

EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

To cite this article: Kılıç, Alev. “Facts and Comments.” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 38 (2018): 9-36.

Received: 26.12.2018

Accepted: 27.12.2018

FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

Alev KILIÇ*

Abstract: *This article covers the relations of Turkey and Armenia as well as the internal and international developments of Armenia between July and December of 2018.*

During this period, Armenia's new Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has put into action his campaign promises to fight wide spread corruption and to reckon with the previous two administrations. He has been able to sustain his command based on the support of the masses of the street. His party and followers achieved a crushing victory at the municipal elections for the capital city Yerevan. Thus encouraged, with a view to obtaining the legislative backing which he totally lacked, he brought about the dissolution of the parliament for snap elections, resulting again with another crushing victory. On the foreign relations side, Pashinyan continued with his efforts to establish some balance in Armenia's foreign policy between Russia and the West. While being meticulous not to antagonize Russia, he has managed to realize high level contacts with the West. Relations with Turkey has also been a topic of prominence, conjuring expectations that a new atmosphere could be in the offing.

Keywords: *Nikol Pashinyan, Armen Sargsyan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Yerevan, Armenia, Snap Parliamentary Elections in Armenia, Vladimir Putin, Russia, CSTO*

* ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5180-2896>
Ambassador (R), Director of the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), akilic@avim.org.tr

Öz: Bu incelemede, Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde ve Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde 2018 yılının Temmuz'dan Aralık ayına kadar süredeki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır.

Dönem içinde, sokaktan aldığı desteği ve güçlü konumunu sürdüren Ermenistan'ın yeni Başbakanı Nikol Paşinyan, seçim kampanyasında verdiği, yaygın yolsuzlukla mücadele ve önceki iki yönetimden hesap sorma sözünü uygulamaya koymuştur. Partisi ve yandaşları, Erivan Belediye seçimlerinde ezici bir üstünlük elde etmiş, bunun verdiği moralle, parlamentonun feshini sağlayarak, yasama gücüne de kavuşmayı hedefleyen erken genel seçimi ilan etmiştir. Bu seçimlerde de mutlak bir üstünlük elde edilmiştir. Paşinyan, dış ilişkilerde Rusya ile Batı arasında bir denge politikası gayretlerini sürdürmüş, bir yandan Rusya'yı karşısına almamaya özen gösterirken, diğer yandan Batılı ülkeler ile üst düzey yoğun temas trafiği gerçekleştirebilmiştir. Türkiye ile ilişkiler de ön sıralarda gündeme gelmiş ve yeni bir havanın oluşabileceği yorumlarına kapı açılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Nikol Paşinyan, Armen Sarkisyan, Dağlık Karabağ, Erivan, Ermenistan, Ermenistan Erken Parlamento Seçimi, Vladimir Putin, Rusya, KGAÖ

1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

Having announced his Cabinet, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan started to put into action his campaign promises to fight the wide spread and prevalent corruption, holding the two previous administrations as the main culprits. His immediate target was his predecessor Sargsyan and his close circle. On 2 July 2018, the brother of Sargsyan together with his son and daughter were detained with charges of corruption.¹ On 4 July, his other brother and his son were detained on charges of assault causing bodily harm in a 2007 incident.

More was to follow. Official investigation started against the former President Robert Kocharian, former Minister of Defense Mikael Harutunyan and the Secretary-General of the Russian-initiated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) General Yuri Khachaturov, on charges of overturning Armenia's constitutional order in connection with the death of ten protesters and wounding of many others in 2008 where military force was used to suppress the demonstrations, which Pashinyan was also participating.

Kocharian was arrested on 27 July.² Harutunyan could not be apprehended as he was in Russia. As regards to General Khachaturov, he was detained, and a notification was forwarded to CSTO member countries that he was recalled from his post as Secretary General and a new candidate would be announced for the post.³

There was immediate reaction from Russia to these developments. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative expressed in a press interview astonishment for the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' "unprofessionalism" in the procedure for recalling the CSTO Secretary General. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov personally took initiative by calling his Armenian counterpart and expressing his "concern". He said that the recent events contradict the declarations of the new Armenian leadership that it was not planning to persecute its predecessors on political grounds. He also said that, Moscow, as an ally of Yerevan, has always had an interest in the stability of the Armenian state and therefore what is happening there must be of concern to Russia. He further expressed his hope for a "constructive" response. In a clear reference to General Khachaturov's prosecution, Lavrov also cautioned that Armenia was putting "the normal work" of CSTO at risk." Lavrov's comments were the first Russian rebuke of Pashinyan voiced in the press since he came to power.⁴

1 "Sarkisian's Brother Questioned Over Son's Alleged Crime, Released," *Azatutyun*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29345186.html>

2 "Ex-Armenian President Robert Kocharian arrested," *Deutsche Welle*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/ex-armenian-president-robert-kocharian-arrested/a-44860220>

3 "Ex-Armenian President Robert Kocharian arrested."

4 "Lavrov about Kocharyan detention: Russia concerned over things in Armenia," *Arka News Agency*, August 1, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/lavrov_about_kocharyan_detention_russia_concerned_over_things_in_armenia/

Reacting to the Russian statements, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, in written comments, said the criminal proceedings are part of the new government's efforts to establish the rule of law and combat corruption, that these processes are not connected with Armenia's foreign policy and should not be misinterpreted. He also reaffirmed the foreign policy priorities of Armenia which are aimed at further strengthening Russian-Armenian allied relations and increasing the effectiveness of cooperation within the CSTO and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) frameworks. Pashinyan downplayed the Russian criticism on August 10. He said Moscow should adapt to the new political realities of Armenia. He also said that there were no unresolvable issues in the relations, that he is confident that those issues will be resolved in the interest of allied relations.

It did not take long for Russia's intervention to show its effects. General Khachaturov was released on bail on 27 July whereupon he left the country for Moscow.⁵ On August 13, Kocharyan was released from detention by the decision of Court of Appeal, following the political appeal by 38 deputies of the National Assembly who signed a guarantee on behalf of Kocharyan to change the measure of restraint. As for Harutunyan, who was in Russia, Russia cancelled Armenia's red notice for fugitive ex- minister of defense on its territory and refused to extradite him.⁶

The apparent frictions and tension were no doubt an indication and precaution for Pashinyan to build a stable and solid basis for his government. As a counter move, he called on his constituency for a popular meeting on 17 August in Yerevan on the occasion of the one hundredth day of his government coming to power through the "velvet revolution", which would enable him to judge to what extent he maintained the popular support.⁷ The demonstration organized on 17 August was an ardent event that reflected the people's continuing support for him and strengthened his confidence. In his speech, Pashinyan highlighted that he will continue his fight against corruption with determination, expressed without giving names that he will pursue the lawsuits against former president Robert Kocharyan, refuted the rumors of Kocharyan's arrest, and the tension in the relations with Russia, which is known to be against the requests for the arrest of the period's Yerevan garrison commander and later Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretary General Khachaturatov and Minister of Defense Harutyunyan.⁸

5 "Yuri Khachaturov 'released on bail'," *Tert*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.tert.am/en/news/2018/07/28/yuri-khachaturov/2753466>

6 "Russia cancels Armenia's red notice for fugitive ex-defense minister on its territory," *ArmenPress*, September 7, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/946361.html>

7 "Pashinian Supporters Rally In Yerevan On 100th Day In Office," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pashinian-supporters-rally-in-yerevan-on-100th-day-in-office/29439667.html>

8 "PM Nikol Pashinyan's Speech Dedicated to 100 Days in Office," *ArmenPress*, August 17, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/944242.html>

In his interview published in a Russian television station on 31 August (which took place on his birthday that President of Russia Vladimir Putin had celebrated on the phone), Kocharyan blamed the new government in Armenia of “being incompetent” and using “uncurbed populism”, expressed his view of establishing political opposition by forming a new party or coalition.⁹ Kocharyan’s statements criticizing the government and blaming it for its opposition to Russia continued throughout the month. On 11 September, a secret telephone conversation that was leaked to social media that took place between intelligence agencies, which reflected the pressure placed on the Armenian judiciary regarding the arrests, strengthened Kocharyan’s hand.¹⁰

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, who publicly criticized the developments in Armenia in the previous period, stated in his speech published in the Russian media on 3 September that the situation in Armenia was not tranquil and that tensions were mounting in Armenia. In response to these statements, Pashinyan explained on the same day that there is no issue in the relations with Russia, that the relations are continuing on their natural course, that in fact, discussions were being made for him to visit Russia again to meet with Putin.

President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian, on the occasion of the separatist Nagorno-Karabakh administration’s 27th Anniversary celebrations, visited this occupied region on 2 September. On 17 September, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan visited the region as well.

On 21 September, the hundredth year of Armenia’s first independence was commemorated with ceremonies. The first three presidents who were invited did not attend the ceremonies.

The capital Yerevan’s 23 September mayor and city council elections was the most important internal development of the month in respect of it displaying to what extent Pashinyan’s support in the street would echo to the ballot box to determine Pashinyan’s future strategy according to the results. The participation level of the election was % 43,7 (in the previous election, this level was % 41). The “My Step” bloc formed by Pashinyan received 80% of the votes and obtained 57 out of the 65 seats in the city council.¹¹ The rest of the council members were divided by the two parties allied with Pashinyan. This result meant an absolute advantage, a victory for Pashinyan, virtually giving him a blank check for his actions in the future.

9 Ani Mejlumyan, “From Arrest to the Campaign Trail: Kocharyan Says He Will Participate in next Elections,” *Eurasianet*, August 31, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/from-arrest-to-the-campaign-trail-kocharyan-says-he-will-participate-in-next-elections>

10 Ani Mejlumyan, “Leaked Phone Calls Scandal Poses New Challenge for Pashinyan,” *Eurasianet*, September 11, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/leaked-phone-calls-scandal-poses-new-challenge-for-pashinyan>

11 “Yerevan City Council Declared as Elected: My Step Bloc Gets 57 Seats,” *ArmenPress*, September 30, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/949135.html>

In this wave of victory, without wasting time, Pashinyan declared the necessity for early parliamentary elections as soon as possible. For the rest of the period, the early election period became the current issue of the country.¹²

Pashinyan called for the early general elections to be held in 2018, as early as possible, using all means. According to the Armenian constitution, for an early election in the case of the prime minister's resignation, if a new prime minister is not elected in two weeks, the parliament is dissolved, and early elections are initiated. However, Pashinyan hesitated in giving his immediate resignation. The parliament majority was still in the hands of the former administration's party. An even more disconcerting development was that two coalition party partners looked unfavorably at such an early election and opted for Spring 2019.

Following this development, Pashinyan blamed the governing coalition partner the Dashnaksutyun (the Dashnak Party / the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - ARF) and the Prosperous Armenia party of forming a front against him to prevent the early elections. Thereby on 3 October, he dismissed six ministers of these parties from government.¹³ On the same day, he assigned three new ministers. The new names of the cabinet were as follows:

- Felix Tsolakian, Minister of Emergency Situations
- Hakop Arshakian, Minister of Transportation, Communication and Information
- Garegin Baghramian, Minister of Energy

In its statement, the Dashnak Party explained that they were not against the early election but only disapproved of moving ahead hastily and criticized Pashinyan for aiming to hold all the power and gravitating towards a one-man regime.

Pashinyan ultimately resigned on 16 October. As a result of the absence of any other candidates besides Pashinyan in the second election on 1 November and no votes being cast in favor of Pashinyan in accordance with a scenario which is understood to have been previously agreed upon; a new prime minister was not elected and the parliament was constitutionally dissolved. The Central Election Commission suggested 9 December as the election date and with the confirmation by the President, 9 December was decided as the date for the early elections.¹⁴

12 "Republican Party Hasn't Agreed: Nikol Pashinyan," *Lragir*, October 1, 2018, <https://www.lragir.am/en/2018/10/01/69511>

13 "Pashinyan Announces about Dismissing Ministers and Governors Representing ARF and Prosperous Armenia Party," *ArmenPress*, October 2, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/949465.html>

14 "Armenia PM Nikol Pashinyan Resigns in Order to Hold Early Vote," *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/armenia-pm-nikol-pashinyan-resigns-order-hold-early-vote-181016161017415.html>

Therefore, the early elections became the determining agenda for the rest of the period under examination.

A striking news report of the UN published during the period regarding Armenia's population is that, as of 1 October, Armenia's population is 2,969,200. According to the statistics of the previous year, the population decreased by 10,400. Therefore, the population of Armenia has dropped below its red line of 3 million.¹⁵ The main reason of this situation is the declining birth rate and increasing emigration.

Pashinyan held a long march, 9 hours and 25 minutes, in Yerevan before the official start of campaigning for the 9 December parliamentary elections, dubbed as “atonement rally”, where he acknowledged possible mistakes made by his government without specifying those mistakes. He then took vacation as Prime Minister to campaign for his bloc, My Step (*Im Kavl*).¹⁶

On 21 November, the outgoing National Assembly approved the state budget for 2019. The projected total is 3,4 billion US dollars. Military spending is projected to increase by 25%, soaring to 633 million US dollars.¹⁷

On 30 November, OSCE/ODIHR, monitoring the upcoming elections, voiced concern about “intolerant, inflammatory rhetoric” ahead of the elections.¹⁸

The parliamentary elections were duly held on 9 December. The Central Electoral Commission certified the vote results on 18 December. Accordingly, the turnout was merely 48,63%. Only three parties, passing the threshold of 5%, qualified for the National Assembly. Pashinyan's My Step alliance won a landslide victory with 70.43% with 884,456 votes. The Prosperous Armenian Party, whose chairman has repeatedly expressed support to Pashinyan and his velvet revolution has come a distant second with 8.27% (103,824) votes. The third was the Luminous Armenia Party getting 6,37% (80,024) votes. The previous ruling party commanding a majority, the Republican Party, garnering only 4.70% with 59,059 votes, could not make it to the National Assembly. Such was the fate also of the Dashnak Party (ARF-Armenian Revolutionary Federation), garnering 3,89% with 48,811 votes.¹⁹

15 “Armenian Population down by 10,000 in First Half-year, UN Report Shows,” *Panorama*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2018/10/17/Armenian-population-UN/2019516>

16 “Armenian PM Holds ‘Atonement’ Rally,” *Azatutyun*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29619735.html>

17 “Armenian parliament approves 2019 state budget,” *JamNews*, November 24, 2018, <https://jam-news.net/armenian-parliament-approves-2019-state-budget/>

18 “OSCE/ODIHR - ‘inflammatory rhetoric’ ahead of Armenia elections,” *PanArmenian*, November 30, 2018, <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/262921/>

19 “Pashinian Alliance Scores ‘Revolutionary Majority’ In Landslide Armenian Win,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-elections-pashinian-my-step-sarkisian-hhk/29645721.html>

The new national assembly/parliament has 132 MP's, whereas there were 105 lawmakers in the previous legislature. The reason is that My Step Alliance has received more than 70% of the votes. The election law stipulates that the opposition cannot have less than one third of the parliamentary seats. So, the other two parties that have made it to the parliament receives additional seats to have a one third presence in the National Assembly. My Step Alliance got 84 seats. The four parliamentary seats allocated to national minorities are also added to the Alliance. Thus, the seat distribution is 88, 26 and 18 respectively.

The Dashnak Party, which has branches in Armenian communities around the world and assumes the leading voice of radical and fanatic views in the diaspora, put a sullen face on its electoral performance. Having been cast out of the parliament after 20 years of presence, the party has acknowledged that “this is a defeat, however not for those who voted for us”. The party has made the following reflective observations in this defeat²⁰:

- The voter today gave his/her vote to an individual and not to an ideology or program,
- A significant portion of the voting population is focused on a figure of an ‘internal enemy’ and shockingly do not care about the external and domestic threats facing Armenia,
- The approaches by the Dashnaks are understood by a minority,
- The Nagorno Karabagh issue as a political agenda is not being properly understood,
- A National Assembly is being developed that does not have a succinct ideological or national character.

The other disgruntled extremist party, the Daredevils of Sassoun (*Sasna Tserer*), named after an armed group that seized a police station in Yerevan in July 2016, declared that “this parliament will not be able to fully serve its (five year) term is obvious to us”, the new parliament dominated by Pashinyan’s allies will have to be dissolved because it will fail to cope with challenges facing the country”. The party chairman who made these pronouncements was at the head of the three dozen gunmen which raided the police station, laying down their weapons after a two-week standoff with security forces which left three police officers dead. Despite standing trial on serious charges, they were set free shortly after Pashinyan came to power.

Pashinyan was congratulated by a number of world leaders upon his election victory. One conspicuous missing is the Russian President Putin. On 10

20 “ARF Announcement on Elections,” *Asbarez*, December 10, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/176634/arf-announcement-on-elections/>

December, Catholicos of Cilicia in Antelias/Lebanon, Aram I, chose to send a letter, not to Pashinyan, but to President Sarkissian, welcoming the elections of the new National Assembly. Not once was a reference made to Pashinyan. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Karekin II, also issued a message where he extended his “congratulations and best wishes to the ‘My Step’ alliance, ‘Prosperous Armenia’ and ‘Bright Armenia’ parties”. On 15 December, clashes broke out in Etchmiadzin between the members of “New Armenia, New Catholicos” movement who were demanding resignation of Karekin II and the latter’s supporters.²¹

2. External Developments

Armenia was the only CSTO member country that participated the NATO Summit held in Brussels on 11 July within the framework of countries that have contributed to the NATO led mission Resolute Support in Afghanistan, alongside with two other south Caucasian states, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The final communique adopted at the Summit, supporting the territorial integrity of the states in the South Caucasus was no doubt embarrassing for Armenia. In the words of the Russia supported ex-President Kocharyan, “For example, I did not understand why Armenia should take part in the NATO summit at this level... when the relations between NATO and Russia are at level zero.”²²

Armenia also took part in the US led military exercise “Nobel Partner 2018” in Georgia, close to Tbilisi, with four officers.²³ The spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense who officially announced the participation of Armenia made it a point to underline that it was a NATO exercise and Armenian officers were taking part upon the invitation of Georgia. The spokesman also reminded that Armenian armed forces had participated at the same exercise in 2017 with a 40-member field hospital. However, it was reported by the Armenian press at the time that the administration of President Sarkisian had decided to take part in the exercise but at the last moment, presumably under Russian pressure, had decided against. The Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time criticized those exercises organized by the US and NATO so frequently in the region, saying they put the security in the region into jeopardy.

21 “Catholicos Aram I of Great House of Cilicia sends letter to Armenian President welcoming snap parliamentary elections,” *ArmenPress*, December 10, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957675.html>

22 “Prime Minister, Deputy PM, Ministers: Armenia gears up for NATO Summit,” *PanArmenian*, July 09, 2018, http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/257620/Prime_Minister_Deputy_PM_Ministers_Armenia_gears_up_for_NATO_Summit

23 “Multinational Exercise “Noble Partner 2018” Starts on August 1st,” *Official Website of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia*, June 7, 2018, <https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/6623/multinational-exercise-noble-partner-2018-starts-on-august-1st>

The new Armenian Minister for Diaspora Mkhitar Hayrapetyan made his first official visit abroad to Cyprus on 26 July. The Armenian minister took up the means of cooperation between the diaspora communities of Armenia and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus with his counterpart, the presidential commissar for humanitarian issues and overseas Cypriots. He then attended the third trilateral meeting of Armenia, Cyprus, and Greece on diaspora relations and cooperation. The Armenian minister then moved on to the US to meet with the Armenian community representatives in Los Angeles to ask for assistance and support for the new government.²⁴

The Italian President Sergio Mattarella paid an official visit to Armenia on 30 July. The visit was widely covered in the press. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, accompanying the President, also had talks with his Armenian counterpart. He indicated that the visit of the president availed the proper opportunity to discuss the steps that could be taken to deepen the relations based on a history and cultural partnership of millennia. The Armenian minister underlined the importance of the very first visit of an Italian president in the history of bilateral relations.²⁵

China's interest in Armenia also appears to be on the rise. It was announced in the Armenian press on 2 August that within the framework of a technical assistance agreement with China, an Armenian-Chinese school with Chinese curriculum would open in Yerevan as early as September.²⁶

It is possible to define the period's determinant feature regarding external relations as on the one hand maintaining cooperation with Russia without overshadowing or casting doubt on the close relations, and on the other hand, conveying the message to the Western countries that Armenia is willing to expand its horizons and establish new relations and is expecting attention and support. In this context, in light of the discomfort in Russia created by some of the practices of Armenia's new administration and personally reflected to the press by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Armenia's relations with Russia, which are always overbearing, have gained importance beyond the usual level.

Pashinyan met with Putin in Moscow on 8 September. This third meeting between the two leaders in four months, in Putin's words, predicted a mutual assessment regarding current and future subjects. Putin stated that Russia maintains its primary place in Armenia's economic relations, that the volume of bilateral trade, which is constantly growing, has increased by %22 in the first half of the year, that relations with Armenia are developing in every area.

24 "Armenia diaspora minister on three-day official visit," *Cyprus Mail*, July 24, 2018,

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/07/24/armenia-diaspora-minister-on-three-day-official-visit/>

25 "Italy's President to pay a two-day state visit to Armenia," *Public Radio of Armenia*, July 04, 2018,

<http://old.armradio.am/en/2018/07/04/italys-president-to-pay-a-two-day-state-visit-to-armenia/>

26 "Armenian-Chinese school to open in Yerevan on September 1," *Arka News Agency*, August 02, 2018,

http://arka.am/en/news/society/armenian_chinese_school_to_open_in_yerevan_on_september_1/

In a press statement prior to his visit to Moscow, Pashinyan stated “our relations should be at a much higher level. They should be more strategic, much more concerted and much more fraternal” and after the meeting he stated “we have discussed very important subjects. I would like to say that we have established trust”.²⁷

Among the subjects that create discomfort for Russia, the attempt to arrest the Armenian General who was serving as the Secretary-General of the CSTO had struck a sour note on the prestige of the organization that Russia values and the distress created by the process of assigning a new secretary general was reflected to the press in detail.

The Armenian Minister of Defense’s statement that his country was ending the practice of its borders with Turkey and Iran being secured by Russian soldiers and his critical approach towards the Russian military bases was corrected by Pashinyan after the meeting. He expressed that this practice will proceed as it is very beneficial for Armenia and that the Russian military bases in the country serve Armenia’s security interests.

It was striking that Pashinyan had accepted supporting Russia militarily regarding Syria, which was a matter that even the previous government had been cautious to stay out of. The Ministry of Defense officials felt the need to make an explanation regarding this subject on 11 September. They stated that the support did not have a military aspect and completely aimed for humanitarian aid, that it was made upon the request of the Syrian government, that together with being in cooperation with Russia in some areas, the Armenian personnel would act under the Armenian flag.²⁸

A development of the period that raised interest were the official visits of German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the three South Caucasian republics, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This was considered as a historical first for Germany. Historically, Germany’s interest towards the region is not new and it was updated with this visit.

Merkel arrived in Armenia in 24 August. In her meetings with Pashinyan and President Sarkissian, she promised support to Armenia in the implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that Armenia had signed with the EU. She also congratulated Armenia for the exemplary balance it had obtained in its relations with the EU and Russia. She expressed her country’s support for a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In addition, she emphasized that Germany is ready to assume a more active role in this process (Russia soon responded to this offer. The Russian Ministry

27 “Meeting with Prime Minister Of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan,” *President of Russia*, September 8, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58491>

28 “Newspaper: Armenia PM Ended up in Russia’s Trap,” *News.am*, October 9, 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/475005.html>

of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated that the issue needed to be resolved by the respective countries and that there is a current structure for a resolution). In her visit to the Tsitsernakabert monument, Merkel described the “atrocities the Ottoman Empire committed against the Armenians on 1915-17” as a “heinous crimes” without using the genocide word. Hereby, she reminded of the decision that was approved by the German parliament in 2016.²⁹ After her visit to the region, in her statement to a German military unit in Lithuania in 15 September, Merkel stated that many countries that have gained their independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union but are not EU or NATO members are exposed to the domestic conflicts triggered by Russia and mentioned Armenia along with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan within this context.

The Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono, in the framework of his visit to three South Caucasus republics, made a three-day visit to Armenia that began in 2 September. Minister Kono stated his satisfaction with the democratic transformation in Armenia and that they are ready to lend support in this process. This was the first visit of a Japanese minister to Armenia.³⁰

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze visited Armenia on 10 September. This was a response to Pashinyan’s visit to Georgia on 30 May. In the meeting, multilateral cooperation and trade opportunities were discussed between the two neighbors. President Sarkissian stated that the two countries were entering a period of brotherhood and partnership.³¹

France’s interest towards the region continued with a focus on warm relations with Armenia and a pace which displayed that it was not falling behind Germany. Pashinyan went to Paris on 14 September for a two-day official visit and met with French President Emmanuel Macron for the second time since coming to office. The French Speaking Countries Summit (“the Francophonie” - *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*) meeting was one of the main subjects. It would be held in Yerevan one month later, providing an opportunity for Macron’s visit to Armenia. Pashinyan also met with the French Armenian diaspora representatives in Paris. Pashinyan expressed that France’s Armenians being organized under one roof could provide a model for the entire Armenian diaspora around the world, that the Armenians should unite on a common goal, that this goal is Armenia and (Azerbaijan’s occupied) Nagorno-Karabakh region.³² On 26 September, this time President Sarkissian went to

29 “Merkel Concludes Visit to Caucasus; During Armenia Visit Calls Ottoman-Era Killings Of Armenians ‘Heinous Crimes’,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, August 30, 2018, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2018/08/30/merkel-concludes-visit-to-caucasus-during-armenia-visit-calls-ottoman-era-killings-of-armenians-heinous-crimes/>

30 “‘My Visit Will Serve as a Milestone for Stronger Relations between Japan and Armenia’ – Foreign Minister Taro Kono,” *Armenpress*, September 3, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/945811.html>

31 “Georgian, Armenian Prime Ministers Meet in Yerevan,” *Georgia Today*, September 10, 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/12207/Georgian,-Armenian-Prime-Ministers-Meet-in-Yerevan>

32 “Pashinyan, Macron Meet in Paris; Both Agree to Expand France-Armenia Relations,” *Hetq*, September 14, 2018, <https://hetq.am/en/article/92997>

France for a business visit and met with French businessmen and company representatives. During 7-12 October, Armenia arranged the French speaking countries week, to which it became a member on 2008. During 11-12 October, it arranged the 17th Summit of the Francophonie.³³ Regarding participation to the Summit, the two prominent names were French President Macron and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Macron also visited the Tsitsernakabert monument and repeated his statements supporting the Armenian narrative and claims concerning 1915.

On 26 September in New York, where the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan paid a visit on the occasion of the UN General Meetings, the two ministers met with the Minsk Group co-presidents and then with each other. This was the second meeting of the two ministers.³⁴ In the statement made by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was expressed that a beneficial exchange of opinions had taken place regarding the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, that the sides have come to terms on maintaining this dialogue, including the scope of the visit the co-presidents would soon make to the region. Pashinyan, who spoke at the UN General Assembly one day earlier, repeated his statement that a resolution will not be achieved until Azerbaijan does not meet with the separatist Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.

A striking development in the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations was the meeting of the two countries' leaders in Dushanbe on the occasion of the Commonwealth of Independent States summit. Despite that Pashinyan and President of Azerbaijan Aliyev had been introduced for the first time by Putin in Sochi on the occasion of the FIFA World Cup, their first bilateral meeting took place in Tajikistan.³⁵ In the message published on social media by Pashinyan after the meeting, it was stated that the two leaders came to an agreement on three subjects:³⁶

- Assigning the Ministers of Defense in taking concrete precautions for decreasing the tension at the Nagorno-Karabakh line of contact,
- Preventing of ceasefire violations on the borders of Armenia-Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh,
- Establishing a communication system.

33 "Francophonie Summit Offers an Opportunity for the New Armenia to Shine on the World Stage," *The Armenian Weekly*, September 28, 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/09/27/the-worlds-leading-francophonie-summit-will-be-held-in-yerevan-heres-why-you-should-care/>

34 "Minsk Group Co-Chairs Meet Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan on Margins of UN General Assembly in New York," *OSCE*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/397700>

35 Armine Avetisyan, "Pashinyan and Aliyev Vow to Reduce Tensions after Meeting in Tajikistan," *OC Media*, October 3, 2018, <http://oc-media.org/pashinyan-and-aliyev-vow-to-reduce-tensions-after-meeting-in-tajikistan/>

36 Avetisyan, "Pashinyan and Aliyev Vow to Reduce Tensions after Meeting in Tajikistan."

Pashinyan expressed that, after this agreement and giving the necessary instruction to the armed forces, he has had the most comfortable and peaceful night since becoming the Prime Minister.

However, Pashinyan did not rest there. No doubt aware that it would provoke Azerbaijan, he repeated that a third party, an “independent” Nagorno-Karabakh administration, should have a voice in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. He even went a step further in his meeting with US National Security Advisor John Bolton and stated that the Armenian diaspora should have a voice in the resolution of the problem since it is a “Pan-Armenian” subject that only concerns the people of Armenia, the people of “independent” Nagorno-Karabakh, and all Armenian people.³⁷ Reactions to this came not long after. In the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ statement in 25 October, it was expressed that Pashinyan’s explanations were, in essence, laying mines on the path towards the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue through the meetings in the current structure. Following his meeting with OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, on 2 November Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov stated that it is only possible to change the parties of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue with the consent of the two opposing parties, Armenia and Azerbaijan.³⁸

Between 20-21 October, Pashinyan made an official two-day visit to Lebanon and met with the Prime Minister, the Parliament Chairperson and the President of the country. The Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri expressed that they appreciated the role of the Lebanese Armenian community in the country’s development and their contributions to the improvement in the Lebanon-Armenia relations. Pashinyan also met with the notables of the Armenian community and stated that he especially expected investments on communication and advanced technology from them.³⁹ Pashinyan also joined a religious rite attended by Lebanese officials and met with the Catholicos of Cilicia Aram I on this opportunity (Aram’s statements supporting the former administration were publicly known, so a visit to Antelias was not in Pashinyan’s agenda). Pashinyan’s visit to Lebanon coincided with a period in which a conflict had occurred between the Orthodox Assyrians and the Armenians regarding representation in the formation of the new government. The Assyrian Patriarch complained at the infringement of the proportionate representation principle in the Lebanese cabinet and the Assyrians not being able to obtain ministry positions. Thereupon, it was speculated that it was being

37 “Bolton, or Anyone For That Matter, Cannot Speak on My Behalf,’ Says Pashinyan,” *Asbarez*, October 29, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/175935/bolton-or-anyone-for-that-matter-cannot-speak-on-my-behalf-says-pashinyan/>

38 “Lavrov: OSCE MG Co-chairs Working Actively to Solve Karabakh Conflict,” *AzerNews*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/121636.html>

39 “Acting Armenian Premier Talks Bilateral Relations with Lebanese Leaders during Visit,” *The Daily Star Newspaper*, October 21, 2018, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Oct-20/467008-armenian-premier-talks-bilateral-relations-with-lebanese-leaders-during-visit.ashx>

considered to give the Assyrians one of the two ministries assigned to the Armenians.⁴⁰ Following this development, the Dashnak Party initiated an extensive campaign towards the protection of the Armenians' rights, where Catholicos Aram I and the Armenian Minister of Tourism were at the forefront.

Another related development regarding Catholicos Aram I, who does not abstain from exploiting his position as a religious functionary at the expense of Turkey and the Turks and supports fanatical Armenian views, was his meeting with Armenian President Sarkissian who joined the celebration ceremony of his 50th anniversary of being a religious functionary organized in Geneva on 25 October. In response to Sarkissian who expressed:

“For fifty years, you have been faithfully serving our Apostolic church, our home country and the entire Armenian people. You have much to do, for Armenia, [the occupied] Nagorno-Karabakh and the diaspora need your active efforts not only in Antelias, but in the other centers of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the diplomatic and political resolutions of the Armenian issues.”

Aram I stated that he will continue his service to Armenia and the Armenians with the same commitment and more effort and that the first thought of religious functionaries should be Armenia.

A development regarding the Armenian Apostolic Church was it taking pro-Russian steps by getting involved in the initiatives against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was trying to separate from the Russian Orthodox Church and gain its independence.

In Armenia, which is known to be under Russia's absolute supervision in the South Caucasus, the possibility of the Pashinyan administration being in search of something new has naturally caught the interest of the US along with other Western countries. In the message he sent to Pashinyan on 21 September, US President Donald Trump praised the mass protests that brought him to power and stated “A peaceful, popular movement ushered in a new era in Armenia, and we look forward to working with you to help you execute the will of your people to combat corruption and to establish representative, accountable governance, rule of law buttressed by an independent judiciary, and political and economic competition.”⁴¹

American Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills, whose duty term ended, stated during a farewell meeting he organized in 15 October that he was optimistic that Armenia will attain a stable democracy after the last dramatic governmental change. Likewise, he stated that the American people want this

40 “Pashinyan Meets Catholicos Aram I,” *News.am*, October 21, 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/476949.html>

41 “Trump Congratulates Armenia on 27 Years of Independence from USSR,” *The Armenian Weekly*, September 22, 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/09/22/trump-congratulates-armenia-on-27-years-of-independence-from-ussr/>

as well. Mills also made the following statements regarding Nagorno-Karabakh that led to criticism and reactions: “It is unsettling that so few of the Armenians agree to make concessions to Azerbaijan regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. The sad truth is that resolution will require returning some of the occupied lands.”⁴²

US Deputy Secretary of State George Kent went to Armenia on 15 October and had talks with Pashinyan. Kent expressed that the US government “is interested in Armenia having successes in developing democracy, economic progress, as well as in other priority directions of the country, and is ready to assist the Armenian government in the process of implementing reforms.” In the press meeting organized in Yerevan on 16 October, he explained that the US is anticipating “strategic meetings” with Armenia in order to assess how the bilateral relations can be improved further and that the “USA-Armenia Task Force Strategic Meetings” can be made in Washington probably on 2019 February after the snap elections.⁴³

Beyond doubt, the next most striking development of the period was US National Security Advisor Bolton’s visit to three Caucasian republics following his visit to Moscow, respectively to Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.⁴⁴ Before his visit, Bolton expressed that the South Caucasus is of great strategic importance and that the states of the region wish to hold a view on their relations with Iran, Russia and Turkey. Bolton, who had met with Pashinyan in Yerevan on 25 October, conveyed the kind regards of US President Trump. Bolton explained that they approached various subjects, put emphasis especially on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, that they expect that the Armenian Prime Minister would take “firm action” towards an amenable peace with Azerbaijan after the early elections, which he was predicted to win with a stronger hand. Regarding this subject, he also stated “the safest way for Armenia to decrease external pressures is to provide the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”. Bolton expressed that the US is ready to permit American weapons being sold to Armenia, and that in this way, Russia’s “excessive influence” over Armenia could be decreased. Another message that Bolton conveyed to Armenia, which shares borders with Iran, is that the US is very determined on its sanctions towards Iran. Likewise, it is understood that a military support to be given to Syria would be met with a negative reception.

In the Armenian government statement regarding the meeting, it was expressed that both sides emphasized the importance of “consistent” efforts for a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and had agreed that an

42 “PM Pashinyan Receives U.S. Ambassador Richard Mills,” *ArmenPress*, October 8, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/950165.html>

43 “United States Attaches Importance to Further Enhancement of Mutually Beneficial Partnership with Armenia: PM Holds Meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State,” *ArmenPress*, October 15, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/950894.html>

44 “Pashinyan Describes Bolton Meeting ‘Major Diplomatic Achievement’,” *ArmenPress*, November 1, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/953041.html>

“atmosphere for the negotiation process” should be created. With a confident and cheerful air, Pashinyan stated during his parliament speech regarding the meeting “I’ve met with Bolton, there wasn’t even the slightest nuance during this meeting which can cause disturbance in Armenia and among Armenian people. I consider this meeting to be a major diplomatic achievement for us, I will say in the future as to what is the reason that I am saying so.” Regarding the meeting, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan added the following: “The meeting with Bolton has been very successful. He has understood the logic of our relations with the US, the Russian Federation and Iran, our stance regarding Nagorno-Karabakh and our relations with Turkey.”⁴⁵

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement on Bolton’s declarations in his visit to Armenia, criticizing his words against Russia and his expressions that may be interpreted as interfering in Armenia’s internal affairs.

President Sarkissian paid an official visit to Germany on 27-28 November.⁴⁶ He met with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and praised the bilateral ties. He also met with Chancellor Merkel. Merkel spoke of her fond memories of her August visit to Yerevan. Sarkissian on his part said Armenia views Germany as an important political and economic partner and a friendly country. He also had a working lunch with a group of German diplomats and parliamentarians. Photographs released by the presidential press service showed him sitting next to Cem Özdemir, a German MP of Turkish descent.⁴⁷

On 29 November, an exhibition “Armenian genocide and Scandinavian response” was inaugurated at the Swedish Parliament.

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan visited Brussels on 4 December for a working visit and met with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs. They discussed issues on EU-Armenia cooperation. He also met with the Belgian Foreign Minister. On this occasion, the two ministers signed an agreement on the remunerated work of family members of diplomatic missions and consular officers.⁴⁸

President Sarkissian received on 6 December an Italian parliamentary delegation on an OSCE observation mission to monitor the elections and communicated the message that Armenia, a member of the Eurasian Economic

45 “Pashinyan Describes Bolton Meeting ‘Major Diplomatic Achievement’.”

46 “President Armen Sarkissian’s official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany,” *The President of the Republic of Armenia*, November 27, 2018, <http://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2018/11/27/President-Armen-Sarkissian-official-visit-to-the-Federal-Republic-of-Germany/>

47 “Armenian President Visits ‘Friendly’ Germany,” *Azatutyun*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29628212.html>.

48 “Zohrab Mnatsakanyan Met With The Deputy Prime Minister And Foreign Minister Of Belgium,” *Armencom*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.armencom.be/fr/actualite/presse/1727-zohrab-mnatsakanyan-met-with-the-deputy-prime-minister-and-foreign-minister-of-belgium>

Union, can become a bridge between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, opening up new opportunities for businessmen and investors.⁴⁹

Pashinyan travelled to St. Petersburg on a working visit on 6 December to take part in the regular session of the Supreme Council of the Eurasian Economic Union, where EEU 2019 presidency passed to Armenia. On this occasion he reiterated that membership to the EEU was one of the priorities of his government.⁵⁰

3. Latest Developments in Turkey-Armenia Relations

18 representatives of non-Muslim communities of Turkey signed a joint declaration on 31 July confirming the freedom of religion in Turkey. The declaration stated the following⁵¹:

“As religious representatives and foundation directors of the ancient communities of different religions and belief groups that have been living in our country for centuries, we live our beliefs freely and we freely worship according to our traditions. Statements claiming or implying that there is repression are completely false. The various problems and times of victimization in the past have reached solutions over time. We are in continual communication with our state institutions, who meet the issues we wish to advance with good intentions and a desire for solutions. We are making this joint statement consciously out of responsibility to correctly inform public opinion.”

The 18 signatories were the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Armenian Acting Patriarch, Chief Rabbi, Syriac Ancient Community Deputy Patriarch, the Spiritual Leader of the Armenian Catholics, Chaldean Community Deputy Patriarch, Syriac Catholic General Deputy Patriarch, Gedikpasha Armenian Protestant Church and Denomination Foundation Spiritual President, RUMVADER President, VADIP and Yedikule Soup Pergich Armenian Hospital Foundation President, Turkish Jewish Society and Turkish Chief Rabbinate Foundation President, Beyoglu Syriac Lady Mary Church Foundation President, Soup Agop Armenian Catholic Hospital Foundation President, Istanbul Syriac Catholic Foundation President, Chaldean Catholic Foundation President, Bulgarian Exarchate Orthodox Church Foundation President, Georgian Catholic Church Foundation President, and Haskoy Haraite Jewish Foundation President.

49 “President Sarkissian optimistic towards future of Armenian-Italian relations,” *ArmenPress*, December 6, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957153.html>

50 “Pashinyan attends opening ceremony of new building of Armenia’s Consulate General in St. Petersburg,” *ArmenPress*, December 6, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957161.html>

51 “Turkey’s minority leaders sign joint declaration denying ‘pressure’ on communities,” *Daily Sabah*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/minorities/2018/07/31/turkeys-minority-leaders-sign-joint-declaration-denying-pressure-on-communities>

This Declaration is significant since it also reflects the feelings and well-being of the Turkish Armenian community.

Al-Jazeera TV broadcast in early August an interview with Pashinyan, given on 28 July. Pashinyan's remarks to a question on relations with Turkey are as follows:

“Armenia is ready to establish diplomatic Relations with Turkey without any precondition. Turkey closed the border between Armenia and Turkey. From the Armenian side, it can be considered open. For us, international recognition of the Armenian genocide is very important and Armenia is one of the active fighters against genocides. The issue of genocide for our country is not so much an issue of Armenian-Turkish Relations as a matter of the global struggle against genocide”.⁵²

The above cited interview has once again reflected the distorted mindset of the Armenian administration in its outlook to Turkey and relations with Turkey. It has been discouraging as it reveals the continuation of the falsification of facts and reality on the one hand and the assumption that deception, on a level of childish naivety, is possible.

Upon the American authorities' request for a judiciary extradition, it was published in the Armenian media that American citizen of Turkish origin Kemal Öksüz had been arrested in Armenia on 29 August.⁵³ He was stated to be working with a lobby group in Texas, having ties with the Azerbaijan government and SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic), and is apparently associated with the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ). Afterwards, he was arrested to be extradited to the US. No explanation has been made as to why he was in Armenia and what he was doing there.

In the Armenian press on 15 September, the news report of the arrest of a 16-year-old Turkish teen crossing the border illegally⁵⁴ was published, explaining that the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had called on Pashinyan requesting that the boy be released. It soon became evident that such a call did not take place and the boy's release was achieved through police contacts.

On 9 September in the Akdamar (Akhtamar) Church of Van, the news of a religious rite being performed after a three-year gap was published in the Armenian press in detail.⁵⁵

52 “Ready to talk Nagorno-Karabakh peace: Armenia PM Nikol Pashinyan,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2018/07/ready-negotiate-ilham-aliyev-armenia-pm-nikol-pashinyan-180726072935944.html>

53 “Turkish White-Collar Fugitive wanted by United States Apprehended by Yerevan Police,” *ArmenPress*, August 30, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/945456.html>

54 “Turkey demands release of 16-year-old boy held in Armenia,” *Tert.am*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.tert.am/en/news/2018/09/15/armenia-turkey/2792102>

55 “Üç Yıl Aradan Sonra Akdamar Kilisesi'nde Ayin Gerçekleştirildi,” *HaberTürk*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.haberturk.com/uc-yil-aradan-sonra-akdamar-da-ayin-yapildi-2135764>

Turkish President Erdoğan, who visited Azerbaijan on 15 September for joining the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Caucasus Islamic Army liberating Baku, expressed his messages regarding Nagorno-Karabakh's occupation and why the borders are closed. In the news reports of the Armenian press, President Erdoğan stated:

“finding a resolution in the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh is essential for the normalization of the relations with Armenia... As long as the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh continues, Turkey will not open its border with Armenia... Those who have invaded 20 percent of Azerbaijan land and do not permit one million Azeris to return to their lands should not expect Turkey to open its borders... Those who were in Khojali 26 years ago, who do not answer for the massacre in Nagorno-Karabakh, who declare the murderers to be heroes do not have a history lesson to give to Turkey.”⁵⁶

The Deputy Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly, who joined the Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments (MSEAP) organized in Antalya during the first week of October, initiated an abrupt battle of words against the Speaker of the Azerbaijani National Assembly's statements regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

In the joint statement made by the three ministers during the sixth Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia trilateral Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting organized in Istanbul on 29 October, the following points were emphasized: the importance of creating a permanent peaceful resolution in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region and its perimeter, in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions on the basis of the universally recognized principles and rules of international law, especially the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, the non-violation of states' internationally recognized borders.⁵⁷

In the joint statement published at the end of the sixth Turkey-Azerbaijan-Iran trilateral Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting organized in Istanbul on 30 October, a call was made for a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue on the basis of the principle of territorial integrity.⁵⁸ In the statement made in response to this call, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson expressed that the Co-Chairs of OSCE Minsk Group, which were established to support the resolution of the issue, are the only formation that has international authority in this issue and that it is this structure that assesses the

56 “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Yukarı Karabağ Açıklaması,” *NTV*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-yukari-karabag-aciklamasi.rQJhrrgAlUeSrb3fnP8nVA>

57 “Türkiye-Azerbaycan-İran Üçlü Dışişleri Bakanları Toplantısı,” *Sabah*, 30 October 2018, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2018/10/30/cin-yasaga-ragmen-ozon-tabakasini-incekten-kimyasal-kullaniyor>

58 “Tahran İle Ankara, Azerbaycan'ın Toprak Bütünlüğü Çerçevesinde Karabağ'da Çözümü Destekliyor,” *Sputnik Türkiye*, October 30, 2018, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/dunya/201810301035917594-tahran-ankara-azerbaycan-toprak-butunlugu-cercevesinde-karabag-cozumunu/>

principles through which this issue can be resolved. Additionally, the Ministry stated that acting in a selective manner in the determination of these principles would not in any way contribute to a peaceful resolution.

In a news report published in the Armenian media on 24 October, it was stated in an interview Armenian President Sarkissian made with a Swiss television channel that he was ready for a dialogue with Turkish President Erdoğan. Sarkissian explained that, according to the Christian faith, it is possible to forgive, but that recognition is required first, that recognition would have a historical dimension because the “Armenian Genocide” is the “first genocide of the 20th century”. Describing how he would approach a hypothetical meeting with the Turkish President, the Armenian President stated:

“I would first of all tell Erdogan: ‘Good morning Mr. President.’ I believe we have something to discuss. You are the President of Turkey, and I am the President of Armenia. My family, my ancestors are from Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis. My old family has a story. Why shouldn’t we speak about the relations between Turkey and Armenia, why shouldn’t we speak about our personal stories? We should speak about not only history, but also the future – the future of our children and grandchildren, about our two peoples...”⁵⁹

The future of the relations between Sarkissian, who is known for keeping a foot in both camps and is dubbed as having Teflon coating and Pashinyan, following his expected victorious emergence from the elections, is a subject of speculation in Armenia.

Regarding the relations with Turkey, Pashinyan made a speech that was far from being convincing or persuasive and was a repetition of his discourse in the recent past. Pashinyan spoke at the Armenian national assembly’s extraordinary session on 1 November, stating that Armenia is ready to establish relations with Turkey without preconditions. According to Pashinyan, there is no need to make a connection between this approach and the process of the “Armenian Genocide’s” international recognition and that this is a national and international security issue for Yerevan, which allegedly aims to prevent new genocides.⁶⁰ This approach of Pashinyan was also reflected onto Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan’s speech at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva on 13 September. He differed from the previous years as no statements were made that directly targeted Turkey. It focused on the seriousness of the crime of genocide and ways of preventing its repetition.

According to Pashinyan, the border is open on the Armenian side. According to him, Turkey tying the opening of the border to the resolution of the Nagorno-

59 “‘Forgiveness Comes After Recognition’: Armenian President’s Message To Turkish Counterpart,” *ArmenPress*, October 24, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/952038.html>

60 “Paşinyan: Türkiye İle Önkoşulsuz Normalleşmeye Hazırız,” *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2018/11/01/Paşinyan-Türkiye/140589>

Karabakh issue for the benefit of Azerbaijan is a weak policy. He further stated that it is not possible to ensure requests through threats and that such an approach would increase the solidarity between Armenia and an independent Nagorno-Karabakh. As he had stated to US National Security Advisor Bolton, Armenia, which has four neighbors, has two exits. Out of these, Georgia is semi-closed. The Iran route may close due to the US embargo. So, Armenia is an island.

In response to this assessment of Pashinyan that lacks depth and realism, it is possible to guess that Bolton expressed realistic recommendations on the reasons and solutions to Armenia's isolation.

A development in the period which indirectly concerns Turkey are the statements of the Armenian Deputy Minister of Culture Nazeni Gharibyan during his visit to Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government on the occasion of attending the Duhok international film festival. Deputy Minister Gharibyan emphasized that Armenians and Kurds have been two people who have been very close to each other for centuries, and stated that Kurds have been living in Armenia for a hundred years since the 1915 "Armenian Genocide", and alleged that his grandfather had survived the "genocide" due to his closeness to the Kurds.

During the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) in Yerevan on 27 November, Honorary Medals issued by Armenian side were refused to be received by the heads of three delegations, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

At a press conference at the G-20 summit in Argentina on 3 December, a journalist addressed Turkish President Erdogan, asking about the rights of minorities in Turkey, adding also that he was one of the descendants of the families that suffered the "Armenian genocide". President Erdogan's response was swift and unambiguous. He said,

"Turkey cannot be blamed of having committed genocide against the Armenians. On the question of genocide, please let's leave the discussion to historians and let's listen to what the historians have to say. This is not a part of our history. I can very confidently say that we are ready to take part in any discussion."

He further added,

"Do you know how many Armenians live in my country right now? Hundreds of thousands. About 30.000 of them are citizens and the rest are undocumented. They have fled Armenia only to settle in Turkey."⁶¹

61 "We will not allow any organization in northern Syria that poses threat to the security of our country and region," *Official Website of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, December 2, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/99916/-we-will-not-allow-any-organization-in-northern-syria-that-poses-threat-to-the-security-of-our-country-and-region->

Before the arrival of President Erdogan to Argentina, the Armenian community held a demonstration in front of the Turkish Embassy on 26 November. Not surprisingly, among the instigators of the demonstration were the Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church for Argentina and Chile as well as representatives of the Armenian Institutions of the Argentine Republic (IARA).

Immediately after his election victory, on 10 December, Pashinyan again reiterated at a press conference that Armenia reaffirms readiness to establish relations with Turkey without preconditions. This well-worn statement does not augur any new perspectives as it is construed to mean that Armenian hostile narrative cannot be countered.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “‘Bolton or Anyone For That Matter, Cannot Speak on My Behalf,’ Says Pashinyan.” *Asbarez*, October 29, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/175935/bolton-or-anyone-for-that-matter-cannot-speak-on-my-behalf-says-pashinyan/>
- “‘Forgiveness Comes After Recognition’: Armenian President’s Message To Turkish Counterpart.” *ArmenPress*, October 24, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/952038.html>
- “‘My Visit Will Serve as a Milestone for Stronger Relations between Japan and Armenia’ – Foreign Minister Taro Kono.” *Armenpress*, September 3, 2018. <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/945811.html>.
- “Acting Armenian Premier Talks Bilateral Relations with Lebanese Leaders during Visit.” *The Daily Star Newspaper*, October 21, 2018, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Oct-20/467008-armenian-premier-talks-bilateral-relations-with-lebanese-leaders-during-visit.ashx>
- “ARF Announcement on Elections.” *Asbarez*, December 10, 2018, <http://asbarez.com/176634/arf-announcement-on-elections/>
- “Armenia diaspora minister on three-day official visit.” *Cyprus Mail*, July 24, 2018, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/07/24/armenia-diaspora-minister-on-three-day-official-visit/>
- “Armenia PM Nikol Pashinyan Resigns in Order to Hold Early Vote.” *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/armenia-pm-nikol-pashinyan-resigns-order-hold-early-vote-181016161017415.html>
- “Armenian parliament approves 2019 state budget.” *JamNews*, November 24, 2018, <https://jam-news.net/armenian-parliament-approves-2019-state-budget/>
- “Armenian PM Holds ‘Atonement’ Rally.” *Azatutyun*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29619735.html>
- “Armenian Population down by 10.000 in First Half-year. UN Report Shows.” *Panorama*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2018/10/17/Armenian-population-UN/2019516>
- “Armenian President Visits ‘Friendly’ Germany.” *Azatutyun*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29628212.html>
- “Armenian-Chinese school to open in Yerevan on September 1.” *Arka News Agency*, August 2, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/society/armenian_chinese_school_to_open_in_yerevan_on_september_1/

- “Catholicos Aram I of Great House of Cilicia sends letter to Armenian President welcoming snap parliamentary elections.” *ArmenPress*, December 10, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957675.html>
- “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’dan Yukarı Karabağ Açıklaması.” *NTV*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-yukari-karabag-aciklamasi,rQJhrrgAIUeSrb3fnP8nVA>
- “Ex-Armenian President Robert Kocharian arrested.” *Deutsche Welle*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/ex-armenian-president-robot-kocharian-arrested/a-44860220>
- “Francophonie Summit Offers an Opportunity for the New Armenia to Shine on the World Stage.” *The Armenian Weekly*, September 28, 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/09/27/the-worlds-leading-francophonie-summit-will-be-held-in-yerevan-heres-why-you-should-care/>
- “Georgian, Armenian Prime Ministers Meet in Yerevan.” *Georgia Today*, September 10, 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/12207/Georgian.-Armenian-Prime-Ministers-Meet-in-Yerevan>
- “Italy’s President to pay a two-day state visit to Armenia.” *Public Radio of Armenia*, July 4, 2018, <http://old.armradio.am/en/2018/07/04/italys-president-to-pay-a-two-day-state-visit-to-armenia/>
- “Lavrov about Kocharyan detention: Russia concerned over things in Armenia.” *Arka News Agency*, August 1, 2018, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/lavrov_about_kocharyan_detention_russia_concerned_over_things_in_armenia/
- “Lavrov: OSCE MG Co-chairs Working Actively to Solve Karabakh Conflict.” *AzerNews*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/121636.html>
- “Meeting with Prime Minister Of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan.” *President of Russia*, September 8, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58491>
- “Merkel Concludes Visit to Caucasus; During Armenia Visit Calls Ottoman-Era Killings Of Armenians ‘Heinous Crimes’.” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, August 30, 2018, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2018/08/30/merkel-concludes-visit-to-caucasus-during-armenia-visit-calls-ottoman-era-killings-of-armenians-heinous-crimes/>
- “Minsk Group Co-Chairs Meet Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan on Margins of UN General Assembly in New York.” *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/397700>

- “Multinational Exercise “Noble Partner 2018” Starts on August 1st.” *The Ministry of Defense of Georgia*, June 7, 2018. [https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/6623/multinational-exercise-noble-partner-2018"-starts-on-august-1st](https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/6623/multinational-exercise-noble-partner-2018)
- “Newspaper: Armenia PM Ended up in Russia’s Trap.” *News.am*, October 9, 2018. <https://news.am/eng/news/475005.html>
- “OSCE/ODIHR - “inflammatory rhetoric” ahead of Armenia elections.” *PanArmenian*, November 30, 2018. <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/262921/>
- “Pashinian Alliance Scores ‘Revolutionary Majority’ In Landslide Armenian Win.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-elections-pashinian-my-step-sarkisian-hhk/29645721.html>
- “Pashinian Supporters Rally in Yerevan On 100th Day In Office.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pashinian-supporters-rally-in-yerevan-on-100th-day-in-office/29439667.html>
- “Pashinyan Announces about Dismissing Ministers and Governors Representing ARF and Prosperous Armenia Party.” *ArmenPress*, October 2, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/949465.html>
- “Pashinyan attends opening ceremony of new building of Armenia’s Consulate General in St. Petersburg.” *ArmenPress*, December 6, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957161.html>
- “Pashinyan Describes Bolton Meeting ‘Major Diplomatic Achievement’.” *ArmenPress*, November 1, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/953041.html>
- “Pashinyan Meets Catholicos Aram I.” *News.am*, October 21, 2018. <https://news.am/eng/news/476949.html>
- “Pashinyan, Macron Meet in Paris; Both Agree to Expand France-Armenia Relations.” *Hetq*, September 14, 2018. <https://hetq.am/en/article/92997>
- “Paşinyan: Türkiye İle Önkoşulsuz Normalleşmeye Hazırız.” *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2018/11/01/Paşinyan-Türkiye/140589>
- “PM Nikol Pashinyan’s Speech Dedicated to 100 Days in Office.” *ArmenPress*, August 17, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/944242.html>
- “PM Pashinyan Receives U.S. Ambassador Richard Mills.” *ArmenPress*, October 8, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/950165.html>

- “President Armen Sarkissian’s official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany.” *The President of the Republic of Armenia*, November 27, 2018, <http://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2018/11/27/President-Armen-Sarkissian-official-visit-to-the-Federal-Republic-of-Germany/>
- “President Sarkissian optimistic towards future of Armenian-Italian relations.” *ArmenPress*, December 6, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/957153.html>
- “Prime Minister, Deputy PM, Ministers: Armenia gears up for NATO Summit.” *PanArmenian*, July 9, 2018, http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/257620/Prime_Minister_Deputy_P_M_Ministers_Armenia_gears_up_for_NATO_Summit
- “Ready to talk Nagorno-Karabakh peace: Armenia PM Nikol Pashinyan.” *Al-Jazeera*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2018/07/ready-negotiate-ilham-aliyev-armenia-pm-nikol-pashinyan-180726072935944.html>
- “Republican Party Hasn’t Agreed: Nikol Pashinyan.” *Lragir*, October 1, 2018. <https://www.lragir.am/en/2018/10/01/69511>
- “Russia cancels Armenia’s red notice for fugitive ex-defense minister on its territory.” *ArmenPress*, September 7, 2018 <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/946361.html>
- “Sarkisian’s Brother Questioned Over Son’s Alleged Crime, Released.” *Azatutyun*, July 5 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29345186.html>
- “Tahran İle Ankara, Azerbaycan’ın Toprak Bütünlüğü Çerçevesinde Karabağ’da Çözümü Destekliyor.” *Sputnik Türkiye*, October 30, 2018, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/dunya/201810301035917594-tahran-ankara-azerbaycan-toprak-butunlugu-cercevesinde-karabag-cozumu/>
- “Trump Congratulates Armenia on 27 Years of Independence from USSR.” *The Armenian Weekly*, September 22, 2018. <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/09/22/trump-congratulates-armenia-on-27-years-of-independence-from-ussr/>
- “Turkey demands release of 16-year-old boy held in Armenia.” *Tert.am*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.tert.am/en/news/2018/09/15/armenia-turkey/2792102>
- “Turkey’s minority leaders sign joint declaration denying ‘pressure’ on communities.” *Daily Sabah*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/minorities/2018/07/31/turkeys-minority-leaders-sign-joint-declaration-denying-pressure-on-communities>

“Turkish White-Collar Fugitive wanted by United States Apprehended by Yerevan Police.” *ArmenPress*, August 30, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/945456.html>

“Türkiye-Azerbaycan-İran Üçlü Dışişleri Bakanları Toplantısı.” *Sabah*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2018/10/30/cin-yasaga-ragmen-ozon-tabakasini-incekten-kimyasal-kullaniyor>

“Üç Yıl Aradan Sonra Akdamar Kilisesi’nde Ayin Gerçekleştirildi.” *HaberTürk*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.haberturk.com/uc-yil-aradan-sonra-akdamar-da-ayin-yapildi-2135764>

“United States Attaches Importance to Further Enhancement of Mutually Beneficial Partnership with Armenia: PM Holds Meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.” *ArmenPress*, October 15, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/950894.html>

“We will not allow any organization in northern Syria that poses threat to the security of our country and region.” *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, December 2, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/99916/-we-will-not-allow-any-organization-in-northern-syria-that-poses-threat-to-the-security-of-our-country-and-region->

“Yerevan City Council Declared as Elected: My Step Bloc Gets 57 Seats.” *ArmenPress*, September 30, 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/949135.html>

“Yuri Khachaturov ‘released on bail’.” *Tert*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.tert.am/en/news/2018/07/28/yuri-khacharurov/2753466>

“Zohrab Mnatsakanyan Met With The Deputy Prime Minister And Foreign Minister Of Belgium.” *Armencom*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.armencom.be/fr/actualite/presse/1727-zohrab-mnatsakanyan-met-with-the-deputy-prime-minister-and-foreign-minister-of-belgium>

Avetisyan, Armine. “Pashinyan and Aliyev Vow to Reduce Tensions after Meeting in Tajikistan.” *OC Media*, October 3, 2018, <http://oc-media.org/pashinyan-and-aliyev-vow-to-reduce-tensions-after-meeting-in-tajikistan/>

Mejlumyan, Ani. “From Arrest to the Campaign Trail: Kocharyan Says He Will Participate in next Elections.” *Eurasianet*, August 31, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/from-arrest-to-the-campaign-trail-kocharyan-says-he-will-participate-in-next-elections>

Mejlumyan, Ani. “Leaked Phone Calls Scandal Poses New Challenge for Pashinyan.” *Eurasianet*, September 11, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/leaked-phone-calls-scandal-poses-new-challenge-for-pashinyan>