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FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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Abstract: *This article covers Turkey-Armenia relations as well as the domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period of January to July of 2020. It has been a turbulent period for Armenia at home. Having difficulties in fulfilling promises and falling behind expectations, Prime of Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan has targeted the bureaucracy, in particular the judiciary with the members of the Constitutional Court at the top, identified with the previous administrations. With the desire to shape the institutions in his own way in a legal manner, he called for a referendum for changes in the constitution but was forced to give up on this call. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has continued to be the dominating and vulnerable problem casting its shadow internationally, internally a trump card for exploitation by the opposition. The “Multi-vector” approach in formulating foreign policy has become fashionable again, leading to searches for new openings as relations with Russia experienced strains. The COVID-19 pandemic took a heavy toll on Armenia as well, with consequences on the internal situation. Attitudes against Turkey have sharpened, projecting the appearance of enmity.*

Keywords: *Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia-Turkey Relations, Nagorno-Karabakh, Zohrab Mnatsakyan, COVID-19.*

Öz: *Bu incelemede Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde ve Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde Ocak-Temmuz 2020 ayları arasındaki gelişmeler*

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ele alınmaktadır. İç politikada Ermenistan çalkantılı bir dönem geçirmiştir. Ermenistan Başbakanı Nikol Paşinyan yönetimi gerçekleştiremediği vaatlerin ve karşılayamadığı beklentilerin sorumlusu olarak eski yönetim döneminin halen görevde bulunan bürokratlarını, özellikle yargı erkini ve anayasa mahkemesi üyelerini hedef almış, arzuladığı değişiklikleri yapabilmek üzere, gereken anayasa değişikliği için referanduma gitme kararı almış, daha sonra bu karardan vaz geçmek zorunda kalmıştır. Uluslararası öncelikli bir sorun olmaya devam eden Dağlık Karabağ çatışması iç politikada da muhalefetin istismarına açık duyarlı niteliğini devam ettirmiştir. Dış ilişkilerde özellikle Rusya ile ilişkilerde karşılaşılan sıkıntıların ışığında, yeni açılımlar arayışını ifade eden “çok vektörlü” dış politika söylemi ve pratiği devam etmiştir. COVID-19 salgını Ermenistan’ı da ciddi biçimde sarsmış, iç politikada da yansımaları olmuştur. Türkiye ile ilişkilerde Türkiye karşıtlığı düşmanlık görüntüsü kazanmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Nikol Paşinyan, Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri, Dağlık Karabağ, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, COVID-19.*

1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

2019 was a turbulent year for the Nikol Pashinyan administration of Armenia in terms of hardships and obstacles in the realization of the pledges that were made during the election campaign. In the report of the Armenian Statistical Committee published during late December 2019, it was calculated that the poverty rate was 23.5% in 2018, in other words, every fourth person lived below the poverty line.¹ This shed light on the economic-social situation of 2019 and heralded the hardships that would be faced in 2020. On the other hand, Prime Minister Pashinyan stated that Armenia had achieved the highest growth rate in Europe in 2019 by 8.2%.²

During a period in which the country was facing economic hardships, Pashinyan started facing accusations of denigrating government institutions, conducting activities that harm the state's reputation. His public statements on topics such as littering the streets with garbage and cigarette butts,³ the color of the yoghurt sold in the market, the increase in the export of cucumbers and radish, have been interpreted not as public relations and a communication strategy, but as lacking seriousness. In a press meeting on 4 April, the Minister of Economy stated that Armenia achieved a growth of 7.6% in 2019, but a maximum growth rate of 0.7% is predicted for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ This prediction naturally created a pessimistic picture for the country. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in its report projected Armenian economy to shrink by 3,5% in 2020.⁵ The Finance Minister on his part reported on 23 April that the aggregate public debt amounted to 7.3 billion US dollars. The minister did not specify the sources of extra borrowing planned by the government. One such source for 248 million dollars is the “stand-by arrangement” approved by the International Monetary Fund.⁶

1 Seda Hergnyan, “Armenia 2018: 23.5% Live,” *Hetq*, November 29, 2019, <https://hetq.am/en/article/110402>

2 “Independent experts predict Armenia’s economic growth in 2019 will reach 8.2% – PM Pashinyan,” *ArmenPress*, February 9, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1004220/>

3 “‘War is to be waged on garbage in Armenia’ – Government continues discussing Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure-proposed projects for 2020,” *Prime Ministry of the Republic of Armenia*, December 21, 2019, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/12/21/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting/>

4 “Armenia recorded 7.6% GDP growth in 2019,” *ArmenPress*, February 20, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1005606.html>

5 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “EBRD forecasts Armenia’s GDP to shrink by 3.5 per cent in 2020 before rebounding to 5.5% in 2021,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, May 13, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/05/13/ebird-forecasts-armenias-gdp-to-shrink-by-3-5-per-cent-in-2020-before-rebounding-to-5-5-in-2021/>

6 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “IMF allows an immediate release of US\$280 million for Armenia,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, May 19, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/05/19/imf-allows-an-immediate-release-of-us280-million-for-armenia/>

The efforts to cover up the issues facing the administration by diverting attention outside were continued. On 9 December, during a rare working meeting with the President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian on the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, the Prime Minister made the following public statement to the press:

“The international recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not only a matter of historical fact and justice for us, but it is also our important contribution to the global effort for genocide prevention. And, of course, we have repeatedly noticed that we consider the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide as a key security element for Armenia and the Armenian people. We have talked about this in the past and today we will talk about coordinating the steps to take ahead”.⁷

The former chief of the Armenian National Security Service, who was at odds with the Prime Minister and was dismissed on 16 September⁸ stepped into political activity on the opposition front by creating a development fund on 11 December with the aim of strengthening democracy.⁹ During a press interview on 5 January, he stated that he decided to go into active politics and establish a party, that he does not miss the past, that he is not a man of the former administrations, and that he does not approve of Pashinyan’s policies.¹⁰

Pashinyan’s pledged reforms and economic recovery falling behind the expectations, the revival and consolidation of the internal opposition, the support rate in a confidential credible polling dropping to approximately 19.5%¹¹ has directed Pashinyan to search for scapegoats. At a cabinet meeting in late December, he stated that the “deep state” was opposing him, that the current bureaucratic structure and the public organizations were insufficient, that they were resisting change.¹² Accordingly, he primarily targeted the judiciary, starting with the highest organ, the Constitutional Court, which he

7 “Armenia Honors Genocide Victims on UN International Day Of Commemoration,” *Asbarez*, December 9, 2019, <http://asbarez.com/189202/armenia-honors-genocide-victims-on-un-international-day-of-commemoration/>

8 “Top Armenian security official resigns,” *Eurasia.net*, September 16, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/top-armenian-security-official-resigns>

9 “Hraparak: Arthur Vanetsyan establishes a Fund,” *Aysor*, December 10, 2019, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2019/12/10/vanetsyan-fund/1638309>

10 Nane Sahakian, “Former Armenian Security Chief To Set Up Party,” *Azatutyun*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30422495.html>

11 “168.am newspaper: Armenia National Security Service records low rating of PM,” *News.am*, December 27, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/552154.html>

12 Armen Grigoryan, “A Year in Review: Armenian Government Hampered by Path Dependence,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, February 5, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-year-in-review-armenian-government-hampered-by-path-dependence/>

considered as a hindrance to his policies. Firstly, he called on the Constitutional Court members to resign voluntarily, providing tangible advantages.¹³ When this did not work, he made attempts to force the Constitutional Court President to resign, initiated a judicial proceeding against him with charges of corruption. This yielded no results either, it even backfired. The Constitutional Court President proved the unlawfulness of this attempt and accused Pashinyan of becoming an irresponsible one-man ruler.¹⁴

During the period, Pashinyan also expanded his reckoning with the former administrations. He brought up once again the case regarding the assassination of the then Prime Minister, Parliament speaker and six prominent officials of the Parliament in an ambush in the Parliament of Armenia during a session on 27 October 1999. The target of reopening this case, accusing those for being behind and benefiting from this attack to eliminate powerful opponents, was the President of the time, Robert Kocharyan and the Minister of National Security of the period Serzh Sargsyan, who would go on to succeed Kocharyan following the end of his term as President.

The countering moves of the opposition became more visible especially following the initiation of a judicial process against former President S. Sargsyan on 4 December with accusations of corruption and acquisition of unlawful wealth.¹⁵ In addition to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a persistent and effective leverage of exploitation, the opposition also assumed the role of “protector of national and cultural identity” and created a campaign occasion from the changes regarding Armenian language and history lessons in universities in the education reform Pashinyan was launching.¹⁶ The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - Dashnaktsutyun) announced its stance against the government to the point of threatening to conduct a “guerilla strike”, displaying a violent streak inherent in its historical past and its ideology.¹⁷

In a statement in January, Pashinyan expressed that the security services had thwarted a “hybrid” coup attempt by the former and current administration officials.¹⁸

13 “Armenian Constitutional Court judges offered early retirement,” *OC Media*, December 11, 2019, <https://oc-media.org/armenian-constitutional-court-judges-offered-early-retirement/>

14 Naira Nalbandian, “Armenian Authorities Deny Bullying High Court Judges,” *Azatutyun*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30375105.html>

15 “Former Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan indicted for corruption,” *OC Media*, December 5, 2019, <https://oc-media.org/former-armenian-president-serzh-sargsyan-indicted-for-corruption/>

16 Grigoryan, “A Year in Review...”

17 Grigoryan, “A Year in Review...”

18 “Armenian PM: We broke backbone of hybrid coup,” *News.am*, January 25, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/556579.html>

The former National Security Service chief from the period of former President S. Sargsyan being found dead inside his home on 16 January¹⁹ was correlated with the Law Enforcement Agency chief being found dead inside his home four months prior prompted conspiracy theories. However, it was concluded that the death was suicide for personal reasons.

Regarding the continuing protests against the Amulsar gold mine operation, Pashinyan repeated his calls to the locals on 25 January to end the obstruction of the operations.²⁰ He was rebuffed and was unable to find a solution for the continuation of the gold mine excavation works. The Anglo-American Corporation founded in 2016 and was stated to have invested 500 million dollars, continues to be an unsettling topic for Armenia, as half of the exports of Armenia comes from the mining sector.²¹ The Anglo-American company with headquarters in Canada expressed in its statement that a thousand people were dismissed and 60 million dollars of losses were incurred due to this obstruction.²² An internal report of the EU delegation to Armenia asserted that the UK and the US had put pressure on the government.²³

A subject that raised concern with the public in February was the number of suicides and deaths in the army, particularly with the Armenian soldiers stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁴ The death of 13 soldiers in approximately one month forced the Prime Minister Pashinyan and President A. Sarkissian to make statements regarding the subject and to express their condolences. Armenia's Chief of General Staff stated that the deaths were due to sickness and accidents.²⁵ As a result of these developments, two top-level military and law enforcement authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh had to resign.²⁶

19 "Armenia's Former Security Chief Found Dead," *Asbarez*, January 17, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/190624/armenias-former-armenian-security-chief-found-dead/>

20 "PM again calls on demonstrators at Jermuk to open access to Amulsar mine," *ArmenPress*, January 25, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1002705.html>

21 Umberto Bacchi, "Gold of contention: Armenia land dispute in spotlight as government steps in," *Reuters*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-mine-protests/gold-of-contention-armenia-land-dispute-in-spotlight-as-government-steps-in-idUSKCN1T701D>

22 "Lydian International calls on Armenia to help end gold mine blockade," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 20, 2020, <https://ottawacitizen.com/pm/business-pmn/lydian-international-calls-on-armenia-to-help-end-gold-mine-blockade/wcm/8a1e1946-6983-4fb8-88fe-c104c69a0ba8/>

23 Thomas Rowley, "Armenia 'under pressure' from UK and US over mining dispute, says EU report," *Open Democracy*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/armenia-under-pressure-from-uk-and-us-over-mining-dispute-says-eu-report/>

24 "Armenian government backtracks after protests over soldier's death," *Eurasianet*, February 3, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-backtracks-after-protests-over-soldiers-death>

25 "Armenia armed forces' general staff chief: I'm not going to resign," *News.am*, February 18, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/560959.html>

26 "Senior officers fired after spate of non-combat deaths in Armenian military," *Eurasianet*, February 19, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/senior-officers-fired-after-spate-of-non-combat-deaths-in-armenian-military>

The most important development in domestic politics was Pashinyan's decision to take Constitutional amendment, which he envisaged for changing the members of the Constitutional Court, to a referendum- as Constitutional amendment legally requires a parliamentary resolution and the approval of the Constitutional Court. 5 April was designated as the date for the referendum. Pashinyan's six article justifications he made public on 11 March²⁷ regarding the Constitutional amendment referendum of 5 April are summarized below:

- None of the official results of the elections conducted between 1995-2018 reflected the people's free will. The 1999 parliament elections which expressed the people's will were reset by terrorists on 27 October 1999.
- The limitation of free will, in other words, the system of corruption that developed through illegal influence on the voters' will and the alteration of the election results has become systematic corruption in Armenia. This situation continued until the 2018 Velvet Revolution.
- In this system, the presidency, legislation, executive power and judicial bodies including the Constitutional Court served personal and group interests to a large extent. Many high-level state officials have acquired extensive illegal wealth as a result of this.
- The taking back of illegal wealth acquired this way is an indispensable right of the Republic of Armenia and its people. This is possible with an independent judicial organ and an independent and legitimate Constitutional Court.
- Armenia needs efficient mechanisms that will differentiate between power and commercial affairs. Power cannot be the way to acquire power.
- Only an election system that allows the people to freely express their will can provide this. With the 5 April 2020 referendum, the people will be able to end illegal government and local authority institutions and officials.

The referendum decision was met with suspicion and criticism internally and externally, especially by the Council of Europe and the European Union. How the domestic stability of Armenia and Pashinyan's future was to be affected was also an open ended subject of speculation if this attempt that would change the balance of power would not yield the result that Pashinyan wanted, which

27 “Փաշինյանը հանրաքվեի հռչակագրի նախագիծ է հրապարակում,” *Azattyun*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30481268.html>

needed to acquire approximately 680,000 yes votes. The COVID-19 pandemic emergency measures came to the rescue of the government, first to delay²⁸, then to rescind the referendum.²⁹ Yet the resolve to change the constitution to replace Constitutional Court judges persisted. On 30 June, at a special session of the National Assembly of Armenia, amid strong opposition objections, the Assembly approved constitutional changes calling for the immediate dismissal of three of the nine-member chamber.³⁰ Two other members would have to resign in 2022.³¹ The controversial chairman of the Court would have to vacate that post but remain as one of the nine judges.³² President A. Sarkissian informed the Speaker of the National Assembly that he would not be signing the law making amendments and additions to the Constitutional law on the Constitutional Court.³³ In this case, the law comes into force with the signing of the Speaker of the National Assembly.³⁴

A striking reaction came from Armenia's first President Levon Ter Petrosyan. Ter Petrosyan, who was Pashinyan's mentor in his years of youth and his supporter afterwards, reacted to Pashinyan characterizing the Constitutional Court judges as corruption partisans of the three former Presidents among the justifications of the constitution referendum. He emphatically rejected Pashinyan placing him in the same pot as Kocharyan and S. Sargsyan. He is reported to have stated to the press that "such ingratitude will not be forgotten" and that "the time will come and unpleasant compromising materials will be made public about Nikol".³⁵ During early April, probably also to soften those words, Ter Petrosyan made an out of the ordinary statement to the nation,³⁶ requesting from the Armenian people that, during a period of struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic, they put aside their domestic political disputes and differing political views and support the government as a single unit and as a necessity of war time.

28 "Constitutional referendum in Armenia will take place after state of emergency is over," *ArmenPress*, March 16, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1008847/>

29 "Armenian Constitutional Referendum Delayed Indefinitely," *MassisPost*, May 18, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/05/armenian-constitutional-referendum-delayed-indefinitely/>

30 "Parliament Passes More Amendments On Constitutional Court," *Azattyun*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30699018.html>

31 "Armenian Parliament Votes To Replace Constitutional Court Judges (UPDATED)," *Azattyun*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30684602.html>

32 "Armenian Parliament Votes To Replace Constitutional Court Judges."

33 "President Says Will Not Sign Amendments to Constitution," *Asbarez*, June 30, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/195066/president-says-will-not-sign-amendments-to-constitution/>

34 "President Says Will Not Sign Amendments to Constitution."

35 "Newspaper: Armenia 1st President clearly says to PM that such ingratitude will not be forgotten," *News.am*, March 13, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/565672.html>

36 "Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյան. Պատերազմական վիճակի թելադրանքով," *Azattyun*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30540341.html>

The ARF of the opposition celebrated the 130th anniversary of its foundation on 25 February in Azerbaijan's occupied historical city of Shusha.³⁷ Hence, the ARF has once again displayed its historical, traditional mode of agitation and subversion.

In order for him to be able to attend the EPP group meeting at the European Parliament, permission was granted to former President S. Sargsyan to travel to Brussels, despite the fact that a judicial proceeding against him had been initiated, barring his travel abroad. S. Sargsyan's cordial reception by the EPP group president in Brussels was reflected in the press.³⁸ The fact that Pashinyan was scheduled to visit Brussels and meet with the same circles a few days later led to comments that S. Sargsyan being granted permission constituted the precondition of Pashinyan's visit's success.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has afflicted the whole world, has also affected Armenia extensively. Following the first outbreak in mid-March, state of emergency was declared from 16 March to 14 April.³⁹ Consequently, the referendum envisaged for 5 April was postponed to an uncertain date.⁴⁰ After a brief easing on lockdown restrictions, emergency rule has been extended on a monthly basis. Thus, on 14 April, the state of emergency was extended to 14 May.⁴¹ It was extended again until 13 June, then to 13 July and lastly until 12 August.⁴² Early in June, Prime Minister Pashinyan said that he and all members of his family tested positive for the virus.⁴³

Armenia's top religious authority, Armenian Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II got involved in the internal political feud when he expressed in public his opinion about necessity of changing Kocharyan's preventive measure of arrest.⁴⁴ On 20 April, Pashinyan retorted, putting into question the

37 "ARF Marks 130th Anniversary in Shushi," *Asbarez*, February 26, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/192270/arf-marks-130th-anniversary-in-shushi/>

38 Astghik Bedevian, "Serzh Sarkisian Again Visits Europe Despite Trial," *Azatutyun*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30472601.html>

39 "Armenia declares state of emergency from March 16 to April 14," *Prime Ministry of the Republic of Armenia*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/03/16/Cabinet-meeting/>

40 "Constitutional Referendum Indefinitely Delayed," *Asbarez*, May 18, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/194217/constitutional-referendum-indefinitely-delayed/>

41 "Armenia extends coronavirus-related state of emergency until July 13," *ArmenPress*, June 12, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1018222/>

42 Siranush Ghazanchyan, "Armenia extends the state of emergency for another month," *Public Radio of Armenia*, July 13, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/07/13/armenia-extends-the-state-of-emergency-for-another-month-2/>

43 "Pashinyan and His Family Infected With Coronavirus," *Asbarez*, June 1, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/194468/pashinyan-and-his-family-infected-with-coronavirus/>

44 "Catholicos Karekin II Calls for Kocharian's Release," *Asbarez*, April 14, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/193621/catholicos-karekin-ii-calls-for-kocharians-release/>

qualifications of the clergy with an unfavorable assessment of their activities. He included the church among those groups, the former ruling regime, oligarchs, many media outlets, and some diaspora structures who he said are upset with his government. He asserted that the government's policies are causing very serious disappointment among the clergy because they are exposing a lack of spiritual life in Armenia. He further added that "more political intrigues are seen in the activities of spirituality than activities arising from the Bible".⁴⁵

The response from Etchmiadzin came the following day, while not agreeing with the assessments and views expressed, the Catholicos urged all to refrain from controversy and speculation.⁴⁶ The background to this clash goes deeper. Pashinyan, in his education reform, removed teaching the subject of the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church from the general education curriculum that was introduced, for the first time, in 2002 by the Kocharyan administration. This move has provided yet another opportunity for the political opponents, notably the ARF as well as religious circles to strike against Pashinyan with accusations of being anti-Armenian, atheist, unpatriotic etc.

A controversy with similar implications also erupted with the appointment of a new director to the "Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute" (AGMI). The new director and a member of the museum's Board of Trustees were accused of avoiding the using of the word "genocide" on purpose, preferring instead "*Medz Yegern*" (Great Calamity) so as to dilute, if not annihilate, Armenian legal claims and to encourage rapprochement with Turkey.⁴⁷ This has been cited as yet another example of Prime Minister "destroying Armenian values and statehood",⁴⁸ a claim much loved and abused by the ARF.

Pashinyan appeared on a live broadcast on public television on 20 April where he reiterated his resolve to purge Armenia's government, judiciary, and security department of "remnants" of the country's former leadership. He also asserted that many Armenian media outlets are also sympathetic to the former regime and keen to undercut him. It transpired that for at least 15 minutes preceding the broadcast, Public Television also recorded Pashinyan's preparation for the

45 "Armenian Church Rejects Fresh Criticism From Pashinian," *Azattyun*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30568063.html>

46 "Catholicos of All Armenians urges to refrain from controversy, speculation," *HyeTert*, April 21, 2020, <https://hyetert.org/2020/04/21/catholicos-of-all-armenians-urges-to-refrain-from-controversy-speculation/>.

47 Stephan Astourian, "Hybrid Warfare, a Pseudo-Scandal and the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute," *EVNReport*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/hybrid-warfare-a-pseudo-scandal-and-the-armenian-genocide-museum-institute>

48 Astourian, "Hybrid Warfare..."

address. The footage was leaked to his detractors who circulated it on social media, to make a mockery out of it.⁴⁹

The traditional public commemoration events for the “Armenian Genocide” remembrance day on 24 April were cancelled due to COVID-19 lockdown.⁵⁰ The Tsitsernakaberd Memorial was also closed for all visitors except for a brief wreath lying ceremony by the state dignitaries.⁵¹ The Foreign Minister held a press conference on this occasion and said;

“The recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is the united work of several generations and all Armenians... Like in the previous years when we had difficulties, this year as well difficulties exist... 105 years later the Armenian people continue fighting for the restoration of justice. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide is an important step in terms of preventing the crimes against humanity”.⁵²

On another occasion, he added “The Armenian Genocide recognition was and remains a foreign policy priority for Armenia”.⁵³

Minister for Environment tendered in his resignation on 5 May without any explanation. It was promptly accepted by the Prime Minister.⁵⁴

On 8 May the National Assembly was the scene for bitter accusations against the Prime Minister and physical violence.

A controversial government bill allowing the confiscation of private properties and other assets deemed to have been acquired illegally, later endorsed by the National Assembly, was signed into law by the President on 12 May, without heeding the persistent calls from the opposition to seek for the opinion of the Constitutional Court.⁵⁵ The son in law of the former president S. Sargsyan was one of those subject to the application of the law. In turn, he has accused

49 “Pashinian Vows ‘Purge’ Of Armenian State Officials,” *Azatutyun*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30566025.html>.

50 “Armenian Genocide commemoration events go remote amid coronavirus lockdown,” *ArmenPress*, April 21, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1012928>

51 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Tsitsernakaberd Memorial to be closed to public on April 24,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, April 21, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/04/21/tsitsernakaberd-memorial-to-be-closed-to-public-on-april-24/>

52 “Armenian FM highlights recognition of Genocide in terms of preventing crimes against humanity,” *ArmenPress*, April 21, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1012920.html>

53 “Denied justice cannot be solution to the issue – FM Mnatsakanyan about Armenian Genocide,” *ArmenPress*, April 21, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1012939.html>

54 “Armenian Environment Minister Resigns,” *Azatutyun*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30594469.html>

55 “New Law Allows Armenia to Confiscate Illegally Gained Property,” *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.occrp.org/ru/daily/12323-new-law-allows-armenia-to-confiscate-illegally-gained-property>

Pashinyan of entangling Armenia in international mafia system and filling his own pockets.⁵⁶ To substantiate his allegations, he cited Armenian imports of diamonds from India and of contraband cigarettes.⁵⁷ The wife of the Prime Minister and her brother filed a lawsuit against those allegations.⁵⁸

On 8 June, in a major reshuffle, Prime Minister Pashinyan appointed new names for the head of the National Security Service, the Chief of Police, and the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces.⁵⁹

Pasahinyan announced on 10 June the decision to reject the Russian credit and conditions for upgrading the Soviet-built Metsamor nuclear power plant and rather to finance it within Armenian state budget.⁶⁰ He said that the government would hence be free to select the equipment and service suppliers for the plant, located some 15 kilometers to the Turkish border generating roughly 40% of Armenia's electricity.⁶¹ It is on the records that the EU and US have long pressed for the closure of the nuclear plant on the grounds that it does not meet safety standards.⁶²

Armenia's major opposition party and its leader Gagik Tsarukyan, a wealthy businessman, came under heavy criticism and branded as "fifth column" by the ruling party when he started a campaign for the resignation of the government.⁶³ Shortly after he was interrogated by the security services and his house was searched.⁶⁴ Law enforcement authorities asked the National Assembly on 15 June for dissolving the immunity of Tsarukyan to allow his arrest.⁶⁵ On 16 June, the National Assembly cleared the way for this request.⁶⁶ However, the court rejected on 21 June the arrest warrant request.⁶⁷

56 "Ex-Ambassador: Pashinyan has entangled Armenia in international mafia system and is making Money," *News.am*, May 16, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/578963.html>

57 "Ex-Ambassador: Pashinyan has entangled Armenia..."

58 "Armenian PM's wife and her brother file lawsuit against ex-Ambassador Mikayel Minasyan," *ArmenPress*, June 3, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1017254/>

59 "Armenia PM announces names of new police, national security and army chiefs," *ArtsakhPress*, June 8, 2020, <https://artsakhpress.am/eng/news/127414/armenia-pm-announces-names-of-new-police-national-security-and-army-chiefs.html>

60 "Armenia Rejects Russian Funding For Nuclear Plant Upgrade," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-rejects-russian-funding-for-nuclear-plant-upgrade/30667786.html>.

61 "Armenia Rejects Russian Funding..."

62 "Armenia Rejects Russian Funding..."

63 Sargis Harutyunyan, "Armenian Opposition Party Branded 'Fifth Column'," *Azatoryun*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/30663599.html>

64 Ani Mejlumyan, "Armenian government moves against opposition figure," *EurasiaNet*, June 15, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-moves-against-opposition-figure>

65 Mejlumyan, "Armenian government moves..."

66 Mejlumyan, "Armenian government moves..."

67 Naira Nalbandian, Artak Khulian, "Court Rejects Arrest Warrant Request For Armenian Opposition Leader," *Azatoryun*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/30682721.html>

On June 14, a meeting of the representatives of the five political parties of opposition took place in the premises of the ARF. A statement by the ARF said; “ the government is, once again, responding to the opposition’s political assessment with repressive methods. Especially now, when the country is facing serious domestic and foreign threats resulting from the leadership’s selfish governance, one person’s blatant aspirations to establish an authoritarian regime is becoming evident”.⁶⁸ The war of words between the ARF and Prime Minister had escalated when the Prime Minister, addressing criticism from the ARF recently, forecasted the 130- year-old party’s “political death”.⁶⁹

Pashinyan headed the meeting of the National Security Council on 10 July and made a long, comprehensive speech in the framework of approving the National Security Strategy.⁷⁰ He asserted that the Republic of Armenia is a pan-Armenian state and represents all Armenians around the world.⁷¹ Among the national goals of the Armenian people he cited international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh’s right to self-determination without any restrictions and international recognition of the “Armenian Genocide”.⁷²

2. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

This issue, which can be defined as Armenia’s ongoing occupation of Azerbaijani territory for close to 30 years with a peaceful resolution still not in sight, continues to be Pashinyan administration’s dominant problem and the opposition’s main leverage against the government. Armenia has skillfully used its propaganda machine and also succeeded to bring about the delegation of the executive powers of the OSCE Minsk Group to three Powers historically and traditionally allies of Armenia with a view to converting its occupation to a lasting, de facto frozen conflict. Even the term “Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” is a minimizing misnomer as it connotes only the occupation of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabagh within the Republic of Azerbaijan, whereas the occupation and purge of nearly one million local Azerbaijani population goes much beyond that to adjacent territories, extending to Iran in the South, comprising nearly 20% of Azerbaijani territory.

Pronouncements on part of Russia carry a substantial weight regarding the solution of the conflict. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov

68 “ARF of Armenia Warns of ‘Irreversible Losses’ in Armenia,” *Asbarez*, June 15, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/194711/arf-of-armenia-warns-of-irreversible-losses-in-armenia/>

69 “ARF of Armenia Warns...”

70 “PM Nikol Pashinyan Presents Armenia’s National Security Strategy,” *MassisPost*, July 10, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/07/pm-nikol-pashinyan-presents-armenias-national-security-strategy/>

71 “PM Nikol Pashinyan Presents...”

72 “PM Nikol Pashinyan Presents...”

made some groundbreaking statements during the period. During his visit to Azerbaijan on 3 December, he made two points: that contacts must be resumed between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of Nagorno-Karabakh and that there is room for compromise in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁷³ These two points made headlines and were argued intensively in Armenia.

On the occasion of the OSCE Ministerial conference, on 4 December, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia attended a 3.5-hour meeting in Bratislava, where the Minsk Group Co-chairs and the OSCE term president representative were also present. After this fifth meeting between the two ministers, an agreement could not be reached between the two sides regarding a joint declaration text. Both ministers of foreign affairs made their own statements after the meeting. Due to the principle of confidentiality, they did not refer to the content of the meeting. They only expressed their own viewpoints and stances. The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan underlined seven points in his statement to the press.⁷⁴

- There is no alternative to the peaceful settlement of the conflict within the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship,
- The inalienable right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination represents a fundamental principle and foundation for the peaceful resolution. The recognition of this principle not to be limited in the scope of determination for the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh must be clearly and unequivocally accepted,
- The security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh will not be compromised,
- The peaceful settlement should be inclusive by directly engaging all the parties to the conflict. Therefore, Nagorno-Karabakh through its elected representatives should be a direct party to the negotiating process,
- Peaceful settlement cannot take place in an environment of tensions and risks of escalation. Therefore the 1994 and 1995 ceasefire agreements concluded between Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia should be strictly adhered to and strengthened,

73 “Resuming dialogue between Azerbaijan, Armenia instrumental for Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement: Russian FM,” *Xinhua*, December 4, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/04/c_138604769.htm

74 “Statement by Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia at the 26th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, December 5, 2019, https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/12/05/fm_remarks_osce_26/9996

- The basic principle of non-use of force or threat of use of force should be unconditionally adhered to. The policies of hatred, intolerance, xenophobia, Armenophobia, instigated and directed by the leadership of Azerbaijan should be denounced,
- The maximalist positions of Azerbaijan, which ignore the will and sensitivities of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are fundamental obstacles to a meaningful progress in the peace process.

In his detailed statement, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs also touched upon the official memorandum that was distributed at the meeting and contained Azerbaijan's views, expressing that Azerbaijan demanded "immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan", that Nagorno-Karabakh's predominantly Armenian population can only be granted "the status of self-rule within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan".⁷⁵

The three Minsk Group Co-chairs also made a statement following the Bratislava meeting. Despite the invitation, Azerbaijan and Armenia chose not to be a party to the statement. In the statement, the three Co-chairs expressed that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh that would be recognized internationally must be done with a legal declaration of intention, as it is stated in the Madrid Principles, that a plebiscite can be made after Armenia withdraws its soldiers from the territories of Azerbaijan outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, underlined that the present status-quo is unacceptable and that the resolution of the issue cannot be military.⁷⁶ The news worthy information in the statement was that the two ministers agreed to meet once again early next year.⁷⁷

In the European Parliament, former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini responded on 5 December to a question regarding the "parliament elections" held in Nagorno-Karabakh in September by stating "The EU doesn't recognize constitutional and legal framework within which so-called 'elections' are being held in Nagorno-Karabakh". The High Representative also invoked that the Eastern Partnership Summit declarations clearly state that the EU remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of all its partners, including Azerbaijan. The High Representative expressed that such procedures cannot prejudice the determination of the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh

75 "Statement by Zohrab Mnatsakanyan..."

76 OSCE Minsk Group, "Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries," *OSCE*, December 5, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/441242>

77 OSCE Minsk Group, "Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation..."

or impact the negotiation process, that the EU continues to support the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs toward the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including through the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus.⁷⁸

On 11 December, former President Kocharyan stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh talks are in deep deadlock and made critical accusations against the Pashinyan administration. Kocharyan asserted that the Nagorno-Karabakh administration must not act according to the Armenian Prime Minister's directive and Nagorno-Karabakh must fight for independence, that a new war is inevitable, that they must be prepared for this.⁷⁹

These statements of Kocharyan impacted his supporters in Nagorno-Karabakh, some of whom were candidates of the "presidential elections" to be held in March. The Nagorno-Karabakh former Security Council Secretary stated that Pashinyan's discourse and approach served the interests of Azerbaijan, that Pashinyan expressed in a speech of his that he looks favorably towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijan community representatives to also attend the negotiation process, that this is unacceptable and is an offer that can jeopardize the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. He added that all reliable and realistic Armenian forces would be inclined to neutralize this situation.⁸⁰

The sixth meeting between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia took place on 29-30 January in Geneva, as agreed in Bratislava. Following the meetings that lasted for two days and approximately seven hours, the statement below was published on the OSCE news page:⁸¹

"The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group met separately and jointly with Armenian Foreign Minister and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister in Geneva on 28-30 January. They were joined in their meetings by the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

Over three days of intensive discussions, the Co-Chairs and the Ministers discussed the following agenda items: implementation of agreements and proposals discussed in 2019 and possible next steps to

78 "Mogherini: EU doesn't recognize constitutional framework within which so-called 'elections' held in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Trend News Agency*, December 6, 2019, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/3160136.html>

79 "Hraparak: Pashinyan's call for universally acceptable deal over Artsakh 'unpromising' – Robert Kocharyan," *Tert.am*, December 11, 2019, <https://www.tert.am/en/news/2019/12/11/hraparak/3162220>

80 "Karabakh ex-official: Armenia PM Pashinyan's approach to Artsakh issue serves Azerbaijan's interests," *News.am*, December 16, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/549983.html>

81 OSCE Minsk Group, "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," *OSCE*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/445114>

prepare the populations for peace; principles and elements forming the basis of a future settlement; and timing and agenda for advancing the settlement process.

The co-chairs reiterated their full commitment to helping the sides find a peaceful solution to the conflict and the principle of confidentiality in the settlement process, as well as the need for creativity and a spirit of compromise to achieve a fair and lasting peace.

The Ministers agreed to meet again in the near future under Co-Chair auspices.”

The President of France Emmanuel Macron joined the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations of France’s (CCAF) meeting in Paris on 29 January, referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during his speech and stated that “France is one of the main guarantors for the continuation of peaceful negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”. He proclaimed that he is in contact with both the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to achieve this aim and that this channel remaining functional is one of the key steps to ease tension.⁸² During that meeting, the French President edged on the red lines concerning international status of Nagorno-Karabagh in his response to the Council’s co-chairs Ara Toranian and Murad Papazian as he responded to the criticism regarding memorandums concluded by some cities in France on friendship and solidarity between them and some cities in Nagorno-Karabakh being cancelled by the administrative courts acting by order of the ministries when he stated that “the application of the law does not exclude dialogue, we can move forward in a realistic and efficient way”. He even expressed that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs of France can find more effective facilities with the local authorities.⁸³

Following a bilateral meeting in Munich where the President of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister of Armenia attended the International Security Conference, they broke new ground on 15 January by holding a live television panel discussion face to face.⁸⁴ The panel discussion that lasted for about an hour was focused on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the discussion, Pashinyan’s command of language, image and grasp of the issue appeared to be amateurish whereas Aliyev gave the impression of a statesman who could relate with his

82 “France one of main guarantors of peaceful negotiations for NK conflict settlement – Macron,” *ArmenPress*, January 30, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1003071.html>

83 Karina Manukyan, “France-Artsakh Friendship Circle Members welcome French President’s proposal,” *Arminfo*, February 12, 2020, https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=49279&lang=3

84 “Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev Hold Public Debate in Munich,” *YouTube*, February 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_V2cafAhug

case to the audience. Pashinyan was heavily criticized domestically and by the Diaspora for accepting a TV panel discussion in such an unprepared manner. In terms of content, only asserting the security considerations as the justification for Nagorno-Karabakh's occupation, not emphasizing the self-determination principle was also a major point of criticism. Following a brief period of panic, a uniform pan-Armenian approach and response was formulated to undo the harm by asserting that both speakers were unsuccessful, that the discussion was unproductive. The interpretation of some of the Western observers was that the two leaders discussing such a subject in public and making mutual accusations did not contribute positively to the continuing negotiation process, which was carefully kept confidential, that it even put the process at risk.

Once again, Kocharyan took Pashinyan's performance and attitude on this subject as an opportunity to exploit. In his statement on 17 February, Kocharyan stated "Our people have already resolved the Karabakh issue. The negotiations today have one goal, to legitimize what we already have today on this land".⁸⁵

On 22 February, a joint security council meeting was held in Hankendi between Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh administration. In the meeting that was held for the third time and was attended by the Armenian Prime Minister, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, and the Chief of General Staff, subjects regarding the Armenia-Nagorno-Karabakh coordination were discussed. In his speech during the meeting, Pashinyan stated the importance of having a common understanding regarding the security of Nagorno-Karabakh, that he does not consider it possible to reach a conclusion if Nagorno-Karabakh is not represented as a participant, that he openly referred to the content of the negotiations at the Munich Security Conference, that security is one of the cornerstones of cooperation between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, therefore this is now called the Munich Principles.⁸⁶ It is however obvious that the meeting focused on the various alternatives of the "presidential election" to be held in Nagorno-Karabakh on 31 March and its possible repercussions were assessed.

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan felt the need to make a statement on 24 February regarding the "Munich Principles". According to the Minister, the "Munich Principles" in essence reflected the meeting between

85 Ani Mshetsyan, "Robert Kocharyan: People have already resolved the Karabakh issue," *Arminfo*, February 17, 2020, https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=49379&lang=3

86 "Interaction between Armenia and Artsakh is the key to our people's security - The Security Councils of Armenia and Artsakh are holding a joint session in Stepanakert," *Prime Ministry of the Republic of Armenia*, February 22, 2020, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2020/02/22/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-Security-Council/>

the Azerbaijani President and the Armenian Prime Minister in Munich. According to the Minister, there is nothing in the “Munich Principles” that transforms the Armenian side’s approaches to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. The Minister stated;

“As for the new approaches, Armenia has been and remains committed to a peaceful settlement of the issue within the Minsk Group co-chairmanship. Within this framework, we will continue to work for solutions that are acceptable to all parties and peoples. This means a compromise, which is a two-way road. There can be no talk of unilateral concessions. In this regard, the most pressing issue for us has been and remains the provision of a real security system for our compatriots in Nagorno Karabagh, which is the issue of status. Please do not interfere and do not assume that they are separated from each other”.⁸⁷

On 2 March, the Minsk Group Co-chairs and OSCE term president visited Ankara and met with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. Following the meeting, Minister Çavuşoğlu stated to the press that the OSCE Minsk Group must participate more actively in the resolution of the conflict and that “the solution should be in full respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan”.⁸⁸ The response to Minister Çavuşoğlu’s statement quickly came from Armenia; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated “With an unfriendly policy towards Armenia and the Armenian people, which is also expressed in the context of the Karabakh conflict by unilateral military-political support of Azerbaijan, Turkey cannot play any role in the process of the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict”.⁸⁹ The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan also responded, by making a quote from the Bible, he stated “doctor, heal yourself”.⁹⁰

The fact that Armenia insists on ignoring here is that Turkey, beyond being a member of the Minsk Group, is one of the four countries that initiated this process. The efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh war

87 “Pashinyan’s ‘Munich Principles’,” *MassisPost*, February 23, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/02/pashinyans-munich-principles/>

88 Tefik Durul, “Bakan Çavuşoğlu: AGİT Minsk Grubu Yukarı Karabağ’da çözüm için daha etkin çalışmalı,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 2 Mart 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/bakan-cavusoglu-agit-minskgrubu-yukari-karabagda-cozum-icin-daha-etkin-calismali/1751517>

89 “Ermenistan Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü: “Türkiye, Karabağ sorununun barış çözüm sürecinde bir rol oynayamaz,” *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, 3 Mart 2020, https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2020/03/03/naghdalyan/177551?fb_comment_id=2800984773269983_2801300789905048

90 “Ermenistan Dışişleri Bakanından ‘Çavuşoğlu tweeti’: ‘Ey doktor, önce kendini iyileştir’,” *HyeTert*, 3 Mart 2020, <https://hyetert.org/2020/03/03/ermenistan-disisleri-bakanindan-cavusoglu-tweeti-ey-doktor-once-kendini-iyilestir/>

were initiated in late 1992, within the scope of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) of the period, with a 5+1 format (Azerbaijan, Armenia, the US, Russia, Turkey and the CSCE term presidency), Turkey was always part of the process as the closest and most concerned country on the issue. Following several meetings held in 5+1 format, the first meeting being held in Geneva during late 1992, the 13 member Minsk Group of today, of which Turkey is also a part, was established.

“Elections” were held in Nagorno-Karabakh on 31 March 2020. The so-called parliament and presidential elections were monitored by observers from Armenia. The statement of Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 March is as follows:⁹¹

“The so-called Presidential and Parliamentary elections to be held on 31 March 2020 in Armenian occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, is a manifestation of the efforts to unilaterally legitimize the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is contrary to international law. This step is a flagrant violation of international law, including the UN Security Council Resolutions and the OSCE principles.

At a stage when there are talks within the OSCE Minsk Process to find a peaceful settlement for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, holding the so-called elections in the occupied territories undermines the efforts towards a peaceful and lasting resolution. We call on the international community, including the OSCE Minsk Group, not to recognise these elections.

Turkey does not recognise these illegitimate elections, which will constitute yet another violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. As a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, Turkey will continue to support the efforts for finding a just and lasting solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”

The EU also responded to the “elections”, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy spokesperson made the following statement:⁹²

91 “No: 82, 30 Mart 2020, Ermenistan İşgali Altındaki Azerbaycan Toprağı Yukarı Karabağ’da 31 Mart 2020 Tarihinde Düzenlenmesi Öngörülen Sözde Seçimler Hk.,” *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı*, March 30, 2020, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_82_-_yukari-karabag-da-duzenlenmesi-ongorulen-sozde-secimler-hk.tr.mfa

92 “Nagorno-Karabakh: Statement by the Spokesperson on the so-called presidential and parliamentary elections,” *European External Action Service*, March 31, 2020, https://ecas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76801/nagorno-karabakh-statementspokesperson-%20so-called-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections_en

“In view of the so-called ‘presidential and parliamentary elections’ in Nagorno-Karabakh on 31 March 2020, the European Union reiterates that it does not recognise the constitutional and legal framework within which they are being held. This event cannot prejudice the determination of the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh or the outcome of the ongoing negotiation process. The EU recalls its firm support to the OSCE Minsk Group and, in particular, to its Co-Chairs’ efforts to bring about progress beyond the status quo and substantive negotiations towards comprehensive and sustainable peace. The EU stands ready to further support efforts, aimed at early, peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”

In the context of international organizations, one response to the so-called elections in Nagorno-Karabakh came from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The statement expresses; “OIC views the holding of elections in the occupied region of the Republic of Azerbaijan on March 31, 2020 as a contravention to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”, moreover it emphasizes “decisions of the OIC and the OSCE to encourage a peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan”.⁹³

On its part, Armenia could not but advocate the elections. It continued to claim that the OSCE member states used the expression “elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh” in a document in 1992 and that these representatives were parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations.⁹⁴ Thus, since the negotiations are continuing, the “elections” and “elected representatives” are necessary.

Armenia responded to the statement of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a statement that repeated the well-worn claims. The statement of the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs is as follows:⁹⁵

“The statement of the Foreign Ministry of Turkey on the elections being held in Nagorno-Karabakh is yet another expression of Turkey’s hostile policy towards the Armenian people. In line with its traditional method of selective interpretation of international documents, on one hand Turkey invokes the relevant UN Security Council’s resolutions and on

93 Zehra Nur Düz, “OIC rejects elections in ‘occupied’ Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Anadolu Agency*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/oic-rejects-elections-in-occupied-nagorno-karabakh/1788243>

94 “ANCA: OSCE Response to Artsakh Elections Betrays America’s Commitment to Democracy,” *Armenian Weekly*, April 3, 2020, <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/04/03/anca-osce-response-to-artsakh-elections-betrays-americas-commitment-to-democracy/>

95 “Ermenistan Dışişleri’nden Türkiye’nin Karabağ seçimleriyle ilgili açıklamasına tepki,” *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, 31 Mart 2020, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2020/03/31/Ermenistanı-Türkiye-Karabağ/179760>

the other hand ignores their call to refrain from any hostile actions in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict explicitly addressed to the states in the region. Whereas it is Turkey itself that has been imposing land blockade on the Republic of Armenia for decades and supporting aggressive and atrocious actions unleashed against the people of Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh], including in April 2016.”

“The reference of Turkey’s Foreign Ministry to the OSCE principles and the Minsk Process is equally groundless. We recall that the OSCE/CSCE decision of March 24, 1992, which laid a foundation for the Minsk Process, refers to the elected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh as a participant in the process. Elections must be held to have elected representatives, and from this viewpoint, elections conducted in Artsakh don’t contradict, but derive from the logic and fundamental documents of peaceful process.”

“Turkey’s attempts to act as an international guardian of human rights and its appeals to the international community are more than bankrupted in the light of its constant violations of the rights of peoples and territorial integrity of its neighbors and its aggressive policy which breaches the norms of international law and democracy.”

The Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), one of the radical Armenian organizations in the United States, was not late in congratulating the Nagorno-Karabakh elections. On this occasion, it also did not shy away from harshly criticizing primarily Turkey as well as the EU and OSCE statements which considered the elections as null and void.⁹⁶ It would certainly be prudent, especially for the US Congress, to put on record the attitude of such an organization operating with impunity in disregarding the policies of the US, countering globally acknowledged norms and universal legal principles. In this context, it is also worth noting that Head of the Azerbaijani Community of the Nagorno-Karabakh Region of Azerbaijan condemned the sending of a “congratulatory letter” to the illegal regime created by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan by members of the Congress -Frank Pallone, Jackie Speier, Gus Bilirakis and Adam Schiff.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Germany took legal action against an impostor for claiming to be diplomatic representative of Nagorno-Karabakh regime.⁹⁸

96 “Armenian Assembly Applauds The People Of Artsakh As Presidential And Parliamentary Elections Are Held,” *Armenian Assembly of America*, March 31, 2020, <https://armenian-assembly.org/2020/03/31/armenian-assembly-applauds-the-people-of-artsakh-as-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections-are-held/>.

97 “Head of Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh sends letter of protest to US congressmen,” *The Middle East North Africa Financial Network*, April 23, 2020, <https://menafn.com/1100071999/Head-of-Azerbaijani-community-of-Nagorno-Karabakh-sends-letter-of-protest-to-US-congressmen>

98 “Urgent: Germany banned activities of ‘NKR representation’ (Editorial),” *Azeri Daily*, May 22, 2020, <http://azeridaily.com/reality/56136>

As it can be seen, the so-called elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh, far from providing legitimacy for Armenia's policy of occupying Azerbaijan's territories, nor contributing to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process, has sparked reactions from third parties and international organizations, to confirm once again that an independent identity of Nagorno-Karabakh is not acknowledged by international politics or law. Italy displayed a clear example in a joint declaration with Azerbaijan affirming support for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based upon the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of national borders.⁹⁹

While Armenia postponed its referendum for 5 April to an uncertain date due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when one looks for an explanation as to why it insisted on conducting these so-called elections on 31 March, the Pashinyan administration's dilemma regarding Nagorno-Karabakh becomes apparent. In the search for a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is an issue with the potential for the opposition to undermine the administration devastatingly, Pashinyan felt the need to quickly create a balance against the leverage of the two former Presidents of Nagorno-Karabakh origin, Kocharyan and S. Sargsyan who could command high level Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian administrators against him. As he could not find a powerful candidate in Nagorno-Karabakh close to him, he chose to neutralize one of the previous term's respected figures by drawing him to his side through promising support for a sure to win election. He had to act fast to achieve this. Contrary to expectations, this scenario did not materialize in the first round. It went into runoff between the two top polling candidates. However, the result was secure. The militant candidate that was supported by the opposition, who was known for harassing Pashinyan publicly, was disqualified, coming in third place. As such, the new administration would not be militant anti-Pashinyan but rather open to options. Therefore, this delay did not change the core of the calculated balance. The second round was held in 14 April. The turnout was very low. The reason was twofold: the COVID-19 pandemic precautions and the result being already certain. Indeed, there were no surprises. The expected result was achieved.

The OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair brought the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia for yet another meeting on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a video conference on 21 April. After the consultations, the following joint statement was announced:¹⁰⁰

99 "Almost an ally: Italy's new approach to Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, April 16, 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_almost_an_ally_italys_new_approach_to_azerbaijan_and_the_nagorno

100 "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," *OSCE*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/450508>.

“Armenian Foreign Minister, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister and OSCE Co-Chairs (Russia, France and the USA) have held regular consultations since mid-March, including April 21. Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office also took part in the consultations.

During the consultations, the participants discussed the impact of the global health crisis on the region and recent developments on the ground. They also touched upon further steps in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process in line with a joint statement issued on January 30, 2020 in Geneva.

It was confirmed that due to the unusual situation with the COVID-19 virus, the implementation of previously acquired humanitarian measures has been postponed. The agreements reached in Geneva between the ministers on face-to-face meetings and the Co-Chairs’ visit to the region have also been postponed. However, the necessary work to prepare the above-mentioned actions continues.

The Co-Chairs stressed the need to maintain the ceasefire unconditionally, and in the current situation to refrain from provocative actions, and called on the parties to take further steps to reduce tensions. They also praised the continued work of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in the current situation and stressed the need to resume monitoring as soon as possible.

Given the enormous challenges currently facing all peoples, regardless of political boundaries, which serve as a stark reminder of the value of every human life, the Foreign Ministers and Co-Chairs expressed hope that the determination to respond to the global contagion will give creative and constructive impetus to the peace process. The Co-Chairs drew attention to the UN Secretary-General’s March 23 message on ceasefire during the current health crisis and the March 19 statement of the Co-Chairs.

The Foreign Ministers and the Co-Chairs agreed to remain in close contact and to continue face-to-face talks as soon as possible”

A cursory read of the announcement shows that after umpteenth time consultations, no panacea to the conflict is provided and business as usual, that is continuation of occupation, is once again ordained.

Probably with a view to breaking the impasse and charting a way out of pessimism, Foreign Minister of Russia spoke at a public forum, at the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Foundation in Moscow on 21 April. He noted that the decisions on the Karabakh settlement proposed at the meeting

of the Foreign Ministers of Russia.¹⁰¹ Azerbaijan and Armenia in Moscow last year were being actively discussed and their signing would be a significant step towards the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions.¹⁰²

He went on to say that the resolutions that have been adopted are well-known documents. They were adopted during the hot phase of hostilities, assuming, first of all, a complete cessation of hostilities and the transition to negotiations. Yes, the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been confirmed in them. But they also called for an end to the war and negotiations.

He said that there are the Madrid Principles.¹⁰³ There are documents prepared by the Russian Federation in 2010-2011, the so-called Kazan document.¹⁰⁴

The Russian Minister clarified that those documents “mean reaching a settlement on the basis of a step-by-step approach, in the first stage assuming the solution of more urgent problems, the liberation of a number of territories around Nagorno-Karabakh and the unblocking of transport, economic and other communications”.¹⁰⁵ He also added that “the issue of the resolution should be considered in the process of the negotiations in the framework of the current format”.¹⁰⁶

This revelation of “phased approach” and “liberation of regions” as well as negotiations to continue with the “current format”, that is to say no representation from Nagorno-Karabakh, dropped like a bomb on the Armenian public and caused a great wave of indignation. The Foreign Minister of Armenia rejected the phased settlement idea in a statement, saying Armenia is not considering any compromise on the matter of liberating occupied Azerbaijani territories. On his part, the Armenian Prime Minister said “we negotiate within the authorities we have and we will not be afraid while heading to talks neither from insiders nor the outsiders. One very important resolution over the Karabakh issue: until everything is decided, nothing is decided”.¹⁰⁷

101 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to questions at a roundtable discussion with the participants of the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund in the videoconference format,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, April 21, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4103828.

102 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks...”

103 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks...”

104 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks...”

105 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks...”

106 Joshua Kucera, “Lavrov stirs the pot in Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *Eurasia.net*, April 24, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/lavrov-stirs-the-pot-in-armenia-and-azerbaijan>

107 “Armenia negotiates over what it considers necessary: Armenia’s PM on talks over Karabakh conflict,” *Aysor.am*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2020/05/06/pashinyan-karabakh/1693054>

Speaking at the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) meeting on 13 May, Armenian Foreign Minister however stated to his Azerbaijani counterpart that the settlement of the Karabakh conflict is based on the principle of compromise.¹⁰⁸ The Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan responded, saying;

“Recent statements by the Armenian leadership show that the Armenian side is doing its best to impede the activation of the process of peaceful settlement of the conflict, thereby creating new threats to regional stability and security... negotiations cannot last forever and should not serve for continuing and maintaining the situation that arose as a result of the use of force”.¹⁰⁹

Prime Minister Pashinyan criticized the President of Azerbaijan in unusually strong terms as he chaired a meeting of Armenia’s and Karabakh’s top security officials on 19 June. He said that Azerbaijan was sticking to maximalist demands rather than reciprocating his calls for a deal that would satisfy “all” parties to the conflict.¹¹⁰

OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs issued a statement following a meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers on 30 June. They praised the relative stability on the ground and expressed satisfaction that the parties continue to use the existing direct lines of communication to avoid escalating the conflict.¹¹¹ They reiterated that there is no military solution to the conflict. The Co-Chairs and ministers agreed to hold a joint video conference in July and meet in person as soon as possible.¹¹²

In an interview with Azerbaijani TV on 7 July, the President of Azerbaijan lambasted the Co-Chairs for their fruitless efforts, said that he would not negotiate for the sake of negotiating and asked for substantive negotiations without any change in their format.¹¹³

108 “The session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States was held in the video-conference format,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, May 12, 2020, https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/05/12/CIS_Council_of_FMs/10263

109 “No:103/20, Speech by the Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the CIS through videoconferencing on May 12, 2020,” *Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, May 12, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/6672/n>

110 “Armenian, Azeri FMs Trade Accusations In Fresh Talks,” *Azatutyun*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30699152.html>

111 “Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,” *OSCE*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/455866>.

112 “Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group” (June 30, 2020).

113 “Aliyev Slams Karabakh Peace Process Mediators,” *MassisPost*, July 7, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/07/aliyev-slams-karabakh-peace-process-mediators/>

On 12 July fighting erupted on the border with Azerbaijan in the Tavush region, with casualties on both sides and both sides accusing the other for starting it. The Minsk Group Co-Chairs called on the parties to cease fire and to resume substantive talks as soon as possible. Sporadic firing continued up to 16 July. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), of which Armenia is member, scheduled a meeting for 13 July that was later postponed. Russia called on the Minsk Group members to avoid making inflammatory statements.

The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs later issued the following statement on the July 12-13 armed fighting on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border:¹¹⁴

“According to reports from the Ministries of Defence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as other sources, on 12-13 July there was a serious breach of the ceasefire on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, resulting in casualties. Artillery of various calibers reportedly was used by both forces.

The Co-Chairs and Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office (PRCIO) Andrzej Kasprzyk regret the loss of life and offer their condolences to the families of those who were killed and injured. The Co-Chairs and PRCiO have been in direct contact with Armenian and Azerbaijani officials since the beginning of the incident.

The sides have accused each other of initiating the fighting. The Minsk Group Co-Chairs condemn the recent ceasefire violations and call upon the sides to take all necessary measures to prevent any further escalation, including by use of the existing direct communication channels between them.

The Minsk Group Co-Chairs also call on the sides to resume substantive negotiations as soon as possible and emphasize the importance of returning OSCE monitors to the region as soon as circumstances allow.”

3. Armenia’s Foreign Relations

In 2019, after an active year on the occasion of the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization (EECO) term presidency, Armenia once again entered a relatively isolated year. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this situation. Nevertheless, the statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister, and even the President highlight that Armenia will continue its multi directional-vector foreign policy line. That is to say, it will not remain

114 “Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,” *OSCE*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/457225>

dependent on a single country or bloc, hence will be active in in a broad spectrum in foreign relations.

During late December, a statement of neighboring Georgia's President highlighting the border conflict with Armenia caused discomfort as it connoted another dimension of Armenia's expansionist policy. In her statement on 27 December, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson expressed that meetings are being held on the designation of the Armenia-Georgia border since 1992, that the sides established a border designation committee with this aim in 1996, that the subject is also being discussed in the bilateral political consultations, that an agreement was reached for 147 km of the 247 km border, that the negotiations for 78 km part are continuing.¹¹⁵ As is known, Armenia's primary transit route with Russia and third countries passes through Georgia. Highway border crossings are realized through three gates. The EU had made a 60 million dollar aid for these roads and gates to be improved.

In a statement of the Russian Ambassador to the press, he said that Russia's extensive relations with its South Caucasian ally Armenia have deepened even more following the 2018 administration change, affirming: "for us Armenia is a reliable key partner that we can seek during difficult situations".¹¹⁶ As is known, Russia has a land base in Gyumri in Armenia, an air base close to Yerevan. Russia lastly reinforced its military force in Gyumri of around 5000 with combat helicopters and prolonged the duration of the agreement on its right to use this base until 2044. As it has been in the past, the Pashinyan administration considers the Russian military presence in the country as the basis of their national security strategy.

Russia's attitude towards the 2018 revolution and Pashinyan administration was an indicator of the flexibility in the new Russian foreign policy. After Kocharyan and S. Sargsyan, in whom Russia had no doubts regarding their loyalty, Russia approached Pashinyan cautiously, who came to power full of spite against them. Being aware of the risk of losing an ally it needs in South Caucasia by toppling a government that came to power with the support of the people, with a pragmatic approach, Russia looked for ways of accord with Pashinyan. In a way, both sides are bidding their time for opportunities. Pashinyan would be able to conduct a "multi directional-vector" foreign policy with some distance to Russia to the extent that he can build up a solid internal base and eliminate the opposition representing the vestiges of the past. Then he would be able to gradually open to the West. On the other hand, should internal struggles increase, he would become more dependent on Russia.

115 "225 կմ երկարությամբ հայ-վրացական պետական սահմանից համաձայնեցվել է 147 կմ-ն. Աննա Նաղդալյան," *168.am*, December 27, 2020, <https://168.am/2019/12/27/1230618.html>

116 "Armenia remains key, reliable partner for Russia – Ambassador Kopyrkin," *ArmenPress*, December 24, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/999882.html>

The fluctuating relations of Russia with Turkey during the period were followed closely by Armenia with comments in the press of concerns and speculations.

In its 31 January broadcast, the Voice of America radio announced that the US-Armenia military cooperation is developing according to the US Department of Defense. The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian Affairs said;

“The actively developing cooperation between the Armenian and the US Armed Forces is generating true excitement, and it is an honor to them to receive students from Armenia, and providing them with military education. This year we also plan to develop cooperation with the National Defense Research University of Armenia, as well as to continue to train current and future leaders of the Armenian Armed Forces. The ongoing program with Kansas allows increasing the capacity of Armenia and NATO, and facilitating defense reforms in Armenia”¹¹⁷

The news report also indicated that 120 Armenian military personnel are stationed in Mezar-ı Sharif in Afghanistan, that 41 Armenian soldiers are serving within the NATO forces in Kosovo.¹¹⁸

The Armenian President’s and Prime Minister’s interest in foreign visits continued during the period until the COVID-19 restrictions. During early January, the President visited Abu Dhabi and met with the UAE governors.¹¹⁹ On 20 January, the President, who visited Switzerland, also met with the Switzerland-Armenia Chamber of Commerce representatives and Swiss businesspeople there.¹²⁰ Afterwards, he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos.¹²¹ On 23 January, he visited Israel to attend the Holocaust remembrance ceremonies. On this occasion, he met with the Israeli Parliament Speaker and the President. He also crossed over to the West Bank and met with the President of Palestine. In his contacts with the Israeli officials and in a statement he gave to the Jerusalem Post newspaper afterwards, he continued his efforts to identify the narrative of “Armenian Genocide” with the

117 “Armenian-American military cooperation is actively developing,” *News.am*, January 31, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/557618.html>

118 “Պենտագոն. հայ-ամերիկյան ռազմական համագործակցությունն ակտիվորեն զարգանում է. VOA,” *Factor.am*, January 31, 2020, <https://factor.am/217983.html>

119 “Armenian President meets Chairman of Rotana Hotel Management Corporation in Abu Dhabi,” *ArmenPress*, January 16, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1001568.html>

120 “President Sarkissian meets with members of Swiss-Armenian Chamber of Commerce and businessmen,” *ArmenPress*, January 20, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1002005.html>

121 “President Armen Sarkissian participated at the opening of the World Economic Forum in Davos,” *The Presidency of the Republic of Armenia*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2020/01/20/President-Armen-Sarkissian-attended-World-Economic-Forum-in-Davos/>

Holocaust.¹²² This attitude, which gave the impression that he attended a remembrance ceremony in order to find supporters for his own political discourse, has undoubtedly disturbed the hosts. When these claims and narrative, which demonstrated that he did not understand the Holocaust and served to water down the Holocaust reality itself, did not receive positive responses, he made a statement in a newspaper that the Armenian people do not understand why Israel does not support the Armenian discourse.¹²³

There was a scathing comment to that statement from an Israeli journalist which appeared in *Israel Hayom*. Some excerpts:

“The former Armenian authorities erected a monument, in the center of Yerevan, in honor of the fascist executioner and traitor Garegin Ter-Harutyunyan, who served with the German fascists under the nickname Garegin Nzdeh. Unfortunately, the new government of Armenia did not dismantle this monument. [...] How can we, Israelis, react to the monument erected three years ago in Yerevan to commemorate Nzdeh, an anti-Semite and apparent Nazi accomplice. [...] It is no longer a hushed secret, and the ideology of fascism, glorification of Armenian fascists and Nazis who worked closely with Nazi Germany, are being promoted at the state level in Armenia. [...] Really, the Armenians have no other heroes to commemorate except the fascist Nzdeh?”¹²⁴

A very appropriate question, but the answer is not one of compliment. There are other hero monuments in the center of Yerevan of acknowledged terrorists and murderers.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands paid a working visit to Yerevan on 23 January. This was the first visit from the Netherlands to Armenia at this level.¹²⁵

Prime Minister Pashinyan, who went to Germany to attend the Munich Security Conference, first headed to Berlin for a working visit on 13 February and met with Chancellor Angela Merkel. This was the third meeting of the two leaders following those in August 2018 Yerevan and February 2019 Berlin. Merkel

122 “Armenian president to ‘Post’: Failure to recognize genocide will backfire,” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/failure-to-recognize-our-genocide-will-backfire-616003>

123 “Israel can’t win the battle against antisemitism until it recognizes the Armenian Genocide,” *Mediamax*, January 31, 2020, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/36320/>

124 Arye Gut, “Glorifying fascism disrespects the memory of the Holocaust,” *Israel Hayom*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.israelhayom.com/opinions/glorifying-fascism-disrespects-the-memory-of-the-holocaust/>

125 “Pashinyan, Dutch Foreign Minister Discuss Expanding Bilateral Relations,” *Hetq.am*, January 23, 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/112456>

commended that much has changed in Armenia following the “Velvet Revolution”, that a major renewal process was initiated, and stated “Germany is a close friend and partner of Armenia and we feel the power of that friendship in both emotional and practical senses”. In the Armenian government memorandum published following the meeting, it was highlighted that Merkel promised to sustain her support for the “democratic reforms” in Armenia.¹²⁶ Economic issues were also high in the agenda of the meeting. Pashinyan called on German companies to invest in Armenia. Germany is the forerunner country in the EU that provides the most grants to and has the highest trade volume with Armenia. The bilateral trade volume in 2019 was 451 million dollars.¹²⁷

On 31 January, Pashinyan attended the OEEC heads of government meeting in Kazakhstan.¹²⁸ In this first meeting that Armenia attended after its term presidency, there were no new developments that would encourage Armenia’s expectations.

Other than Georgia, Iran is the only other country that Armenia can have an outlet to third countries. Approximately one third of Armenia’s foreign trade is conducted through this route. Despite the difficulties due to the international embargoes placed on Iran, aid of 21 million euros was supplied from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the improvement of the bridge where a border crossing is being upgraded between Iran and the entry point Meghri.¹²⁹

On 10 February, the King of Jordan made an official visit to Armenia. The King’s abstention from visiting the “genocide” monument despite being included in the envisaged schedule overshadowed the visit for Armenia.¹³⁰

The Defense Minister of Georgia visited Armenia together with a delegation on 27 February. The Georgian Minister invited Armenia to attend the NATO “Noble Partner” military drills held in Georgia every year.¹³¹ It was stated by Georgia that this year Armenia would join these drills. Armenia is on record

126 “Germany’s Merkel Praises ‘Deepening’ Ties With Armenia,” *Azatutyun*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30433090.html>

127 “Germany one of Armenia’s key partners: 2019 trade turnover grew by 4.2%,” *ArmenPress*, February 12, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1004527.html>

128 “PM Pashinyan attends Eurasian Intergovernmental Council Meeting in Almaty,” *ArmenPress*, January 31, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1003257.html>

129 “Armenia to Upgrade Meghri Area Border Crossing with Iran,” *MassisPost*, February 7, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/02/armenia-to-upgrade-meghri-area-border-crossing-with-iran/>

130 “Jordan’s King in ‘Historic’ Visit to Armenia,” *Center for Eurasian Affairs (AVİM)*, AVİM Bulletin, February 14, 2020, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/JORDAN-S-KING-IN-HISTORIC-VISIT-TO-ARMENIA>.

131 “Armenia To Join NATO Drills In Georgia,” *Azatutyun*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30458402.html>

for having affirmed in the past that it would join those exercises, but it became unclear whether or not it materialized. This time also, a confirmation was not made regarding this subject by the Armenian minister.

On 3 March, Pashinyan paid an official visit to Georgia. The main subject that was taken up was Armenia's transit passage through Georgia. An agreement was signed between the two countries on the citizens' fairway through the borders.¹³² Pashinyan explained his proposal on the relations between the two countries to be raised to a level of strategic cooperation. The two countries still do not characterize each other as strategic partners. Georgia considers Armenia as a "close neighbor" whereas it considers its relations with Azerbaijan on a strategic level.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Greece came together in Geneva on 25 February. The two ministers reiterated their wishes to carry out joint initiatives in order to deepen cooperation in fields where there are mutual benefits. Within this scope, they emphasized that the bilateral preparations of the trilateral format of Armenia-Greece-Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) they had decided to establish in 2019 was completed. The two ministers reached an agreement on the first summit meeting of this trilateral format to be held in Yerevan in April.¹³³

On 28 February, an Armenian Defense Ministry delegation discussed the defense cooperation programme between Armenia and Greece in Athens. At the end of the meeting, a bilateral cooperation programme was signed for 2020 between the ministries of defense of Armenia and Greece. The programme envisages 21 activities. Armenia-Greece-Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) ministry of defense representatives gathered on the same day and signed a "tripartite action plan" for 2020.¹³⁴

On 24 February, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia made an official visit to Armenia. The Slovak Minister made a promise to establish an embassy in Armenia.¹³⁵

On 9 March, Pashinyan visited Brussels to meet with the new EU officials. At his meeting with the Council President, the Eastern Partnership summit, which

132 "Georgian and Armenian citizens to cross the border via ID cards," *Agenda.ge*, March 5, 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/674>.

133 "Meeting of Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan with Nikos Dendias, Foreign Minister of Greece," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/02/25/meeting-of-foreign-minister-zohrab-mnatsakanyan-with-nikos-dendias-foreign-minister-of-greece/10109>

134 "Greek, Armenian defense ministries sign cooperation plan," *News.am*, February 28, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/563042.html>

135 "Opening of Slovak Embassy in Armenia will enrich bilateral agenda – FM Mnatsakanyan," *ArmenPress*, February 24, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1005990.html>

is planned to be held in June, was discussed.¹³⁶ Another high-level official he met with was the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.¹³⁷ In addition, he held a cordial meeting with the president of the European Peoples Party (EPP) of the European Parliament.¹³⁸ As one may remember, a brief period earlier, on 5 March, the former President S. Sargsyan, who left the country with special permission as he was under judicial indictment, also had a cordial meeting with the EPP president. This permission was a pre-condition for Pashinyan's reception according to the speculations that were reflected in the Armenian press.

Armenia's relations with the EU, takes place in the frame of the Eastern Partnership Project. The legal framework is the "Comprehensive and Enhanced Cooperation Agreement (CEPA)" signed in 2017. The confirmation process of the agreement has not yet been completed by the EU. The EU supports the government that came to power in 2018 in an encouraging manner and provides financial aid, with the promise of increasing it more.

The article titled "EU Eastern Partnership" published on 27 March jointly by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Neighborhood and Enlargement Commissioner states the following regarding Armenia:¹³⁹

"In this challenging time, marked by the coronavirus outbreak, we can see how important international cooperation is. Over the last decade, the Eastern Partnership has brought concrete benefits for people in Armenia and across the European Union's eastern neighborhood... Since 2009, the European Union loaned the companies in Armenia €500 million, supported 25,000 enterprises and created 2,500 new jobs. The European Union also supports one of the most growing industries in the country – tourism... The Pilot Regional Development Programme Grant Scheme 'EU4Regions: support to Regional Development in Armenia' supported regional and local economic development and created 544 new jobs... Over the past 14 years, the European Union has supported Armenian colleges' educational reforms, renovation and upgrading... Under Erasmus+ (2014-2020), over 1,800 students and academic staff from Armenia have studied or taught in Europe, and 885 Europeans went to

136 "Armenia-EU Ties Discussed during Pashinyan Visit to Brussels," *Asbarez*, March 9, 2020, <http://asbarez.com/192746/armenia-eu-ties-discussed-during-pashinyan-visit-to-brussels/>

137 "Josep Borrell salutes developments in Armenia's judicial system in a meeting with Pashinyan," *ArmenPress*, March 9, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1007918/>

138 "You can rely on me in my new position - Donald Tusk to Prime Minister Pashinyan," *ArmenPress*, March 9, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1007900/>

139 "An Eastern Partnership That Delivers for All'," *MassisPost*, March 27, 2020, <https://massispost.com/2020/03/an-eastern-partnership-that-delivers-for-all/>

Armenia... Our proposals for the future are ambitious yet achievable. They build on existing cooperation but also identify areas where we need to go further... Concretely, we are proposing to our partners to work together on the following objectives: the rule of law... democracy, climate resilience... digital transformation... resilient fair and inclusive societies...”

There appeared to be an open divergence with Russia in April, stemming from gas prices. Gazprom had raised its wholesale price for Armenia from 150 to 165 dollars per thousand cubic meters¹⁴⁰, which in turn reached the Armenian households for 285 dollars.¹⁴¹ When the oil and gas prices came tumbling down globally and it was reported that the gas price to Europe was delivered as low as 60 dollars, the Armenian government is reported to have officially requested a price cut in a letter sent to Russia’s Gazprom. Prime Minister Pashinyan also sought to involve Belarus that is also heavily dependent on Russian gas. Following a telephone call, Pashinyan and President of Belarus agreed that the current gas prices set for their countries were inflated. Pashinyan conveyed the issue to Russian President Vladimir Putin in an April 6 phone call. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs addressed the issue and dismissed such complaints. While acknowledging that the two ex-Soviet states allied to Russia are entitled to privileged treatment by Gazprom, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed that they must also honor their contractual obligations. The Russian Minister promised that Russia would continue to take into account allied relations in deciding the gas price for Armenia but that Armenia too should demonstrate its commitment to the Russian-Armenian alliance by dropping “inappropriate” criminal proceedings launched against major Russian corporations, one prominent being Armenia’s railway network managed by the Russia Railways (RZD).¹⁴²

The Russian Foreign Minister’s public statements also over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict put the Armenian authorities in a difficult position. In an odd manner, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and then Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson of Armenia were forced to publicly deny the Russian Foreign Minister’s “allegations”.

Speculations on the level of relations with Russia were raised again when it was reported in the press that on the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Second World War, the Russian President Putting had failed to call both the

140 “Armenian Gas Operator May Seek Price Rise,” *Azatutyun*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30383219.html>

141 Arshaluys Mgdesyan, “Armenia and Russia Argue Over Gas Deal,” *IWPR*, May 26, 2020, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenia-and-russia-argue-over-gas-deal>

142 “Moscow Dismisses Complaints About Russian Gas Price For Armenia,” *Azatutyun*, April 2020, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30570510.html>

prime minister and the president of Armenia. Then came the cancellation of the visit of Pashinyan to attend the ceremonies in 24 June. The Armenian side's announced reason for the cancellation was the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴³ It fell on the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan to explain that there was no crisis in Armenia-Russia relations. He said;

“Armenian-Russian relations are not based on a fundamental crisis, they are based on a strategic allied partnership. That is the foundation of our cooperation in its entirety, in every area. As for whether there are issues in these relations, the answer is as follows: if we have no issues, we have no relations. We have many issues but no fundamental problem or crisis”.¹⁴⁴

On 25 May, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a report for the Prime Minister about the priorities of the foreign policy.¹⁴⁵ Listed as major topics were the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, international recognition and condemnation of “Armenian Genocide” and prevention of crimes against humanity, promotion of human rights protection, development of cooperation on bilateral and multilateral platforms. Steps aimed at developing relations with Georgia, the US, the EU, the European continent, including France and Germany, Iran, and others in different regions. The establishment of a trilateral format of Armenia-Greece-GRSC cooperation was particularly emphasized.

Pashinyan pointed to his April 28 phone call with the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and said “our countries have very good relations. They are developing dynamically”. The Armenian government hopes that the ongoing construction of a third power transmission line connecting Armenia to Iran will be completed by the end of the year. The high voltage line is to stretch almost 280 kilometers from Yerevan to the Iranian border.¹⁴⁶

An interesting development in Armenia's foreign relations was the initiative to develop its ties with India.¹⁴⁷ The tension that occurred in India's relations

143 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Pashinyan tells Putin he won't be able to attend Victory Parade on June 24,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, June 19, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/06/19/pashinyan-tells-putin-he-wont-be-able-to-attend-victory-parade-on-june-24/i>

144 “Zohrab Mnatsakanyan: There is no crisis in Armenia-Russia relations,” *Media Max*, June 11, 2020, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/38100/>

145 “Foreign Affairs Ministry submits annual performance report,” *Prime Ministry of the Republic of Armenia*, May 25, 2020, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/05/25/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting/>

146 “Armenia Hopes To Complete Energy Project With Iran In 2020,” *Azatutyun*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30599554.html>

147 Shishir Upadhyaya, “India Wins Defense Deal With Armenia in Bid to Chasten Turkey,” *The Diplomat*, March 18, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/india-wins-defense-deal-with-armenia-in-bid-to-chasten-turkey/>.

with Turkey due to the Kashmir conflict created an opportunity for Armenia, which seeks such opportunities and considers ingraining itself against Turkey as political leverage for developing third party relations which was also witnessed in the cases of Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt.

Another country that Armenia has been attentive to develop its relations with for some time is China. It is a welcome opening for China in its quest of expanding the OBOR Project, connecting with the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson's statement at a press conference on 14 April regarding China's position on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was indicative of China's interest in the region.¹⁴⁸

4. Turkey-Armenia Relations

It is possible to say that the Turcophobia of the new administration in Armenia has become increasingly more assertive and has escalated into assuming an appearance of enmity. A novelty in this escalation has surfaced in the form of efforts to meddle in Turkey's internal affairs. In December 2019, a stance had been taken to openly criticize the rules, subject to Turkish law, regarding the election of the Armenian Patriarch of İstanbul.¹⁴⁹ What lay behind was the desire to put candidates of their choice. Not discouraged by the outcome, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a congratulatory message to the newly elected Patriarch, an unusual step without a precedent, signaling political interest. In his message, Minister Mnatsakanyan stated that he was certain that the Patriarch would not abstain from any effort to ensure the Armenian community's unity, safeguarding of its religious and cultural values.¹⁵⁰

During late February 2020, the "Kurdish community" in Armenia staged a demonstration in front of the UN Bureau in Yerevan protesting the imprisonment conditions of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.¹⁵¹

The genocide claims also maintained their intensity during the period. Greece also joined the choir and, during his speech at the international conference on

148 "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on April 14, 2020," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, April 14, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1769716.shtml.

149 "Patrik seçimi sürecine karşı yeni bir dava," *Agos*, 12 Aralık 2019, <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/23193/patrik-secimi-surecine-karsi-yeni-bir-dava>.

150 "Ermenistan Dışişleri Bakanı Zohrap Mnatsakanyan'dan İstanbul Ermenileri Patriği Sahak Piskopos Maşalyan'a kutlama mesajı," *Ermenistan Kamu Radyosu*, 13 Aralık 2019, <https://tr.armradio.am/2019/12/13/ermenistan-disisleri-bakani-zohrap-mnatsakanyandan-istanbul-ermenileri-patrigi-sahak-piskopos-masalyana-kutlama-mesaji/>

151 "Kurdish Community of Armenia Rallies and Demands Turkey Allow Lawyers to Visit Imprisoned Öcalan," *Mirror Spectator*, March 5, 2020, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/03/05/kurdish-community-of-armenia-rallies-and-demands-turkey-allow-lawyers-to-visit-imprisoned-ocalan/>

the crime of genocide, the Greek Prime Minister accused Turkey of conducting a genocide against the Assyrians, Greeks and Armenians, the Christians in general, emphasizing the Pontian Greeks.¹⁵²

The US Senate's endorsement on 12 December of the same resolution text adopted earlier by the US House of Representatives against Turkey was jubilantly received by the Armenian circles. Prime Minister Pashinyan described the decision a "historic event", extended his appreciation to all the members of the Congress in the name of the Armenian people and alleged that this decision opened a new chapter in the "Armenian Genocide" being recognized internationally, that it represented the victory of truth and justice, that it will bring the process to a new level.¹⁵³

Within this context, Pashinyan claimed that Turkey's "denialist policies" remain a threat to the Armenian people and Armenia, that the decisions of the US Congress and some other parliaments prove that Turkey is running an aggressive and unconstructive policy in the region, that Turkey's aggressive policies against Syria, Iran, GASC, Greece, and embargo on Armenia are proof of this.¹⁵⁴

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan interpreted the US Senate's decision as commemorating the Armenian victims and their dignity.¹⁵⁵ Armenian religious functionaries, the Armenian Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia (in Antelias/Lebanon) also celebrated the Senate's decision with joy. The Armenian press underlined that US Presidential candidate Joe Biden also approved and supported the Senate's decision.¹⁵⁶

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey made a joint declaration against the US Senate's resolution. The declaration is as follows:¹⁵⁷

152 Benjamin Weinthal, "Greek PM chides Turkey for genocide against Christians," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 8, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/international/greek-pm-chides-turkey-for-genocide-against-christians-610242>

153 "US Senate's resolution is the victory of justice and truth – PM Pashinyan," *ArmenPress*, December 12, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/998721.html>

154 "Turkey's policy remains threat for Armenia and its people – PM Pashinyan," *ArmenPress*, December 13, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/998780.html>

155 "U.S. Senate Also Recognizes Armenian Genocide," *Azatoryun*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/30322637.html>

156 "Joe Biden pledges to support a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide if elected," *Public Radio of Armenia*, April 24, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/04/24/joe-biden-pledges-to-support-a-resolution-recognizing-the-armenian-genocide-if-elected/>

157 "Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Senatosu Kararının Kınanması Reddedilmesi Ve Yok Hükümünde Sayılmasına Dair Karar," *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti - Resmi Gazete*, 13 Aralık 2016, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2019/12/20191214-8.pdf>

“As the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, we strongly condemn and reject the resolution regarding the Armenian genocide claims approved by the US Senate by means of distorting historical facts and disregarding the fundamental rules of international law.

This resolution, which has no legal significance and will not be binding to the Senate after the following election period, is clearly part of a dirty political machination. This constitutes a worthless posture on the interpretation of history based on the petty interests of arbitrary and daily politics.

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey reiterates the standpoint that delivering judgements on historical events is not the duty of parliaments. The so-called Armenian genocide draft resolution had previously been brought to the US Senate many times and had been rejected. It is worth noting that whenever the US’ interests come into conflict with Turkey’s politics, this subject is brought to the Senate’s agenda. Fundamentally, the issue here is not the 1915 events, and in truth, the US Senate does not in any way care about either the Armenians or historical events. If Turkey develops policies favorable to the US’ demands and not according to our Noble People’s will, neither the Armenians nor the 1915 events would be brought to the US Senate’s agenda.

Turkey’s stance regarding this subject is clear and obvious: If historical facts are earnestly of interest and deemed important, scholars can inform the world opinion on these facts with reliable research. Turkey has opened her rich archives to all researchers, including the Armenians; however, the archives of Armenia have not been opened, even to the most prominent researchers. Deferring to black propaganda and racist approaches by hiding information and documents is not befitting of any parliament, including the US Senate.

We feel great sorrow due to the strategic alliance and friendship between Turkey and the US of many years being harmed by and made into the subject of nefarious calculations. The US Senate must now live with the burden of this guilty conscience that it has added to its own history.

Paying no heed to this resolution of the US Senate or similar tools of pressure, Turkey will, with determination, continue to protect its national interests and security in its region.

This resolution of the US Senate, in terms of history and law, is deemed null and void by our Noble People and peoples of the world with reason, conscience, and fairness.

We announce to the public opinion that we express our people's common determination and solidarity against this resolution and that it a natural right for Turkey to give the necessary response within the framework of international reciprocity.

With these thoughts, it has been approved by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey General Assembly's 32nd Session dated 13 December 2019 that the US Senate's aforementioned resolution is fully condemned, rejected, and declared null and void and that this resolution of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is to be published in the Official Gazette."

The Center for Eurasian Studies' (AVİM) evaluation of the resolution is as follows:¹⁵⁸

"After the tense period between Turkey and the U.S. that began with the purchasing of the S-400 missile defense system, resolutions concerning Turkey are continuing to come one after another. As is known, draft resolutions were presented to both sides of the U.S. Congress last April with the aim of recognizing the events of 1915 as genocide. These drafts, which are completely identical to each other, were brought to the Congress agenda after Turkey's Operation Peace Spring. In these drafts, it is slandered with the repeated clichés that Turkey did not only destroy Armenians but also attempted to destroy other Christian groups. Consequently, on October 29, a resolution titled "Affirming the United States record on the Armenian Genocide" was adopted in the US House of Representatives. Our perspective and assessment titled "America on The Wane: The House Of Representatives Disgraces Itself and Loses Credibility" about the House of Representative's resolution which was published on AVİM's website on 29 October is also valid for the resolution of the Senate on 12 December.

The first reason behind the decision that everyone can easily guess, was confirmed by the words of Steve Cohen, a member of the US House of Representatives:

I've always opposed the Armenian resolution, and I voted for it this week (...) because Turkey doesn't seem to respect the United States at all.

158 AVİM, "Resolutions On 1915 Came One After Another From U.S. Senate," *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2019/67, December 19, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/RESOLUTIONS-ON-1915-CAME-ONE-AFTER-ANOTHER-FROM-U-S-SENATE>

Another reason behind the decision was the conflict in American internal politics.

Keeping these reasons in mind; we need to mention the S.Res 150 of the Senate on 12 December. In fact, the Senate determined its thoughts on an official recognition of the “Armenian Genocide” with this resolution. First of all, it should be noted that this resolution, referred as Simple Resolution in American law, is non-binding. These types of laws are defined as laws that do not require approval from the US President, that is to say they are not considered sanctions. The Senate may take such decisions about its internal functions or to demonstrate its non-binding stance. Therefore, this decision is not binding for the U.S. or Turkey. After the decision was taken, a U.S. State Department spokeswoman stated that the administration’s position has not changed, and their perspectives is still the same with the definition in the President’s statement during last April. However, the 24 April speeches mentioned by the Spokeswomen which have been repeated every year as a tradition are quite problematic as previously mentioned by AVİM many times. Using these events by the heads of states as an element of internal politics, which have to be evaluated in the light of objective history and science, prepares the ground for these kinds of parliament decisions. Thus, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined how politicization of history can be made with its statement on the S.Res 150 the decision of the Senate.

On the other hand, the timing of the Senate’s Resolution is not a coincidence; since it was taken during a period of significant developments as a result of internal politics of the U.S. and the hydrocarbon resources of the Eastern Mediterranean, it is a reflection of the reprisal and image of ‘power’ that the Congress wants to emphasize. This taking place during same time of the signing of an agreement between Turkey and Libya on the jurisdiction area of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea cannot be considered as a coincidence. Just as in the decision of the House of Representatives, the U.S. Congress which seeks to prove its power in domestic and foreign policy through Turkey wanted to send a message through the Senate this time. By this way, it was revealed that the Congress could throw aside the long-standing alliance and friendship relations between the US and Turkey because of its ambitions.

Returning to the statement on the subject of respect expressed by Mr. Cohen, a member of the House of Representatives, it would be appropriate to mention that this issue is bilateral. Since decisions taken by the Senate on the sanctions against Turkey on the same day with the

Armenian resolution was assessed by the Turkish Foreign Ministry as disrespect for the sovereign decisions regarding national security by the Ministry. So, the point here is not about the Turkey's respect to U.S, it is about the Congress not respecting the decisions taken by a sovereign state regarding its own interests.

At this point, it would be appropriate to mention the impacts of the resolutions on the public opinion of Armenia and the Diaspora. Because following the resolution of the House of Representatives, it is seen that most of the evaluations in the Armenian press stated that the 1915 issue was used for other political purposes. The Senate decision is another sample of this situation. Therefore, it can not be said that the interest groups, who have engaged in lobbying activities and have attempted to take advantage of the tensions between Turkey and U.S., have achieved the desired results. The U.S. Congress used the "Armenian cause" in its own interests; however, many Armenians were not pleased because it was done in a very apparent manner. The results reached after long-term lobbying have left a bitter taste in the mouths.

The U.S. Congress, which wanted to retaliate against Turkey and display its power, adopted resolutions full of clichés and chose bad timing. These resolutions revealed to everyone, including Armenia and the Diaspora, that genocide allegations directed against Turkey are about political calculation rather than the seeking of historical justice. On the one hand, by taking this decision, the U.S. Congress has further strained relations with Turkey, which has key importance as an ally of the United States. As a result, the U.S. Congress has become a victim of its own ambitions; at the same time it hurts U.S. interests, weakened U.S.-Turkey relations, and has disappointed Armenian circles."

The US Department of State made a statement on 17 December regarding the Senate's decision. The statement expressed "The position of the Administration has not changed. Our views are reflected in the President's definitive statement on this issue from last April".¹⁵⁹

Armenian organizations in the US were encouraged by the US Congress resolutions to further press for action against Turkey. Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), one such organization, was audacious enough to issue a message to that end on "Shushi Liberation Day", the occupation anniversary of the historical Azerbaijan town.¹⁶⁰

159 "Senate Resolution 150," *U.S. Department of State*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/senate-resolution-150/>

160 "ANCA-Eastern Region Celebrates 28th Anniversary of the Liberation of Shushi," *Armenian Weekly*, May 12, 2020, <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/05/12/anca-eastern-region-celebrates-28th-anniversary-of-the-liberation-of-shushi/>

In the Armenian press, the announcement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey condemning the parole board's decision on 27 December for the conditional release of the terrorist who assassinated the Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles in 1982 was published without comment. The decision was subject to approval of the Governor of California. Had the Governor refrained from vetoing the decision, the terrorist murderer would have been released after 120 days. The Turkish organizations in the US initiated a campaign for the governor to veto. The Armenian organizations, spearheaded by the ARF, while doing their utmost behind-the-scenes lobbying, also connected their campaign with the general convict release decision, that was initiated due to COVID-19, as a justification for the release.

The Governor of California rejected the parole board's decision on 26 May. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey welcomed this decision with the following statement:¹⁶¹

“The terrorist attack, in which Consul-General of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Kemal Arıkan was martyred, was perpetrated by terrorists Hampig Sassounian and Krikor Saliba in the name of the Armenian terrorist organization. Hampig Sassounian was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. The escapee terrorist Krikor Saliba allegedly died in the Lebanese civil war in 1982.

Terrorist Sassounian, with an intention to push the US laws, has once again applied to avail himself of the right to conditional parole. In the parole hearing on December 27, 2019, Sassounian was found suitable for parole.

Our expectation of non-implementation of this decision has been brought to the attention of the US authorities with its justifications. The Governor of California, with his final decision dated 26 May 2020, reversed the decision to parole.

The murder that terrorist Sassounian shamefully committed and for which has not shown any sign of remorse throughout his prison term, will never be forgotten as a crime demonstrating the appalling dimensions of an ill and a twisted ideology.

This decision is welcomed as it once again indicated that terrorist attacks, as the utmost point of hate speech and extremism in the world, will not go unpunished.

161 “No: 107, 27 May 2020, Press Release Regarding the Reversing of the Decision to Parole Hampig Sassounian, Who was Sentenced for the Terrorist Attack in Which Consul-General of the Republic of Turkey in Los Angeles, Mr. Kemal Arıkan was Martyred,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, May 27, 2020, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-107_-kemal-arikan-in-sehit-oldugu-teror-saldirisi-hukumulusunun-karari-hk.en.mfa

On this occasion, we once again remember with respect and gratitude our martyred diplomat Kemal Arıkan and all our martyrs who fell victim to terrorism.”

It was highlighted in the Armenian press that the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accepted the new Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Sahak II Mashalyan, in the Presidential complex and met with him on 14 January.¹⁶²

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who answered a question in the Armenian parliament, expressed the following on 22 January:

“This is a very serious issue in our foreign policy agenda. There is a special group of landlocked countries within the UN, and we are working also within this framework. Your question concretely relates to the Armenia-Turkey relations, and the absence of these relations today is a challenge for Armenia in broad terms, for Armenia’s security. We consider this issue as one of the most serious challenges of the national security. We need a more detailed calculation on how we should continue this process in the legal field”.¹⁶³

On 30 January, French President Macron, who spoke during a conference of the Co-ordination Council of Armenian Organizations of France (CCAF) in Paris, reiterated that they will ensure that those who reject that a genocide was committed during the period of the Ottoman Empire will receive legal action against them. He concluded saying “no great history is formed on lies, denial and revisionism”. He also showered praise on a notorious Turkish academic who was invited to the conference as he advocates the Armenian claims, distorting historical facts.¹⁶⁴

The newly elected Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Sahak II made his first foreign visit, together with the prominent clergy of the Patriarchate, to Armenia, to the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin on 28 February.¹⁶⁵

Turkish President Erdoğan, in a phone call to the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul on 8 April, informed him that facilities were being provided to the Armenians working in Turkey if they should wish to return to their country

162 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Turkish President receives Armenian Patriarch,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, January 14, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/01/14/turkish-president-receives-armenian-patriarch/>

163 “Absence of relations with Turkey is a challenge for Armenia – FM Mnatsakanyan,” *ArmenPress*, January 22, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1002255.html>

164 Marianna Mkrtychyan, “Macron: No great history is formed on lies, denial and revisionism,” *ArmlInfo*, January 30, 2020, https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=48938&lang=3

165 “Newly Elected Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Visits Etchmiadzin,” *Hetq.am*, February 28, 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/113881>

and that Turkey was ready to aid Armenia against the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁶ This was widely reflected in the Armenian media with mixed responses, supporting and opposing views and speculations. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson made a statement on the subject, expressed that Armenia does not want aid from Turkey, that such a subject is not on their agenda. The spokesperson added “Unfortunately, some statements made by the Turkish side in the context of fighting against COVID-19 do not contribute toward creating a depoliticized and humanitarian environment of cooperation”.¹⁶⁷ The subject of Armenia’s discomfort from Turkey’s reaction against the inscription of Ağrı Mountain (Mount Ararat) being on some of the aid packages sent from China to Armenia was among the news reports.¹⁶⁸ These news reports-comments have tried to surrealistically justify this misnomer of a Turkish mountain, the highest of the country by being some 5500 meters, that Ağrı is on Armenia’s coat of arms as an official national symbol.

US President Donald Trump issued the following statement on 24 April on Armenian Remembrance Day:¹⁶⁹

“We join the global community in memorializing the lives lost during the Meds Yeghern, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century. Beginning in 1915, One and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. On this day of remembrance, we pay respect to those who suffered and lost their lives, while also renewing our commitment to fostering a more humane and peaceful world.

Every year on April 24, we reflect on the strong and enduring ties between the American and Armenian peoples. We are proud of the founders of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, a ground-breaking effort established in 1915 that provided crucial humanitarian support to Armenian refugees, and grateful for the thousands of Americans who contributed or volunteered to help Armenians expelled from their homes.

On this day, we bear witness to the strength and resiliency of the Armenian people in the face of tragedy. We are fortunate that so many

166 “Erdogan phones Sahak II of Constantinople amid coronavirus outbreak,” *ArmenPress*, April 9, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1011625.html>

167 “The response by MFA Spokesperson to the statements of the Turkish side amid the fight against COVID19,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/04/13/armresponse-turkey/10209>

168 Zuhal Demirci, “Turkey asks China to clarify aid packages to Armenia,” *Anadolu Agency*, April 12, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-asks-china-to-clarify-aid-packages-to-armenia/1801444>

169 “Statement by the President on Armenian Remembrance Day,” *The US White House*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-armenian-remembrance-day/>

Armenians have brought their rich culture to our shores and contributed so much to our country, including decorated soldiers, celebrated entertainers, renowned architects and successful businesspeople.

We welcome efforts by the Armenians and Turks to acknowledge and reckon with their painful history. On this day, we believe it is our obligation to remember those who suffered and perished and reaffirm our commitment to protecting vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities around the world.”

This statement, much biased in favor of the Armenian narrative, still did not satisfy the Armenian circles, complaining that the President followed the traditional line and refrained from describing the past events as “genocide”. So, the focus was given more to what the US House Speaker and presidential candidate Joe Biden had to say. Prime Minister of Canada was also cited favorably for adopting the Armenian narrative.

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the message of President Trump with the following statement:¹⁷⁰

“US President Trump’s statement dated 24 April 2020 with regard to the events of 1915 is based on a subjective narrative which Armenians try to turn into a dogma.

This statement, made with domestic political considerations has no validity for us. We reject the claims put forward in this statement.

We observe that the suffering of more than 500 thousand Muslims who were massacred by Armenian rebels in the same period was insistently ignored in this statement. This understanding which is deprived of justice and equity needs to be changed from now on.

Our proposal to establish a Joint Historical Commission on the events of 1915 is still on the table. We believe that the truth will be unveiled if this Commission is established.

Those who try to take this proposal off the agenda are radical Armenians who want to make their responsibilities forgotten on the events of 1915. The US Administration should realize this fact and act accordingly.

170 “No: 90, 24 April 2020, Press Release Regarding the Statement by the U.S. President Donald Trump on the Events of 1915,” *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 24, 2020, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_90_abd-baskaninin-bindokuzyuzonbes-olaylarina-iliskin-aciklamasi-hk.en.mfa

On this occasion, we commemorate with respect Muslim, Christian and Jewish civilians of the Ottoman communities who lost their lives during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.”

Meticulous research was done for reporting all favorable messages. In that context, messages from the President of France, Prime Minister of France, Mayor of Paris, and President of Lebanon were highlighted. On the other hand, there were signs that the Armenian narrative was crumbling. One recent example was the official stance of Ukraine. Representatives of state bodies were asked not to take part in the commemoration events and not to use the term “Armenian Genocide”.¹⁷¹ There was also undisguised disappointment with the attitude of the EU. The EU mission in Armenia was criticized for avoiding using the term “Armenian Genocide” unlike in past years and instead, this time, referring to “tragic events”.

Prime Minister Pashinyan expressed gratitude to all states which recognized and condemned “Armenian Genocide”. He said: “the Armenian people not only suffered enormous human losses, but were subjected to deportation and a cultural genocide. The loss of the spiritual and religious heritage was irreparable; its material damage was enormous”.¹⁷²

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan was equally aggressive, saying: “Turkey’s consistent denial of Armenian Genocide and its justification, the land blockade imposed on Armenia and the overt anti-Armenian position in the context of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict threaten the security of the Republic of Armenia and the descendants of the victims of the ‘Armenian genocide’”.¹⁷³ He expanded on those views in an interview with public TV:

“Any step in politics should be the result of a cold-hearted and balanced calculation, and this is our guidelines for relations. Apart from the fact that we live under the conditions of denied justice, Turkey makes other steps that further deepen the issue – those steps include closed borders and unconditional support to Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. All these factors together are a threat for us and we answer this threat in a way a state has to – we ensure our national security based on cold-hearted and balanced calculations”.¹⁷⁴

171 “Ukraine bans all events related to so-called Armenian genocide,” *Trend News Agency*, April 24, 2020, <https://en.trend.az/world/other/3228543.html>

172 “PM Pashinyan expresses gratitude to all states which recognized Armenian Genocide,” *ArmenPress*, April 24, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1013265.html>

173 “Statement of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, April 23, 2020, https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/04/23/genocide105_statement/10229

174 “FM Mnatsakanyan presents Armenia’s approaches in relations with Turkey,” *ArmenPress*, April 25, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1013430.html>

The notorious ARF, which has an active playing ground in the US, has also come up with an appeal to Armenian youth on this occasion. It targeted Turkey, stating;

“Turkey, the successor to the Ottoman Empire, has not escaped responsibility for the Armenian Genocide thanks to the tireless struggle of the Armenian people and specifically the sacrifice of the Armenian youth. [...] It remains the conviction of the youth of the ARF that Western Armenia is not only a historical homeland, but also an occupied territory that has yet to be liberated”.¹⁷⁵

In a 4 May TV address, President of Turkey Erdoğan also referred to the “Greek and Armenian lobbies” anti-Turkish collaboration. He said “Turkey will fully defend its interests in the Mediterranean, Cyprus and the Aegean. We will not give up before the forces of evil, either FETÖ, the PKK, the Armenian and Greek lobbies or centers of hostility in the Gulf.”¹⁷⁶ This was quoted and criticized widely in the Armenian press.

As if to justify the words of the Turkish President; Armenia, Greece and GASC put on a joint initiative at the UN to block the election of a Turkish diplomat for the post of President of the General Assembly, breaking the traditional procedure of silence. Nevertheless, to their chagrin, the Turkish candidate won unanimous support of the 178 UN members that were present and voting.¹⁷⁷

The High Advisory Board of the Turkish Presidency held a meeting on 16 June to discuss how to respond to baseless and anti-Turkish accusations and distortion of historical events by the radical Armenian circles.¹⁷⁸ The Armenian government took issue with that meeting. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson had the following to say:

“The statements made by the Turkish president justifying the Armenian Genocide and insulting its victims are not new and are manifestations of hate speech, which have an impact on maintaining and strengthening the atmosphere of xenophobia against Armenians in that country. The

175 “An Appeal to Armenian Youth,” *The Armenian Weekly*, April 22, 2020, <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/04/22/an-appeal-to-armenian-youth/>

176 “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Kabine Toplantısı’nın ardından konuştu,” *Haberler.com*, 11 Mayıs 2020, <https://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-kabine-toplantisi-nin-13212615-haberi/>

177 Tutku Dilaver, “The Opposition Against Turkey in The Election of The President of Un General Assembly,” *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2020/18, June 26, 2020, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/THE-OPPOSITION-AGAINST-TURKEY-IN-THE-ELECTION-OF-THE-PRESIDENT-OF-UN-GENERAL-ASSEMBLY>

178 “Cumhurbaşkanlığı Yüksek İstişare Kurulu, Cumhurbaşkanlığı Erdoğan başkanlığında toplandı,” *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı*, 16 Haziran 2020, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskanligi-yuksek-istisare-kurulu-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-baskanliginda-toplandi-16-06-2020>

issue of recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide is not an Armenian-Turkish issue. This is the problem of Turkey and the international community...”¹⁷⁹

Concerning this development, there were also hate mongering words and a blatant attempt to provoke Turkish citizens of Armenian origin in Turkey, who are not part of the Armenian diaspora, but indigenous and full-fledged citizens of Turkey.

The decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia back to a mosque was another topic Armenian and Greek organizations joined hands to protest. The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Sahak II endorsing the decision and calling for Hagia Sophia to become a place of worship¹⁸⁰ was also met with disparaging comments.

President A. Sarkissian visited the Armenian-Turkish border on 6 July and met with the Russian border troops, which according to the 1992 agreement between Armenia and Russia guards and controls the state border of Armenia with Turkey and Iran. President A. Sarkissian stated on this occasion that the state flags of Russia and Armenia hovering on the state border were “a symbol of our friendly and allied relations based on mutual trust”.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 12 July condemning the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan. The text is as follows:¹⁸¹

“We strongly condemn the attack of the Armenian armed forces on Tovuz region of Azerbaijan. We convey our condolences to the friendly and brotherly Azerbaijani people and Government for the Azerbaijani martyrs who lost their lives and wish speedy recovery to the wounded.

The fact that this attack, which is yet another manifestation of Armenia’s aggressive nationalism, has been repelled by Azerbaijan, is a concrete indication that aggression will not be left unanswered.

179 “Comment by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Anna Naghdalyan on the Session of Supreme Advisory Council Under the Turkish President’s Office,” *HyeTert*, June 18, 2020, <https://hyetert.org/2020/06/18/comment-by-foreign-ministry-spokesperson-anna-naghdalyan-on-the-session-of-supreme-advisory-council-under-the-turkish-presidents-office/>

180 Semra Orkan, “Türkiye Ermenileri Patriği Maşalyan’dan ‘Ayasofya’ açıklaması,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 13 Haziran 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turkiye-ermenileri-patrigi-masalyandan-ayasofya-aciklamasi/1875985>.

181 “No: 149, 12 July 2020, Press Release Regarding The Armenian Attack On Azerbaijan,” *Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Washington*, July 12, 2020, <http://washington.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowAnnouncement/374425>.

These attempts, which Armenia has made to distract the attention of the international community from its continued illegal occupation of Azerbaijani territory Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding regions for many years and to add new dimensions to the conflict for blocking the political settlement, are bound to fail.

The Armenian side should give up on such dangerous tactics and choose the path of reason and law. Embarking on adventurism for aspirations beyond its own capacity reveals Armenia's failure of judgement and constitutes the biggest obstacle to peace and stability in our region.

We hope that Armenia's effort to cover up its own aggression will not be accepted by the international community in any way.

Turkey will continue, with all its capacity, to stand by Azerbaijan in its struggle to protect its territorial integrity.”

On 13 July, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded with the following statement:¹⁸²

“On July 12, the Foreign Ministry of Turkey issued a statement, in which the Turkish side not only expressed its unconditional support to Azerbaijan, in fact justifying the use of force by Azerbaijan on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, but also disseminated utterly false and misleading information.

This provocative attitude by Turkey and its groundless accusations against Armenia attest to the fact that this country has not been acting as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, but as a party, involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This fact makes even more impossible for Turkey to play any role in the issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, within international, and particularly the OSCE framework.

Turkey's attempts to intervene in the conflicts in its neighboring regions has already undermined the security and stability thereon.

We strongly condemn Turkey's attempts to instigate instability in our region, and affirm that Armenia will continue to consistently work towards maintaining and strengthening the international and regional security, while closely cooperating with international partners to this end.”

182 “Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the statement of the Turkish Foreign Ministry,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, July 13, 2020, https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/07/13/MFA_Statement_Turkey/10361

In the face of Turkey's staunch solidarity with Azerbaijan, Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following additional statement on 15 July:¹⁸³

“On July 12, following the attack by the Azerbaijani armed forces in the direction of the Tavush region of the Republic of Armenia, the leadership of Turkey, including the President, the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defense issued a number of official statements.

These statements not only contain commitment of unconditional support to Azerbaijan, but also exhibit clear regional ambitions towards the South Caucasus, which the President of Turkey, along with other officials, attempt to substantiate by referring to Turkey's ‘historic mission’ in the region.

Invoking its historical mission and ethnic or religious affiliations, Turkey has already destabilized the situation in a number of neighboring regions: the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa causing immeasurable sufferings to the peoples of those regions.

It is noteworthy that in 21st century, Turkey builds its policy in our region on the traditions of kinship, justification of the Armenian Genocide and the impunity of that crime.

Turkey's provocative and biased stance seriously undermines the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and proves that Turkey cannot be involved in any international processes related to the conflict and first and foremost within the OSCE framework.

With its approaches, Turkey is a security threat for Armenia and the region, and broad regional and international cooperation is needed to counter it.”

The most recent development on this issue in the period under review has been the decision announced by the National Security Council of Turkey following in the meeting on 22 July.¹⁸⁴

“Armenia, which has maintained an illegitimate occupation in the territory of Azerbaijan for years, has been strongly condemned for its aggression that disrupts peace and disregards international law.

183 “Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the recent statements by Turkey,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/07/15/armmfa-statement/10373>

184 “22 Temmuz 2020 Tarihli Toplantı,” *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu Genel Sekreterliği*, 22 Temmuz 2020, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/22-temmuz-2020-tarihli-toplanti>

Turkey has emphasized that Armenia must stop its aggression and withdraw from Azerbaijani lands and that Turkey will support any decision by brotherly Azerbaijan in pursuit of its just cause.”

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