

## EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

**To cite this article:** Alev Kılıç, “Facts And Comments”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 43 (2021): 9-82.

**Received:** 26.07.2021

**Accepted:** 28.07.2021

# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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**Abstract:** *This article covers Turkey-Armenia relations as well as domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period of January-July 2021. The period under review has already been registered in the historical annals as one where the second independent Republic of Armenia (third according to Armenian sources, which also count the Soviet era republic), has waged a war, endured defeat and gone through serious internal havoc and instability. During these uncertain times, Armenia's government has vacillated between adopting a realist and peaceful policy based on regional cooperation and a surrealist and revanchist one encouraged by the Diaspora, the Apostolic Church and western partisan supporters. The defeat in the 2020 Karabakh War against Azerbaijan and its consequences have further increased its dependence on Russia, narrowing Armenia's margin of double play between Russia and the West. Although the war and the following ceasefire agreement testified to the fact that Karabakh is part of the territory of Azerbaijan and that the question of status is confined solely to the question of what rights are to be accorded to the Armenian minority living in Karabakh, Armenia has nevertheless continued in its contacts with the West to plea for sovereignty over Karabakh. The West did not surprise and once again unscrupulously sided with and further encouraged the Armenian narrative. The US President's 24 April statement was one such partisan step. The strategic dilemma and vacillation have kept on as well with regards relations with Turkey, as on the one hand, Turkey is seen as an enemy, while on the other hand, the search for regional*

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*cooperation and neighborly relations with acknowledged benefits has gained prominence in the agenda. Heavy criticism from the vociferous old guard, unabashedly pro-Russian yet vehemently against the ceasefire and eventually the peace agreement, accusing Pashinyan with treason -one of the lesser disparaging remarks pronounced against him- inevitably led to snap elections. Interestingly, the Diaspora representatives also openly joined the anti-Pashinyan rhetoric. Pashinyan's landslide victory was a surprise to many.*

**Keywords:** *Pashinyan, Ayvazyan, Putin, Lavrov, ceasefire agreement, transport corridors, snap elections, US President's statement*

**Öz:** *Bu incelemede Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde ve Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde Ocak-July 2021 ayları arasındaki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır. İncelediğimiz dönem, 1992 yılında tarihinde ikinci kez (Ermeni siyasetçilere göre, Sovyet dönemi de hesaba katılarak üçüncü kez) bağımsız olan Ermenistan devletinin bir savaş yaptığı, bir yenilgiye, ciddi bir iç karışıklığa ve istikrarsızlığa girdiği bir zaman dilimi olarak tarihe geçmiştir. Bu dönemde Ermenistan yönetimi; bölgesel işbirliğini esas alan, gerçekçi ve barışçı bir politika ile Diasporanın, Apostolik Kilisenin ve batılı yandaşlarının baskısı ve teşvikiyle, hayalperest ve intikamcı bir strateji benimseme arasında yalpalamıştır. 2020 Karabağ Savaşı yenilgisi Rusya'ya olan bağımlılığını daha da arttırmış, Ermenistan'ın Batı ile Rusya arasında ikili oynama marjını daraltmıştır. Savaş ve ateşkes anlaşmasının Karabağ'ın Azerbaycan'ın toprak bütünlüğü içinde yer aldığını kanıtlanmasına, statü konusunun münhasıran Karabağ'da yaşayan Ermeni azınlığa tanınacak haklara inhisar ettiğini göstermesine rağmen, Ermenistan Batı ile temaslarında Karabağ üzerinde hak iddia etme girişimlerini sürdürmüştür. Batı'nın Ermenistan'ı bir kez daha bu iddialarında destekleyen, hatta teşvik eden izansız tutumu şaşırtıcı olmamıştır. ABD Başkanının 24 Nisan açıklaması da bu yönde taraftar bir adım olmuştur. Türkiye ile ilişkiler konusunda da stratejik ikilem ve yalpalama devam etmiş, Türkiye bir yandan düşman olarak tanımlanırken, diğer taraftan sağlayacağı çıkar açık olan bölgesel işbirliği ve komşuluk ilişkilerinin nasıl geliştirilebileceği arayışı gündeme gelmiştir. Diğer taraftan, bir yandan Rusya'ya kayıtsız şartsız bağlılık beyan eden, diğer yandan ateş-kes anlaşmasına ve izleyecek barış anlaşmasına karşı çıkan eski yönetim önderlerinin ve taraftarlarının Paşinyan'a karşı başlattıkları ses getiren kampanya ve Paşinyan'ı en hafifinden vatana ihanet ile suçlamalar erken seçime gidilmesini kaçınılmaz kılmıştır. İlginç olan, Diasporanın önde gelen temsilcilerinin de Paşinyan aleyhtarı bu kampanyayı açıkça desteklemiş olmalarıdır. Paşinyan'ın seçimlerde sağladığı ezici çoğunluk birçoklarını yanıltmış ve şaşırtmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Paşinyan, Ayvazyan, Putin, Lavrov, ateşkes anlaşması, ulaşım koridorları, erken seçim, ABD Başkanının açıklaması*

## 1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

Following the 44-day war with Azerbaijan in 2020 settling the Karabakh conflict, the heavy defeat and Azerbaijan regaining its territory under occupation, except approximately two-thirds of Nagorno-Karabakh, led to deep disappointment, grief, and reaction in Armenia and in the Armenian Diaspora. While the Armenian Government, aware of the realities in the field, displayed a relatively more realistic stance, the old guard of previous administrations and their followers, chanting under the banner of opposition, as well as radicals and militants of the Diaspora spearheaded by the Dashnaksutyun (the Dashnak Party, Armenian Revolutionary Federation-ARF) with head quarters in the United States (US) and France, adopted a revanchist approach and refused to acknowledge the defeat. In search of changing the outcome, envisaging preparations for a new military venture, they initiated a vociferous opposition to topple the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

On the other hand, in the Armenian press, although in a covert manner, self-criticism was expressed to the effect of “we reaped what we sowed”. There were also those who drew links with the mistakes made a hundred years ago.<sup>1</sup> The following were cited as the main mistakes:

- We deluded ourselves that we could continue for 50 more years the occupation that we maintained for 25 years and make it permanent.
- We exaggerated our army’s power and the belief that it could not be defeated.
- We dreamed about a new war and gaining new lands.
- We thought that Azerbaijan could not dare fight a war.
- We could not take into account Turkey’s support for Azerbaijan.
- We thought that Armenia’s closed borders with its neighbors would not prevent Armenia’s development.
- We exaggerated the Armenian Diaspora’s power, support, and our expectations.
- We forgot our mistake of a hundred years ago regarding the support from sympathizing western countries.

<sup>1</sup> “What Happened and Why: Six Theses,” *Mirror Spectator*, November 24, 2020, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/11/24/what-happened-and-why-six-theses/>

- We paid the price of our greed by not withdrawing in time from the seven Azerbaijan provinces we occupied.
- We took the easy way out by accusing the administration of treason, betrayal, and being sold out to foreign interests.

In the aftermath of the war, with the exploitation of intense emotions and fresh grief, the mistakes leading to the defeat were covered up. The voice of the opposition, despite being the minority, was at a level that could drown out the realities. The Government was left under pressure. 17 “parties” formed of various non-parliament groups and spearheaded by Dashnaksutyun members initiated protests and rampancy, demanding the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Pashinyan, the forming of a temporary government of technocrats, and the holding of early elections.<sup>2</sup>

In his national address broadcasted on television on 27 November 2020, Pashinyan reiterated his discourse that the Armenian people support him and that the opposition was acting to spread chaos with the help of “external forces” known by the people.<sup>3</sup> On 3 December, the opposition agreed on senior politician Vazgen Manukyan, who was the first prime minister during the years 1990-1991 following the independence, to become the transitional prime minister candidate.<sup>4</sup> With a joint declaration, the opposition once again rejected the November 2020 ceasefire agreement signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, describing it as a “national disaster and treason”.<sup>5</sup>

The President of Armenia, Armen Sarkissian, who adopted a stance in support of the opposition, questioned the use of the 170 million Dollar remittance from the Hayastan Armenian Fund sent on 7 December from the US and France and requested a detailed report from the administration.<sup>6</sup> The Prime Ministry and Fund administration did not respond directly to this attempt and it was stated that a large portion of the provided revenue came from Los Angeles and that 370 million Dollars of aid was made to Armenia since the Fund’s establishment in 1992.

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2 “17 Armenian Political Parties Demand Resignation Of Nikol Pashinyan and His Team,” *Arminfo*, November 9, 2020, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=57905&lang=3&\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_=pmd\\_3cbbab9d9dfa1f239a3379046ac522f0c96b13a9-1627411803-0-gqNtZGzNAjijcnBszQ96](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=57905&lang=3&_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=pmd_3cbbab9d9dfa1f239a3379046ac522f0c96b13a9-1627411803-0-gqNtZGzNAjijcnBszQ96)

3 ““Most important objective is to provide for stability and security around Armenia, Artsakh’ - PM,” *ArmenPress*, November 27, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1036087/>

4 “Opposition Names Vazgen Manukyan Candidate for Prime Minister,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, December 3, 2020, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/12/03/opposition-names-vazgen-manukyan-candidate-for-prime-minister/>

5 Gayane Saribekian, “Opposition Leaders Insist on Pashinian’s Resignation,” *Azatutyun*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31025195.html>

6 “Armenian President Wants Government To Return \$100 Million Donation,” *Azatutyun*, December 7, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30988085.html>

Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia's first President, a benefactor of Pashinyan in that period, ventured to meet with the former Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan, for the second time in 20 years to back the demands of the opposition for Pashinyan's resignation (the three men reportedly met for the first time in October 2020 to discuss ways of stopping the Karabagh war. Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan offered to jointly travel to Moscow for urgent talks with Russian leaders. Pashinyan refused to authorize them to negotiate on behalf of his administration). In this 25 March 2021 meeting, Ter-Petrosyan made a public call for Armenia's two other former presidents to form an electoral alliance with him to jointly try to oust Prime Minister Pashinyan's "criminal and nation-destroying regime". Kocharyan rejected it out of hand, while S. Sargsyan did not immediately express any opinion but later made his rejection clear. Not giving in, Ter-Petrosyan repeated his call of alliance again on 5 May, again to no avail. On this occasion, Ter-Petrosyan said, "the continuation of Pashinyan's regime is much more dangerous for Armenia and Karabagh than even the possible or supposed threats coming from Azerbaijan and Turkey".

Ter-Petrosyan also condemned the opposition for resorting to violence and threatening to overthrow the government by a coup d'état. Moreover, he took issue with the opposition's prime minister candidate's statements, for instance, his "A great force will gather against Turkey, the world will not forgive Turkey for its insolence. If an alliance is formed against Turkey, we are in that alliance", warning such utterances would have destructive consequences for Armenia and were thus very dangerous. He also underlined that Manukyan did not understand that his dream of a non-existent anti-Turkey alliance might constitute an action, not only against Turkey or against the Turkish-Russian agreement, but also against Russia. Ter-Petrosyan increasingly hardened his anti-administration discourse in time. In March, he said that Pashinyan had to resign "in the interest of the nation" and suggested that the parliament grant him legal guarantees and immunity and that he at the least temporarily left the country.<sup>7</sup>

The opposition, which issued a decision of joint action under the title "National Salvation Movement", called for nation-wide demonstrations on 5 December. The Dashnaksutyun representative that assumed the movement's coordination issued an ultimatum to Pashinyan that he resign until 8 December.<sup>8</sup> Kocharyan also called on his supporters to participate in the

7 "Ter-Petrosian Calls For Armenian PM's 'Immediate Resignation'," *Mirror Spectator*, March 18, 2021, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/03/18/ter-petrosian-calls-for-armenian-pms-immediate-resignation/>

8 "Hundreds Protest in Armenia after PM ignores the Deadline to Resign," *Al Jazeera*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/8/hundreds-protest-in-armenia-after-pm-ignores-deadline-to-resign>

opposition demonstrations, thus making public his political ambitions.<sup>9</sup> In his speech broadcasted on television, Kocharyan did not hesitate to mention that the Pashinyan administration legitimized Azerbaijan's operation with its approach creating an impression of non-reconciliation and not knowing what it wanted during the negotiation period with the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, that it placed its territorial integrity principle on the forefront through its "Artsakh is Armenia" discourse, that it appropriated the aggressor title by provoking conflict in the North at Tavush in June 2020. Furthermore, he claimed that the Pashinyan administration's handing war medals to 70 Armenian soldiers after this conflict with the discourse of defeating Azerbaijan and Turkey constituted warmongering, that the Minister of Defense's "new wars for new territories" discourse did not leave any alternative to Azerbaijan other than a military response. He ended his speech by stating "If I were in power, the war would not have started."

The Armenian Apostolic Church also actively took part in the politics and openly displayed a stance supporting the opposition. In his message on 8 December addressing the Armenian people and the Diaspora, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Karekin II, accused Pashinyan of dictatorial governance and called on him to resign immediately for the country's welfare.<sup>10</sup> The Catholicos also called for the national parliament to act responsibly and elect a new prime minister. The Catholicos of Cilicia (in Antelias/Lebanon), Aram I, did not remain idle either. In his message broadcasted to the Armenian public, he stated "(...) despite the brave resistance of our heroic army against the Turkish-Azerbaijani army we lost. We also lost our national dignity and pride. Our expectation is that the conciliatory transitional government to be formed under the leadership of the new Prime Minister to be elected will give priority to the organization of elections to the National Assembly." Moreover, Aram I declared the year 2021 as the year of "Artsakh" (Karabakh). These high-level clerical statements demonstrated once again how much religion and politics are intertwined and the role of religion in Armenia's politics.

The Diaspora Armenians, mainly in the US and France, also issued declarations of support to Armenia, calling for unity while supporting the opposition to a large degree. A US citizen of Armenian origin, purporting to be employed in the US legislative branch and justice departments, published statements targeting the Pashinyan administration in the name of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), which is the biggest contributor to the Armenian cause in the world. Below are some of the odd claims of this

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9 "Robert Kocharian: The Current Authorities Consciously or Unconsciously did Everything to Make This War Inevitable," *Arminfo*, December 5, 2020, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=58982&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=58982&lang=3)

10 "Catholicos Karekin II Urges Pashinyan to Step Down," *Asbarez*, December 8, 2020, <https://asbarez.com/199029/karekin-ii-urges-pashinyan-to-step-down/>

Diaspora statement, which disparages the Pashinyan administration and exhibits Turcophobia:<sup>11</sup>

“PM Pashinyan abolished the original ministry and created the role of High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs. This new position would serve to coordinate programming between all of the Armenian ministries and diasporan communities. Rather than appointing someone with vast experience in community organizing or with an existing network in the Armenian government, PM Pashinyan appointed Zareh Sinanyan, the former Glendale Parks & Recreation Commissioner, former Glendale City Mayor, and a once law practitioner. High Commissioner Sinanyan then appointed Sara Anjargolian as his Chief of Staff, an Armenian-American attorney with a vast network of ties to American non-governmental organizations and expats living in the Armenian capital of Yerevan. This undynamic duo has failed to demonstrate leadership.”

“After Pashinyan marginalized Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan (arguably the most qualified minister in the present administration), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has become rudderless. With resignation after resignation, the title of Foreign Minister recently landed on Ara Ayvazyan, an individual with no known diplomatic accomplishments that would merit his elevation to the highest diplomatic office.”

“Tigran Khachatryan resigned from the Pashinyan government with the efficiency of a paratrooper jumping from an airplane. Pashinyan then appointed Vahan Kerobyan to the position. The highlights of Kerobyan’s resume are that he managed a supermarket chain in Armenia from 2004 to 2012 and later served as CEO of ‘Menu.am,’ the restaurant delivery start-up in Armenia (which I should mention has terrible reviews). Kerobyan may demonstrate a native business management background but he lacks the credentials and experience to manage economic policy, financial regulation, and foster economic stability in the aftermath of a war. For example, after the capitulation document was announced on November 9th, 2020, Kerobyan seeking to ingratiate himself with Armenia’s war-mongering neighbors, commented in an interview that ‘Turkish ports will open and many vast opportunities will be provided... perhaps the Azerbaijani market will open for us, and our market for Azerbaijan.’ This statement not only betrays Kerobyan’s inability to consider Armenia’s national security but also reveals an astounding failure to understand the calamity of

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11 Sarig Armenian, “The Pashinyan Amateur Hour in Armenia,” *California Courier*, December 15, 2020, <https://www.armenianclub.com/2020/12/15/the-california-courier-online-december-17-2020-2/>

flooding Armenia with cheaper Turkish and Azerbaijani goods, which would undoubtedly destroy entire sectors of Armenia's economy. Kerobyan may be an expert grocer but he has no business running an economy.”

“In this tour of amateurs, the biggest winner is the first lady turned wannabe commando, Mrs. Anna Hakobyan, the prime minister's spouse. Through a series of tone-deaf social media posts, GI Anna appears perfectly coiffed with nails done and a pressed uniform attempting to persuade the audience that she is serving on the battlefield.”

In response to early election pressure, Pashinyan declared on 25 December that he was ready for an early election next year.<sup>12</sup> The oppositional front rejected Pashinyan's early election offer on 28 December. The opposition insisted on their demands that Pashinyan first resign and leave office, that a transitional government be established, and only then should early elections be held. In view of this conditionality, the parliament majority party spokesperson requested Pashinyan to withdraw his early election offer due to the opposition rejecting it.

It was announced on 5 January 2021 that President A. Sarkissian, who spent the new year vacation in the United Kingdom (UK) where his children and grandchildren live, was infected with Covid-19 and taken into quarantine. It was stated that he was taken to the hospital for treatment on 13 January.<sup>13</sup> In his article titled “Towards The Fourth Republic<sup>14</sup>” published on the Presidency's official website on 11 January, A. Sarkissian dwelled in self-criticism and evaluation of the past thirty years. He attributed the failure of defeat to the implementation of certain tactics and policies from the very beginning. He claimed that “the information war was lost both externally and internally, we had only managed to deceive ourselves”. The press comments were that A. Sarkissian, who taught in London during the Soviet period between the years 1984-85, assigned as ambassador to the UK, the EU, Belgium and the Vatican in 1992, assigned to the UK once again as a Special Ambassador during the years 1998-2000, acquired British citizenship, was elected as the first president of the presidential system with former President S. Sargsyan's patronage despite his British citizenship, needed to answer many

12 Avet Demourian, “Armenia's prime minister offers to discuss early election,” *Associated Press*, December 25, 2020, <https://news.yahoo.com/armenias-prime-minister-offers-discuss-200155575.html>

13 “Ermenistan Cumhurbaşkanı Sarkisyan hastaneye kaldırıldı,” *Sputnik Türkiye*, 12 Mart 2021, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/dunya/202103121044017473-ermenistan-cumhurbaskani-sarkisyan-hastaneye-kaldirildi/>

14 Armen Sarkissian, “Towards the Fourth Republic,” *Presidency of Armenia*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2021/01/11/President-Armen-Sarkissians-article/>

of the questions himself while making those criticisms. With this prelude, prosecutors initiated an official criminal investigation on 3 May into renewed allegations that A. Sarkissian was not eligible to serve as head of state because of his past British citizenship. The President and his Office did not immediately react to the development.

The Prime Minister, who traditionally participates in the Orthodox Christmas, did not attend the 6 January celebrations due to his self-isolation from the pandemic. It was claimed in the comments that the real reason was the dispute with the Church and the demands by senior clerics for his resignation. The opposition's calls for Pashinyan's resignation and street demonstrations continued unabated. The former President Kocharyan also increased the level of criticism and made the accusation that "If the Prime Minister of Armenia was Turkey's agent, he would take all the actions that have been taken in Armenia"<sup>15</sup> in a speech on 28 January.

Statements in favor of terrorism also started to surface in such an atmosphere. The "press bureau" of the criminal terror organization ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberalization of Armenia) published a long interview with the terror organization's "political bureau" representative. In the interview, based on anti-Turkish claims and hate mongering, ASALA made the threat that it reserves the right to retaliate by the same logic. It was expressed that the only means for Armenia's sovereignty and security will be Turkey's partition and ensuring Armenia's access to international waters. The importance of the Diaspora was emphasized in this outcome. Additionally, ASALA's political leadership issued a declaration on 20 January celebrating the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASALA's establishment.<sup>16</sup> This declaration stated;

"Armenian Secret Army for the Liberalization of Armenia, with reference to the official applications it has received, decided to 'tactically stop' the actions in the armed struggle for national-independence. However, taking into account the decline of the independent role of the Republic of Armenia and the restriction of its sovereignty, [ASALA] has been invited to revise its attitude towards 'tactical stop' by developing a new strategy of reasonable activity".

The state of emergency that was declared in Armenia on 11 September 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak was extended for six months on 11 January 2021 as the efforts to curb the pandemic failed.

15 "Robert Kocharyan: 'We will win Armenia's next election'," *OC Media*, January 28, 2021, <https://oc-media.org/robert-kocharyan-we-will-win-armenias-next-election/>

16 Barçın Yınanç, "Turkey warns its foreign missions against 'ASALA threat'," *Yetkin Report*, January 28, 2021, <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2021/01/28/turkey-warns-its-foreign-missions-against-asala-threat/>

Pashinyan, who was exposed to the question of the former President S. Sargsyan on why the ballistic Iskander missiles purchased from Russia were not used and to accusations of making mistakes in the 2020 Karabakh War and being responsible for the defeat, explained that these missiles “either didn’t explode at all or only by 10 percent [of them exploded]”. The subject turned into an international argument that led to the reaction and protest from Russia, in which Pashinyan resorted to stepping back with his defense that he was misinformed.<sup>17</sup> Afterwards, Azerbaijan also brought the subject to the agenda and shared records that these missiles were used in Shusha in a way that would cause the civilian casualties.

On 25 January, the Armenian military unexpectedly sided with the opposition groups demanding Pashinyan’s resignation through a declaration issued by the Chief of General Staff and approximately 45 high-level commanders in the Armenian military.<sup>18</sup> In response, Pashinyan qualified the action as a coup attempt and dismissed the Chief of General Staff. Pashinyan accused the Chief of General Staff of attempting to end the “power of the people” through military means with the instigation of former President S. Sargsyan and other opposition leaders. It is understood that the reason which triggered the military to take this action was the Deputy Chief of General Staff refuting Pashinyan’s statement regarding the Iskander missiles in a sarcastic manner during a press interview one day prior and thereupon Pashinyan dismissing the Deputy Chief of General Staff. The legal conclusion of this procedure was dependent on the President’s approval. President A. Sarkissian promptly approved the dismissal of the Deputy Chief of General Staff. However, he abstained from approving the dismissal of the Chief of General Staff, stating that he considered this decision to be improper. Consequently, he initiated a long legal process taking it to the Constitutional Court to enable his return to post.

The entire opposition, former President Kocharyan being in the forefront, protested this dismissal decision and voiced its support for the military. Pashinyan, without waiting for completion of the legal process, announced on 10 March that he assigned retired lieutenant general Davtian, who previously served in this post during the years 2018-2020, as the new Chief of General Staff. President A. Sarkissian did not approve this assignment either, however, de facto did not obstruct the assignment by not forwarding his objection to the Constitutional Court. Pashinyan conducted a meeting in the Ministry of Defense on 22 March for the introduction of the newly

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17 Pavel Felgenhauer, “Russia’s Iskander Missiles Fail in Karabakh but Cause Crisis in Armenia,” *Jamestown Foundation*, February 25, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-iskander-missiles-fail-in-karabakh-but-cause-crisis-in-armenia/>

18 “Ermenistan ordusu muhtıra verdi... Paşinyan: darbe girişimi var,” *Gazete Duvar*, 25 Şubat 2021, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/ermenistan-ordusu-muhtira-verdi-pasinyan-darbe-girisimi-var-haber-1514391>

assigned Chief of General Staff to the military's upper echelons and highlighted in his speech that the military must stay out of politics. On 24 March, it was announced that the state of emergency which was in force since 27 September due to the 2020 Karabakh War had ended by the decision of the parliament.

In this period, during which the inner turmoil and uncertainty was increasing strikingly, President A. Sarkissian repeated his call from 27 February for Pashinyan to resign. Pashinyan invited the people on 28 February to a large rally that would take place on 1 March.<sup>19</sup> He explained that the rally's aim was advocating the democratic constitutional order and the people's power in Armenia. Referring to the disorder following the presidential elections on 1 March 2008 and the clashes that ended with the deaths of ten people in Yerevan, Pashinyan stated "there will be no other clashes in Armenia", announced that he would make statements in the rally regarding the 2008 events, the legal process in which the former President Kocharyan was also a culprit, the recent "military coup attempt", the President's statements and his incomprehensible decision to not approve the Chief of General Staff's dismissal.

In his hour-long speech during the 1 March rally, Pashinyan began by apologizing to the Armenian people for his mistakes, expressed that the new constitution, which was ratified in 2015 and entered into force in 2018, did not fulfill the requirements and has many shortcomings and suggested conducting a national referendum in October 2021 to adopt a new constitution or making amendments to the current one.<sup>20</sup> He also repeated his suggestion of an early election if the parties represented in the parliament came to an agreement. The Security Council of Armenia made a statement on the same day, "strongly condemning all attempts wishing to pull the army into the political process", called on the President to approve the decision to dismiss the Chief of General Staff.

To resolve the political tension and uncertainty, of which President A. Sarkissian was also a part of, Pashinyan met with the President on 13 March and evaluated the early election suggestion. After Pashinyan met with the opposition parties in the parliament on 18 March, he officially announced his decision to conduct snap elections on 20 June. Thus, Armenia would be going to the early election polls for the third time in four years. In accordance with

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19 "Ermenistan'da Darbe Girişimi: Paşinyan Halkı Sokağa Çağırıldı," *TRT Haber*, 25 Şubat 2021, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ermenistanda-darbe-girisimi-pasinyan-halki-sokaga-cagirdi-559515.html>

20 "Ermenistan Başbakanı Paşinyan: Erken Seçime Hazırım, Darbe Girişiminin Sorumlusu Eski Cumhurbaşkanı Serj Sarkisyan," *BBC Türkçe*, 1 Mart 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-56237502>

the procedure required in the Constitution for the conducting of early elections, Pashinyan announced that he would resign on 28 March. He also pointedly explained that a new candidate would not be elected in his place, that he would serve his duty ad interim with full authority.

In a trustworthy public opinion survey conducted on 31 March upon the early election becoming certain, it was estimated that Pashinyan's party could receive %31.7 of the votes, the other two parties within the Parliament %2.7 and %2.4, former President Kocharyan %4.4 from outside of the Parliament, and the other groups could receive more marginal votes. It was indicated that %24.6 of the survey's participants would not vote for anyone and %20 of the participants were undecided. Yet, in a Gallup poll on 18 June, Kocharyan appeared to lead with 28.7% against Pashinyan's 25.2%. In a relevant statement, the opposition leader in the parliament informed that he would not support Pashinyan in the case of a coalition becoming necessary after the election and that they wanted neither Pashinyan nor Kocharyan to become prime minister. On the eve of election day, there was much speculation of polarization of equal strength and such dire predictions that there would be clashes after the elections as stated by Ter-Petrosyan.

On 31 March, the Minister of High-Tech Industry was forced to resign following the reaction caused by him slapping a journalist in a restaurant. Tavush Governor Hayk Chobanyan was assigned in his place on 2 April.<sup>21</sup>

On 23 April, the Labor and Social Affairs Minister handed in his resignation after only five months in office. He was promptly relieved of his duties. He gave no reasons for his resignation and neither did the Prime Minister.

In a surprising move, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayvazyan announced on 27 May his resignation just hours after an emergency meeting of the Security Council where Pashinyan is reported to have proposed deployment of observers from Russia or other OSCE Minsk Group countries to ease tensions on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. In a public address, Ayvazyan said "The reason for my decision to resign was to make sure that there are never any suspicions that this ministry could take some steps or agree to some ideas, initiatives going against out statehood and national interests". Pashinyan responded to those remarks through his press secretary as follows: "While we thank Mr. Ayvazyan for his work, we believe our national and state interests require Mr. Ayvazyan to publicly explain who, where and how was going to take some step or to make decisions contradicting our country's national and state interests". No further comments on part of Ayvazyan were forthcoming,

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21 "Hayk Chobanyan appointed Minister of High Technological Industry," *ArmenPress*, April 2, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1047905.html>

but the three deputy ministers as well as the speaker of the ministry rendered their resignations shortly after, curtailing the function of the ministry. Only on 15 July, former Secretary General of the Security Council Armen Grigorian was appointed as First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, seen as being slated to the vacant ministerial position ahead of the formation of the new cabinet.

On 20 July, Defense Minister Harutiunian, appointed on 20 November shortly after the defeat, resigned ahead of the expected installation of the new cabinet. In a related development, another general, A. Karapetian was appointed as the First Deputy Defense Minister.

The Armenian Parliament ratified certain amendments in the election law during early April. The opposition claimed that these amendments, which were planned prior to the early election, envisages amendments in favor of the ruling party and would compromise the legitimacy of the elections if they were finalized.

The former President Kocharyan, who was standing trial for the accusation of contravening the constitutional order was acquitted despite all Pashinyan's efforts and attempts for his conviction. Following the verdict, Pashinyan accused the judges of being "the supporters of the old regime". Kocharyan immediately filed a lawsuit for moral compensation against Pashinyan on 8 April with the claim of disdain and personal defamation.<sup>22</sup> Within this context, Armenian President A. Sarkissian refused to sign a bill, which was approved by the parliament with the government's support, on the grounds that he considered it as a threat to the opposition's judicial independence. He considered it to be unconstitutional and forwarded it to the Constitutional Court for review.<sup>23</sup>

Another clash with the President came when A. Sarkissian blocked a bill passed by the National Assembly in March which would empower the government to appoint most members of the boards that elect university rectors and make other key decisions. On 22 April, he announced his decision not to sign the bill on being "contentious in terms of constitutionality".<sup>24</sup> He also asked the Constitutional Court to rule on its conformity with the constitution. Pashinyan nevertheless put the bill into circulation with an executive order in early May<sup>25</sup>.

22 "Armenia ex-President Kocharyan sues PM Pashinyan," *APA.az*, April 8, 2021, <https://apa.az/en/cis-countries-news/Armenia-ex-President-Kocharyan-sues-PM-Pashinyan-346343>

23 "Armenian President Objects to 'Unconstitutional' Bill on Court," *Azatutyun*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31199835.html>

24 "Armenian President Blocks Another Government Bill," *Azatutyun*, April 23, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31219190.html>

25 "Government seeks to take over three public universities," *Asbarez*, June 12, 2021, <https://asbarez.com/government-wants-to-take-over-3-public-universities/>

Armenia's Central Election Commission approved on 31 May a record of 22 parties and 4 alliances to run in the 20 June snap elections<sup>26</sup>. To be represented in the Parliament of 107 seats, there is a threshold; the parties need to win at least 5% of the votes, while alliances need at least 7%. The election campaign was officially launched on 7 June to last until 18 June. Bitter recriminations were traded during the campaign. On the campaign trail, Pashinyan pledged to "purge" the state bureaucracy and wage "political vendetta against those heads of communities and entities who [were] trying to coerce people"<sup>27</sup>. He also criticized the Apostolic Church during several rallies. Top level officials of the Church had earlier expressed "deep concern" over "hate speech" by political forces during the campaign. Pashinyan said, "they are telling us that we are trying to discredit the Armenian Apostolic Church and traditional values. No, those values are discredited by corrupt clergymen". The Church responded to the accusations with a written statement, rejecting "unfair accusations" of the Prime Minister. It is well known that Pashinyan has had frosty relations with Catholicos Karekin II throughout his three-year tenure.

Of the four alliances, the largest bloc was that of Kocharyan's "Armenia" bloc. Early on, the Dashnaksutyun, which has branches in Armenian Diaspora, most prominently in the US with financial support and political headquarters, followed by France, had officially confirmed that they would join forces with Kocharyan. In fact, the Dashnaksutyun was allied with Kocharyan during his presidential term of 1998-2008. It was not represented in the parliament, as it received only about 4% of the votes in the December 2018 elections. Kocharyan was probably counting on the Dashnaksutyun as he warned of post-election protests should the result not be clear cut. In fact, the Dashnaksutyun came out with a declaration on 27 May, published in the US-based Armenian newspaper *Asbarez*, demanding the immediate de facto removal of Pashinyan and the appointment of a new interim head of government<sup>28</sup>. It went further on extorting "The inaction by members of the government and law enforcement in this matter makes them an accomplice and each of them bears individual responsibility for the failures of the country's security diplomatic efforts".

Two other alliances were formed around former Presidents Ter-Petrosyan and S. Sargsyan. S. Sargsyan's Republican Party announced an alliance with the party of former National Security Service Director Venetsian, which was named "I have the Honor". Both Kocharyan and Venetsian based their

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26 "26 Parties, Blocs Cleared For Armenian Elections," *Azatutyun*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31283049.html>

27 "Pashinian Vows Post-Election 'Vendettas'," *Azatutyun*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31296393.html>

28 "Armenia ARF Calls for Pashinyan's Immediate Removal," *HyeTert*, May 27, 2021, <https://hyertert.org/2021/05/27/armenia-arf-calls-for-pashinyans-immediate-removal/>

campaign pledges on closer ties with Russia. Venetsian repeatedly called for Armenia's "deeper integration" with Russia. Kocharyan, known for his close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, also repeatedly made a case for much closer ties with Russia. Pashinyan on the other hand, who decided to run with his own party, the Civil Contract, played to the West, the US, France, and the EU, while also vowing to deepen Russian-Armenian ties.

The official results of the 20 June elections revealed a landslide victory for the Civil Contract Party of Pashinyan. He received 687,251 votes (53.92%), the Armenia bloc of Kocharyan 21.04%, and the third eligible to enter the parliament, "I have the Honor" Bloc, 5.23%. The Civil Contract Party thus obtained a constitutional majority to form a government. Of the 107 seats in the new parliament, Civil Contract received 71 seats, the Armenia bloc 29, I Have the Honor bloc 7. The ruling party has thus a larger proportion of seats as the two dozen other contenders could not clear the legal threshold despite polling a combined 20% of the vote<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, Pashinyan's party will be one vote short of the two-thirds parliamentary majority required to amend the constitution, calling a referendum, or impeaching the president.

Despite this incontestable showing, the opposition objected the results for irregularities and applied to the Constitutional Court, but as expected, to no avail. Kocharyan for his part predicted that snap elections might be held again in a year and a half. The two opposition blocs also wavered in their decisions whether to take up their seats in the Parliament or to boycott it. Finally, both decided to take part. However, Kocharyan gave up his seat for a party member on the grounds that he is an executive and not a legislator. The new parliament is scheduled to assemble for its first meeting on 2 August.

The economy was also critically impacted within this period. The fragile structure collapsed due to the pandemic and the war. Armenia's public debt soared by more than 1 billion to 8.65 billion Dollars or 63.5% of the GDP. The Central Bank raised its main interest rate in May, for the third time in five months, to 6%.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) sent during the first half of December a 37 million Dollar portion of the 443 million Dollar support assistance (stand-by) it approved in May 2020. Thus, the total loan received reached 332 million Dollars. In his statement on 14 January, the Minister of Economy indicated that Armenia's economy had shrunk by 8.5% in 2020. The Minister stated that exports, imports, and domestic consumption experienced a decrease of 20% in total. The President of the Central Bank explained on 2 February that a

29 "Armenian premier's party wins parliamentary vote: Unofficial results," *Anadolu Agency*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/armenian-premier-s-party-wins-parliamentary-vote-unofficial-results/2280280>

7.8% recession was foreseen in the economy in 2020. In addition, the Central Bank President stated that 750 million Dollars-worth of Eurobonds were issued, and the interest of the ten-year bonds would be 3.875%. The economic growth envisaged for 2021 dropped from 2% to 1.4%.<sup>30</sup> The IMF reaffirmed in April its earlier projection that Armenia's economy would grow only 1 percent in 2021 after shrinking by 7.6 % in 2020.

In its statement on 5 February, the Armenian Statistical Committee (*Armstat*) informed that Armenia's foreign trade volume decreased to 7.1 billion Dollars with a 13.2% drop in comparison to 2019.<sup>31</sup> Russia is the leading country with regards to the foreign trade. Mutual trade decreased by 3.5% in comparison 2019, becoming 2.155 billion Dollars. China came in second place with the trade volume increasing by 2% in comparison with 2019, reaching 964 million Dollars. Switzerland reached 485 million Dollars, the EU 276 million Dollars, and the US 152 million Dollars.

The World Bank cautioned in its April report that its GDP projection is a baseline scenario which assumes that the country will avoid pandemic related lockdowns and further political upheavals. The report said, "the risks to the Outlook are weighted heavily to the downside".

## 2. Developments Following the 2020 Karabakh War

The 2020 Karabakh War, which started on 27 September 2020, lasted for 44 days and ended with the ceasefire agreement signed on 9 November in Moscow by the Azerbaijani President and Armenian Prime Minister in the presence and with the participation of the President of Russia. The ceasefire provisions were duly respected towards ending the fighting. Armenian occupied territory of Aghdam was returned on 20 November, Keljeber was returned on 25 November, and Lachin was returned to Azerbaijan on 1 December. The Armenian government, feeling the brunt of the defeat, put all its efforts to healing the wounds of the war and preventing the instability and chaos caused by the few but militant and influential internal opposition. On the other side, there was urgent need to prepare a peace strategy.

The initial steps taken by the Armenian administration indicated that it had not derived the necessary lessons from its wrong and unlawful Karabakh policy, as it was still searching for ways to become a garrison state and reach

30 "IMF Staff Concludes Visit to Republic of Armenia," *International Monetary Fund*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/04/21/pr21111-armenia-imf-staff-concludes-visit-to-republic-of-armenia>

31 Karine Melikyan, "Armenia's Foreign Trade Turnover Decreased in 2020 by 13.2% per annum," *Finport*, February 9, 2021, [https://finport.am/full\\_news.php?id=43617&lang=3](https://finport.am/full_news.php?id=43617&lang=3)

its expansionist ambitions through military power instead of establishing regional cooperation and good neighborly relations. The Armenian administration did not have a free hand in pursuing this radical approach, as it was under intense pressure from the Diaspora militants, the Apostolic Church (more overtly from the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias) and encouragement from its all too well-known western sympathizers.

On 25 November, the French Senate adopted a resolution recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent republic.<sup>32</sup> The other wing of the parliament, the French National Assembly followed suit with 188 votes and only 3 rejections. In his address to the members of the parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France Jean-Yves Le Drian stated “I hear your anger, your fears, your questions that you ask, however, I do not share the objective of this resolution, namely the recognition, because our Armenian friends are not asking us to do that. They themselves haven’t recognized [Karabakh].” He expressed objection, not to the principle or incorrect legal aspects, but to its written formulation. During the same time frame, the Foreign Ministry State Secretary went to Armenia, together with French officials, aid organizations and the Armenian community activists in France, with the aim of delivering in person the second batch of the aid material to the Karabakh Armenians. Le Drian also made accusatory statements against Turkey.

President of France Emmanuel Macron, who accused Azerbaijan in the very beginning of the Karabakh War and criticized Turkey for her firm political and military support for Azerbaijan, met with the Armenian community representatives in France during a dinner event and criticized Pashinyan. Macron expressed that Pashinyan did not call him prior to or just after the signing of the 9 November ceasefire agreement, did not inform him that he was forced to sign such an agreement, or consult with him on what could be done to alleviate the results of the agreement. Macron said, “After all, I am the president of an OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing country. Why didn’t he inform me, or ask for assistance before or after signing?” and asked the Armenian community representatives present at the dinner how they expected France to act - stay in the Minsk Group and continue to assist the negotiation process, or push the “Artsakh” recognition process forward, leaving the Minsk Group.<sup>33</sup>

32 “Turkey: France’s resolution recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as independent republic ‘biased, unrealistic’,” *Daily Sabah*, November 26, 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-frances-resolution-recognizing-nagorno-karabakh-as-independent-republic-biased-unrealistic>

33 “Newspaper: France’s Macron expresses bewilderment over Armenia’s Pashinyan,” *News.am*, December 26, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/621007.html>

The other Minsk Group co-chair, the US, also showed its colors in a short time. The US House of Representatives Resolution no. 1165, which was presented to the House on 1 October 2020 and sent to the Foreign Relations Commission within the period, is sufficiently enlightening. Some of the articles of the text are here below:<sup>34</sup>

“Condemning Azerbaijan’s military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh and denouncing Turkish interference in the conflict.”

“According to multiple reports, including the Washington Post, Reuters, and the Guardian, in the weeks prior to Azerbaijan’s military operation Turkey recruited mercenaries from Syria and, as of September 29, 2020 and has facilitated their deployment to Azerbaijan.”

“According to newspaper reports of the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Turkey shot down an Armenian Su–25 fighter jet in Armenian airspace, killing the pilot. That the House of Representatives:

1. Condemns Azerbaijan’s continued aggressive military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh and breaches of the cease-fire agreement,
2. Denounces Turkey’s reported participation in and escalation of the conflict under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,
3. Supports an immediate return to the cease-fire agreement along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan and a peaceful solution which protects all parties’ human rights and joins with other countries supporting the same goals; and,
4. Reaffirms United States support of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group efforts to secure an agreement from Azerbaijan to cease offensive military operations against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and to accept independent third-party monitoring along the line of contact.”

The US-Armenian Diaspora’s supporters in the US Congress and the strength of their lobbies was observed once again, this time after the war with an anti-Azerbaijan resolution. Azerbaijan, which was in the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Bill’s list, together with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, regarding preparing reports for and aiding displaced people, was removed from the list.

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34 “H.Res.1165 - Condemning Azerbaijan’s military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh and denouncing Turkish interference in the conflict,” *US Congress*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/house-resolution/1165/actions?r=1&s=1>

Acting Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Reeker made the following statements on 8 December at the US Congress' Helsinki Commission: "We have expressed our concern about Turkey's role, the foreign militants being brought in, weapons being provided. These are issues of concern and remain a part of our dialogue with Turkey and Russia.<sup>35</sup>" The Acting Assistant Secretary hereby stated that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs would go to Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Despite the revealing of the partiality and dysfunctionality of the two members of the Minsk Group co-chairmanship to such a degree, practically disqualifying themselves, their aspirations and ambitions for continuing with their role have not decreased. On the occasion of the OSCE Council of Ministers meeting held in Tirana on 3 December, the three co-chairs made a statement at the ministerial level confirming the continuation of the process. In the statement issued on the OSCE website, the co-chairs expressed their satisfaction with regard to the cessation of the hostilities through the 9 November ceasefire agreement, stated their concerns and sentiments in support of Armenia in a covert manner, through a well disguised effort to give the appearance of an impartial approach. The co-chair states called for the parties to promptly initiate negotiations for a lasting and sustainable peace agreement within the ceasefire environment and under the supervision of the co-chairs. In this framework, the co-chairs made a call to the to parties to receive them in their respective countries as early as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the two co-chairs visited Baku on 12-13 December and Yerevan on 13-14 December.<sup>37</sup> The third co-chair, Russia, was represented during these visits by its ambassadors in these capitals. The statement made by the co-chairs following this imposed visit indicated that it was neither efficacious nor was a concrete result achieved.

The Diaspora Armenians and the Armenian Apostolic Church also not accepting the defeat, spearheaded a revanchist and militant approach during the period. The Dashnaksutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation-ARF), which is not represented in the Armenian Parliament, assumed a leading role. Deriving its strength and support mainly from the organizations in the US and France, it called for the international community, through its communique issued on 11 December, to take action. The communique targeted Azerbaijan and Turkey. Some of the statements in the text are as follows:

35 "U.S. is Concerned with Turkey's Role in Karabakh," *Asbarez*, December 8, 2020, <https://asbarez.com/199036/u-s-is-concerned-with-turkeys-role-in-karabakh/>

36 "Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries," *OSCE*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/472419>

37 "Statement of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs," *OSCE*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/473649>

“During a military parade in Baku on December 10, 2020, the leaders of Turkey and Azerbaijan took the liberty of making declarations that amount to hate speech, threatening the physical existence of the Armenians living on Armenian lands, and questioning the territorial integrity of the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh (Karabakh).

The Azeri leader did not hesitate, once again, to consider Syunik [Zengazur], Gegharkunik [Sevan] and the capital Yerevan as Azerbaijani territories. Furthermore, the Turkish leader, by invoking the name of Enver, crowned himself a successor of one of the greatest executioners of the Armenian people. [...]

It is also evident that after the November 9 trilateral declaration, Turkey is pursuing its policy of destabilizing regions, especially the South Caucasus, with renewed vigor, by overtly pursuing its long-held goal of uniting the Turkish-speaking people from Azerbaijan—through Armenia’s southern territories—to Central Asia. [...]

[...] the Armenian Revolutionary Federation calls on the international community, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries and partner international organizations to closely monitor and prevent Turkey’s expansionist policies [...]<sup>38</sup>

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), which is Armenian Diaspora’s largest and most powerful organization, whose headquarters is located in the US, also issued a communique on 11 December calling on the Armenian people to be united. The AGBU called for the Prime Minister’s resignation and the forming of a transitional period government. It was expressed that the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, which has been “the people’s beacon of hope in their 1700-year history”, had a role to play in this process. The current period Armenia is passing through was defined as constituting a “defining moment” and it was expressed that;

“As an organization that has accompanied our nation on its arduous journey since our founding in 1906 and has stood by our nation through both Ottoman and Soviet governance, as well as independence, we solemnly renew our pledge to ensure the bright future of Armenia, to the reconstruction of our ravaged Artsakh, and to our mission to tend to the humanitarian and social needs of our people in Armenia and across the globe”.<sup>39</sup>

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38 “ARF Bureau strongly condemns statements by Azeri and Turkish leaders,” *Armenian Weekly*, December 12, 2020, <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/12/12/arf-bureau-strongly-condemns-statements-by-azeri-and-turkish-leaders/>

39 “AGBU Statement on Transition Government,” *Armenian General Benevolent Union*, December 11, 2020, <https://agbu.org/news-item/agbu-statement-on-transition-government/>

Certainly, also under the influence of these discourses, the Armenian administration began faltering between the options of a peaceful, realistic approach and pursuing their radical dreams. The newly installed Minister of Foreign Affairs, who carries the primary responsibility of expressing Armenia's peace strategy to the world, let alone learning lessons from the fanatical mistakes of his predecessor, continued revealing the same fanaticism in a more inept manner. Some of the Minister's statements during the 27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council are as follows:

“During the 44 days of war Azerbaijan and Turkey, in a clear defiance of their international obligations, and in violations of their commitments towards the OSCE, despite numerous calls made by OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair countries, despite three agreements to cease hostilities, despite persistent calls of international community, continued the offensive. The aggression was accompanied by numerous gross violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts, by war crimes including deliberate targeting of civilian population and critical infrastructure, executions, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war and civilian captives, beheadings, mutilation of dead bodies and other well documented crimes with the ultimate purpose of ‘ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population from their ancestral lands.’ “The actions of Azerbaijan and its allies [Turkey] created new dangerous precedent for addressing conflict situations in the area of responsibility of the OSCE. Turkey recruited, transferred and deployed foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists from Syria and Libya in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. Secondly, Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh] was greatly instigated and supported politically and militarily by the Turkish leadership in its pursuit of expansionist power projection into the South Caucasus and beyond. Thirdly, Azerbaijan and its allies unleashed the war against Artsakh falsely claiming the legitimate right to use force, which is a clear breach of international law. Furthermore, Azerbaijan and Turkey now insist that the situation resulting from the use of force, aggression and war, large-scale violations of international law, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, should be considered as resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”<sup>40</sup>

The Minister listed the factors of a lasting and sustainable peace in the region as follows:

“-Status of Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh] based on realization of the right of self-determination, security of its people,

40 Ara Aivazian, “Statement by Ara Aivazian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia at the 27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, December 3, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2020/12/03/OSCE\\_Ministerial/10688](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2020/12/03/OSCE_Ministerial/10688)

- De-occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh,
- Safe and dignified return to their homes of the recently displaced population of Artsakh,
- Preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage on the territories that fell under the control of Azerbaijan.<sup>41</sup>

The Minister finished his words by emphasizing that the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can only be achieved through the negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship. Moreover, he did not omit mentioning Turkey's "well-known genocidal record" against Armenians. A comment that could be made for these surrealist expectations and statements would probably be "no comment".

The most important development following the 9 November ceasefire agreement was the Azerbaijani President and Armenian Prime Minister coming together once again in Moscow on 10 January 2021 by the invitation of the Russian President and signing a 4 article accord on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The text of the accord is as follows:

“1. For the purpose of implementing the 9th point of the November 9, 2020 statement, which refers to the unblocking of all economic and transport links in the region, we support Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin’s proposal to create a trilateral Working Group under the joint chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation.

2. The Working Group will hold its first meeting by January 30, 2021, according to the results of which it will draw up a list of primary tasks arising from the implementation of the aforementioned Paragraph 9 of the Statement. The priorities shall include rail and road communications, as well as the identification of other directions as agreed upon by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation, hereinafter referred to as the Parties.

3. In order to implement the primary directions, the Working Group’s co-chairs will approve the composition of expert subgroups in these areas from among the officials of the competent authorities and organizations of the Parties. Within a month after the Working Group’s meeting, the expert subgroups will submit a list of projects, which

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41 Aivazian, “Statement by Ara Aivazian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia at the 27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.”

should specify the necessary resources and activities for their implementation and approval at the highest level by the Parties.

4. By March 1, 2021, the Working Group shall submit for the Parties' approval at the highest level a list and timetable of activities to restore or build new transport infrastructure necessary for initiating, implementing and providing for the safety of international traffic through the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, as well as ensuring the safety of transportations carried out by the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia through the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia."<sup>42</sup>

The working groups assembled and started with their work in accordance with the envisaged modality and time frames. Russian President Putin, who called his counterparts in Azerbaijan and Armenia on 12 March, evaluated the developments in Karabakh with his interlocutors. The issued statement signified positive developments and it was expressed that the activities of the working groups, established in January, were satisfactory.

The 10 January Moscow high level meeting showed once again Russia's role, interest, sincerity, and influence towards regional economic cooperation. It was also another indication that the OSCE Minsk Group was being sidelined. Following the meeting, Pashinyan expressed that he was pleased with achieving some outcomes after these meetings, however he was upset that no progress was made regarding the exchange of prisoners of war. Pashinyan's statements concerning his meeting with Putin were as follows:

"I am certain that the agreements formulated in our joint statement can seriously help change the economy in the region and seriously increase the potential for investments. However, in my opinion, the economic issues will become difficult to solve, if the humanitarian issues aren't solved and, of course, as I already said, the humanitarian issue related to the exchange of prisoners of war, missing persons and bodies of deceased is the most sensitive and most painful issue for us Armenians.

I would like to thank you for supporting this position. Of course, your personal contribution to the peace process is very, very tangible, especially now after the well-known events. I am certain that the relations between Armenia and Russia will grow deeper. Russia has been and remains Armenia's key strategic ally... also in the security

42 "Joint statement issued following meeting between Nikol Pashinyan, Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev," *Prime Ministry of Armenia*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2021/01/11/Nikol-Pashinyan-Moscow-meeting-Announcement/>

sector. Of course, we need to discuss not only the future of the region, but also the agenda for bilateral relations, and I am glad for this meeting and this opportunity.”

The accord achieved in Moscow and the new document signed sparked intense reactions in Armenia. The opposition called it Pashinyan’s “second treason”. Turkey was a prominent subject in the criticisms. Premonitions regarding Turkey’s interest for the southern corridor, that Turkish investments will dominate the Armenian economy were voiced. Pashinyan expressed the following in his statement upon his return:

“Regretfully, a single meeting couldn’t bring a solution to all issues. I hope, we will proceed and want to stress that one of the most important issues pending implementations are those related to the humanitarian aspect, in particular, the exchange of war prisoners, as envisaged by Point 8 of the November 9 trilateral statement. Armenia is ready to continue the talks under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group.”

A statement of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov issued on 18 January brought clarity to the subject. Lavrov explained that “The status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved and it must be a subject of future Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, Russia imposed obligations as of 8 February for foreigners to travel through the Lachin corridor that they would be under their supervision and would need to obtain permits beforehand.

On 12 January, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayvazyan sent a comprehensive letter to the UN Secretary General accusing and criticizing Azerbaijan in a multi-faceted manner regarding the post-war situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>44</sup> While it was indicated through a document signed a day prior in Moscow by the Prime Minister himself that progress and cooperation was achieved in the implementation of the ceasefire provisions, Ayvazyan’s letter revealed the degree of how much the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Prime Ministry were disconnected and how much discord existed within the Armenian Administration. On the other hand, the adverse discourses expressed several times within the period have created the impression that conscious and arranged attempts were being made to use different discourses for Russia and separate discourses for third parties. Such appeared to be the new period’s “multi-vector” foreign policy.

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43 Aza Babayan, “Deal On Karabakh’s Status Not Urgent For Russia”, *Azatutyun*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31051257.html>

44 “The letter of Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian to the UN Secretary General,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, January 13, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/01/13/UN\\_SG\\_letter/10751](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/01/13/UN_SG_letter/10751)

In late-January, the Turkish-Russian joint monitoring center was established to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire agreement which began its field duty.<sup>45</sup>

Through a decision taken on 12 March by the illegitimate separatist Armenian administration in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian language was approved as the second official language.<sup>46</sup> This decision, which is clearly seen as a step taken with the intention of obtaining Russia's support, will likely be evaluated as a self-ingratiating move.

On 1 April, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs discussed the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia separately and evaluated the final situation. It was expressed in the statement issued by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the three ministers discussed humanitarian issues and the region's economic and transport corridors.

On 13 April, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs issued a new joint declaration. The essence of the declaration is the co-chairs' and OSCE term president special representative's expression of intent for playing a leading part in the developments hereafter. It remains to be seen how realistic and applicable this will prove to be. A relevant clue can be found in the words of the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov at his press conference on 6 May during his visit to Armenia. In response to the statement of his host Armenian Foreign Minister Aivazyan that Armenia is interested in strengthening the mediation mission of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, Lavrov described the work of the Minsk Group co-chairs as "needed" but went on to qualify it as follows:

"Russia, having played a decisive role in stopping the war, is more interested than anyone else in seeing everything done in practice. We have no doubt that when the Armenians and Azerbaijanis begin to feel the benefits of a peaceful life and when all sanctions and blockades are lifted, they will begin to treat the issues that today some of our colleagues are trying to bring to the fore in a different way.

"There is no need to politicize the process today while the issues of the opening of communications in the region and delimitations of the borders are being discussed. These are practical and understandable things that need to be resolved in order for the region to breathe freely. Those who propose leaving these issues for later and those who are now

45 "Türk-Rus Ortak Merkezi'nin İlk Görüntüleri Ortaya Çıktı," *Sözcü*, 30 Ocak 2021, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/dunya/turk-rus-ortak-merkezinin-ilk-goruntuleri-ortaya-cikti-6235796/>

46 "Russian Language To Get Official Status In Nagorno-Karabakh," *RFL/RL*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-language-official-status-nagorno-karabakh/31169752.html>

engaging in political discussions are turning the process upside down. Political issues are easier to solve when people begin to live a normal life.”<sup>47</sup>

As Armenia decided to hold snap elections, three issues came to the fore with regard to Karabagh and fully exploited during the campaign with strong populist appeal. These were the return of war prisoners, maps for demining the formerly occupied territories, and border demarcations.

The Armenian Defense Ministry announced that on 12 May that Azerbaijani Armed Forces had attempted to carry out “certain activities” in the Syunik (Zangezur) border. Prime Minister Pashinyan then claimed that the Azerbaijani Armed Forces had crossed Armenia’s border and had moved 3.5 kilometers into the country. Pashinyan officially applied the next day to the Collective Security Council’s (CSTO) Chairperson in Office to initiate the mechanism of immediately launching emergency consultations to come to the aid of Armenia. A day later, Pashinyan criticized the CSTO for not publicly siding with Armenia. Frustrated with the inaction of CSTO, Pashinyan tried extortion tactics, saying that he could turn to the UN Security Council if the CSTO or the joint Russian-Armenian military contingent were not enough to resolve the problem. Once again, he could not convince his allies of his concocted Azerbaijani aggression tale.<sup>48</sup>

Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry drew attention to the fact that the border between the two South Caucasus states had not been properly demarcated ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union, that Soviet-era maps are the only indicators and affirmed unambiguously that Azerbaijan’s soldiers did not cross into Armenia<sup>49</sup>.

The French President intervened the same day, expressing strong support for Armenia in its ongoing border standoff with Azerbaijan. He said that he was considering taking the issue to the UN Security Council and with a UN mandate France was also prepared to provide, if necessary, military support to international efforts to resolve this issue. The US for its part urged Azerbaijan to immediately withdraw its troops. A US State Department

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47 “Russian FM Lavrov’s visit to Armenia leaves many questions unanswered,” *Jam News*, May 6, 2021, <https://jam-news.net/russian-fm-lavrovs-visit-to-armenia-leaves-many-questions-unanswered/>

48 “CSTO Rejects Yerevan’s Appeal for Help in Armenia Border Breach by Azerbaijan,” *Asbarez*, July 4, 2021, <https://asbarez.com/csto-rejects-yerevans-appeal-for-help-in-armenia-border-breach-by-azerbaijan/>

49 “No:199/21, Information of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on another provocation by Armenia in the direction of Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no19921-information-of-the-press-service-department-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-on-another-provocation-by-armenia-in-the-direction-of-kalbajar-region-of-azerbaijan>

spokesperson told the reporters, “We expect Azerbaijan to pull back all forces immediately and cease further provocations. Military movements in disputed territories are irresponsible and they are also unnecessarily provocative. Border demarcation issues should be resolved through negotiation and discussion.”<sup>50</sup> The EU High Representative issued a written statement saying that the EU was following closely the worrying developments along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and asked both sides to exercise utmost restraint and to de-escalate the situation.

Russia was instrumental again, arranging three partite contacts and meetings at the border with a view to engaging the two sides for the demarcation and delimitation of their internationally recognized border. The Russian Foreign Minister said Moscow proposed that the two sides set up a commission on the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and expressed readiness to participate in its activities as a “consultant or mediator”. On 21 May, Armenia’s Secretary of the Security Council said that a new Armenia-Azerbaijan-Russia trilateral group would be created which would finally determine the country’s borders.

President of Armenia, who would be expected to contribute to the easing of tension, did an insidious move and issued a statement on 19 May, calling on the Defense Ministry, the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and the National Security Service to make all possible efforts and take the toughest measures against the encroachments on Armenia’s territorial integrity and border violations.

The November 9 Moscow cease-fire agreement called for the unconditional release of all prisoners held by the conflicting sides. It is known that several prisoner swaps took place, arranged by the Russian peacekeepers stationed in Karabagh. Armenia asserts that Azerbaijan has not complied and has not returned more than one hundred prisoners. Azerbaijan does not deny the existence of some detained Armenians, but says they are not covered by the cease-fire agreement because they were captured inside Azerbaijan territory after the 9 November agreement and detained for carrying out acts of sabotage and terrorism. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has been subject to international criticism and pressure to free all such prisoners or detainees.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has serious grievances stemming from non-delivery of maps of the minefields in territories that the Armenian military withdrew, considering it a breach of understanding of the agreement. Since the ceasefire, seven soldiers and 15 civilians had been killed and many more

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50 “State calls for Azerbaijan to pull back forces from Armenia border,” *The Hill*, May 14, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/553648-state-calls-for-azerbaijan-to-pull-back-forces-from-armenia-border>

wounded due to mine explosions. The death of two Azerbaijani journalists and a local government official in a land mine explosion on 4 June in an area opening for displaced civilian population to return brought the problem to international attention. An EU parliament resolution of 18 May called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to cooperate on issues including “the provision of maps of minefields” and to “provide available maps of minefields to permit civilians to return to former conflict regions.”<sup>51</sup>

In a relevant development addressing the two issues simultaneously, a deal was brokered by the US and Georgia on 13 June whereby Azerbaijan set free 15 Armenian prisoners after receiving information from Armenia about minefields around Karabagh<sup>52</sup>. In a deal brokered by Russia, Azerbaijan set 15 more Armenian prisoners free on 4 July. They were flown from Baku to Yerevan by a Russian military transport. In a statement to the press in Yerevan, the commander of Russian peacekeeping forces said that earlier he had handed over to Azerbaijan Armenian maps detailing the location of thousands of landmines in two districts South of Karabagh recaptured by Azerbaijani forces during the Autumn war.

On 9-10 July, Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan organized a tour for the diplomatic corps to the recently recovered historical Azerbaijani city of Shusha in Karabagh<sup>53</sup>. The reaction of official Armenia was astonishing and telling. The heads of the diplomatic missions of the participating countries were called to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be delivered a verbal note stating that Armenia considered it utterly unacceptable the visit of diplomatic representatives accredited in Azerbaijan to the occupied territories of Karabagh. The Ministry acknowledged that it further delivered this message in the capitals of respective countries which do not have resident diplomatic missions in Armenia. It is an incontrovertible evidence of militant and expansionist dreams, in total contradiction with the cease-fire agreement and acknowledgement of defeat. Pashinyan could have been given the benefit of doubt had this taken place before the snap elections, but after a landslide victory which granted him the authority to act with common sense and follow realistic, peaceful policies, he has once again revealed how fickle he can be.

In view of the machinations of the Armenian regime, the warning made by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on 14 July did not come

51 “Azerbaijan demands “mine maps” from Armenia,” *Eurasianet*, June 11, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-demands-mine-maps-from-armenia>

52 “Georgian mediation obtains the release of 15 Armenian POWs by Azerbaijan,” *Euractiv*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgian-mediation-obtains-the-release-of-15-armenian-pows-by-azerbaijan/>

53 “Azərbaycandakı diplomatik korpusun nümayəndələri Şuşa qalası ilə tanış olublar,” *APA*, 9 Temmuz 2021, <https://apa.az/az/xeber/xarici-siyaset/azerbaycandaki-diplomatik-korpusun-numayendeleri-susa-qalasi-ile-tanis-olublar-foto-651928>

unwarranted. He complained that Armenia was reluctant to sign a “peace treaty”. He said such a treaty must commit the two sides to recognizing each other’s territorial integrity. He added, “the Armenians must think carefully about that because it could be too late for them in the future.”<sup>54</sup> In that context, he referred to parts of Armenia’s territory, including the capital Yerevan as “historical Azerbaijani lands”. Pashinyan retorted by saying that Azerbaijan was hampering regional peace and stability with “statements threatening Armenia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.” He added, “Armenia will defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity by all possible means, including the mechanisms of the joint Russian-Armenian military contingent and the CSTO. Pashinyan also pointed to President Aliyev’s threats to forcibly open a “corridor” connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenia’s Syunik (Zangezur) province. He said there was no commitment for such a corridor in the agreement. The agreement commits Armenia to opening rail and road links between Nakhchivan and the rest of Azerbaijan.

### 3. Armenia’s Foreign Relations

In the aftermath of the 2020 Karabagh War and defeat, Armenia’s major goal in its foreign relations and contacts became how to alleviate, and to the extent possible, overturn the results of the war with diplomatic initiatives. On the other hand, its increasing dependency on Russia after the war has created limitations to its foreign policy previously defined as “multi-vector” to be interpreted as dual discourse and double game, towards Russia on one hand and to the West on the other.

The Russian President Putin, who spoke at the Collective Security Treaty Organization’s (CSTO), summit held online in 2 December 2020, consoled and praised CSTO member Armenia’s Prime Minister Pashinyan for accepting a painful ceasefire. He said that Pashinyan ““had to make painful but necessary decisions’ to stop the conflict” and added;

“Everybody at today’s session understands the level of responsibility when such decisions are made. [Pashinian] took that responsibility and our task now is to support the prime minister as well as his team in their efforts to establish peace, achieve the implementation of all of the decisions made, and assist people who found themselves in very difficult life situations.”<sup>55</sup>

54 Joshua Kuchera, “What’s the future of Azerbaijan’s ‘ancestral lands’ in Armenia?,” Eurasianet, July 16, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/whats-the-future-of-azerbaijans-ancestral-lands-in-armenia>

55 “Putin Calls On Leaders Of CSTO Member States To Support Armenia’s Prime Minister,” *RFL/RL*, December 2, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-calls-on-leaders-of-csto-member-states-to-support-armenia-s-prime-minister/30980306.html>

Armenia's then new Minister of Foreign Affairs Aiyvazyan made his first official foreign visit of two days to Moscow on 7 December. He met with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, and the two ministers held a press conference afterwards. The statement issued by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that the two ministers evaluated regional matters and the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Within this scope, the ministers discussed humanitarian aid, the re-construction of infrastructure and the opening of transit corridors in the region. Other than Karabakh, the ministers discussed the bilateral relations, the CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Union and cooperation in other multi-lateral organizations. According to the news reports in Armenia, Aiyvazyan "Turkey, as the main instigator and supporter of the Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Artsakh [Karabagh]. He added that Turkey today as well continues advancing a destructive policy for the region". He further demanded that Turkey withdraws the soldiers and foreign mercenaries, which he claimed that Turkey had sent to Karabakh.

Armenian Minister Aiyvazyan travelled directly from Moscow to Paris for his second official visit. He met with his French counterpart Le Drian on 8 December. Aiyvazyan expressed the following during the press conference:

"A ceasefire is not an accord, it's the end of a war. We think that we need a lasting solution to this conflict, notably on the questions relating to the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh, its administrative [border] delimitations, mode of governance. Under the auspices of the co-presidency of the OSCE Minsk Group, France will assume all its responsibilities to achieve that."<sup>56</sup>

The French Minister Le Drian stated that "France will stand with Armenia in order to accompany it on this trajectory". Aiyvazyan thanked France for its "courageous and at the same time impartial position adopted since the beginning of the war." The Armenian Minister met with the President of the French Senate on 9 December and thanked the Senate for its 25 November Karabakh resolution. To be on the safe side, during his interview published in *Le Monde* on 10 December, he thanked the Russian President and Minister of Foreign Affairs for their efforts towards the ensuring of the ceasefire.

From Paris, he proceeded to Brussels on 17 December to attend the third meeting of the EU Partnership Council. Prior to the meeting, the Minister explained that the Armenian side would focus on Karabakh and regional matters during this meeting. The Minister also had a meeting with the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs with whom he repeated the same narrative.

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56 "Self-determination is a key point in the negotiations on Karabakh' – Armenian FM," *Jam News*, December 10, 2020, <https://jam-news.net/armenian-foreign-minister-in-france-ara-ayvazyan-settlement-of-the-karabakh-conflict/>

Likewise, he met with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell.<sup>57</sup> Borrell expressed that the EU is ready and willing to play a part in the shaping and supporting of a lasting resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh in close cooperation with the Minsk Group co-chairs. Borrell stated that he was in contact with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia and attempted but failed to organize a trilateral meeting with the EU, that he envisaged meeting with the two countries' ministers separately.

Russian President Putin expressed during his new year address his wish and hope to establish stronger ties with Armenia. Pashinyan responded shortly after, stating on 1 January 2021 that he planned to further deepen Armenia's relations with Russia, that his country "needs new security guarantees after the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh". This discourse was frequently repeated and underlined within the period by the Armenian Administration.

Following the shipment of new humanitarian aid via air from France, Pashinyan made a phone call on 7 January with French President Macron.<sup>58</sup> In the statement issued by France, Macron expressed "his determination to strive for a balanced political process in order to find a lasting political solution after the ceasefire agreement of November 9".

The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, representing an interested party in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the war that followed, its results and consequences affecting the region, visited Armenia on 27 January within the framework of a contact tour of the regional countries including Azerbaijan, Georgia as well as Russia and Turkey.<sup>59</sup> Armenia was disturbed by Zarif stating "Iran is happy to see that Azerbaijan has regained control over its occupied territories from Armenia" while visiting Azerbaijan prior to visiting Armenia. "Iran lost its impartiality" headlines were published in the Armenian press and cast clouds on the visit before it began. The Iranian Minister, hosted by his Armenian counterpart, also had a private meeting with Prime Minister Pashinyan. This time, he tried to ingratiate himself with the catch phrase "Armenia's territorial integrity is our red line"<sup>60</sup> and added, "We have common concerns, including the presence of terrorists and foreign fighters." In this context, during an interview on 27 February with a Russian

57 "EU-Armenia Partnership Council Discusses Karabakh, Covid-19 Issues," *Hetq*, December 18, 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/125534>

58 "Pashinyan and Macron Discuss Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh," *MassisPost*, January 7, 2021, <https://massispost.com/2021/01/pashinyan-and-macron-discuss-situation-in-nagorno-karabakh/>

59 "Foreign Minister Zarif to Visit Baku, Moscow, Yerevan, Tbilisi, Ankara," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran*, January 23, 2021, <https://en.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/625455/Foreign-Minister-Zarif-to-Visit-Baku-Moscow-Yerevan-Tbilisi-Ankara>

60 "'Armenia's territorial integrity is our red line' – Iranian FM says in Yerevan," *ArmenPress*, January 27, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1041595.html>

newspaper, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs made the claim that “Azerbaijan and Turkey have transferred foreign armed terrorists to the conflict zone to engage in the hostilities against Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). This fact has been confirmed by our international partners”.

The EU made an official announcement on 10 February, to inform that the ratification process of the European Union-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed on the occasion of the Eastern Partnership Summit at Brussels on 24 November 2017 was completed and that the agreement would enter into force from 1 March 2021 onwards. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Borrell expressed in a written statement on 1 March that the agreement “sends a strong signal that the EU and Armenia are committed to democratic principles and the rule of law, as well as to a wider reform agenda.” On 9 March, the EU’s representative in Armenia stated “The European Union is a reliable partner and we are supporting Armenia. But we are also ready for greater involvement in the conflict’s resolution.” On the other hand, it was highlighted in the Armenian press that the Head of the European Council visited Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, but not Armenia, implicating that this indicated Armenia being placed in a different category.

The British Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office made an official visit to Armenia on 16 February.<sup>61</sup> During the two-day visit, the minister attended the opening of the new British Embassy office.

On 24 February, Armenia’s Consulate General in Erbil in the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq was inaugurated.<sup>62</sup> The Consul General who spoke at the ceremony explained that an agenda was essentially established based on mutual interests as a result of active contacts with his counterparts during the previous months and that they were ready to deploy efforts in order to make progress. Shortly after, the Consul General was granted the title of Ambassador with a Presidential decree. In some articles and commentaries published in the Armenian press during this period, comments were made to the effect that, in the event of Kurdish activities leading to break up of Turkey, opportunity can be created for Armenia.

On 26 February, it was indicated in the Armenian press that two pro-Armenian resolutions were adopted in the Dutch Parliament, one being the request for the Dutch Government to recognize the alleged genocide, the other being the

61 “UK Minister for European Neighborhood to visit Armenia,” *MediaMax*, February 16, 2021, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/41937/>

62 “Armenia opens consulate in the Kurdistan Region,” *Kurdistan 24*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/24001-Armenia-opens-consulate-in-the-Kurdistan-Region>

request for Azerbaijan to return the imprisoned Armenian soldiers. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in response to the Dutch Parliament's resolutions.

The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, made a phone call with Prime Minister Pashinyan on 5 March.<sup>63</sup> Regarding the phone call, the US Department of State spokesperson explained that both parties emphasized the importance of the US-Armenia bilateral relations, that the Secretary of State underlined respect to the rule of law and democratic institutions and that the US' support towards the development of the democratic process and institutions in Armenia will continue. The Secretary of State also expressed that he was pleased with the efforts towards the ensuring of a lasting political resolution in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that will be beneficial to the people in the region.

On 20 January, the US Secretary of State Blinken's responses to the questions, comments and statements spearheaded by the highly biased, Armenophile Chair of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations gained the admiration and praise of the Armenian organizations in the US and was published broadly in the Armenian press. In his written response to a question, the Secretary of State stated "I support the provision to Armenia of security assistance and aid to strengthen democratic governance and promote economic growth, both of which will help to strengthen Armenia's security and resilience... In light of the recent outbreak of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Biden-Harris administration will review our security assistance to Azerbaijan".

Another interesting development that was published in the US press was the US Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) announcement for offering a reward for the identification of the perpetrators responsible for the arson attack of an Armenian church's administration building in San Francisco in September 2020. As it can be recalled, a similar attack had occurred in July in the same region. Such clear acts of provocation are well known in Turkey in the years preceding the First World War. The exposing of these perpetrators bears importance, and the FBI is to be commended for its efforts. Whether or not the perpetrators will be identified and whether it will be made public will be observed closely.

On 9 March, Armenia declared a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) representative as persona non-grata, urging her to leave the country. When the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson was asked for the justification of this decision, she responded

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63 "Secretary Blinken's Call with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan," *US Department of State*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-armenian-prime-minister-pashinyan/>

by saying “shortcomings in the implementation of her mandate” and “non-cooperative style of work.”<sup>64</sup>

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayvazyan made a phone call with his counterpart in the Vatican on 31 March and requested the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Francis’ support regarding the latest developments.<sup>65</sup> Ayvazyan went to Moscow on 1 April to attend the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) ministers’ assembly. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov on this occasion separately met and assessed the latest developments in the region with the ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on 2 April.

On 1 April, the Armenian government approved the signing of a cooperation agreement in which China will donate a 100 million Yuan (approximately 15 million Dollars) grant.<sup>66</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan went to Moscow for a working visit on 7 April and met with Russian President Putin. Pashinyan expressed that the meeting was very fruitful, that he was very pleased with the outcomes and that he wishes to further strengthen Armenia’s relations with Russia. Pashinyan added the following:

“We didn’t sign any documents but spoke about the further implementation a number of documents, including on security, signed in the past. Russia is helping Armenia reform its armed forces after the autumn war in Nagorno-Karabakh. This was one of the most important issues discussed by us. One thing is clear. The character of Russian-Armenian relations is strategic and this strategic cooperation must be made deeper in view of the existing challenges and situations that we face.”<sup>67</sup>

Putin also emphasized the “strategic” attribute of the relations during the beginning of the meeting. Pashinyan also proposed to Putin that Russia constructs a new nuclear power plant in Armenia.

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64 “Mediaport: UNICEF Armenia Country Office head spied in favor of Azerbaijan and Great Britain”, *IamMedia.am*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.iammedia.am/en/post/unicef-6>

65 “Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian’s phone conversation with Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, March 31, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/03/31/fm\\_vatican/10874](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/03/31/fm_vatican/10874)

66 “China to donate 100,000,000 yuan to Armenia,” *ArmenPress*, April 1, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1047783.html>

67 “Putin, Pashinyan meet in Moscow,” *Anadolu Agency*, April 7, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/putin-pashinyan-meet-in-moscow/2201463>.

Upon his return, Pashinyan gave the following statement regarding the meeting in Moscow on 14 April:

“The Armenian-Russian military alliance reinforced by several dozen international agreements of a strategic nature and mutual allied obligations is the axis of ensuring the external security of the Republic of Armenia.”

“The Armenian-Russian joint military grouping and the joint Armenian-Russian air defense system in the Caucasus Collective Security Region are of practical importance for Armenia’s security. By the logic of the agreements formed by these two systems, an attack on Armenia means an attack on Russia, the two countries must jointly face external challenges.”

“In the strategic perspective, we look to seriously discuss the transition to a professional army, and we should be able to significantly change the structure of military service or conscription.”<sup>68</sup>

In this scope, Pashinyan expressed that Russia is also interested in the expansion of its military base stationed in Gyumri and that “very fruitful meetings” were held among the Russian and Armenian officials regarding the stationing of more Russian soldiers in the Zangezur (Syunik) province in the southeast, along the border with Azerbaijan<sup>69</sup>.

Visits to Armenia from abroad were rare and not necessarily bilaterally oriented. The speaker of French Senate attended the 24 April ceremonies.<sup>70</sup> The Lithuanian Foreign Minister was also there during this time. Lithuania appeared to willingly represent the EU to express solidarity with Armenia throughout the period.<sup>71</sup>

Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov paid a landmark visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan in early May. At a joint press conference with his Armenian counterpart on 6 May in Yerevan, he repeatedly underlined that Russia would keep doing its best to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire

68 “Putin, Pashinyan meet in Moscow,” *Anadolu Agency*.

69 “Armenia and Russia discuss the possibility of expanding the 102nd Russian military base and establishing its foothold in the Syunik region,” *Arminfo*, April 14, 2021, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=61908&lang=3&\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_=pmd\\_988586642ee793d201c582ffd691b93230983c0c-1627414725-0-gqNtZGzNAjjcnBszQqQ](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=61908&lang=3&_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=pmd_988586642ee793d201c582ffd691b93230983c0c-1627414725-0-gqNtZGzNAjjcnBszQqQ)

70 “French Senate Speaker to attend Armenian Genocide commemoration in Yerevan,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, April 22, 2021, <https://en.armradio.am/2021/04/22/french-senate-speaker-to-attend-armenian-genocide-commemoration-in-yerevan/>

71 “Lithuanian FM visits Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan,” *ArmenPress*, April 26, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1050362.html>

agreement that stopped the war. The main concrete outcome of his visit however was the signing of a memorandum on biological safety, in practical terms, access to and supervision by the Russian specialists of the bio laboratories that was founded and operated by the US. The biological laboratories were created in Armenia in 2008 with the participation of the US Department of Defense (Pentagon), working on the American Defense Biological Participation Program. The Russian Foreign Minister had already expressed this urge during his visit in 2019, without a clear conclusion.

The Russian Minister praised Russia's ties with Armenia on the occasion of a forum in Moscow on 21 May. He spoke of an unprecedented "political dialogue" between the two states. He said, "There is an unprecedentedly active political dialogue based on mutual trust between us at the high and other levels. There have already been two meetings and numerous phone calls between the leaders of Armenia and Russia this year". He added that bilateral commercial ties were also expanding.

Pashinyan participated in a virtual summit of the Eurasian Economic Union in Yerevan on 21 May<sup>72</sup>. He reiterated his call for the creation of a single energy market that could lower the cost of Russian natural gas imported by Armenia and other members.

On 26 May Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif paid a visit to Armenia, his second in four months. He was received also by the Prime Minister and the President. Pashinyan stated;

"Our good neighborly relations with Iran are of strategic importance. The common border with Iran has ensured the security of our country in a number of ways ever since the first years of Armenia's independence. It is my pleasure to note that there is a similar perception in Iran about our relationship. Our economic ties have developed over several decades, especially in Syunik [Zangezur] region. There has always been a great interest in implementing joint projects. We have set up a free economic zone in Meghri with a view to deepening economic exchanges with friendly Iran."<sup>73</sup>

Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif's response was as follows;

"I have had a very strategic dialogue with our Armenian partners. Our representative, our negotiator will arrive in Armenia at the first

72 "Yerevan Insists On Ex-Soviet Common Energy Market," *Azattyun*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31267360.html>

73 "Armenia-Iran dialogue is of strategic importance - Nikol Pashinyan Receives Iran's Foreign Minister," *Prime Ministry of Armenia*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2021/05/26/Nikol-Pashinyan-Mohammad-Javad-Zarif/>

opportunity as a follow-up to the ongoing dialogue. There are many important issues, both bilateral and regional that need to be addressed. We want peace in this region. And we have always highlighted the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and the peaceful resolution of crises. Islamic Republic of Iran prioritizes respect for international law. In order to resolve the recent escalation, three visits were paid from our country to Armenia. I was the first to pay a visit, then our special envoy came to Armenia and now I am visiting Armenia again. I am sorry that you have been a victim of this new escalation. Yesterday I had a very detailed and meaningful conversation with the president of Azerbaijan. I hope that today's meeting, like the one I had with my esteemed colleague, will help resolve the crisis."<sup>74</sup>

Pashinyan gave a pause in his election campaign and paid a short visit to France and Belgium on 1-2 June. He was welcomed by the French President in Paris. He also met with the Speaker of the French National Assembly and then the Speaker of the Senate, as well as the Mayor of Paris. On the other hand, French Armenians held a protest against his visit. In Brussels, he met with the President of the European Council and then with the Prime Minister of Belgium. The whole visit appeared to be a subtle electioneering tactic to show his western affiliations to his constituency against the two rival blocs with singular Russian ties.

Armenian President A. Sarkissian paid a working visit to Kazakhstan on 3 June.

US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Asian Affairs visited the three South Caucasus states 6-13 June to advance bilateral and regional priorities and to express support for democratic and economic developments across the region. In his talks in Armenia, the sides reaffirmed the key role of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs format for the resettlement of Nagorno Karabagh conflict. On 16 July, the US State Department reaffirmed US support for "the Minsk Group co-chairs process" and stated, in what appeared to be an effort to turn the clock back, that Washington remains committed to helping Armenia and Azerbaijan achieve a "lasting settlement to the conflict" based on the principles of territorial integrity of states, people's right to self-determination and non-use of force.

The Foreign Ministers of Austria, Lithuania, and Romania made a joint tour of the three South Caucasus states with the mandate of the EU Foreign and Security Policy Chief. The ministers arrived at Yerevan on 25 June. The aim

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74 "Armenia-Iran dialogue is of strategic importance - Nikol Pashinyan Receives Iran's Foreign Minister," *Prime Ministry of Armenia*.

of the visit was to “signal the EU’s readiness to support broader cooperation both with and between the South Caucasus countries, including through the opportunities available under the eastern partnership.”<sup>75</sup> This opening was followed up by the visit of the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement on 9 July. He announced at a news conference that the EU pledged to provide Armenia up to 2.6 billion Euros in economic assistance and investments over the next five years. The aid is part of a package for the EU’s six Eastern Partnership countries. Armenia’s share among them far outweighs others. The crescendo was the visit of the President of the European Council on 17 July. He told his Armenian hosts that the 2.6 billion Euro assistance package for Armenia was aimed for the implementation of deep reforms as well as the economic development of the country. Referring to Nagorno-Karabagh, he highlighted together with his hosts the statement of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs of 13 April 2021.

Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan made his first visit abroad to Moscow on 7 July following his election victory. Russian President Putin congratulated Pashinyan on that victory and said that he has a popular mandate to address “very acute and sensitive issues”. Kremlin spokesman said earlier that they would discuss the situation in and around Karabagh and Russian-Armenian relations.

#### 4. Turkey-Armenia Relations

Turkey was put in the dock again for all the misery that befell from the 2020 Karabakh War. In the efforts to find a scapegoat to put the responsibility for the war and the defeat, Turkey became the primary target and enemy. Widespread statements and comments claimed that Azerbaijan would not have been able to attempt this war without Turkey’s support, that Armenia was not defeated by Azerbaijan but by Turkey, NATO’s second largest military. According to a public opinion research poll published by the press on 4 December 2020, in response to the question which country or countries constitute the greatest threat to Armenia, 86.5% designated Turkey while 70.9% designated Azerbaijan.

In the press conference held in Moscow during his first foreign visit on 7 December, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs demanded that Turkey withdraws its soldiers and foreign mercenaries in Karabakh. Ayvazyan (as we previously discussed in this article) accused “Turkey, as the main instigator

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75 “South Caucasus: Visit of Foreign Affairs Ministers of Austria, Lithuania and Romania mandated by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell,” *European Union External Action Service*, June 23, 2021, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/100571/south-caucasus-visit-foreign-affairs-ministers-austria-lithuania-and-romania-mandated-high\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/100571/south-caucasus-visit-foreign-affairs-ministers-austria-lithuania-and-romania-mandated-high_en)

and supporter of the Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Artsakh [Karabagh].” During his meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister, with regards to relations with Turkey, he claimed that Armenia was taking steps towards the normalization of the relations, but that Turkey was placing preconditions. He said, “I believe we Armenians agree with this vision for the South Caucasus and want peace and stability and cooperation with all of our neighbors but Ankara needs to gain the trust that it has lost during this period.”<sup>76</sup> Ayvazyan repeated similar claims and more during his visit to France, Belgium, at the EU and in the OSCE Ministerial Council.

The statements of the Presidents of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the celebrations held in Baku on 10 December after the Karabakh victory were criticized and condemned by Pashinyan’s spokesperson.

The 10 December Baku military ceremony was also condemned by a communique issued by the Dashnaksutyun on 11 December. It was claimed in the Dashnaks’ communique that the statements of the two countries’ leaders constituted hate speech, that it threatened the physical assets of the Armenians living in Armenian lands, that it questioned the territorial integrity of the “republics of Armenia and Karabakh”. It was alleged in the communique that Turkey is increasing its political-military power, altering the demographic and religious aspect of some sections of South Caucasia by bringing “jihadist extremists” to the region and a call was made for the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries and supportive international organizations to closely observe Turkey and prevent “its expansionist policies”. Moreover, the Dashnak communique blamed the Armenian administration for suffering a shameful defeat and stated that the Dashnaksutyun will continue to serve Armenia and the people’s interests and stand against the joint lobby network initiatives of Azerbaijan and Turkey against all odds.<sup>77</sup>

The Human Rights Representative (Ombudsman) of Armenia also made a long speech on the same subject, which criticized the two countries, but mostly targeted Turkey. The Ombudsman claimed that the Turkish President Erdoğan’s mentioning of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Enver Pasha during his speech carried a “clearly genocidal intent” and that the aim of the speech was undoubtedly to spread more hate.

In its communique simultaneously issued on 11 December, AGBU called for unity “in this decisive period in our history” without referring to the Baku ceremony or naming any country.

76 “Ara Aivazian: Ankara needs to gain Armenia’s trust to achieve peace in South Caucasus”, *News.am*, December 7, 2020, <https://news.am/eng/news/617526.html>

77 “ARF Bureau strongly condemns statements by Azeri and Turkish leaders,” *Armenian Weekly*.

On 25 December, Armenian customs officials announced that Armenia's decision taken on 20 October of banning imports from Turkey would come into force on 31 December, that its duration would be six months and might be extended if necessary. According to Armenia's statistics, trade with Turkey comes in fourth place, ahead of Iran. Armenia's imports from Turkey, in million Dollars, was 137 in 2015, 164 in 2016, 223 in 2017, 253 in 2018, and 268 million Dollars in 2019, repeating the record reached in 2008. It was indicated that exports to Turkey showed a similar increase and that 914,000 Dollars' worth of exports were made in 2017. Turkey's place in Armenia's foreign trade was 9.8% in 2018 and 9.2% in 2019.

A statement made by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson on 28 December regarding the infringement of the ceasefire agreement by Armenia is as follows:

“The attacks carried out by Armenian elements who refused to lay down their weapons and withdraw against Azerbaijani armed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh are clear violations of the ceasefire regime established by the Trilateral Declaration of 9 November 2020.

The earlier attacks of Armenian armed elements on 26 November, 8 and 11 December, as well as the latest on 27 December caused military and civilian casualties and injuries.

As a signatory of the Trilateral Declaration, Armenia bears the primary responsibility for the withdrawal of Armenian armed groups and adherence to the ceasefire.

Using its right of self-defence, the Azerbaijani side gave the necessary response to the said provocations by these Armenian armed elements.

Armenia has to accept the facts on the ground and fulfil the commitments that it has undertaken with the Trilateral Declaration in order to become one of the stakeholders of the lasting peace that is trying to be established in the region.

We wish Allah's mercy upon our Azerbaijani brothers who lost their lives in these attacks, a speedy recovery to the wounded and extend our condolences to the people of Azerbaijan.”<sup>78</sup>

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78 “QA-124, 28 December 2020, Statement of the Spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hami Aksoy in Response to a Question Regarding the Attacks Carried Out By Armenian Elements Who Refused to Lay Down Their Weapons Against Azerbaijani Armed Forces in Azerbaijan's Hocavend Region,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, December 28, 2020, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc-124\\_hocavend-rayonunda-silah-birakmayan-ermeni-gruplarin-azerbaycan-ordusuna-yonelik-saldirilar-hk-sc.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc-124_hocavend-rayonunda-silah-birakmayan-ermeni-gruplarin-azerbaycan-ordusuna-yonelik-saldirilar-hk-sc.en.mfa)

The following questions was asked on 22 January 2021 to Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson:

“Recently, Foreign Minister of Turkey Cavusoglu stated that if the peace is lasting, Turkey and Azerbaijan are ready to undertake steps aimed at normalizing relations with Armenia. Can you comment whether the Armenian side is ready to ‘normalize the relations’? What does this statement mean? Has any initiative been undertaken in this regard, particularly by the Turkish side?”

The spokesperson's response was as follows:

“I would not like to comment on the statements of Turkish-Azerbaijani leadership, which are not consolidated by any action. Moreover, they contradict each other. The Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercises carried out near the Armenian border in violation of relevant OSCE commitments do not prove that the Turkish-Azerbaijani leadership has peaceful intentions towards Armenia. The cessation of hostile actions against Armenia may create conditions for building trust in the region.”

On 3 February, Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson was asked to comment on news reports in the Turkish media stating that some Armenian churches were being put up for sale and Foreign Minister of Turkey Cavusoglu's “Armenia must take lessons from history” statement. In response, the spokesperson expressed that they were aware of the news reports in the Turkish media regarding some Armenian churches being put up for sale, that they strongly condemn the destruction and misappropriation of the Armenian cultural heritage and, as for the “advice to learn lessons from history”, that no one has the right to “speak disrespectfully with the language of threat and give lessons of history to the nation who survived genocide”.

In a news report published in the Armenian press on 5 February referring to the Turkish Statistical Institute, it was stated that the number of citizens of Armenia officially living in Turkey has decreased to 1257, which is a 30% drop in comparison to 2019.

Responding to a question in the Parliament on 10 February, Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs stated “As you know, the [Turkish] blockade, the closure of Turkish-Armenian border was the result of the Nagorno-Karabakh status-quo, which has changed through a use of force. Turkey therefore no longer has any reason to keep its border with Armenia closed”. These statements caused much displeasure within the Armenian Diaspora. Through an “extremely harsh” communique issued without wasting time, the Armenian National Committee (ANC) International, based in the US, demonstrated its

militant, fanatical claims and its pressure and threats towards the people and administration of Armenia. The communique's outlines are as follows:

“From this extremely problematic statements we can make the following assertions:

1. The Government of Armenia is planning to come to terms with the status quo that was created throughout the use of force by the Turkish-Azerbaijani axis against Artsakh that resulted in the occupation of a large part of Artsakh, deportation and ethnic cleansing. In this instance, the Armenian government, is essentially relinquishing its responsibilities as the guarantor of Artsakh's security.

2. Effectively, the Armenian government believes that there are no other pressing issues in Armenia-Turkey relations than the Karabakh issue. Specifically, there is no reasonable doubt that the Armenian government is going to forget the policy of international recognition of and reparations for the Armenian Genocide, as well as other issues related to the Armenia-Turkey interstate border.

It is not clear how the Armenian government envisions the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations, when only a few months ago, with the full and overt support of Turkey, a part of our homeland was subjected to aggressive attacks, coupled with war crimes. At the same time, the representative of the Armenian government speaks about the prospects of normalization of relations with Turkey at a time when large-scale Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercises are taking place near the Armenian border, which coincide with the statements of high-ranking Turkish and Azerbaijani officials about Armenia's sovereignty.

Even at time when there have been fundamental disagreements with the Armenian authorities, the ANC International's worldwide network not only did not retreat from its positions of defending the interests of the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh, but also continued close cooperation with embassies in different countries and Armenian representations within international organizations.

However, the minister's statement yesterday, threatens to create a serious ideological divide between the network of organizations that function in dozens of countries as conduits of Armenia's diplomacy, and Armenia's Foreign Ministry.

The fact of the matter is that Turkey has not given up on the other preconditions it has been advancing for 30 years in regards to establishing diplomatic relations with the Republic of Armenia and the

lifting the land blockade that include the process of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and demanding Armenia to make concessions on the Armenia-Turkey legal border. Turkey maintains its hostile attitude toward Armenia and the Armenian people, which manifested itself with its overt participation in Azerbaijan's attacks unleashed on Artsakh on September 27, 2020, and the continuous anti-Armenian measures taken by the Turkish authorities inside and outside Turkey. Until Turkey fundamentally changes its anti-Armenian policy, any attempt by Armenia to enter into dialogue with the latter will be used by Turkey to achieve its aforementioned goals. Especially on the eve of the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, it will be an opportunity for Turkey to take advantage of it.

The Armenian government's criminal ineptitude and its inability to serve the vital interests of Armenia are nothing new for us. We anticipate, however, that Armenia's Foreign Ministry—one of the government institutions that have not been completely destroyed—will demonstrate the resolve to not give in to Turkey's deceitful policies. The primary precondition for strengthening the security of Armenia, as well as Artsakh, is a fundamental change in Armenia's domestic situation, which can begin only with the removal of the person who led the country to defeat and has been clinging to his position as Armenia's Prime Minister. Only then it will be possible to fathom, plan and act in order to create 'a favorable atmosphere to strengthen Armenia's security.'<sup>79</sup>

The Armenian administration proved to be much too vulnerable to counter these severe provocations, threats, and insults, hence had to swallow them and to step back. It also showed the limits of its independence and sovereignty with regard the Diaspora. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson thus stated the following on the same day of the ANC communique:

“We highly appreciate the cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the offices and committees of the Armenian National Committee, which have always been aimed at advancing our national Armenian agenda”.

“The concerns contained in the ANC International statement were taken out of context, and in no way reflect Armenia's assessment and approaches to Turkey's involvement in the region”.

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79 “ANC International Criticizes Foreign Minister for Remarks on Turkey”, Asbarez, February 11, 2021, <https://asbarez.com/anc-international-criticizes-foreign-minister-for-remarks-on-turkey/>

“Armenia has not reevaluated its assessment of Turkey’s destructive involvement in the region, and those concerns were clearly stated in the question-and-answer session, in particular, regarding the conduct of the joint Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercises near the Armenian border. At the same time, the Armenian Foreign Minister referred to Turkey’s illegal blockade of Armenia, insisting that at the present time there is not even an excuse referring to the fact that Turkey has closed its border with Armenia for decades”,

“The position of the Republic of Armenia on this issue has not changed, neither has the determination to pursue the priorities of the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia. We are convinced that Turkey’s direct involvement in the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against the people of Artsakh, the war crimes committed against the people of Artsakh and other mass crimes make the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide more urgent in order to prevent the reoccurrence of such crimes in the future.”<sup>80</sup>

When the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu condemned the insurgency by the military against the Prime Minister, which Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan himself considered to be a military coup attempt, the comments of “A development that worries Turkey cannot be supportive of Armenia, it can only be anti-Armenian” that appeared in the Armenian press, was indicative of the anti-Turkish mentality in Armenia.

On 26 February, Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following statement on the 29th Anniversary of the Khojaly massacre:

“On the 26 February 1992, 613 innocent Azerbaijani civilians, including women and children, were murdered and hundreds of Azerbaijani citizens were injured as a result of the attacks carried out by the forces of the Republic of Armenia towards the city of Khojaly in Nagorno-Karabakh. During the attacks more than a thousand people were taken captive. The fate of those who are missing remain unknown.

We know that the scars of the Khojaly Massacre which took place before the very eyes of the world are still open. We feel and share the grief of brotherly Azerbaijan deep in our hearts.

We wish Allah’s mercy on our Azerbaijani brothers who have lost their lives in this inhumane massacre and humbly bow before their sacred

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80 “Foreign Ministry Responds to ANC International’s Concerns,” *Asbarez*, February 11, 2021, <https://asbarez.com/200487/foreign-ministry-responds-to-anc-internationals-concerns/>

memories. We also extend our most sincere condolences to the brotherly Azerbaijani nation.

On this occasion, we once again mercifully and respectfully commemorate those martyrs who lost their lives in the Patriotic War which liberated Azerbaijan's invaded territories and enabled nearly a million displaced Azerbaijanis to return to their homes."<sup>81</sup>

In response to the Governor of the US State of California announcing that he will abide by a relevant court decision and accept the release of Armenian terrorist Hampig Sassounian, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 11 March condemning this decision:

"Following the decision of Los Angeles County Superior Court that paved the way for the release of Armenian terrorist Hampig Sassounian who had murdered Kemal Arıkan, Consul General of the Republic of Turkey in Los Angeles, California Governor Gavin Newsom stated that he would not appeal this decision. We strongly condemn this approach, that deeply hurts the conscience of the Turkish nation.

This grave decision, that could not be reversed despite all attempts of the US Administration, is in conflict with the universal principles of law and the understanding of justice.

Turkish citizens, including 31 diplomats, have lost their lives as a result of the attacks perpetrated by Armenian terrorist organizations. In a period when hate crimes are on the rise and international solidarity is most needed, release of a brutal murderer with political motivations harms the spirit of cooperation in fight against terrorism.

This murder, which was heinously committed by the terrorist Sassounian who has never shown a sign of remorse during his 38 years of conviction, will never be forgotten as a crime that represents a sick and distorted ideology.

On this occasion, we commemorate with respect our martyred diplomat Kemal Arıkan and all our martyrs who lost their lives in the attacks of Armenian terrorist organizations."<sup>82</sup>

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81 "No: 74, 26 February 2021, Press Release Regarding the 29th Anniversary of the Khojaly Massacre," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, February 26, 2021, [www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-74\\_-hocali-katliaminin-29-yildonumu-hk.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-74_-hocali-katliaminin-29-yildonumu-hk.en.mfa)

82 "No: 92, 11 March 2021, Press Release Regarding the Release of Terrorist Hampig Sassounian Who Had Murdered Kemal Arıkan, Consul General of the Republic of Turkey in Los Angeles," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, March 11, 2021, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-92\\_-sehit-los-angeles-bk-kemal-arikan-in-katili-teroristin-saliverilmesi-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-92_-sehit-los-angeles-bk-kemal-arikan-in-katili-teroristin-saliverilmesi-hk.en.mfa)

On the centenary of the Treaty of Moscow signed between Turkey and Russia on 16 March 1921, the notoriously militant Dashnaksutyun, which receives its primary support from its organizations in the US, issued a communique condemning and rejecting the Treaty. It purported that this Treaty, not to their liking, which determined Turkey's eastern borders, was illegal. The communique also made a call to the Armenian administration, which "has ceded a large portion of the motherland to the enemy and lost its legitimacy", warning it to not to enter into negotiations with Turkey as it would acknowledge the recognition of the Moscow and Kars Treaties.

The subject of relations with Turkey came into question once again in Armenia during late March. In response to the question "Is Turkey another enemy state for Armenia?" asked during a TV program, the Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia stated, "If we are going to open up, then there should be some corrections in our approaches, and we are working in that direction." When the question was pressed, his response of "It would not be right to state unequivocally that there is no threat from Turkey, but the events in the region also create other opportunities." This response was interpreted as a refusal to define Turkey as an enemy and was heavily criticized.<sup>83</sup> What this response meant was asked to the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister responded by saying "Please address that question to the Secretary of the Security Council, I do not comment". When further pressed, the Minister stated on 29 March that Armenia is not negotiating with Turkey for the normalization of the relations and underlined that "there [were] no talks with Turkey [as of that moment]". Continuing, he highlighted that, before speaking about a process, the issue of the return of prisoners must be resolved.

The subject was also brought to the Parliament. The Minister of Foreign Affairs answered that those who are authorized to state Armenia's official stance regarding foreign policy are the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He reiterated that one of Armenia's priorities is the international recognition and condemnation of the "Armenian Genocide". Additionally, with a reference to the 2009 Zurich Protocols, he reminded that Armenia has made various initiatives for the normalization of the relations with Turkey and claimed that the initiatives to normalize relations without preconditions were not reciprocated by Turkey.

On 29 March, an interview with the editor of Turkey's *Agos* newspaper's Armenian section, Pakrat Estukyan, was published in the Armenian press. This interview, in which views reflecting the radical Armenian discourse were

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83 "Disturbing Contradictions by Armenia's Top Officials on Ties with Ankara," *Asbarez*, March 29, 2021, <http://asbarez.com/201477/disturbing-contradictions-by-armenias-top-officials-on-ties-with-ankara/>

expressed, constituted an example of the freedom of thought and expression in Turkey, which cannot be said for Armenia.

After its communique issued on 11 March, the ANC issued a second communique on 29 March in the same vein. Also referring to the Dashnaksutyun's communique of 16 March "strongly warning" the administration, it was claimed that recent events, especially statements made by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of the Security Council and the Vice-Speaker of the Parliament proved that the authorities of Armenia, who capitulated, were pursuing, guised as normalizing the relations with Turkey and ending blockades,

"a succinct policy which aims to forget the historical past of our people, to renounce the international demand for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, to legally recognize the de facto Armenia-Turkey interstate border, to renounce the Karabakh issue, and with it the restoration of Artsakh's territorial integrity and status, and to make the territory of the Republic of Armenia a geographical corridor connecting the two Turkish states."

This second communique, longer and more threatening than the first, in addition to its warning of not negotiating with Turkey in any way, repeated and highlighted the call for the Armenian administration to resign immediately.

The Dashnaksutyun issued the identical communique stemming from the same pen, on the same day in their own name.

Armenia's second President Kocharyan asserted in the presence of press during the election campaign on 6 April that Turkey constitutes the greatest threat to Armenia.

The subject of relations with Turkey is always on the agenda in April of every year, marked by speculations and expectation of the terminology that the US President will use in his message on 24 April. At the evening of 23 April, a telephone call was held between the President of Turkey Erdoğan and the President of the US Joe Biden, the first encounter since Biden assumed office. Press agencies in Turkey spread the news that the US President would use the word "genocide" the next day.

The message delivered on 24 April demonstrated that the US President chose to act like a populist politician under the influence and pressure of the Armenian lobbies instead of displaying the wisdom of a statesperson. Consequently, not only Turkey-US relations were harmed, but the establishing of a lasting peace in the South Caucasian region also took a blow. Biden's

statement can be seen as a testament that the new US administration chose to continue with its partisan policy in the peace efforts following the Nagorno-Karabakh war and cannot tolerate the active policy of regional stability and cooperation Turkey is pursuing.

Biden's statement is as follows:

“Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring. Beginning on April 24, 1915, with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople by Ottoman authorities, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination. We honor the victims of the Meds Yeghern so that the horrors of what happened are never lost to history. And we remember so that we remain ever-vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all its forms. Of those who survived, most were forced to find new homes and new lives around the world, including in the United States. With strength and resilience, the Armenian people survived and rebuilt their community. Over the decades Armenian immigrants have enriched the United States in countless ways, but they have never forgotten the tragic history that brought so many of their ancestors to our shores. We honor their story. We see that pain. We affirm the history. We do this not to cast blame but to ensure that what happened is never repeated. Today, as we mourn what was lost, let us also turn our eyes to the future—toward the world that we wish to build for our children. A world unstained by the daily evils of bigotry and intolerance, where human rights are respected, and where all people are able to pursue their lives in dignity and security. Let us renew our shared resolve to prevent future atrocities from occurring anywhere in the world. And let us pursue healing and reconciliation for all the people of the world. The American people honor all those Armenians who perished in the genocide that began 106 years ago today.”<sup>84</sup>

Responding to this statement of the US President, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following statement:

“We reject and denounce in the strongest terms the statement of the President of the US regarding the events of 1915 made under the pressure of radical Armenian circles and anti-Turkey groups on 24 April.

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84 “Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day,” *US White House*, April 24, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>

It is clear that the said statement does not have a scholarly and legal basis, nor is it supported by any evidence. With regards to the events of 1915, none of the conditions required for the use of the term “genocide” that is strictly defined in international law are met.

The nature of the events of 1915 does not change according to the current political motives of the politicians or domestic political considerations. Such an attitude serves only a vulgar distortion of history.

The European Court of Human Rights has clearly confirmed the controversial nature of the events of 1915. Moreover, in 2005 Turkey proposed to Armenian side to establish a Joint History Commission in order to reach a just memory in the light of historical facts of that period. Although Armenia has never responded to this proposal, it is still on the table. In this respect, the statement made by the President of the US, who is neither legally nor morally authorized to judge historical matters, has no value.

As a country located at the center of a region that is called as the cradle of civilizations and who has adopted the attitude of exercising effort for the peace and serenity for humanity despite all her sufferings, Turkey has never avoided facing her history and would not take lessons from any country, including the US, in this regard.

On this occasion, we once again commemorate the cherished memories of the individuals from all the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire, who lost their lives under the extraordinary conditions of the period before and during the First World War. The message conveyed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 24 April, for the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives at the First World War which was read during the liturgy at the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, this year as well, reflects the approach of Turkey on this topic.

After more than a hundred years of this past suffering, instead of exerting sincere efforts to completely heal the wounds of the past and build the future together in our region, the US President’s statement will not yield any results other than polarizing the nations and hindering peace and stability in our region.

This statement of the US, which distorts the historical facts, will never be accepted in the conscience of the Turkish people, and will open a deep wound that undermines our mutual trust and friendship.

We call on the US President to correct this grave mistake, which serves no purpose other than to satisfy certain political circles and to support the efforts aiming to establish a practice of peaceful coexistence in the region, especially among the Turkish and Armenian nations, instead of serving the agenda of those circles that try to foment enmity from history.”<sup>85</sup>

As it has been expressed by Turkey, the impacts of this decision (which has no legal bearing) on the Turkish-Armenian relations need to be closely examined. To shed light on to the subject from a different angle, we have included an AVİM commentary dated 26 April 2021 in Annex 1 of this article.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey Çavuşoğlu completely rejected the US President’s use of the term genocide. He stated, “We are not going to take lessons about our history from anyone. Political opportunism is the biggest betrayal of peace and justice. We completely reject this statement that is only based on populism”. The US Ambassador was summoned to the Ministry and was told that Turkey found the statement unacceptable, and that it was totally rejected and strongly condemned.

President of Turkey Erdoğan addressed a letter to the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Sahak II Mashalian (head of the historical Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul which was established in the year 1470) shortly before US President’s statement, offering condolences to “Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives under the difficult circumstances of World War I” and also stating that Turkey was ready to develop relations with Armenia based on mutual respect. In turn, Patriarch Sahak II issued a statement following the US President’s statement. Some excerpts are here below:

“It saddens us to see that the suffering of our people and the suffering of our ancestors are instrumentalised by some countries for every day political purposes. The tension caused by the usage of the issue in parliamentary agendas for decades has not served the rapprochement of the two nations. On the contrary, it provokes hostile feelings and delays peace. We, just like our predecessors and late Patriarchs, will continue to wish for peace, friendship and well-being between Turks and Armenians. We will encourage the rebuilding of relations based on neighborhood and common grounds speedily. We prefer to be one of those who hopefully expect the revival of neighborly relations, which are unique to these lands and exist in the traditions of the two communities.”<sup>86</sup>

85 “No: 160, 24 April 2021, Press Release on 24 April,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, April 24, 2021, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-160\\_-24-nisan-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-160_-24-nisan-hk.en.mfa)

86 “Using 1915 incidents for politics saddens Armenians,” *Anadolu Agency*, April 23, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/using-1915-incidents-for-politics-saddens-armenians/2218547>

The Turkic Council deplored the statement of the US president on the Events of 1915, saying it harms the hopes of regional cooperation and stability. Secretary General of the Council reminded in a written statement that “Weaponization of distorted historical allegations towards another country could only play into the hands of those willing to fan the feelings of hatred, revenge and enmity among the societies”.

Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, on the other hand, welcomed the statement and commented that “the US had once again demonstrated its unwavering commitment to protecting human rights and universal values”<sup>87</sup> He said it was much needed message to the international community. When he was asked in the Parliament to comment on the statement, Pashinyan said there were four factors which contributed to US President’s recognition of genocide. Elaborating on them he said;

“I believe there is one long term, one mid-term and two short term factors here. The long-term factor is definitely the consistent work of the Armenian-American community and all the organizations of the diaspora. The mid-term factor is Turkey’s regional policy and in this context the dissonance which appeared between Turkey and the US. First of the short-term factors is the 44 day war and Turkey’s explicit and active involvement in it, the second is Armenia being a democratic country.”<sup>88</sup>

Armenian President A. Sarkissian sent letters of gratitude to the heads of Armenian organizations in the US; the Dasnaksutyun (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-ARF), Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA).

As was to be expected, Armenian lobbying groups and organizations as well as supporting politicians were jubilant. However, once their immediate target was achieved, a tempered satisfaction came to the agenda to now push for deeds after words and to put more pressure on Turkey. One such comment was “it is a middle step because the statement did not name Turkey”. The director of US based Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) immediately pronounced publicly that the Armenian Diaspora now looked to courts after US President’s statement. ANCA was nevertheless not short of criticism, as they publicly expressed disappointment over reports that US President was waiving a congressional sanction and thereby clearing way for American aid to Azerbaijan.

87 “USA once again demonstrates its unwavering commitment to protecting universal values – Pashinyan,” *ArmenPress*, April 24, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1050280/>

88 “Pashinyan comments on factors behind US recognition of Armenian Genocide,” *ArmenPress*, May 3, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1051078/>

In Armenia, at the ceremony of commemorating 24 April attended by the President and the Prime Minister, Pashinyan spoke of an existential “pan-Turkic threat” facing Armenia and Karabakh. “The second Karabagh war, the Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression aimed at annihilating the Armenians of Karabagh, Turkey’s expansionist foreign policy and territorial aspirations towards Armenia testify to the revival of a genocidal ideology” read a statement released by the Prime Minister.<sup>89</sup> Pashinyan stressed at the same time that Armenia is open to a regional dialogue with Turkey and Azerbaijan. “However, the dialogue we imagine cannot be engaged from a position of strength. It can only succeed if underpinned by the principle of equality” he said and added, “We will never question the fact of the Armenian genocide”.

The same day, Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister told reporters that nothing has changed in the position of official Yerevan, that Armenia is ready for normalization of relations without any preconditions, but Turkey that presents preconditions. “The preconditions are about both the Armenian genocide and Nagorno Karabagh conflict”, he clarified.

Commenting on the possible impact of US President’s statement on Armenia’s relations with Turkey in an interview with *BBC Weekend* on 27 April, Armenian Foreign Minister said;

“As far as relations with Turkey are concerned, Turkey has been pursuing hostile and aggressive policy toward Armenia since the restoration of independence back in 1991. Turkey rejected the establishment of diplomatic relations, it closed border with Armenia and pursued increasingly hostile policy against Armenia. Moreover, Turkey directly got involved in the Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Nagorno Karabagh by dispatching thousands of foreign terrorist fighters to our region. We do hope that this very important statement by the US President will pave the way for dialogue and eventually to the normalization of relations. It will also contribute to the regional peace and stability.”<sup>90</sup>

Russia’s response was expressed by the President’s spokesman reported by *TASS* news agency, according to which he expressed doubt that the desire to understand history was behind the US President’s statements on recognizing a genocide of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire and added that it was an internal affair of the US and that it was part of a “carrot and stick” policy.

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89 “Armenia Marks Genocide Anniversary,” *Azattyun*, April 24, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31220589.html>

90 “Interview of Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Aivazian to the BBC Weekend programme,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, April 27, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/04/27/Aivazian\\_BBC/10917](https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/04/27/Aivazian_BBC/10917)

President of Turkey Erdoğan paid a state visit to Azerbaijan on 15-16 June. He addressed Azerbaijan's Parliament where he voiced his vision of a regional platform and Azerbaijan recovering from the detrimental effects of the past occupation. At the historical town of Shusha, Erdoğan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Aliyev signed the "Shusha Declaration" to cement allied relations between the Turkey and Azerbaijan. The declaration, text of which is included in Annex 2 of this article, consists of many important points and is seen as a road map for the multifaceted aspects of bilateral relations.

Armenia reacted sharply both to the visit to Shusha (which incongruously calls Armenia's historic and cultural center in Nagorno-Karabagh, claiming it to be under Azerbaijan occupation) as well as to the Declaration itself. Regarding the visit to Shusha, the Armenian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 15 June calling it a provocation aimed at undermining regional peace and security.

On 17 June, the Foreign Ministry of Armenia issued another statement, this time on the Shusha Declaration. Some excerpts are here below;<sup>91</sup>

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia has already issued a statement strongly condemning the joint visit of the Presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan to the currently occupied city of Shushi of the Republic of Artsakh and described it as an outright provocation against regional peace and security.

"The declaration signed by the Presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Shushi, as well remarks made by the President of Turkey in the Parliament of Azerbaijan are equally deplorable and provocative.

"The 'Zangezur corridor' expression used in the declaration proves that Turkey and Azerbaijan, encouraged by the impunity of their joint aggression and mass atrocities committed against the people of Artsakh [Karabakh], are now making public agreements against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia. The agreement of the two states to fight against the international recognition of the Armenian genocide is equally worrying.

"Amid such an Armenophobic context, the proposals of the President of Turkey voiced in the Parliament of Azerbaijan on creating a platform for regional cooperation are hypocritical and misleading".

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91 "The comment of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the declaration signed by the Presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, June 17, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/06/17/mfa\\_statement\\_on\\_the\\_decl/10995](https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/06/17/mfa_statement_on_the_decl/10995)

Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov paid a working visit to Turkey and met with his Turkish counterpart Çavuşoğlu in Antalya on 30 June. Talking to the reporters, Lavrov justified the visit of Turkey's President to Shusha, saying it was within the context of a partnership between Ankara and Baku. Some quotations from his remarks are here below;<sup>92</sup>

“Today Cavusoglu and I agreed that both of us will use our resources to contribute to the reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the normalization of relations and to help the Armenians, Azerbaijanis and people of other nationalities to live as good neighbors,

“Russia supports Erdogan's and Aliyev's proposal to create the ‘three plus three’ mechanism for promoting the development of the region, including the three countries of Transcaucasia and the three neighbors -Russia, Turkey and Iran”.

At a government sitting in Yerevan on 24 June, a decision was taken to extend the ban on import of Turkish goods to Armenia for another six months. As was previously mentioned in our article, the six-month ban introduced on 31 December 2020 was to expire on 1 July 2021.

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92 “Lavrov says Erdogan's visit to Shusha was in the context of Ankara-Baku relations,” *CCBS*, July 1, 2021, <https://ccbs.news/en/article/4338/>

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ANNEX 1

**THE GREEK INDEPENDENCE: MEMORY AND POLITICS, THE US PRESIDENT RUBS SALT TO THE WOUND\*\***



*Pictures: (Left) Archbishop Germanos III of Old Patras, whose slogan for the Greek rebellion was “Peace to the Christians! Respect to the Consuls! Death to the Turks!” - Source: MutualArt.com / (Right) Guerilla leader Theodoros Kolokotronis, the ultimate symbol of the Greek independence, who played a leading role in the extermination of the Turks of Morea.*

*Source: GreekReporter.com*

25 March of this year was a symbolic day for Greece as it marked the 200th anniversary of Greek independence. Yet, 25 March was not only the anniversary of the Greek independence, but also the annihilation of the Turks of Peloponnese (also known as Morea) and the surrounding areas who were wiped out in a matter of weeks.

The bicentennial celebrations in Greece, cherished in an overtly nationalistic and mythical mood, for obvious reasons, made no mention of the fate of the Turks that had been completely exterminated by Greece during its

\*\* AVİM, “The Greek Independence: Memory And Politics, The US President Rubs Salt To The Wound”, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2021/38, April 26, 2021, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/THE-GREEK-INDEPENDENCE-MEMORY-AND-POLITICS-THE-US-PRESIDENT-RUBS-SALT-TO-THE-WOUND>

“independence” struggle. The more surprising element was not the attitude of the Greeks but that of the “civilized” West. From the United States to France to Germany, European and other western countries rushed to enthusiastically celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Greek independence without, however, a single reference to the fate of the Muslim population in Greece.

To add insult to injury, French and US warplanes flew over Athens to join the celebrations and publicly show their moral and material support to Greece. This gross and insulting indifference on the part of western countries can hardly be reconciled with their oft-repeated references to the human rights and the sacredness of the human lives, and their efforts to point themselves as the champions of humanity in suffering. The US President Joe Biden, in his 24 April statement of this, even referred to Istanbul as “Constantinople”, which no doubt sound like music to the ears of Greek “megali idea” fanatics.

When the Greek rebellion started 200 years ago on the 25 March, the Turkish inhabitants in Morea became the victims of a barbaric campaign of extermination. The symbolic slogan of the rebellion, proclaimed by the Greek Archbishop Germanos III, was “Peace to the Christians! Respect to the Consuls! Death to the Turks!” And indeed, the archbishop’s slogan was realized to the maximum extent possible. As the British historian William St. Clair noted:

“The Turks of Greece left few traces. They disappeared suddenly and finally in the spring of 1821, unmourned and unnoticed by the rest of the world... Upwards of 20,000 Turkish men, women and children were murdered by their Greek neighbours in a few weeks of slaughter. They were killed deliberately, without qualm and scruple... Turkish families living in single farms or small isolated communities were summarily put to death, and their homes burned down over their corpses. Others, when the disturbances began, abandoned home to seek the security of the nearest town, but the defenceless streams of refugees were overwhelmed by bands of armed Greeks. In the smaller towns, the Turkish communities barricaded their houses and attempted to defend themselves as best they could, but few survived. In some places they were driven by hunger to surrender to their attackers on receiving promises of security, but these were seldom honoured. The men were killed at once, and the women and children divided out as slaves, usually to be killed in their turn later. All over the Peloponnese roamed mobs of Greeks armed with clubs, scythes, and a few firearms, killing, plundering and burning. They were often led by Christian priests, who exhorted them to greater efforts in their holy work.”

As the massacres continued, horrifying scenes emerged:

“... the miserable [Turkish] inhabitants were given over to the lust and cruelty of a mob of savages. Neither sex nor age was spared. Women and children were tortured before being put to death. So great was the slaughter that [Greek guerrilla leader] Kolokotronis himself says that when he entered the town [Tripolitsa], from the gate of the citadel his horse’s hoofs never touched the ground. His path of triumph was carpeted with corpses. At the end of two days, the wretched remnant of the Mussulmans were deliberately collected, to the number of some two thousand souls, of every age and sex, but principally women and children, were led out to a ravine in the neighboring mountains, and there butchered like cattle.”

In this context, the Turkish population in Tripolitsa became the victims of attacks and barbaric treatment. In addition to the reference above, British writers and documents also described in gruesome and graphic detail how the Turks “were slowly burnt to death on a fire, after their arms and legs were chopped off.”

The gross indifference of the western countries and their leaders can hardly be attributed to a genuine ignorance. Popular work such as the Victorian classic, George Finlay’s *History of Greece*, or modern works by scholars such as William St. Clair’s *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, would have known that the Greek War of Independence started with the massacre of the Turkish inhabitants of the Peloponnese.

In addition, these horrifying and disgraceful acts were quite well known to the contemporary Europeans (such as Colonel Thomas Gordon) who volunteered on behalf of the Greeks and later had written what they witnessed with remorse and horror. Wilhelm Boldemann, a contemporary German philhellene who volunteered as a doctor in Greek ranks, was so overwhelmed by what he witnessed that he even committed suicide by taking poison.

Many years later, Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide,” even listed events during the Greek independence as “Genocide by the Greeks against the Turks” in his list of genocides. The international community through the United Nations adopted a definition of “genocide” that was different from that of Lemkin’s. However, Lemkin’s name continues to be frequently referenced (rightly or wrongly) in genocide disputes. In this context, there has not been a single case of condemnation by the European Parliament or the US Congress or individual European countries or states within the US.

In marked contrast to the full-scale campaigns of hate and insult launched against Turkey, there has never been a case in which these self-proclaimed

champions of humanity ever expressed remorse or a desire to remember (or remind people of) the Turkish victims. Greece was never asked to recognize this dark page in history by the European parliament or other European institutions or countries and was never asked to face its history. The Greek people or the Greek State was never asked to apologize to the victims' descendants.

The double standard on the part of the West is thus hardly a veiled one. When it comes the human rights and facing history, the West has never been a genuine defender and promoter of the human rights and their attempts to lecture other countries on human rights is no less disingenuous.

US President Biden has demonstrated this bluntly most recently through his 24 April 2021 statement that nothing has changed in the attitude of the West, promoted both by the church, Catholic as well as Evangelic, and the politicians.

## ANNEX 2

### **SHUSHA DECLARATION ON ALLIED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN AND THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY\*\*\***

The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey,

Emphasizing the historic significance of the meeting between President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the city of Shusha, the ancient cradle of culture of Azerbaijan and the entire Turkic world,

Once again reaffirming their adherence to all international documents signed between the two friendly and fraternal countries, and to the Treaty of Kars of 13 October 1921,

Guided by the “Agreement on the Development of Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey” and the “Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey” signed on 9 February 1994, as well as the “Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance” signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey on 16 August 2010”,

Emphasizing that raising the relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey to a qualitatively new and allied level on the basis of friendship and brotherhood between the two countries and peoples serves the interests of the two countries and peoples,

Realizing the importance of combining the capabilities and potentials of both countries in the political, economic, defense, cultural, humanitarian, healthcare, educational, social spheres, in the field of youth and sports in common interests,

Stressing the importance of continuing joint efforts to ensure global and regional peace, stability and security in accordance with the principles and norms of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations,

Expressing the need for mutual coordination of activities in regional and international strategic issues of common interest,

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\*\*\* “Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey,” *AzerTAC*, 17 June 2021, [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Shusha\\_Declaration\\_on\\_Allied\\_Relations\\_between\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Azerbaijan\\_and\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Turkey-1809375](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Shusha_Declaration_on_Allied_Relations_between_the_Republic_of_Azerbaijan_and_the_Republic_of_Turkey-1809375)

Proceeding from the principles of solidarity and mutual assistance in bilateral and multilateral formats in such issues of national interest as independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, inviolability of their internationally recognized borders,

Combining efforts in promoting joint activities on the regional and international plane aimed at the stable development of the Turkic world,

Emphasizing that the wise sayings of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the national leader of the Azerbaijani people, Heydar Aliyev, “The joy of Azerbaijan is our joy and its sorrow is ours too” and “One nation, two states”, are regarded as the national and spiritual heritage of our peoples,

Comprehensively considering the prospects for further expansion and deepening of bilateral relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey,

Hereby declare as follows:

The sides, expressing their satisfaction with the level of strategically developing relations between the two friendly and fraternal countries, note the importance of continuing the political dialogue at all levels and mutual visits at the highest level.

The sides proudly declare that Azerbaijan, having won a victory during the 44-day Patriotic war, put an end to the aggressive policy of Armenia that lasted for 30 years, liberated its lands from occupation, secured the victory of justice and the restoration of international law.

Azerbaijan highly appreciates the moral and political support of the Republic of Turkey in ending the 30-year Armenian aggression, liberating the occupied lands and restoring the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The parties will continue their efforts aimed at strengthening stability and security in the Caucasus region, restoring all economic and transport links, normalizing the relations between countries of the region and ensuring long-term peace. In this context, the special geographical location of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan will be taken into account. The sides emphasize that the contribution made by Turkey to the operation of the Turkish-Russian Joint Center in the territories of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation plays an important role in ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of the region.

The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, guided by the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of

internationally recognized borders, noninterference in the internal affairs of states, determine the political and legal mechanisms of their allied relations.

The parties note the importance of coordinating their foreign policies and holding regular bilateral political consultations and emphasize in this context the importance of activities between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey within the framework of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council.

The parties pursue an independent foreign policy aimed at protecting and ensuring national interests.

The parties make joint efforts aimed at the development of international relations based on peace, friendship and good-neighborliness through stability and prosperity on a regional and international scale, as well as the settlement of conflicts and the solution of issues of global security and stability.

Demonstrating solidarity and mutual support on international issues of a topical nature and of mutual interest, the parties, speaking from a consolidated position, will deepen bilateral cooperation and support each other within the framework of international and regional organizations, including the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

If, in the opinion of one of the parties, there is a threat or an act of aggression from a third state or states against their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, the inviolability or security of their internationally recognized borders, the parties will hold joint consultations and, in order to eliminate this threat or acts of aggression, carry out initiatives in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and provide each other with the necessary assistance in accordance with the UN Charter. After determining through urgent discussions the volume and form of such possible assistance, a decision will be made to secure defense needs for the adoption of joint measures and coordinated activities will be organized of power-wielding and administrative agencies of the Armed Forces.

Joint meetings of the security councils on national security issues of the parties will be held on a regular basis, discussing issues of national defense, regional and international security that may affect the interests of the parties.

The parties will continue to make joint efforts aimed at reorganizing and modernizing the armed forces of the two fraternal countries in accordance with modern requirements.

Guided by the clearance of mined areas, the parties will support activities aimed at normalizing life in the regions liberated from Armenian occupation.

The parties will encourage the exchange of personnel aimed at strengthening the defense capability and military security, conducting joint exercises and trainings, increasing the interaction capabilities of the armed forces of the two countries, cooperating closely in the management of weapons and ammunition on the basis of modern technologies, and ensuring coordinated activities of authorized agencies and institutions for this purpose. Azerbaijan and Turkey will support the implementation of military exercises together with the armies of other friendly states.

The parties, carrying out mutual technological exchange in the maritime, air and space spheres, and taking into account their national and international obligations, will encourage the implementation of common projects in order to develop joint capabilities and make a positive contribution to the development of mutual technologies in the defense industry, provide their weapons and ammunition, and mutually encourage production technologies and support the creation of production industries that do not currently exist in their countries, the implementation of joint research and production activities, cooperation between defense industry bodies of the two countries in the field of technology, military products and services in the domestic and international markets.

The parties note that the military-political cooperation developed between the two states and meeting their national interests is not directed against third states.

The parties emphasize the importance of further developing cooperation in the field of cyber-security, and will conduct joint scientific research, train specialists in this area and encourage mutual technical cooperation.

The parties will step up efforts aimed at diversifying national economies and exports in trade and economic relations, as well as creating joint production in promising industries and developing more favorable conditions for the mutually beneficial development of investment cooperation. In this context, Azerbaijan and Turkey will take measures aimed at creating mechanisms for organizing the free movement of goods.

The parties emphasize the advanced role of Turkey and Azerbaijan in the implementation of the strategic Southern Gas Corridor, which contributes to the energy security of the region and Europe and ensures the diversification of sources and routes of natural gas. The parties will continue their efforts in a coordinated manner aimed at rational use and further development of the

Southern Gas Corridor. The parties, taking into account the processes in the global energy sector, also express their intention to continue their efforts in the field of electricity and to intensify efforts towards regional cooperation in order to enhance the security of energy supply of the region.

The parties will strengthen their cooperation in order to increase the competitiveness of the East-West Transport Corridor passing through the territory of the two countries. Azerbaijan and Turkey, using the technologies of intelligent transport systems, will further develop the transit and transport potential on the Azerbaijani-Turkish sections of international transport corridors.

The parties note that the opening of the corridor connecting Azerbaijan and Turkey between western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan (the Zangazur corridor) and, as a continuation of this corridor, the construction of the Nakhchivan-Kars railway will make an important contribution to the development of transport and communication links between the two countries.

The parties emphasize that the current level of relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan contributes to the overall regional and international peace and prosperity and that by bringing peace and prosperity not only to the two countries but also to the region as a whole, these relations serve stability, peace and the interests of the international community headed by countries of the region.

The parties will expand and deepen their joint efforts and cooperation in the field of combating various threats and challenges that have a negative impact on regional and international stability and security, in particular terrorism, all its forms and manifestations, financing, as well as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, money laundering, drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal migration.

The Republic of Azerbaijan condemns any activity directed against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, stability and security of the Republic of Turkey, including all forms and manifestations of terrorism, and resolutely supports the fight the Republic of Turkey is waging against terrorism.

The parties will consolidate their efforts to further develop cooperation between Azerbaijani and Turkish diasporas living in different countries, take joint action against common problems they face and show consistent solidarity.

The parties will encourage coordination and mutual support of diaspora activities in representing their countries and communicating the historical truth related to the protection of national interests to the world.

The parties, stressing that Armenia's unfounded claims against Turkey, attempts to distort history and politicize historical facts through their distortion, harm peace and stability in the region, strongly support the efforts of Turkey in this context, which has opened its archives in connection with the events of 1915 in order to encourage the opening of archives in Armenia and other countries and enable a research to be conducted on this topic by historians.

In accordance with the "Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey in the Field of Media" signed on 10 December 2020, the parties, taking into account the capabilities of the Azerbaijan-Turkish media platform, will further strengthen cooperation between relevant agencies of the two countries in the field of information, communication and public diplomacy. Within this framework, active consultations and exchanges of information will be regularly held between the ministers of foreign affairs.

The parties encourage further strengthening of inter-parliamentary cooperation and increased interaction in this direction.

The parties will ensure the provision of the necessary public support for important manifestations of the common values of the two peoples and carry out joint activities to protect the historical and cultural heritage.

The parties note the intensification of national and international efforts that will serve the unity and well-being of the Turkic world.

The parties will strengthen cooperation in the field of promoting and advancing Turkic cultural heritage at the international level.

In order to further strengthen Turkic cooperation, the parties will give an impetus to the activities carried out within the framework of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, the Turkic Academy, the Foundation of Turkic Culture and Heritage, TURKSOY and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries.

The parties express their satisfaction with the agreement reached on the entry of citizens of one party into the territory of the other party with domestic passports only and, noting the exceptional importance of this agreement in terms of proximity between our peoples and ties between them, approve the adoption of appropriate measures to enable citizens of one party to obtain the

right to reside in the territory of the other party in accordance with the principle of reciprocity.

The parties, providing the necessary state support, will continue to develop and deepen close ties on the basis of common values in the humanitarian sphere, in the field of social protection, science, education, healthcare, culture, youth and sports. To this end, relevant agencies of the two countries will carry out joint activities on a permanent basis.

This Declaration is signed in the city of Shusha on 15 June 2021 in the Azerbaijani and Turkish languages in two original copies, and all texts are equally authentic.

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev

President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan