people wanted to see him as the prime minister, wanted the protest demonstrations to start again. While the demonstrations were continuing, the Republican Party stated that a candidate from the party was not going to be presented for the prime ministership. On 30 April, the minority Yelq group in the parliament presented Pashinyan as a candidate for the prime ministership.²² On 1 May, the Armenian Parliament conducted a special session for the prime minister election and the Republican Party, which has the majority of seats, stated that it would not vote for Pashinyan. Therefore, Pashinyan was not elected as the Prime Minister. The elections were

19 "Пашинян: Ты победил, Гордый гражданин Республики Армения," *News.am*, April 23, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447885.html>

20 "Мария Захарова прокомментировала последние события в Армении," *News.am*, April 23, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447897.html>

21 "Velvet Revolution in Armenia: April-May 2018," *Human Rights Online*, May 22, 2018, <https://humanrights-online.org/en/velvet-revolution-in-armenia-april-may-2018/>

22 "Фракция «Выход» выдвинула кандидатуру Никола Пашиняна на пост премьер-министра Армении," *News.am*, April 30, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/448940.html>

postponed for seven days, and Pashinyan demanded the resumption of the civil disobedience and peaceful protests.²³

On 7 May, the Dashnaktsutyun Party, which is the coalition partner of the ruling party, stated that they would support the candidacy of Pashinyan. Also, the President stated; “If he is elected as the Prime Minister, I will work with Pashinyan.”²⁴

Ultimately, Nikol Pashinyan was elected as the Prime Minister of Armenia on 8 May 2018.²⁵

Nikol Pashinyan was born in the Armenian city of Ijevan on 1 June 1975. He is married and has four children. He entered the parliament as an MP in 2012.

He was discharged from the Yerevan State University’s Faculty of Journalism during his fourth year due to reasons regarding his political conduct. He served as the editor of the “Armenian Times” newspaper, which is Armenia’s best-selling liberal newspaper and known for its opposition against the policies of Kocharyan and Sargsyan. In 2000, his newspaper was accused of the offense of libel.

He had joined the March protests that were led by the first president Ter-Petrosyan against the February 2008 presidential elections that were held after President Kocharyan’s second term of office which resulted in Sargsyan’s election. 10 people had died, and 100 people were arrested in these protests. Pashinyan was also wanted by the police for charges of murder and disturbance of public peace and he eventually turned himself in after one year of hiding. On May 2011, he was released through the amnesty brought to political prisoners (this was the event that S. Sargsyan had reminded to Pashinyan during the 22 April meeting).

After being elected, Pashinyan’s first action was to visit Nagorno-Karabakh on 9 May. Speaking at a news conference, he said the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict cannot be resolved without the direct participation of the Nagorno-

23 Sara Khojayan, “Armenia Risks Further Unrest After Protest Leader Is Rejected as PM,” *Bloomberg.com*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-01/armenian-parliament-fails-to-elect-protest-leader-as-premier>

24 Oliver Carroll, “Armenian President Says He Is ‘ready to Stand between Police and Protesters,’” *The Independent*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/armenia-president-protests-police-name-violence-interview-anti-government-a8336661.html>

25 Margarita Antidze and Hasmik Mkrtchyan, “Protest Leader Nikol Pashinian Elected Prime Minister Of Armenia,” *Huffington Post*, May 8, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/armenia-prime-minister-election_us_5af17239e4b0c4f193267607

Karabakh authorities in the peace negotiations, adding that only these authorities have the right to speak on behalf of Karabakh. He criticized Azerbaijan's refusal to directly negotiate with Karabakh's ethnic Armenian leadership. He reiterated that "this negotiation format cannot be considered full-fledged until one of the parties to the conflict, the leadership of Karabakh, participates in it."²⁶ These remarks were met with widespread reaction. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov described Pashinyan's position on Karabakh as "possibly unconstructive."²⁷ Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson considered the statements a non-constructive step aimed at undermining the negotiation process on the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and maintaining the occupation-based status quo.²⁸ According to a British expert, Pashinyan's first statements on Karabakh stirred the situation, as he spoke more like a man from the crowd than a diplomat, saying that Karabakh is an "inseparable part" of Armenia.²⁹ It can be said that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, beyond being deemed a national cause in Armenia, is a sensitive issue for Pashinyan in respect of the connections the previous two presidents had with the area.

Also, during this visit, Pashinyan said that he was ready to establish relations with Turkey without preconditions. He claimed that Turkey was bringing forward preconditions and putting forward a third country (Azerbaijan) as an obstacle. He stated that he does not expect Turkey to recognize the "Armenian genocide" and that they, as Armenia, are striving in the international field for this to be recognized.³⁰

The Hankendi (Stepanakert) born S. Sargsyan had in essence foreshadowed from the beginning an uncompromising future due to his role in the war and invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, and especially his responsibility in the Khojali massacre. He had further ingrained the legacy he had inherited from Kocharyan. Lastly, in 20 February 2018, during the 30th year celebration of "Armenia's revival" by the separatist uprising in Nagorno-Karabakh that

26 "Pashinian Visits Karabakh," *For Rights*, May 9, 2018, http://forrights.am/?ln=2&page_id=458&id=29

27 "Russian Foreign Ministry Describes Pashinyan's Position on Karabakh as 'Possibly Unconstructive'," *ARKA News Agency*, June 1, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/russian_foreign_ministry_describes_pashinyan_s_position_on_karabakh_as_possibly_unconstructive/

28 "Armenia's New PM Angers Azerbaijan with Visit to Disputed Region," *TRT World*, May 9, 2018, www.trtworld.com/europe/armenia-s-new-pm-angers-azerbaijan-with-visit-to-disputed-region-17336

29 Thomas de Waal, "Armenia's Revolution and the Karabakh Conflict," *Carnegie Europe*, May 22, 2018, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/76414>

30 "Paşinyan: Karabağ'ın Uluslararası Çapta Tanınması Ermenistan'la Birleşmesine Yol Açabilir," *Sputnik Türkiye*, May 9, 2018, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/dunya/201805091033373673-pasinyan-karabag-ermenistan/>

started in February 1988, S. Sargsyan had incited militant feelings once more and the ASALA terrorist Monte Melkonyan was once again commemorated with respect and gratitude.³¹ During the end of February, as if aiming to create an excuse and justification for the Nagorno-Karabakh massacres, this time the disputed events (the veracity of which is subject to doubt) that had occurred on February 1988 in the city of Sumgait close to Baku were characterized as a massacre, and the 30th year of “Armenians being massacred” in Sumgait was commemorated.

Only time will tell whether Pashinyan assuming the administration of Armenia means the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh-origin administration that has been ruling the country for the past twenty years. In other words, the answer to whether the initiative to change the order of things and web of interests formed by the previous twenty year-administration will be successful or not is not yet clear. Pashinyan became the prime minister with the consent of the ruling party. Therefore, his executive capabilities are being kept under check. Pashinyan’s counter leverage originates from the obligation of Armenia to hold new elections if he is suspended from duty. It appears that the majority party is waiting for mistakes from Pashinyan and is biding its time for a counter initiative, while Pashinyan is aiming to form a powerful social base constituted of his followers by immediately attempting to enact reforms and carry out purges.

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Although the constitution granted the Prime Minister fifteen days to form a government, Pashinyan made his appointments within a week. On 21 May, the new government was sworn in. There are three deputy prime ministers and seventeen ministers, the youngest of age 28, the oldest 52. Three ministers from the old cabinet have kept their positions, albeit with different portfolios. The list of the ministers is below:³²

31 “Address by President Serzh Sargsyan on Artsakh Revival Day and Karabakh Movement 30th Anniversary,” *President of the Republic of Armenia Official Website*, February 20, 2018, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/02/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyans-address-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-Karabakh-movement/>

32 “Structure,” *The Government of the Republic of Armenia*, accessed July 25, 2018, www.gov.am/en/structure/

Ararat Mirzoyan, First Deputy Prime Minister
Tigran Avinyan, Deputy Prime Minister
Mher Grigoryan, Deputy Prime Minister
Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Artak Zeynalyan, Minister of Justice
Levon Vahradyan, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs
Hrachya Rostomyan, Minister of Emergency Situations
Lilit Makunts, Minister of Culture
Erik Grigoryan, Minister of Ecology
Suren Papikyan, Minister of Territorial Administration and
Development
Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, Minister of Diaspora
David Tonoyan, Minister of Defense
Mane Tandilyan, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs
Arsen Torosyan, Minister of Health
Arthur Khachatryan, Minister of Agriculture
Atom Janjughazyan, Minister of Finance
Arthur Grigoryan, Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural
Resources
Artsvik Minasyan, Minister of Economic Development and
Investments
Ashot Hakobyan, Minister of Transport, Communication and
Information Technologies
Arayik Harutyunyan, Minister of Education and Science

On 28 May, Armenia commemorated the centenary of the proclamation of the country's first independent republic with a military parade at the village Sardarabad,³³ about fifty kilometers west of the capital where Ottoman forces, on their way to liberating Baku, were obstructed in 22-29 May 1918 from occupying Yerevan.

33 "Armenia Celebrates 100th Anniversary of First Republic," MassisPost, May 28, 2018, <http://massispost.com/2018/05/armenia-celebrates-100th-anniversary-of-first-republic/>

On 1 June, unprecedented protests broke out in Karabakh, demanding change, in the foot- steps of events and change in Armenia. Pashinyan took a resolute stand to discourage the further eruption of the demonstrations.³⁴

2. External Developments

In the framework of a working visit, President S. Sargsyan went to France in January. On 22 January, he met with the France-Armenia Parliament friendship group, the Armenian community representatives in France, and the Paris Mayor at the Paris municipality. The next day he met with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron.³⁵ Macron stated that France will continue its warm relations with Armenia and with its support in the international field. In his statement to the press he said; “France will always be with Armenia. As you have always done in your history, for your country’s future to triumph, France will accompany you in this turbulent regional framework.” Macron also referred to the “deep bonds” between the two countries enhanced by the presence of the significant and effective Armenian community and stated; “I am aware of the struggle of the Armenian diaspora for the remembrance of the genocide and I deeply respect this struggle.” In this meeting, an official invitation was made to Macron for visiting Armenia and it was reported that Macron had accepted the invitation to the 17th Francophone summit that is planned to take place in Yerevan on October 2018.

S. Sargsyan then passed on to Strasbourg on 25 January and addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In his speech during which he mentioned the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, S. Sarkissian made the following points:

“It is necessary to adhere strictly to the current ceasefire and respect the agreements that have been made in the past. It is also essential that the resolution is peaceful and fair. All sides need to take collective responsibility and find groundwork for agreement based on a common aspect for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. We can only accept the international format established by OSCE Minsk Group.

34 Sisak Gabrielian, “Pashinian Urges End To Protests In Karabakh,” *Azatutyun*, June 4, 2018, www.azatutyun.am/a/29270933.html

35 “Sargsyan-Macron meeting kicks off in Paris,” *ArmenPress*, January 23, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/919956/sargsyan-macron-meeting-kicks-off-in-paris.html>

For nine years, we have been hearing statements from Turkey of the need to take some steps. Everything is expressed clearly in the documents. First, relations will be established, after which problematic subjects between the countries will be discussed. We can never accept Turkey's preconditions. Yes, Turkey is a powerful country with a large potential that cannot be compared with Armenia. However, this does not mean that Turkey has to speak with Armenia with a language of power and precondition. This is unacceptable."³⁶

After his meeting with S. Sargsyan, on 31 January, President of France Macron addressed the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations in France (CCAF) annual dinner and, promising to open the Armenian file, said that he would declare an "Armenian genocide commemoration day" in France.³⁷ He stated; "struggling for the recognition of the Armenian genocide and justice is the struggle for all of us. We conduct this struggle by supporting the genocide remembrance day." However, Macron turned down the request of the diaspora representatives wanting him to visit Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenia's occupation. He gave the message that in the current situation, visiting the region would lead to France losing its "intermediator" role in the resolution of the crisis. He stated that he would visit Armenia in Autumn as part of a state visit.

Moreover, during this period, S. Sargsyan brought forward a new discourse to the agenda and stated that they -as Armenia- will be celebrating the 2800th anniversary of the capital Yerevan. The President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev responded to this claim shortly after. On 9 February, Aliyev stated "Us Azerbaijanis should return to those historical lands [Yerevan]. This is our political and strategic aim and we should approach this aim gradually."³⁸

On 16 February, the Dutch parliament adopted a motion characterizing the 1915 events as genocide.³⁹ Before the voting for the motion in the parliament, the Dutch Deputy Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag took the floor and explained

36 "Karabakh Conflict Resolution, End to Turkey Protocols Focus of Sarkisian's PACE Speech," *Asbarez*, January 25, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/170020/karabakh-conflict-resolution-end-to-turkey-protocols-focus-of-sarkisians-pace-speech/>

37 "French President Macron Pledges to Add Armenian Genocide to French Calendar and to One Day Visit Artsakh," *The Armenian Weekly*, February 1, 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/02/01/macron-ccaf-2018/>

38 "6th Congress of New Azerbaijan Party held in Baku VIDEO," *AzerTac*, February 8, 2018, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/6th_Congress_of_New_Azerbaijan_Party_held_in_Baku_VIDEO-1134998

39 "Dutch Parliament Recognizes 1915 Armenian Massacre as genocide," *Reuters*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-turkey-armenia/dutch-parliament-recognizes-1915-armenian-massacre-as-genocide-idUSKCN1G62GS>

the Dutch government's stance on this subject. In brief, the Deputy Minister indicated that the definition of the crime of genocide was made in the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and that a genocide must be proven and that the Dutch government preserves the opinion that it can only decide on a genocide's existence as a consequence of an internationally authorized court's decision, a UNSC decision, or a thorough scientific research. Additionally, the Deputy Minister also emphasized that the Dutch government approaches the 1915 events differently from the Dutch parliament and that a "genocide" decision that the parliament would make would not be binding for the government.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey also made the following statement regarding the decision taken by the Dutch parliament:

"We strongly condemn the decisions of the Dutch House of Representatives recognizing the events of 1915 as genocide.

The baseless decisions of the House of Representatives of a country who was a bystander to the Srebrenica genocide, an undying pain in the middle of Europe, have no place either in history or in justice. Thus, they are neither legally binding nor have any validity.

Turkey's position on the events of 1915 is based on historical facts and legal norms. The established jurisprudence in European law and the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights affirm our rightfulness.

Even so, we take note of the Dutch government's statement that "it will not follow the House in its assessment recognizing the 1915 events as genocide and that being represented at a commemoration ceremony in Yerevan would not imply recognition of the events as genocide."⁴⁰

President S. Sargsyan addressed, on 17 February, the Munich Security Conference. In his speech targeting Turkey, S. Sargsyan voiced the claim that "the lack of political will in the Turkish administration is the main obstacle for the forming of relations between Armenia and Turkey." Continuing his words, he stated "During the Cold War period, Armenia was on the border of one of the two opposing blocs. It has been thirty years since the fall of the

40 "No: 53, 22 February 2018, Press Release Regarding the Decisions of the House of Representatives of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the Events of 1915," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, February 22, 2018, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-53_-hollanda-temsilciler-meclisinin-1915-olaylari-konusunda-aldigi-karar-hk_en.en.mfa

Berlin Wall, but Turkey keeps its borders with Armenia shut. It seems that the clocks there have stopped working.”⁴¹

On 8 March, the Serbian parliament rejected by a majority vote the proposed resolution introduced by an opposition party to “recognize the genocide committed against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.”

A member of the German Parliament, Mr. Cem Özdemir of the Green Party, one of the presenters of the genocide resolution that was approved in the German parliament in 2016, received the Mkhitar Gosh medal on 23 March in a ceremony held in Armenia’s Berlin Embassy for his “significant contributions to the Armenian genocide’s recognition in the international sphere.”

Prime Minister Pashinyan assured the Russian President Putin that Armenia would remain allied to Russia during his tenure when they met for the first time in Sochi on 14 May. Putin’s response was that he regarded Armenia as “our closest partner and ally in the region.”⁴² Pashinyan has thereafter repeatedly said that he will not pull Armenia out of the Eurasian Economic Union or the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the two organizations he had voiced heavy criticism against in the past.⁴³

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan paid his first official visit to Moscow on 7 June where he met with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. At the joint news briefing following the meeting, Lavrov said “we held good, constructive and trustworthy negotiations in the spirit of allied relations binding our states.”⁴⁴ On his part, Mnatsakanyan said “During the meeting, I highlighted the importance Armenia attaches to the strategic partnership with Russia. We plan to continue that partnership later based on the principles that exist in the 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. The intensity and depth of our relations really oblige us to make new efforts to ensure their cooperation.” The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs added that the sides plan to further deepen and expand the close cooperation in all spheres, including within the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union.

41 “Munich Security Conference: President Sargsyan Stresses Armenia’s Top Foreign, Security Policy Issues,” *ArmenPress*, February 17, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/923063/munich-security-conference-president-sargsyan-stresses-armenia-s-top-foreign-security-policy-issues.html>

42 Joshua Kucera, “Pashinyan and Putin Hold First Meeting, Pledge to Build Closer Ties,” *Eurasianet*, May 14, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/s/pashinyan-and-putin-hold-first-meeting-pledge-to-build-closer-ties>

43 Kucera, “Pashinyan and Putin Hold First Meeting, Pledge to Build Closer Ties.”

44 “Russia’s Lavrov Holds ‘Good’ Talks with Armenian FM,” *Azatutyun*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29278454.html>

The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France visited Armenia on 28 May as the first foreign minister to visit the country following the formation of the new government, also timed to the 100th anniversary of the first republic. The French minister referred to the broad relations that link France and Armenia and underlined that France and Armenia have historical ties. On his part, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanian emphasized the “privileged” character of their relations. “we have always felt France’s support” he stated.

Prime Minister Pashinyan paid a two day visit to neighboring Georgia on 30 May, accompanied by a high level and large delegation including ministers of foreign affairs, defense, education and science, culture, the diaspora, transportation, communication and IT as well as his deputy. He also visited the Javakheti region to meet with the Armenian community living there.

Armenia’s newly elected president Sarkissian started on 18 June a two-week journey to the United Kingdom, France and the USA for private and official meetings.

Pashinyan attended the NATO Summit held in Brussels on 11 July within the framework of the presidents and heads of governments of all countries that have contributed to the NATO-led mission Resolute Support in Afghanistan.

3. Relations with the European Union

The process of the “Comprehensive and Extended Partnership Agreement” signed with Armenia on 24 November 2017 in the framework of the European Union’s East Partnership Cooperation displayed a fast development. On 21 February, an agreement was signed regarding the priorities of the Partnership Agreement between the EU and Armenia.⁴⁵ Those priorities have been collected under three titles: 1) Improving of public institutions and good governance, 2) Economic development and market opportunities, and 3) Environment and energy.

On 9 March, the EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stated that “Armenia-EU relations have never been this close.”

45 “Nalbandian, Mogherini Sign Document on Implementation of Priorities of Armenia-EU Partnership,” *ArmenPress*, February 21, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/923533/nalbandian-mogherini-sign-document-on-implementation-of-priorities-of-armenia-eu-partnership.html>

The Armenian National Assembly unanimously approved the Partnership Agreement on 11 April despite the domestic upheaval in the country.

On 19 April, the new President A. Sarkissian signed the approval law and thus the law came into effect.⁴⁶

On 11 April, during a comprehensive interview that was published in the Armenian media, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov expressed the following views regarding Armenia-EU relations:

“It is true that Armenia has the desire to improve relations in all fields. This is a profitable and beneficial policy for a country. Post-Soviet countries should commit the mistake of making a choice between Russia and the West. This is an ideological and politically-motivated approach. I believe that Armenia’s persistence in forming relations with the EU -with Armenia’s rights and responsibilities in other integration processes being recognized through documents- is a step in the right direction. Of course, its very important for the European Union to abandon its crooked logic of ‘either me or them’ that lead to the 2014 Ukraine events so that the rights and interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan, or the other participants of the EU initiative called the Eastern Partnership do not get distorted. Otherwise, this would mean stripping a people of its opportunity to develop its cooperation with all its neighbors in the broadest way. This is an approach that Russia consistently maintains. As early as 2015, the Eurasia Economic Union had made an offer to make contact with the EU. However, the EU did not perceive the EEU as a partner to cooperate with due to ideological and political reasons. I am optimistic regarding the future of the EEU-EU relations. I am sure that the EEU administrative body’s Armenian president Tigran Sargsyan will make developments in this direction easier.”

On 21 June, the Armenian Minister Foreign of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanian met with EU Foreign Policy Chief in Brussels for a meeting of the EU-Armenia Partnership Federica Mogherini. Mogherini and Mnatsakanian spoke to reporters after chairing the first session of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council, a body tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in

46 “Armen Sarkissian Signs EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement,” *Arka News Agency*, April 19, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/armen_sarkissian_signs_eu_armenia_comprehensive_and_enhanced_partnership_agreement/

November 2017. Mnatsakanian reaffirmed his governments stated commitment to CEPA. Mogherini reaffirmed the EU's pledge to allocate 160 million euros in fresh assistance to Armenia over the next four years.⁴⁷

Following the NATO Summit, on 12 July, Prime Minister Pashinyan met with the President of the European Commission and later with the EU Foreign Policy Chief.⁴⁸ Speaking to reporters after his talks, Pashinyan complained that the EU has not provided extra aid to his government and said he “expressed bewilderment” at this situation in his first talks with EU leaders. He stressed “We specifically expect more concrete and greater assistance.”⁴⁹

4. The Annulment of the Zurich Protocols

In a statement that the Press Secretary of the Presidency of Armenia made on 1 March 2018, it was announced that President Sargsyan annulled the two protocols that were signed with Turkey in Zurich in 2009 in accordance with the decision taken during the National Security Council meeting.⁵⁰

As a result of the process between Turkey and Armenia that was launched with the facilitative hosting of Switzerland in Zurich on 10 October 2009, the “Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia” and “the Protocol on the Developing Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia” had been signed.⁵¹

The protocols that provided a framework for the normalization of bilateral relations were referred to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in order to be approved, and in Armenia they were forwarded to the Constitutional Court for examination in terms of compliance with the Constitution of Armenia.

The Constitutional Court of Armenia initially declared on 12 January 2010 that the protocols were in conformity with the Constitution, but in its final

47 “Mogherini to Mnatsakanyan: EU Ready to Assist in Armenia’s Reforms,” *News.am*, June 21, 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/457899.html>

48 “Pashinyan and Mogherini Meet in Brussels; Stress Importance of Expanding Armenia-EU Relations,” *Hetq*, July 12, 2018, <http://hetq.am/eng/news/91220/pashinyan-and-mogherini-meet-in-brussels-stress-importance-of-expanding-armenia-eu-relations.html>

49 “Pashinyan and Mogherini Meet in Brussels; Stress Importance of Expanding Armenia-EU Relations.”

50 “Армения аннулировала армяно-турецкие протоколы,” *Голос Армении*, March 1, 2018, <http://golosarmenii.am/article/63342/armeniya-annulirovala-armyano-tureckie-protokoly>

51 “Армения аннулировала армяно-турецкие протоколы.”

decision of 18 January 2010, it put forth preconditions and restrictive provisions contrary to the letter and spirit of the protocols.⁵²

Armenia later announced that it had suspended the approval process of the protocols. The relevant documents were withdrawn from the Armenian Parliament in February 2015 by President S. Sargsyan.

President S. Sargsyan announced in September 2017 at the United Nations meetings in New York that Armenia would cancel the protocols in the spring of 2018.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Edward Nalbandyan stated, “These documents cannot be held hostage forever, for this reason President Sargsyan has stated in the UN that Armenia will cancel the protocols, and we will meet the spring of 2018 without them.”⁵³

President S. Sargsyan made the following statement regarding the subject:

“As of this moment, our obligations mentioned in the protocols signed with Turkey have lost their legal basis. From now on, we may take into consideration any offer that comes without any preconditions; however, our development will now continue -as it has been to this day- without any diplomatic relations with Turkey. Whether the protocols had been approved or not, Armenia has gotten the best out of the situation. We have demonstrated the will to develop relations by signing the protocols. On the other hand, we have come to realize that Turkey is not displaying the proper political will and cannot fulfill its obligations. Time has showed us that our concerns were legitimate. Until now, Turkish authorities failure to take necessary steps for the ratification process of the protocols, the ongoing efforts to tie the ratification of the protocols to preconditions, and the provocative statements of Ankara to Armenia and Armenian people clearly point out that Turkey is not ready to ratify and implement the protocols.”⁵⁴

The Turkish side did not respond to this declaration and annulment that evokes the Turkish saying “yavuz hırsız ev sahibini bastırır” (meaning: A brazen culprit can make others believe that s/he is completely innocent and that the

52 “Ermenistan, Zürih Protokollerini Feshetti,” *TRT Haber*, March 1, 2018, <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ermenistan-zurih-protokollerini-feshetti-353292.html>

53 “Ermenistan, Türkiye ile Protokolleri İptal Etti,” *Aksam*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.aksam.com.tr/dunya/ermenistandan-turkiye-ile-protokolleri-iptal-etti/haber-712579>

54 “Armenia Scraps Zurich Protocols; President Sargsyan Points to Turkish Intransigence,” *Hetq*, March 1, 2018, <http://hetq.am/eng/news/86225/armenia-scraps-zurich-protocols-president-sargsyan-points-to-turkish-intransigence.html>

person s/he has wronged is guilty). Immediately after the signing of the protocols, Armenia -through the decision of its Constitutional Court- had closed from the beginning the ratification gates for the protocols by proclaiming that the protocols would be implemented to the extent that they conformed to Armenia's Declaration of Independence. On 22 April 2010, the decision to suspend the ratification process adopted by the joint Political Council of the ruling coalition parties and its official announcement to Turkey had, in essence, illustrated Armenia's intention. Thereafter, as President S. Sargsyan withdrew the protocols from the parliament in 2015, the outcome of the process had already been clear. S. Sargsyan repeated his intention most recently in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2017. In this way, while Armenia was on its way towards its unilateral termination of an international agreement to which it was uncomfortable with from the beginning, Armenia found -through gradual statements- the opportunity to measure the reactions that could occur in the international community from the violation of the basis of international law; the *pacta sunt servanda* principle.

Therefore, the decision of the annulment of 1 March 2018 did not mean much more than the declaration of what was already known, and reflected Sargsyan's effort of exonerating his record (while his term of office was coming to an end) from a past deed of his that was fiercely criticized from the beginning by the Diaspora and militant circles.

The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation made a statement on 7 March about the annulment of the protocols. In this declaration, it was stated that "Russia supports the normalization of the Turkey-Armenia relations. The Russian delegation was present in Zurich during the signing process of the protocols and had played an active role. We are moving from the point that the normalization of the relations of the two countries is important for their own interests." Similar brief statements were also made by the US and France.⁵⁵

The Turkish side did not respond to this declaration and annulment that evokes the Turkish saying "yavuz hürsüz ev sahibini bastırır" (meaning: A brazen culprit can make others believe that s/he is completely innocent and that the person s/he has wronged is guilty). Immediately after the signing of the protocols, Armenia - through the decision of its Constitutional Court- had closed from the beginning the ratification gates for the protocols by proclaiming that the protocols would be implemented to the extent that they conformed to Armenia's Declaration of Independence.

55 "МИД РФ прокомментировал денонсацию армяно-турецких протоколов," *News.am*, March 7, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/439998.html>

The annulment decision was welcomed by the militant diaspora press and it was emphasized that signing of the protocols by itself had constituted a mistake. S. Sargsyan's understanding that "we are winners on both cases" was also criticized and it was argued that it was the Turks who had actually benefited from this process. The keeping of the door open for a similar process in the future was also condemned by expressing "have we still not learned a lesson?" The executive director of the leading Armenian diaspora organization the Armenian National Committee of America's (ANCA) made the following evaluation of the protocol process; "Armenia played checkers while Turkey played chess." In addition to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun), ANCA had essentially and steadfastly opposed the protocol process from the outset and had maintained its warnings on the negative effects of the protocols on Armenia and the Armenian cause.

On 15 March, Armenia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that they had formally informed Ankara that Armenia had cancelled the protocols normalizing relations that were signed with Turkey. The Deputy Minister stated that Turkey was informed as per the requirements of international law and expressed "In accordance with the instructions of our President, we have officially reported the cancellation of the protocols to Turkey. Also, I would like to remind you that Armenia is consistently expressing that it is unconditionally ready for negotiations and the normalization of the relations."⁵⁶

5. The Commemoration of 24 April

The 103rd commemoration of the anniversary of the April 24th were overshadowed by the developments and demonstrations in Armenia's domestic politics. The usual ceremony in Yerevan was held with the participation of the new President, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Pashinyan. The resigning Prime Minister did not attend. The French President expressed his regrets about the "genocide" in his message to A. Sarkissian.⁵⁷

The focus of Armenia was on the President of the United States' message and its content. The Armenian institutions continued their intensive lobbying activities in the US and many members of the congress were mobilized. It

56 "Ermenistan, Protokolleri İptal Ettiğini Türkiye'ye Resmen Bildirdi," *Sputnik Türkiye*, March 15, 2018, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/avrupa/201803151032646019-ermenistan-protokol-iptal-turkiye-resmen-bildirdi/>

57 "Эммануэль Макрон о Геноциде армян: Не забудем никогда," *News.am*, April 24, 2018, <https://news.am/rus/news/447978.html>

was hoped that the Turkish-US relations would enter into a tense atmosphere and it was expected that this time a message closer to their hearts -one which supports their own discourse- would be published.

A week prior to the US President's message, 102 members of Congress, including the heads of the House of Representatives Foreign and Intelligence Committees, sent a letter to President Donald Trump calling for the recognition of genocide claims.

The letter prepared by Co-Presidents of the Armenian Friendship Group in the US Congress; Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), David Trott (R-Mich.), Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), and David Valadao (R-Calif.), in addition Vice Presidents Adam Schiff (D-calif.) and Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) briefly states the following:

“The Armenian Genocide continues to stand as an important reminder that crimes against humanity must not go without recognition and condemnation. Through recognition of the Armenian Genocide we pay tribute to the perseverance and determination of those who survived, as well as to the Americans of Armenian descent who continue to strengthen our country to this day. It is our duty to honor those contributions with an honest statement of history recognizing the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians as the 20th century's first genocide. By commemorating the Armenian Genocide, we renew our commitment to prevent future atrocities.”⁵⁸

The said letter ends with the following demand: “we ask you to appropriately mark April 24th as a day of American remembrance of the Armenian Genocide.”⁵⁹

As for President Trump, he repeated the statements of the previous presidents in his message. In response to the media's questions, the White House Press Representative confirmed on 24 April that President Trump only used the words of his predecessors and indicated that the statement issued by President was consistent with the statements of previous US administrations.

Trump's message is as follows:

“Today we commemorate the *Meds Yeghern*, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century, when one and a half million Armenians

58 “US Congressmen Call on Trump to Mark April 24 as Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day,” *Armenpress.am*, April 12, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/929663/us-congressmen-call-on-trump-to-mark-april-24-as-armenian-genocide-commemoration-day.html>

59 “US Congressmen Call on Trump to Mark April 24 as Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day.”

were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. We recall the horrific events of 1915 and grieve for the lives lost and the many who suffered.

We also take this moment to recognize the courage of those individuals who sought to end the violence, and those who contributed to aiding survivors and rebuilding communities, including the U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, who sought to end the violence and later raised funds through the Near East Relief to help the Armenian people. We note with deep respect the resilience of the Armenian people, so many of whom built new lives in the United States and have made countless contributions to our country.

As we honor the memory of those who suffered, we also reflect on our commitment to ensure that such atrocities are not repeated. We underscore the importance of acknowledging and reckoning with painful elements of the past as a necessary step towards creating a more tolerant future.

On this solemn day, we stand with the Armenian people throughout the world in honoring the memory of those lost and commit to work together to build a better future.”⁶⁰

The fact that President Trump did not change the known discourse disappointed the leading figures of the diaspora with extremist, militant, racist, and anti-Turkish hate speech-filled narrative. As a result, Trump himself became the target of derogatory discourses. One of these figures even said the following; “It is good that Trump did not say genocide, for if such a president had recognized the genocide, it would not have brought honor to the Armenian cause”. Naturally, once again, the main target was Turkey and the Turks. The executive of the United States’ leading Armenian organization, ANCA, immediately issued a statement describing Trump’s statement as a failure and revealed his inner animosity through these expressions:

“President Trump’s ‘Turkey First’ approach tightens Erdogan’s grip over U.S. policy on the genocide of Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians and other Christians.

60 “Trump’s Commemorative Statement Fails to Properly Characterize Armenian Genocide,” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 24, 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/04/24/trumps-commemorative-statement-fails-to-properly-characterize-armenian-genocide/>

In his annual April 24th statement, the President once again enforced Ankara's gag-rule against honest American condemnation and commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

In outsourcing U.S. leadership on genocide prevention to Erdogan – who openly undermines U.S. interests, attacks U.S. allies, threatens U.S. troops, imprisons American clergy, and even orders the beating of American citizens – President Trump is emboldening a foreign dictator who revels in the public spectacle of having bullied successive American presidents into silence on Turkey's still unpunished murder of millions [of] Christians.

Sadly, by caving in to Turkish pressure, President Trump is isolating America, which today stands alone as Ankara's last genocide-denial lifeline. Forty-eight of our U.S. states have recognized the Armenian Genocide, as have a dozen of our NATO allies – including France and Germany, the European Union, and, of course, Pope Francis.

We will press ahead with our work to end U.S. complicity in Ankara's obstruction of justice, in order to put in place a U.S. policy that actively pressures Ankara to abandon its denials, reckon with its responsibilities, and engage directly with Armenian stakeholders toward a truthful, just, and comprehensive international resolution of this crime against humanity.”⁶¹

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey also criticized Trump's statement. The statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 25 April is below:

“We reject the inaccurate expressions and the subjective interpretation of history in the written statement by Mr. Donald Trump, President of the USA, released on 24 April 2018 regarding the events of 1915.

Our expectation from the US Administration is a fair assessment of a period during which all the peoples of the Ottoman Empire suffered tremendously.

In this context, we remind President Trump that during the same period more than 500.000 Muslims were slaughtered as a result of the events in which Armenian insurgents took part.

61 “Trump's Commemorative Statement Fails to Properly Characterize Armenian Genocide.”

Turkey continues to offer the establishment of a Joint Historical Commission in order to shed light on this painful period of history and has opened its archives to researchers.

On the other hand, Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in the conditions of World War I were commemorated this year once again on 24 April in a ceremony held at the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul suiting the respect they deserve and befitting the 800-year long friendship between Turks and Armenians. We recommend the US Administration to consider the message by our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent to the ceremony at the Patriarchate of Istanbul on 24 April 2018 addressing the descendants of Ottoman Armenians, which reflects Turkey's approach to this sensitive issue.

Besides all these points, we think it is in line with common sense that the statement made by the US President remained within international legal norms and did not refer to baseless genocide allegations.”⁶²

As for the events in Turkey, some associations and small groups, sympathizers of the Armenian narrative, organized commemoration services.

Naturally, a development that bears importance and meaning for Turkey is President Erdoğan's message that was sent to the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. The condolence message of President Erdogan is as follows:

“Reverend Aram Ateşyan,

General Vicar of the Armenian Patriarch of Turkey,

My distinguished Armenian citizens,

I affectionately salute you with all my heartfelt feelings.

You have gathered today under the roof of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul to remember the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives during the fierce and harsh conditions of the First World War.

Once again, I remember with respect the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives, and offer my sincere condolences to their children and descendants.

62 “No: 119, 25 April 2018, Press Release Regarding the Statement by the U.S. President Trump on the 1915 events,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, April 25, 2018, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-119_-abd-baskani-trump-in-1915-olaylarina-iliskin-aciklamasi-hk_en.en.mfa

On this occasion, I also pray for God's grace and mercy on millions of Ottoman citizens we lost due to contagious diseases, migration, war and clashes during the same period.

Throughout the history, we have always been a nation that shared the sufferings, never discriminating between peoples or pitting them against each other.

Besides our people living on our own lands, we have extended assistance to all those in need of help from Andalusia to Africa, from Southern Asia to Europe.

When doing that, we have never taken into consideration their belief, language, religion, ethnic or cultural identity.

Keeping that heritage as a nation, we strive today to strengthen the brotherhood, empathy, peace and serenity.

To be aware of the sufferings of our Armenian citizens in history and to share these pains is a requirement of the conscientious and moral posture of the Turkish Nation.

God willing, we will continue to share your sufferings and bring solutions to your troubles and problems in the days ahead.

No matter how, we will not tolerate marginalization or discrimination of any of our citizens based on their faith, religion or outlook.

I feel confident that our Armenian citizens will continue to contribute increasingly to our cultural, social, political and commercial life.

As hitherto, I kindly request you to avoid helping those who resort to create hatred, grudge and hostility by distorting our common history.

With these thoughts in my mind, I remember with respect, once again, the Ottoman Armenians whom we lost during the First World War.

I extend my greetings and tribute to all my citizens who joined the memorial ceremony."⁶³

63 "Message Sent by President Erdoğan to the Religious Ceremony Held in the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul on 24 April 2018," *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/92513/message-sent-by-president-erdogan-to-the-religious-ceremony-held-in-the-armenian-patriarchate-of-istanbul-on-24-april-2018>

6. Latest Developments in Turkey-Armenia Relations

After Pashinyan's statement during his Nagorno-Karabakh visit (following his election as the Prime Minister of Armenia on 8 May) that he is ready for relations with Turkey without preconditions, Prime Minister of Turkey Binali Yıldırım responded to his statement on 11 May. Prime Minister Yıldırım stated: "If Armenia is renouncing its hostile approach towards Turkey that it has sustained for years, if it wishes to turn a new page, we will review the relevant details and respond accordingly."⁶⁴

President Erdoğan issued the following call on 8 May; "The TAF [Turkish Armed Forces] archive has been completely opened, it is now ready for research. The Presidential archive has been opened, it is now ready for research. Anyone who has the integrity is welcome [to carry out research]. We have constantly made this call especially upon those who make the so-called Armenian genocide claim. If you have the integrity, please come in, we are opening our archives, and [so] you should open your archives as well."

On the other hand, President Erdoğan issued the following call on 8 May; "The TAF [Turkish Armed Forces] archive has been completely opened, it is now ready for research. The Presidential archive has been opened, it is now ready for research. Anyone who has the integrity is welcome [to carry out research]. We have constantly made this call especially upon those who make the so-called Armenian genocide claim. If you have the integrity, please come in, we are opening our archives, and [so] you should open your archives as well."⁶⁵

During his visit to the UK, President Erdoğan stated the following in his speech on 14 May at the Chatham House think tank regarding Turkey's active foreign policy: "As Turkey,

we support the historical silk road initiative. We support all initiatives for the development and prosperity of Caucasia. The only country missing in this positive picture is Armenia. We are especially awaiting the days when we will see a reasonable approach and commonsense in the administration of Armenia."⁶⁶

64 "Başbakan Yıldırım'dan Ermenistan Başbakanı Paşinyan'a Yanıt," *Hürriyet*, May 11, 2018, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-yildirimdan-ermenistan-basbakani-pasinyana-yanit-40833453>

65 "Erdoğan'dan, Soykırım İddialarına Yanıt: Yüreğiniz Yetiyorsa Buyurun," *HaberTürk*, May 8, 2018, <http://www.haberturk.com/erdogan-dan-soykirim-iddialarina-yanit-yureginiz-yetiyorsa-buyurun-1955469>

66 "Turkey's Regional and Global Vision," *Chatham House*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/turkey-s-regional-and-global-vision>

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan said in a radio interview said that he was for good neighborly relations with Turkey in the name of regional stability, but not the expense of harming special interests.⁶⁷ He said that there are some fundamental issues that the Armenian side did not put forward as preconditions for the normalization of relations with Turkey.

On 27 June, a Turkish delegation attended the Council of Ministers meeting of the Organization of the Black Sea Cooperation held in Yerevan.⁶⁸

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu personally congratulated Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan on being elected prime minister on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Brussels.⁶⁹

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