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FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

Alev KILIÇ*

Abstract: *This article covers Turkey and Armenia relations as well as the domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period between January and July of 2019. During this period, Nikol Pashinyan officially resumed the post of the prime minister. He appointed his cabinet and reduced the number of ministries. The abolishment of the Ministry of Diaspora was met with some criticism. Former President Robert Kocharian's arrest and trial developed into a power struggle, including ramifications in Nagorno-Karabakh as that conflict moved more to the center of international attention. In foreign relations, a tight rope act with Russia, the EU, the US and, as a novelty, China continued. Relations with Turkey showed no sign of improvement. In fact, the antagonism displayed by Armenia grew sharper.*

Keywords: *Turkey-Armenia Relations, Pashinyan, Kocharian, Nagorno-Karabakh*

Öz: *Bu incelemede, Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde ve Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde 2019 yılının Ocak-Temmuz ayları arasındaki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır. Dönem içinde Nikol Paşinyan meşru başbakan olarak görevi devraldı. Sayısını azalttığı bakanlıklarla yeni hükümeti kurdu. Diaspora Bakanlığını kaldırması eleştirilere neden oldu. Eski Cumhurbaşkanı Robert Koçaryan'ın tutuklanması ve yargılanması ciddi*

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

sıkıntılara yol açtı ve Dağlık Karabağ yönetimine de uzanan bir kuvvet mücadelesi görüntüsü aldı. Dağlık Karabağ sorunu uluslararası gündemin önemli bir konusu olmaya devam etti. Dış ilişkilerde, her nabza göre şerbet dağıtmaya, Rusya, AB, ABD'nin yanı sıra son olarak Çin'i de kapsayan bir denge oyununu sürdürmeye devam etti. Türkiye ile ilişkilerde bir düzelme görülmedi, aksine Türkiye karşılığında tırmanma gözlemlendi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri, Paşinyan, Koçaryan, Dağlık Karabağ

1. Domestic Developments In Armenia

This period has been marked with efforts of Nikol Pashinyan to consolidate and legitimize his power confirmed by a landslide election victory. During the election campaign, he often raised the issue of the Armenian diaspora, asserting that there is no difference between the Armenians of the diaspora and of Armenia and that it is not correct to make a differentiation between the two entities to the extent that the elections in Armenia could be open to the participation of all. He also stated that he would reduce the number of ministries in his new government, also doing away with the Ministry of Diaspora to be replaced with a more effective institution. However, shortly after the elections, on 19 December, he retracted from his words, taking a position against granting the diaspora Armenians the right to vote in elections in Armenia, saying it could cause problems, citing the example that the number of ballot boxes in Russia would exceed those in Armenia, that it would provide the opportunity for foreign intervention.

On the other hand, he resisted to pressure and harsh criticism of the Diaspora on abolishing the Ministry of Diaspora, saying that relations with diaspora cannot be confined to the competence of one single ministry, that it involves aspects within the responsibility of all ministries. Catholicos Aram I, the spiritual leader of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia (located in Antelias, Lebanon) and a spearhead of militant diaspora activity with a religious cloak, in a letter he sent to Pashinyan on 11 January, urged him to keep the Ministry of Diaspora, saying “our approach to the diaspora should be different because if we have nearly 3 million Armenians in Armenia, the remaining 8 million Armenians live in the diaspora.”¹ Armenian sources appear to be in yet another numbers game with the diaspora population. The Armenian press lately claims the number of diaspora Armenians to be somewhere between 10-12 million, with the following distribution: nearly 2 million in Russia, more than 1 million in the USA, nearly 500,000 in France, 250,000 in Georgia, 140,000 in Lebanon and in smaller numbers dispersed around the world. In this vein, it is also noteworthy to recall that in an official announcement on 18 February by the Armenian Statistics Committee, the population of Armenia as of 1 January 2019 has been a total of 2,965,100, a decline of 7600 from the previous year.²

The arrest and detention of former president Robert Kocharian on 7 December has been the major domestic event that has marred the period. It has taken the form of a blood feud between Pashinyan and Kocharian with no end in sight

1 “Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I Urges Pashinyan to Keep Diaspora Ministry,” *Horizon Weekly*, January 10, 2019, <https://horizonweekly.ca/en/catholicos-of-the-great-house-of-cilicia-aram-i-urges-pashinyan-to-keep-diaspora-ministry/>.

2 “Armenia’s Resident Population Dwindles to 2,965,100 People,” *Arka News Agency*, February 5, 2019, https://arka.am/en/news/society/armenia_s_resident_population_dwindles_to_2_965_100_people/.

and open to interference from the outside. A TV documentary prepared by two Russian journalists insinuating Pashinyan's responsibility in the street fights after the 2008 elections, resulting with the death of 10, a priority topic in Pashinyan's election campaign for punishing the culprits, was construed in Armenia as an attempt to exonerate Kocharian. On 31 December, with a joint declaration, three major parties in Nagorno-Karabakh called for the release of former president of Armenia, Kocharian, who was one of the leaders of the 1988 separatist uprising in Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the top-level administrator there during the 1992 war with Azerbaijan.

On 31 December, Pashinyan issued a New Year address where he qualified 2018 as a year of reinstatement of people's power, civil dignity, optimism and statehood.³ For 2019, he put the main task as economic revolution and making its results more tangible.

The presidential decree of 14 January officially appointed Pashinyan as the Prime Minister. On 19 January, Prime Minister Pashinyan named 12 ministers of his cabinet. Cabinet members were officially sworn in before the President of Armenia, Armen Sarkissian. The total number of ministries was not yet clear since Pashinyan had previously stated that he would reduce the number. The delay in confirming the final decision on the number of ministries was understood to be stemming from the hesitancy regarding the Ministry of Diaspora. On 8 February, Pashinyan announced that the cabinet would consist of 12 ministries, down from 17 in the previous government, to come into force following the approval of the parliament.⁴ The Ministry of Diaspora would be abolished, to be replaced by a body within the Prime Ministry, to be chaired by an ambassador-at-large in the capacity of a high commissioner, acting on behalf of the prime minister under the guidance of the prime minister. The new cabinet of 2 deputy prime ministers and 12 ministers were finally officially announced on 7 March as follows:⁵

- **Deputy Prime Minister:** Tigran Avinyan
- **Deputy Prime Minister:** Mher Grigoryan
- **Foreign Affairs:** Zohrab Mnatsakanyan
- **Defense:** Davit Tonayan

3 "Congratulatory Address by Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on New Year and Christmas Holidays," *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/12/31/Nikol-Pashinyan-New-Year-2019/>.

4 "Cabinet Completes Discussions over New Composition of Government," *ArmenPress*, February 8, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/963577.html>.

5 "Structure," *The Government of the Republic of Armenia*, <http://www.gov.am/en/structure/>.

- **Emergency Situations:** Felix Tsolakyan
- **Justice:** Artak Zeynelyan
- **Labor and Social Affairs:** Zaruhi Batoyan
- **Education, Science, and Culture:** Arayik Harutyunyan
- **Protection of Nature:** Erik Grigoryan
- **Healthcare:** Arsen Torosyan
- **Finance:** Atom Janjughazyan
- **Economy:** Tigran Khachatryan
- **Territorial Administration and Infrastructure:** Suren Papikyan
- **Transport, Communications, and High Technology Industry:** Hakob Arshakyan

On 8 May, Pashinyan defended his one-year track record at an unprecedented 5.5 hours long press conference.⁶ He presented a list of 100 concrete achievements of his rule, citing among others, 30 million US dollars confiscated from former President Sarkissian's brother that was "plundered" from the state. He also announced the "second stage of the revolution" as the opposition from the previous authorities, particularly the two former presidents of the "Karabakh clan", started growing visibly. Imprisoned former President Kocharian, in an interview to a Russian TV channel, predicted the emergence of a new and powerful opposition force and that he would be involved in it. Former President Sarkissian on the other hand, continued travelling in occupied Azerbaijani territories, holding meetings and giving interviews.

On 20 May, Kocharian and two retired army generals on trial for overthrowing the constitutional order and on corruption charges were released on bail, paid by the Armenian separatist authorities in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region. Infuriated with this ruling, the same day, Pashinyan appealed to the crowds and called for a blockade of all court buildings in the country, preventing entry and exit. He also demanded a mandatory vetting of all judges in Armenia, calling for their resignation. He said that many of them must resign because they are connected to the country's former leadership and not trusted

⁶ "Pashinyan's May 8 News Conference Breaks Previous Records with 5,5 Hour Span," *ArmenPress*, May 8, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/974140/>.

by the public.⁷ Indeed, his supporters immediately blocked the entrances to court buildings.

As to be expected, this move gave rise to a number of reactions, both internal as well as external. President Armen Sarkissian sided with Pashinyan, saying the power belonged to the people. The Armenian Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II, as well as the Catholicos of Cilicia, called for calm. Karekin II issued a message expressing his concern about the situation in Armenia. The Council of Europe Secretary General called on Pashinyan and said that a delegation of experts would be travelling to Yerevan to support reform agenda. As the dust settled, the Justice Minister resigned and on 19 June, Rustam Badasyan, a 28-year-old lawyer was appointed as the new Justice Minister. On June 25, the released former President Kocharian was jailed for the third time. As of the date of this article's submission, he is currently behind the bars again.

2. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent Azerbaijani regions continues to be the Achilles heel of not only Armenia but particularly of Prime Minister Pashinyan. The cease-fire established after the 1992 war has proven to be fragile, resting on the continuing international efforts spearheaded by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group and its three co-chairs. Pashinyan appears to be well-aware of the fact that the roots of his domestic problems and challenges as well as his international standing all bear on this very problem. His vision for a developed Armenia, an Armenia that opens up to the world requires first and foremost the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The one-year record of Pashinyan on this problem has been inconclusive, ambiguous, and surreptitious. He has not followed a coherent line. On the one hand, he has played to the nationalistic current by highlighting the recruit of his son in Nagorno-Karabakh for his military duty, while on the other, he has stood behind the statement of his party member during the election campaign that “the success of the people in the street demonstrations during the spring months are more important than the Nagorno-Karabakh war of liberation”, drawing the ire of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.

Pashinyan's repeated public statements of “peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains top priority for us”⁸ and frequent visits to Karabakh

7 “Armenia: After ex-President Released, Premier Opens Conflict with Judges and Karabakh Leaders,” *Eurasianet*, May 20, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-after-ex-president-released-premier-opens-conflict-with-judges-and-karabakh-leaders>.

8 “Armenia's acting PM: Peaceful Resolution of Nagorno Karabakh Conflict Remains Top Priority for Us,” *Aysor*, December 14, 2019, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2018/12/14/pashinyan-twitter/1504147>.

to melt the ice did not succeed. To the contrary, the Karabakh authorities became more outspoken. The last straw was bailing out Kocharian for his release. Pashinyan publicly accused the officials of Nagorno Karabakh of carrying out false propaganda against the Armenian government and himself as the prime minister. The Karabakh authorities immediately rejected the accusations, stating that they were unaware of the existence of anti-government forces which Pashinyan said were plotting conspiracies and treasonous acts.

On 23 January, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Pashinyan met in Davos in the margins of the World Economic Forum,⁹ their third meeting, the first taking place in September 2018 in Tajikistan and the second in Moscow in December, to discuss Nagorno-Karabakh. Although no statement was issued indicating a positive outcome following a 90-minute meeting, the holding of the meeting and continuation of dialogue was assessed to be constructive. The press got hold of the information that Pashinyan talked on the phone with the US National Security Adviser John Bolton before the meeting. Answering questions of the press, Pashinyan said that they discussed bilateral issues and not Nagorno-Karabakh. President Aliyev, who also talked with Bolton on 30 January, said that they took up the Karabakh issue.

The umbrella organization for the extreme right, the militant Dashnaksutyun (the Dashnak party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - ARF), held its 33rd world congress in Nagorno-Karabakh on 16 January.¹⁰ At its closing, a statement was issued on 24 January, urging that the negotiations for a solution to the Karabakh conflict must proceed with the complete participation of the separatist Karabakh authorities, also adding that the leadership of Armenia on the world stage must continue to lead the charge as the guarantor of Karabakh's "independence and security" as if there is a recognized, legitimate Armenian authority in Nagorno-Karabakh, a region whose Azerbaijani population has been ethnically cleansed.

Pashinyan sent a congratulatory message to the ARF congress, paid tribute to the party's 129-year history, saying that it has been "heroic" and at times "contradictory and controversial". He also expressed readiness to again cooperate with the ARF of Armenia, which was a coalition partner in government but was ousted by Pashinyan three months before.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has continued to be the major headache for Pashinyan throughout the period under review. He has tried a number of ways

9 "Azerbaijani President, Armenian Premier meet in Davos," *Anadolu Agency*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/azerbaijani-president-armenian-premier-meet-in-davos/1371882>.

10 Haig Kayserian, "The ARF World Congress: An Opportunity to Self Reflect," *Asbarez*, January 4, 2019, <http://asbarez.com/177058/the-arf-world-congress-an-opportunity-to-self-reflect/?fbclid=IwAR2SCn22-1XyHtj4-FEmyL1NlhX2rMKy0Cem5AavI4Zly4F5Zk7f03XZEg>.

and arguments to extricate himself from responsibility. One in particular is his favorite. He says that he has been elected by the constituency in Armenia, consequently he does not have the authority to represent the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, hence for the sake of the process of negotiations to be approved, the representatives of the state of Nagorno-Karabakh should take part as an equal party in the negotiations. The argument does not hold water. There is no state of Nagorno-Karabakh nor a legitimate authority representing that territory, the former autonomous republic of Azerbaijan whose Azerbaijani population has been forcibly and brutally removed. It has not been recognized by any country as an independent state, including Armenia. It is an illegal entity in terms of international law. Self-proclaimed titles of the authorities such as president, minister, member of parliament are illegitimate and empty. The European Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe has pronounced unambiguously in its judgement in the case of “Chiragov and others vs. Armenia” that Nagorno-Karabakh is under effective control and responsibility of Armenia. The insistence of Pashinyan to bestow a status to the illegitimate, separatist administration has not yielded any results. The Minsk Group through its three co-chairs have made it very clear that the negotiating format cannot be changed and any attempt to change it would be understood as blocking the process. The European Union (EU) has also delivered the same message through its Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement. Pashinyan has made a following move, possibly to change the agenda, putting into question and re-interpreting the three principles and six points that was agreed at the Minsk Group.

The intelligence community of the US, in its 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment report, delivered in January to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence had the following to say on Nagorno-Karabakh: “Tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh region remains a potential source for a large scale military conflict that might draw in Russia.”¹¹

In such an atmosphere, President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan met in Vienna on 29 March upon the invitation of the Minsk Group co-chair.¹² Although it was the fourth meeting of the two leaders, it was the first official meeting under the aegis of the Minsk Group co-chair for the resolution process of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Despite the lack of a concrete result, again, the mere fact that the meeting took place and the process continued was assessed as a positive development. The two leaders met for the fifth time and briefly talked with each other on 13 May in Brussels as they attended the 10th anniversary of Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU. Pashinyan told reporters

11 “U.S. says Karabakh Conflict may Grow,” *AzerNews*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/144772.html>.

12 “First formal Aliyev-Pashinyan Meeting deemed a Success,” *Eurasianet*, March 30, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/first-formal-aliyev-pashinyan-meeting-deemed-a-success>.

that they briefly spoke at dinner and that it was a general discussion of the current situation around Nagorno-Karabakh.

In the meantime, the foreign affairs ministers of the two countries appeared to do a lot of groundwork with the Minsk Group co-chair. They met on 15 April in Moscow in the presence of the Russian Foreign Minister. A joint statement by the three ministers said the warring sides reaffirmed their intention to strengthen the ceasefire regime around Karabakh and along the Armenian-Azerbaijani borderland to take other confidence building measures.¹³

The two ministers met on 21 June in Washington with US National Security Adviser John Bolton to hold fresh talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In a Twitter post, Bolton said that he would encourage continued dialogue between them. The meeting came after an upsurge in skirmishes along the “line of contact” around Karabakh. The tension there had escalated in late May after months of relative calm. Before meeting with Bolton, the Armenian foreign minister held a “preparatory meeting” with the Minsk Group co-chair and representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office who were also in Washington for this occasion.¹⁴

3. International Developments Concerning Armenia

Armenia assumed the annually rotating presidency of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Eurasian Economic Council, and the Eurasian Economic Commission on 1 January. Pashinyan was in St. Petersburg for a working visit where on 6 December he attended the Council meeting to officially take over the presidency. On this occasion, he reiterated that membership to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was a priority for his government. The Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit proposed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin, and which was also planned for 6 December, was postponed, as the election of a new Secretary General following the ousting of the indicted Armenian Secretary General who held the post, could not be mutually agreed. Armenia was insistent that another Armenian candidate should fulfill the remaining three-year tenure while the rest favored the next country’s (Belarus) candidate in line of rotation.

13 “Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,” *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/417281>.

14 “Armenian, Azerbaijani FMs comment on Results of June 20 Meeting in Washington D.C.,” *Armenian Press*, June 21, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/979340.html>.

The Armenian Caucus members of the US Congress called on the US Secretary of State on 17 December to upgrade US-Armenian Relations by raising the US-Armenia Joint Economic Task Force (USATF) to a standing permanent dialogue platform.¹⁵

The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said to reporters on 16 December that Russia and Armenia would conclude an agreement that Armenia would not host foreign armed forces in its territory. The only foreign armed forces in Armenia, with nearly 5000 military personnel and two air bases being Russia, this statement led to much speculation and curiosity.¹⁶ Even Pashinyan is reported to have called on Lavrov to clarify the comments. Lavrov informed the press that he was not talking about the Russians. Later, it transpired that there were a number of biological laboratories in Armenia built or renewed by the US with funds from the US Department of Defense (Pentagon) which raised Russia's concern that they could be employed against Russia in biological warfare. Pashinyan also informed the public that he had personally given instructions for Russian experts to inspect these laboratories back in September and that it was out of question to be used against Russia in any manner. On his part, on 19 December, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin urged Armenia to resist US interference, saying that in view of radical changes in Armenia, Washington's meddling in that country's internal as well as external affairs was being increasingly vulgar. He called on the Armenian leadership to have the courage to resist the unhidden external blackmail and pressure.

At the UN General Assembly, Armenia, like Russia, voted against the UN resolution on Crimea and the freedom of navigation at Azov Sea which was adopted by a two thirds majority.¹⁷

A historical change of course was announced by the Armenian Apostolic Church on 21 December, appointing the first ever representative to the Vatican. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian was designated as representative of the Armenian Church to the Holy See. It was explained that this change of course was intended to strengthen friendship between the two entities. The reported aim is to establish liaison between the two to smoothen dialogue in both theological and pragmatic issues. This was a clear expression of the Armenian Church reciprocating to Pope's visit to Yerevan in 2015 and his narrative there.

15 "Congressional Armenian Caucus Leaders Urge Secretary of State to Enhance U.S.-Armenia Joint Economic Task Force," *Aravot*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.aravot-en.am/2018/12/19/226859/>.

16 "Lavrov promises no "foreign soldiers" in Armenia. He wasn't talking about Russians," *Eurasianet*, December 18, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/lavrov-promises-no-foreign-soldiers-in-armenia-he-wasnt-talking-about-russians>.

17 Tatevik Shahunyan, "Armenia voted against 'On the Militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol, and the Black and Azov Sea Regions' resolution at UN General Assembly," *Arm-Radio*, December 18, 2018, https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=37786&lang=3.

Pashinyan went to Moscow on a working visit following his election victory and met with President Putin on 27 December. The Kremlin informed that they discussed key topics of the bilateral agenda. Those must have included a new agreement on the price of Russian natural gas supplied to Armenia, who should be the new Secretary General of the CSTO as well as regional issues including Nagorno-Karabakh. President Putin spoke of a good dynamic in Russia's relationship with Armenia. He stated:

“There is no need to describe our relations. These are truly allied relations filled with substantial content. Russia holds the first place in Armenia's economic cooperation with foreign states. Russia accounts for 25.5 per cent. 2200 Russian enterprises are operating in Armenia. Trade is growing. Last year it went up by almost 30 percent.”

In an interview with a Russian Newspaper, Pashinyan admitted that he is still distrusted by some Russian circles. He said they are wrong to suspect the Armenian “velvet revolution” was orchestrated by Western Powers. He underlined that there would be no fundamental changes in Armenia's traditional foreign policy.

On 15 January, an informal meeting was held between the Prime Ministers of Armenia and Georgia in the village Bolnisi in Georgia. The two decided to hold a Georgian-Armenian business forum in Armenia in May.

Pashinyan went to Moscow again on 25 January on a working visit, this time on the occasion of addressing the Eurasian Economic Commission dedicated to the beginning chairmanship of Armenia in the EAEU.¹⁸ This was his fourth visit to Moscow after the “velvet revolution”, the first in his absolutely legitimate status as Prime Minister -which Putin congratulated in writing on 14 January for the first time. Pashinyan was not scheduled to meet with Putin, instead he held talks with the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Official press releases were short on specifics. They indicated only that the two focused on economic issues. The Russian government also noted that the meeting took place at the request of the Armenian side.

At a news conference held at the EAEU headquarters, Pashinyan was asked about his past position on EAEU when he criticized Armenia's accession to the organization and even called for its withdrawal from the bloc. His answer was as follows: “The fact is that Armenia is a member of the EAEU and I do not think that U turns are good in international affairs. As you can see, our efforts now are aimed at making the EAEU more effective.”

18 “Talks with Acting Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan,” *President of Russia*, January 27, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59531>.

The EU and the World Bank announced a grant of 730 million euros to Armenia for transport infrastructure investments.¹⁹ It was noted that the grant and credit was allocated within the framework of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy paid a visit to Armenia on 29 January, announcing additional financial assistance for achievements in democracy and rule of law. Commissioner Johannes Hahn said:

“There is a solid system at the foundation of our entire cooperation. Today we are at the stage of implementation of 300 million Euro worth of projects, with another 100 million worth of projects underway. We are working with the government in order to outline the sectors of future cooperation. We recently signed a package that concerns the development of educational area. It is a 23 million Euro project. We have already had big contribution in education, and we will do it in the future also.”²⁰

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin met with Armenian Foreign Minister in Yerevan on 29 January. Karasin spoke of Russia’s developing relations with Armenia and a favorable international environment for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh. Karabakh conflict was high on the agenda. He welcomed the regularity of Aliyev-Pashinyan meetings. The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry statement said that Karasin and Zohrab Mnatsakanyan discussed a broad range of issues. Special attention was paid to the topics of security and stability in the Transcaucasus region, including the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement.²¹

Pashinyan started an official visit to Germany on 31 January. Germany is Armenia’s number one EU donor and trading partner. He met with the President, Chancellor, and Parliament Speaker. Chancellor Angele Merkel expressed confidence that the EU’s Relations with Armenia will intensify after the recent Armenian parliamentary elections which she described as democratic. She said: “We want to support Armenia. I believe that the European Union has also made this clear through Commissioner Hahn -without us interfering in Armenia’s other foreign policy activities.”²² The Nagorno-

19 “EU, World Bank Pledge Over 730 Million Euros for Armenian Road Upgrades,” *MassisPost*, January 25, 2019, <https://massispost.com/2019/01/eu-world-bank-pledge-over-730-million-euros-for-armenian-road-upgrades/>.

20 “EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy Johannes Hahn to visit Armenia,” *ArmenPress*, January 25, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/961998.html>.

21 “Mnatsakanyan, Karasin discuss some issues,” *Arminfo*, January 30, 2019, http://arka.am/en/news/politics/mnatsakanyan_karasin_discuss_some_issues_/.

22 “Nikol Pashinyan pays official visit to Germany,” *Public Television of Armenia*, January 31, 2019, <https://news.1tv.am/en/2019/01/31/Nikol-Pashinyan-pays-official-visit-to-Germany/111359>.

Karabakh conflict was also on the agenda of talks. Merkel praised the “courageous steps” taken by Pashinyan and expressed the hope that they will be reciprocated by the other side. She said: “I encouraged the Prime Minister to continue trying to resolve this conflict, but as I said at the end of the day both sides must be ready for a compromise.” At the meeting with the Parliament Speaker Wolfgang Schäuble, Pashinyan praised the controversial 2016 genocide resolution of the German parliament. Shortly after Pashinyan’s visit, on 18 March, Speaker of the Armenian Parliament paid an official visit to Germany to meet with Schäuble.

The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia said at a reception hosted by the Armenian Embassy that she would visit Yerevan soon to explore the possibility of stepping up military cooperation. She also expressed her government’s appreciation of the Armenian troop deployments in Afghanistan and Kosovo. She added that the 160 or so Armenian soldiers serving there are part of a special Peacekeeping Brigade which has received considerable assistance from US Army Europe and the Kansas National Guard. It was further noted that US instructors have long been training the brigade’s personnel and a newly renovated training center of the brigade, mostly financed by the US, was inaugurated by Armenian and US military officials in October 2017.

Two ethnic Armenians, as stipulated by the constitution of Lebanon, were appointed to the new Lebanese government that was announced on 1 February.

Prime Minister Pashinyan, in an interview with a Swiss TV, shared his views on balancing Armenia’s relations with Russia, the EU, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Pashinyan stressed a number of points in this regard: a) Ties with Russia are important for Armenia’s economy and security, b) The relations with the EU allow Armenia to reform its political and judicial systems and to allow its society to enhance its competitiveness, c) Concerning NATO, it is important to be cautious not to affect the balance and that Armenia has no plans to join that organization, but still cooperates with countries that are part of it and participates in peace keeping missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan and would soon take part in the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon.

On 8 February, Armenian Defense Minister announced the dispatch of a group of specialists to Syria. 83 medics, demining experts, and other military personnel were sent to Aleppo. The Ministry attributed the deployment to the severe humanitarian situation in Aleppo, have received written request from the Syrian side and the existence of an Armenian community in Syria. Russia’s Defense Minister is reported to have thanked Yerevan for its humanitarian assistance to Syria. Four days later, the Armenian Defense Minister said at a press conference that Armenia would take part in military actions in Syria if

necessary.²³ The US State Department also commented, saying US recognizes the desire of other nations to respond to the humanitarian situation in Syria and shares the concerns about protecting religious minorities in the Middle East; however, it does not support any engagement with Syrian military forces, whether that engagement is to provide assistance to civilians or otherwise.

On 12 February, a committee under the presidency of the Defense Minister of the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) went to Armenia for a three-day official visit. At the end of the visit, the defense ministers of Armenia and GASC signed an agreement on the 2019 bilateral cooperation program.²⁴ Hereby, the GASC Minister made a claim of Turkey's "threats" towards the natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, gave information regarding the cooperation between GASC, Greece, Israel, and Egypt, and expressed the possibility of establishing a cooperation between GASC, Greece, and Armenia in the near future.

Armenia's obstruction of the election of the CSTO Secretary General was brought forward once again on 14 February with the statement of the spokesperson of the Belarussian Foreign Affairs Ministry. In place of General Yuri Khachaturov, who had been assigned for three years but was discharged by Pashinyan one and a half year later on 2 November 2018, the Belarussian candidate's turn had come by rotation. Armenia claimed that their candidate had the right to serve for the remaining one-and-a-half-year period and refused to grant its approval, leading to a rift in the CSTO.

In his statement to the Russian press agency on 18 February, Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan indicated that Armenia would purchase 12 warplanes from Russia (Su-30SM) within two years.²⁵

Pashinyan paid a two-day official visit to Iran on 27 February and met with the Iranian religious leader Ali Khamenei and Prime Minister Hassan Rohani.²⁶ The Iranian leaders emphasized the necessity of establishing strong, permanent, and friendly relations, despite the obstruction of the US.

Pashinyan paid an official bilateral visit to Belgium on 5 March, and met with European Council President Donald Tusk, High Representative of the EU for

23 "Armenia Sends Military 'Humanitarian Mission' to Syria," OC Media, February 14, 2019, <https://oc-media.org/armenia-sends-military-humanitarian-mission-to-syria/>.

24 "Defence Ministers of Cyprus and Armenia Sign Bilateral Cooperation Programme," *Gold News*, February 14, 2019, <http://www.goldnews.com.cy/en/energy/defence-ministers-of-cyprus-and-armenia-sign-bilateral-cooperation-programme>.

25 "Russia to Boost Armenian Military, Fighter Jets Approved," *Armenian Weekly*, February 5, 2019, <https://armenianweekly.com/2019/02/05/russia-to-boost-armenian-military-fighter-jets-approved/>.

26 "Ermenistan Başbakanı'nın İran Ziyaretinde Bir İlk Yaşanacak," *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2019/02/26/Ermenistan-Nikol-Paşinyan-İran/148860>.

Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini, and European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Hahn in Brussels. In the joint press conference, Tusk spoke highly of the democratic reforms and economic developments in Armenia and emphasized that the EU would continue to support Armenia on this path.²⁷ In his speech at the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, Pashinyan stated;

“I do not think that there is a contradiction between our relations with the EU and our relations with Russia. It is important to express this persistently: There is no trick against Russia in our relations with the EU and there is no trick against the EU in our relations with Russia.”

The President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili visited Armenia on 13 March.²⁸ The Georgian President addressing the principle of territorial integrity and Nagorno-Karabakh within the context of the occupied lands during her visit to Azerbaijan in early March was received negatively in Armenia. It is fair to guess that her visit to Armenia was with the aim of obviating this frostiness in bilateral relations. Indeed, the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze, as a continuation of the meeting he had made with Pashinyan in Georgia's Bolnisi city on January, held a private meeting with Pashinyan in a mountain village in the north of Armenia on 24 March.

A US delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State held the first session of US-Armenia Strategic Dialogue in Yerevan on 6 May. The US promised 16 million US dollars in fresh assistance. He also met with the Armenian Prime Minister. Pashinyan was cited by his press Office as telling him that forging closer ties with the US is of great importance to Armenia.²⁹

Before attending the 10th anniversary of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative on 13 May, Pashinyan paid a working visit to Luxemburg.

Earlier on 8 May, he told at a news conference that he would be travelling to China to attend the international Asian Civilizations Forum on which occasion also a meeting with the President of China Xi Jinping was planned. Chinese President received Pashinyan and his delegation at the Great Hall of the People on 14 May.³⁰ President Xi said China views the ongoing development of

27 “Armenian PM, Tusk Discuss Relations and Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 5, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-pm-tusk-eu-relations-nagorno-karabakh/29804811.html>.

28 “Georgian President Zurbashvili discusses development of cooperation with Armenian Prime Minister,” *Agenda.ge*, March 13, 2019, <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/700>.

29 “The first session of the Armenian-American Strategic Dialogue was held in Yerevan,” *Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Armenia*, May 7, 2019, <https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2019/05/07/us-armenia-strategic-dialogue/9532>.

30 “China's Xi Sees Closer Ties With Armenia,” *Mirror Spectator*, May 23, 2019, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/05/23/chinas-xi-sees-closer-ties-with-armenia/>.

relations with Armenia in various areas as an important aspect of its foreign policy and highlighted the strong cultural and historical bonds. He said they knew the Armenian people very well and they were confident that the tragic events which happened to the Armenian people would not occur in the future. The Chinese leader said his country was ready to take part in the construction of the North-South highway and the implementation of other infrastructure projects. Pashinyan underlined that improving relations with China is top priority for his government.

Armenian President Sarkisyan went to Kazakhstan on a working visit on 18 May and met with the new President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Prime Minister Pashinyan received on 28 May the designated new Secretary General of the CSTO. Pashinyan assured Stanislav Zasi of his post.

The Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Greece, and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) pledged to deepen relations among their countries at a first ever trilateral meeting held in Nicosia on 4 June. Armenian Foreign Minister said the new platform was very important, adding that the three countries set down their next joint moves. He said that Armenia would host a summit for the three countries in the near future. Greek Foreign Minister said that the three countries share historical ties and common positions. He also said that they agreed to cooperate in international organizations on issues such as the recognition of so-called “Armenian Genocide”.³¹

Pashinyan travelled to St. Petersburg on 6 June to participate in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.³² He also met with Russian President Putin on the sidelines of the Forum. Putin praised bilateral ties and reminded that Russia is Armenia’s leading trading partner with 26 percent of its foreign trade and 2 billion US dollars in direct investments. Pashinyan described their relations as strategic, informed about the ongoing high growth rate, and expressed the hope to be able to manage to find solutions on some issues so as not to break the good pace of economic growth.

The second session of the Partnership Council between the EU and Armenia was held in Brussels on 13 June. The Council reaffirmed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement to effectively implement the commitment of Armenia and the EU. The Council underlined the importance of rule of law and respect for human rights, which includes an independent,

31 “Cyprus, Greece and Armenia agree to further expand cooperation in first trilateral meeting of Foreign Ministers,” *In-Cyprus*, June 5, 2019, <https://in-cyprus.com/cyprus-greece-and-armenia-agree-to-further-expand-cooperation-in-first-trilateral-meeting-of-foreign-ministers/>.

32 “Nikol Pashinyan attends plenary session at St. Petersburg International Economic Forum,” *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2019/06/06/visit-to-saint-petersburg/>.

effective, and accountable justice system. On this occasion, the Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister also had talks with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

4. Latest Developments in Turkish-Armenian Relations

In the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in Yerevan on 27 November, the honorary medals prepared for the participants by Armenia were rejected by the heads of the Azeri, Georgian, and Turkish committees.³³

In a press conference he organized on 3 December in Argentina where he went for the G-20 Summit, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan quickly gave an open and clear reply to a reporter who asked a question regarding the situation of the minorities in Turkey and stated that they were born to a family that was subjected to the “Armenian Genocide”:³⁴

“Turkey cannot be accused of conducting a genocide against the Armenians. Let us please leave the arguments of the genocide claims to the historians and look at the result that the historians will conclude. There is no genocide in our history. I am saying this very confidently, we are open to any discussion.”

President Erdoğan also stated the following:

“Do you know how many Armenians live in my country? A hundred thousand. About 30,000 of them are citizens, the rest are undocumented. They are people who have fled Armenia to live in Turkey.”

Before President Erdoğan arrived in Argentina, on 26 November, an Armenian group carried out a demonstration in front of the Turkish Embassy. It was not surprising that among the organizers of the demonstration were the Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Argentina and Chile and representatives of the Armenian Institutions of the Republic of Argentina (Instituciones Armenias de la República Argentina - IARA).

Shortly after the election victory, in a press conference he had organized on 10 December, Prime Minister Pashinyan repeated once again that he was ready

33 “Gürcistan, Azerbaycan, Türkiye ve Ukrayna, Erivan’da Verilen Madalyayı Reddetti,” *Sputnik Türkiye*, November 30, 2019, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/asya/201811301036396856-gurcistan-azerbaycan-turkiye-ukrayna-erivan-madalya-reddetti/>.

34 “Erdoğan G20 Zirvesi Sonrası Açıklamalarda Bulundu,” *Sözcü*, December 1, 2018, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/gundem/son-dakika-erdogan-g20-zirvesi-sonrasi-aciklamalarda-bulundu-2771532/>.

to establish relations with Turkey without preconditions. Considering that what Pashinyan is referring to by precondition is the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, that he does not perceive the incoherent and hostile Armenian discourse and claims as precondition, and that he refuses to even propose abandoning this discourse; it is clear that this cliché statement about preconditions fails to provide any prospects for better bilateral relations.

Three Americans of Armenian descent living in the US state of California applied to court once again and filed a lawsuit claiming that their families had been subjected to genocide during the Ottoman period and that their property was seized by force. Their lawsuit began to be heard in December. It is expected that the court's decision made in 2013 regarding the same case will be renewed. The 2013 decision indicated that whether Turkey can be accused of genocide or not is not a case that the court can decide and that the authority to decide on such matters belongs to the executive power (president) according to the US Political Question Doctrine.

At the end of December, the New Year Message of the engagement director of Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), which is associated with the Dashnak party, published in the press once again had the main theme of animosity towards Turkey. The message called for Christian solidarity and claimed that Turkey attempted to annihilate the Christian population during First World War including the Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrians, and Maronites.

In the Armenian press, it was indicated that member of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Garo Paylan visited the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia Aram I in his post in Lebanon on 26 January. During the meeting lasting over an hour, they reportedly talked about the Turkish-Armenian relations, the “genocide” subject, the subject of the return of the Sis Patriarchate of Kozan's property, the situation of the Armenian community in Turkey, and other current subjects. Afterwards, Paylan visited the Martyrs cemetery to pay respects to the victims of the “Armenian Genocide”.³⁵

An unidentified person hung a Turkish flag on the door of an Armenian school in Los Angeles on the night of 2 February. This was attempted to be attributed to the Turks by the Armenian groups in the city. The law enforcement authorities who investigated the incident could not find evidence on the perpetrator and nobody claimed responsibility for the incident. Thus, the possibility of the incident being a provocation attempt aiming to agitate the Armenian community against Turkey and the Turks gained prominence. The

35 “Paylan Haygazyan Üniversitesi'nde Konuştu,” *Agos*, January 30, 2019, <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/21967/paylan-haygazyan-universitesinde-konustu>.

statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey reflected this understanding.

The French President Emmanuel Macron, during a meeting organized by the representatives of the Armenian community in France on 5 February, fulfilled the promise he had made during the election campaign and stated that “in the following weeks, France will declare 24 April as the commemoration day of the Armenian genocide”.³⁶ Official responses to this statement from Turkey were made shortly after, notably by the President, the Presidency spokesperson, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson. On the other hand, Pashinian received Macron’s statement positively and Aram I expressed his gratitude to Macron.

On 13 February, during a session of the Armenian parliament on the government’s five year program,³⁷ Pashinian stated that his government does not perceive the genocide subject only in the framework of the Turkey-Armenia relations, that they approach the recognition and condemnation of the “Armenian genocide” within the context of global security and the prevention of future genocides, and that maximum effort must be shown towards this matter.

The Armenian Minister of Healthcare Arsen Torosyan, who joined the World Health Organization’s conference in Istanbul, visited the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul on 15 February on this opportunity and met with the Turkish Armenian community’s representatives. Torosyan, who stated that he was proud to be the first minister of the new Armenian government to visit Turkey, expressed that he placed great importance on the Armenian community living in Turkey, that the diaspora cannot continue its existence without the homeland, and that Armenia is developing by means of the support from Armenians living inside and outside of the country.

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu hosted a committee consisting of the Armenian Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Director of Ecumenical Relations of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin Shahe Ananyan, and the Armenian General Vicar (Acting Patriarch) of Istanbul Aram Ateshian.³⁸ Archbishop Barsamian, who was born in 1951 Arapkir/Malatya, after serving for 28 years as a reverend of the highest level for the Armenian

36 “Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron 24 Nisan’ı ‘Ermeni Soykırımını Anma Günü’ İlan Etti,” *EuroNews*, February 6, 2019, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/02/06/fransa-cumhurbaşkanı-emmanuel-macron-24-nisani-ermeni-soykirimi-anma-gunu-olarak-ilan-etti>.

37 “Armenia adopts plan for “economic revolution,” *Eurasianet*, February 15, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-adopts-plan-for-economic-revolution>.

38 “Barsamyan ve Ateşyan Ankara’da Çavuşoğlu ile görüştü,” *Agos*, February 4, 2019, <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/21987/barsamyan-ve-atesyan-ankara-da-cavusoglu-ile-gorustu>.

Apostolic Church in the US, unexpectedly and voluntarily retired last year. This decision of his led to comments that he was preparing to become a patriarch candidate for Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. However, Barsamian denied these comments. A few months later, during last September, the Armenian Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin appointed Barsamian to the Vatican as the representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The appointing of a representative to the Papacy has been a first in the Armenian church history since 451, when the Byzantium separated from the Orthodox church and became non-aligned. This is in conformity with the Pope's idea of world Christian ecumenism. Regarding his meeting with the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, Barsamian stated; "The Minister greeted us warmly. I clearly explained that my intention was not foreign intervention, but to express our concerns and understand how we can help. The esteemed Minister stated that he understands the issues regarding the Patriarch election and that the government is following this subject."

With the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul Mesrob II's passing away³⁹ on 8 March, the patriarch election was brought to the agenda. When Mesrob II, who was elected as the Patriarch in 1998, became unable to serve, Archbishop Ateshian carried out this duty since 2008 as the General Vicar. During the latest period, this position of Ateshian became a subject of criticism, especially by circles that wanted to influence the patriarch election by means of foreign intervention. When Mesrob II was still alive but unable to serve, there were foreign-sourced attempts (supported by some domestic groups in Turkey) at holding elections for a new patriarch.

The passing away of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul's 84th Patriarch Mesrob II was met with sorrow. Notably by the Turkish President, many messages of condolences were sent by officials to the Patriarchate. It was foreseen that the election process for the position of Mesrob II, who was buried with a stately ceremony on 17 March, would be initiated after a 40-day grief period. In 4 July, Bishop Sahak Mashalyan, at that time the Head of the Clerical Council of the Patriarchate, was elected as the Trustee (*Locum Tenens*) of the Patriarchate and thus was tasked with conducting the upcoming patriarch election.

During the following days, Mashalyan is expected to gather the heads of the Armenian foundations and establish an 'Enterprising Committee' to conduct the patriarch election process, determine the patriarch election date by consulting the Ministry of Internal Affairs, form the balloting committees and conduct the delegate elections. As the Turkish Armenians Patriarch election is

39 "Türkiye Ermenileri Patriği Mutafyan hayatını kaybetti," *Sputnik Türkiye*, March 8, 2019, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201903081038092175-turkiye-ermenileri-patrigi-mesrob-mutafyan-hayatini-kaybetti/>.

a two-level election, the process will be completed with the delegates electing the patriarch.

In the interview Pashinian gave to the EURACTIV agency on 5 March in Brussels, where he made an official visit, he answered questions regarding the relations with Turkey. In response to the question on whether there are positive signs on the improving of the relations with Turkey, Pashinian stated:

“Unfortunately, I have to say no. There are no developments that indicate a change in Turkey’s previous stance. If Turkey considers itself a democratic country, it must take kindly to the victory of democracy in its neighboring country and initiate dialogue. Within this context, Turkey’s continuing anti-Armenian stance disturbs us. We assert our determination to ameliorate our relations without preconditions. If Ankara will be persistent with its stance that diplomatic relations with Armenia can only be established after the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, should we bring the Cyprus issue and the human rights issues in Turkey to our agenda? Will these types of policies bring stability to our region?”

As it is seen, Pashinian conveniently ignores Armenia’s own insistence on preconditions and the main subjects that have made the Zurich Protocols obsolete and which prevented the dialogue and rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia. As such, in his own way, Pashinian attributes the obstacles in bilateral relations to Turkey.

24 April was again the flash point of Turkish-Armenian relations. The well-versed, improvised, updated, and Turcophobic Armenian narrative was voiced at every level and occasion, including President Sarkisyan and Prime Minister Pashinyan. Even a member of the Turkish parliament joined the chorus. US President Donald Trump also issued a statement on Armenian Remembrance Day which drew criticism from both the Turks as well as the Armenians. French President Macron was an obvious target for his audacious remarks.

The Turkish President Erdoğan sent a letter to General Vicar of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul Aram Ateshian in which he expressed his condolences to the descendants of Armenians killed during the First World War in the Ottoman Empire:

“[...] My distinguished Armenian citizens, I salute you wholeheartedly. [...] This year as well, I remember with respect the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives under harsh conditions of the First World War and offer my sincere condolences to their grandchildren. [...] I wish Allah’s mercy upon other Ottoman citizens, as well, who died because of

epidemics and migrations as well as acts of sedition spearheaded by gangs and armed groups that escalated as a result of the weakening of the state authority. The Armenian community provided great contributions to our country by bringing up esteemed citizens both during the Ottoman Empire and throughout the history of the Republic nearing its centennial. Our Armenian citizens, as equal and free citizens, have important roles in every sphere of the social, political and commercial life of our country today, as they did in the past. It is our common objective for these two peoples, who have shared their grief and joy throughout the history, to heal the wounds of the past and further strengthen their ties. We will continue to stand with you for the alleviation of your sufferings and the resolution of your problems. I especially would like to underline that the peace, security and happiness of the Armenian community in our country are of very special importance to us. We will stand against those who allow even a single Armenian citizen of ours to be alienated or excluded. [...] I believe that the way to building a shared future is to be one and united. In this regard, I kindly request you to avoid helping those who seek to create hatred, grudge and hostility by distorting our common history. [...]"⁴⁰

Provocative narratives, acts and policy against Turkey appear to be on the rise in the Pashinyan administration. It is probable that it stems from domestic difficulties and challenges that Pashinyan cannot afford to look appeasing at every front. One such act was repatriating the remains of a petty murderer who assassinated two Turkish diplomats in Los Angeles with a hero's welcome and ceremony at a military cemetery.⁴¹

On 24 June Armenian propaganda centers jointly highlighted an initiative undertaken in Geneva UN premises, in the hope of bringing Turkey under suspicion.⁴² However, such efforts failed to achieve their aim.

40 "The letter President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent to General Vicar of the Armenian Patriarch of Turkey, Reverend Aram Ateşyan," *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/105101/the-letter-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-sent-to-general-vicar-of-the-armenian-patriarch-of-turkey-reverend-aram-atesyan->.

41 Melek Sina Baydur, "Open Letter To The President Of Armenia," *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Blog No: 2019/33, May 27, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/Blog/OPEN-LETTER-TO-THE-PRESIDENT-OF-ARMENIA-27-05-2019>.

42 "Frivolous Letter To Turkey Sent By UN Rapporteurs," *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Daily Bulletin, June 26, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/FRIVOLOUS-LETTER-TO-TURKEY-SENT-BY-UN-RAPPORTEURS>.

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