

## EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

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# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

Alev KILIÇ\*

**Abstract:** *This article covers Turkey-Armenia relations as well as domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period of July-December 2021. The tumultuous days in the aftermath of the 44-day Karabagh war and the bitter defeat acknowledged with the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement on 9 November in Moscow left its place initially to relative calm and stability following the snap elections held on 20 June, resulting with the landslide victory of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to the chagrin and against the forecast of several circles. On the other hand, a relatively small but vociferous opposition in the Armenian Parliament composed of prominent and radical elements of the past administrations together with their militant supporters has given Pashinyan reason to be more circumspect. A determining factor in Pashinyan's success has been his deft handling of relations with Russia, the EU, the US and maintaining a fragile balance. Having named his new cabinet and proclaimed his government's ambitious program, the daunting fact before him is to put into practice his promises and vision.*

*Pashinyan has proven to be a seasoned and populist politician. What is now required is to be a statesman. That prompts leading his people to understand that the way to prosperity and stability does not entail trying furtively to turn the clock back but rather accepting the reality in Karabagh despite the incitement and encouragement he receives otherwise. However, instead of accepting the realities and working for a lasting peace, it seems that*

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

*Armenia has been opting for a policy of procrastination with the pipe dream of receiving assistance to continue occupying Azerbaijani territory that is temporarily guarded by the Russian peacekeeping forces. In fact, the President of Armenia is on record declaring for the permanent stay of Russian troops there. Such a policy puts both Russia and the West at odds. Armenia's posturing to be the victim and depicting itself as the sacrificial lamb in the hands of "barbaric neighbors" does not resonate, as it is seen more of a fox in sheep's skin.*

*The changed conditions in the region bodes unprecedented opportunities for regional cooperation and stability for far sighted statesperson to grasp. Approaches to normalizing relations with Turkey would be a concrete indicator on part of Armenia to that end. Unfortunately, the initial indications in the period under review of Armenia's policy towards Turkey appears to be following centuries long practiced traditional pattern of submitting allegiance to rising powers and expecting moral and material rewards for availing itself to the service of those in adversity to Turkey.*

**Keywords:** Pashinyan, Mirzoyan, Sarkissian, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Georgia, USA, France, EU, Trilateral Moscow Agreements, Zangezur Corridor, 3+3 cooperation

**Öz:** *Bu incelemede Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde ve Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde Temmuz-Aralık 2021 ayları arasındaki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır. Karabağ'da 44 gün savaşının ve 9 Kasım Moskova Ateşkes Anlaşması ile tescil edilen ağır yenilginin ardından çalkantılı bir dönem geçiren Ermenistan, 20 Haziran erken seçimleri ve bu seçimlerden, birçok çevrenin tahminlerini ve beklentilerini hüsrana uğratan bir sonuçla, Başbakan Nikol Paşinyan'ın zaferle çıkması sonrası göreceli bir istikrara kavuşmuştur. Ancak, Ermenistan Parlamentosunda temsil olanağı bulan, eski yönetimlerin ileri gelen ve radikal unsurlarından oluşan küçük fakat sesini duyuran muhalefet ve militan yandaşları Paşinyan'ın hareket serbestisini kısıtlayan bir güç olmuştur. Paşinyan'ın seçim başarısında, bir yandan Rusya, diğer yandan AB ve ABD ile kıvrak ve hassas bir denge kurabilmesi belirleyici etki yapmıştır. Yeni kabinesini kuran ve Parlamentosunda iddialı hükümet programını açıklayan Paşinyan'ı bekleyen zor görev, vadettiklerini yerine getirmesi ve vizyonunu uygulamaya geçirebilmesidir.*

*Paşinyan usta ve popülist bir politikacı olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Şimdi gereken devlet adamlığıdır. Bunun yolu da, refah ve istikrarı gerçekleştirebilmek için, sinsice saati geriye döndürme çabasından vazgeçip, aldığı teşvik ve cesaretlendirmeleri bir kenara bırakıp, Karabağ gerçeğinin kabulünü halkına anlatabilmesinden geçmektedir. Ancak, değişen koşulları ve gerçekleri kabul etmek ve kalıcı bir barışı gerçekleştirmeye çalışmak yerine, Ermenistan'ın bir*

*oyalama ve erteleme politikasına yöneldiği, halen Rus barış gücü askerlerinin koruması altında olan Karabağ'ın henüz Azerbaycan'a iade edilmemiş kesiminde işgalini sürdürebilme ham hayalinden vazgeçemediği görülmektedir. Ermenistan yönetiminin en üst mevkiinde bulunan Cumhurbaşkanı'nın, Rus askerlerinin kalışının devamlı olması beyanı resmi kayıtlara geçmiştir. Böyle bir talep ve politika Batı'yı olduğu kadar Rusya'yı da zora sokmaktadır. Ermenistan'ın kendisini "barbar komşuları" karşısında kurbanlık kuzu göstererek mazlumu oynama taktiği etkisini yitirmekte, gerçekte kuzu postunda tilki olduğu görülmeye başlanmaktadır.*

*Bölgenin değişen koşulları bölgesel işbirliği ve istikrarın gerçekleşmesi yolunda, uzak görülmesi devlet adamları için, bugüne kadar görülmemiş olanaklar yaratmıştır. Türkiye ile ilişkilerin normalleşmesi yönündeki yaklaşımları Ermenistan bakımından bu yöndeki en somut göstergesi oluşturacaktır. Ne yazık ki, incelenen dönemdeki ilk göstergeler, Ermenilerin yüzyıllar boyunca uygulaya geldikleri yükselen güçlere biat etme geleneğini, önemsenmek ve ödüllendirilmek üzere, Türkler ile ihtilafta bulunan taraflara hizmet sunma çizgisini izlemekte olduğu izlenimini vermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Paşinyan, Mirzoyan, Sarkissian, Rusya, Azerbaycan, Türkiye, İran, Gürcistan, ABD, Fransa, AB, Üçlü Moskova Anlaşmaları, Zangezur Koridoru, 3+3 bölgesel işbirliği

## 1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

The inaugural session of the new Armenian parliament was held on 2 August. The distribution in the 107-seat parliament is 71 for Nikol Pashinyan's party of The Civil Contract, 29 for Armenia Alliance of former President Robert Kocharyan and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun) faction, 7 for I Have the Honor Alliance, co-headed by former President Serzh Sargsyan and former National Security Service Director Artur Vanetsyan. Tensions ran high at the first session, leading to brawls and intervention of security forces. Pashinyan was confirmed as the Prime Minister of Armenia. Alen Simonyan was elected as the Speaker of the National Assembly. The opposition parties did not participate in the voting. Armen Sarkissian, the President of Armenia, and Catholicos Karekin II, the head of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, also addressed the Parliament. Karekin II called and appealed for unity. President A. Sarkissian underlined the importance of the Armenian Diaspora. He said that the Diaspora is not a wallet for Armenia but a key part of its national state identity. He added, "Our compatriots have the right to influence the fate of their homeland. Armenia and the Diaspora are two different sides of the same coin. This fact cannot be ignored. The time has come to show political will and fix the necessary legal mechanisms."

Pashinyan formed his new cabinet, not in one dispatch as was customary, but with intervals. The cabinet with 12 ministerial posts is filled as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- Deputy Prime Minister: Mher Grigoryan
- Deputy Prime Minister: Suren Papikyan
- Minister of Foreign Affairs: Ararat Mirzoyan
- Minister of Health: Anahit Avenesyan
- Minister of Justice: Karen Andriasyan
- Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport: Vahram Dumanyan
- Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure: Gnel Sanosyan
- Minister of Environment: Romanos Petrosyan
- Minister of Labor and Social Affairs: Narek Mkrtychyan
- Minister of Economy: Vahan Kerobyan
- Minister of Emergency Situations: Andranik Piloyan
- Minister of Finance: Tigran Khachatryan
- Minister of High-Tech Industry: Vahagn Khachaturyan
- Minister of Defense: Arshak Karapetyan

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1 "Structure," *The Government of the Republic of Armenia Official Website*, <https://www.gov.am/en/structure/>.

The post of Minister of Foreign Affairs was the most contested one. It remained vacant for almost three months after the resignation of Ara Ayvazyan on 27 May<sup>2</sup>. Then Secretary of the Security Council Armen Grigoryan was appointed as deputy minister to carry out the duties of the post. Finally, on 19 August, the former Speaker of the Parliament, and a very close collaborator of Pashinyan from the days of the “Velvet Revolution” onwards, Ararat Mirzoyan was officially appointed as Grigoryan was reappointed to his former post<sup>3</sup>. The first change in the cabinet came about on 15 November with the dismissal of the Minister of Defense. He was replaced, on the same day, by the Deputy Prime Minister Suren Papikyan, a 35 years-old civilian, one of the co-founders of the party in 2015<sup>4</sup>.

On 18 August, Pashinyan outlined his 5-year Action Plan covering the years 2021-2026, based on the document “Armenia Transformation Strategy by 2050” which he had made public last year. He presented it as his government’s new five-year program in the Parliament sitting on 24 and 25 August. Much of the program focuses on the new government’s vision of Armenia’s future in new geopolitical realities in the region created after the Karabagh war. Speaking for two days in a row, his main points are here below<sup>5</sup>:

- Armenia is ready for constructive negotiations on Nagorno-Karabagh and considers it important to resume the negotiation process within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship,
- It is necessary to start the process of demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border as soon as possible. He apologized that the planned accomplishment could not be achieved in the Spring due to political turmoil but that the Armenian side was now ready to start the process of demarcation, a remarkable change from his statement in May when he said that the process was conditional on an Azerbaijani withdrawal from Armenia’s sovereign territory and the release of dozens of Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan,
- Unblocking communications in the region, planned according to the trilateral statement signed with the Heads of State of Russia and Azerbaijan is a serious opportunity to break the 30-year blockade of

2 “Armenian Foreign Minister Explains Resignation,” *Azatutyun*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31282523.html>.

3 “Armenia at Last Appoints New Foreign Minister,” *Eurasianet*, August 19, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-at-last-appoints-new-foreign-minister>.

4 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Suren Papikyan will replace Arshak Karapetyan as Defense Minister of Armenia,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, November 15, 2021, <https://en.armradio.am/2021/11/15/suren-papikyan-will-replace-arshak-karapetyan-as-defense-minister-of-armenia/>.

5 “Armenian Government Unveils Five-Year Action Plan,” *Mirror Spectator*, August 20, 2021, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/20/armenian-government-unveils-five-year-action-plan/>.

Armenia. The document does not contain any wording on the creation of a corridor through the territory of Armenia. Just as Armenia must get a road through Azerbaijan for transport links with Russia and Iran, so Azerbaijan must get a road through Armenia for its western regions for transport links with Nakhichevan,

- Adopting a new constitution or constitutional amendments needs to be seriously considered. After the Karabagh war, many have come to the conclusion that the parliamentary system of government is not the best solution for the country. In such a security environment, perhaps Armenia needs to return to a presidential or semi-presidential system,
- It is planned to reform the armed forces, revise the terms of compulsory military service and move towards creating a professional army. As the women make up the majority of the population, greater involvement of women in the structure is also planned. As an important security factor, Pashinyan singled out Armenia's strategic alliance with Russia and the country's membership in the Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO),
- It is estimated that the average annual growth rate of the five years will be at the level of 7 percent. It could be up to 9 percent a year in case of favorable external conditions. The level of poverty will drop below 10 percent by 2026 while extreme poverty will be stamped out. The minimum monthly salary will be raised from the current 68.000 drams (138 US dollars) to 85.000 drams (172 US dollars),
- Developing infrastructure, including roads will be a priority. The 2.6 billion euros granted by the EU will be used for that purpose. 300 schools and 500 kindergartens will be built or renovated. Every third and subsequent child in all families will receive 50.000 drams (about 100 US dollars) a month until the age of six. Decrease of population has long been a concern in Armenia. The population has shrunk by about 15% since the independence due to a combination of low birth rates and high level of emigration. According to official data, in the three quarters of 2021, 103,000 more Armenians, roughly about 3% of the population, left the country than entered it.

The two opposition factions harshly criticized Pashinyan and his action plan. Brawls, scuffles, fist fighting, throwing of bottles, intervention of security forces, expulsion of a female MP and the removal of journalists were the accompanying unpleasant scenes to the sessions on the presentation of the program. After three days of acrimonious debate, the program of the new

government presented by the Prime Minister was approved by 70 votes in favor. The opposition did not take part in the voting<sup>6</sup>.

Armenia marked on 21 September 30th anniversary of its declaration of independence with official ceremonies and an open-air concert boycotted by opposition leaders and condemned by some relatives of soldiers killed in the Karabagh war<sup>7</sup>. The ceremonies began with the President, the Prime Minister and other senior officials laying wreaths at a Karabagh war memorial. The traditional military parade was replaced by a march of soldiers with no display of heavy weaponry. The concert in the evening featured classical, folk, and modern music. Addressing the crowd before the live performances, Pashinyan paid tribute to the fallen soldiers. Overall, it was a somber day.

On this occasion Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia (in Antelias/Lebanon) also issued a statement with political provocation, hatred, and vengeance, saying;

“In fact, countries that are our friends, following their regional interests, sometimes silently and sometimes openly share Azerbaijan and Turkey’s so called ‘peaceful’ approaches. In these adverse circumstances the genocide perpetrator has become a claimant and Armenia is left alone and unfortunately, always in the role to give in.”

He went on to warn that “Do we realize that a new pan-Turanian and pan-Turkic alliance is shaping up in the Caucasus, based on strategic and political interests and pursuing an expansionist vision?<sup>8</sup>”.

On 24 September, the vice-speaker for the opposition faction of the Parliament, representative of the radical, militant ARF-Dashnaktsutyun allied with Kocharyan, announced that they were re-launching the “street struggle”. He told reporters; “We cannot eliminate the challenges and threats facing our country only with parliamentary activities. We have called a march for 26 September and afterwards you will see numerous rallies and actions<sup>9</sup>”.

The former minister of Defense David Tonoyan of the previous Pashinyan government, serving from 2018 to 2020, was arrested on 30 September together with the former Deputy Chief of Army’s General Staff, Lieutenant General

6 “Pashinyan’s five-year plan, now approved, outlines Karabakh priorities,” *Civilnet*, August 29, 2021, <https://www.civilnet.am/news/630970/pashinyans-five-year-plan-now-approved-outlines-karabakh-priorities/?lang=en>

7 Ani Mejlumyan, “On Independence Day, Armenia not in a mood to celebrate,” *Eurasianet*, September 22, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/on-independence-day-armenia-not-in-a-mood-to-celebrate>.

8 News from the Holy See of Cilicia, “Catholicos Aram I: Artsakh Must Be Recognized,” *St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church of Greater Boston*, September 10, 2021, <https://soorpstepanos.org/2021/09/10/news-from-the-holy-see-of-cilicia/>.

9 Gohar Abrahamyan, “The Nikol Pashinyan Administration: 2018-Present,” *EVN Report*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.evnreport.com/magazine-issues/the-nikol-pashinyan-administration-2018-present>.



Galstian, the commander of the Air Force, and some other serving and retired military officials as part of “large scale operational-investigative measures” on criminal charges of fraud and embezzlement for supplying faulty ammunition to armed forces.<sup>10</sup>

Financial irregularities of President A. Sarkissian have also been leaked to the press in late October. He is reported to have held the position of director of the French “VH Estate” company (apparently named after the initials of his sons) for nine years, including when he was president, which he did not declare. The family company is reported to have bought two units of real estate in one of the most expensive districts of Paris for 7,510,000 euros with murky explanation of its financing. The Constitution of Armenia stipulates that the President may not hold any other position, engage in entrepreneurial activity, perform any other paid work. The criminal code imposes a penalty in the case when the person responsible for submitting a declaration submits false information or hides the data subject to declaration<sup>11</sup>.

This is not the only legal issue around the President. There is a criminal case under investigation on the issue of the president’s citizenship. A criminal complaint has been filed alleging that before being elected president, he concealed his dual citizenship, that of his British citizenship, which makes him ineligible to being elected president.

An announcement was made in early October that a Russian company, the GeoProMining group bought a majority stake in Armenia’s largest mining enterprise, the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine and then “granted” a quarter of that stake to the Armenian government. The volume of proven reserves in the mine area are 2 billion 210 million tons of ore. Until 2004, the plant was owned by the government. Then, it was privatized and sold for 162 million US dollars to a German metallurgy group, Cronimet, which officially owned 75 percent of its stock, employing some 4000 workers. Ever since, it has been the major source of undisclosed and unaccounted income of the political elite. In a parliament session, Pashinyan informed the public that for the first time since the 2000’s, Armenia and the people of Armenia are co-owners of the Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine. He expressed hope that their share will increase. He further added that the deal included two very important components: “the first is the construction of a copper smelter which means that copper will be produced in Armenia, second, the construction of a new nuclear power plant is part of this program”<sup>12</sup>.

10 “Armenian General Arrested In Corruption Probe,” *Azattyun*, October 4, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31492556.html>.

11 Vahe Sarukhanyan, “Armenian President Sarkissian Never Declared He Was Director of Company that Purchased,” *Hetq*, November 8, 2021, <https://hetq.am/en/article/137496>.

12 Naira Nalbandian, “Armenian Mining Giant Changes Hands,” *Azattyun*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31488318.html>.



The World Bank report on the regional development of Europe and Central Asia said “as a result of faster than expected economic growth recovery in Armenia in the first half of 2021, the projected growth rate for 2021 has been revalued to 6.1% from the earlier estimation of 3.4%.” World Bank experts linked the recovery not to structural changes but to conjectural developments. Unemployment has slightly decreased from about 20% in 2020 to a level of 17-18%. The IMF has also signaled a significant improvement of its economic outlook forecast<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. Aftermath of Karabagh War and the Process for a Peace Treaty

The Moscow Cease-fire Agreement of 9 November 2020 expressed a clear understanding that Azerbaijan would retain its liberated territories and maintain its territorial integrity within its internationally acknowledged borders. What left the door open for ambiguity was an enclave with an Armenian population of an estimated 25,000 people left intact to be guarded by Russian peace keeping forces. Its return to Azerbaijan would be contingent on establishing the status for the safeguarding of the rights of that population. The Peace Treaty would be the final document to settle all the outstanding and disputed questions.

One of those was the demarcation of state boundaries between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Those boundaries were drawn up during the Soviet era and no on the spot delicate delimitation was made by the two states after gaining their independence.

Having weathered the defeat, Armenia has started looking for ways to turn the clock back and salvage what it can of its previously accomplished facts. In this endeavor, they were also reassured, if not encouraged, by their longtime supporters represented by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-chairs that negotiations could re-start where they were left. A justifiable way to do that would be to show that the cease-fire agreement was not working. Border skirmishes was one obvious and legitimate reason. It would also cut both ways for Armenia. As the boundaries were not precise, the identification of the aggressor would be one's claim against the other. As the “aggression” this time would be against the territory of Armenia, Russian and CSTO intervention could legally be invoked.

The Ministry of Defense of Armenia reported on 28 July that Azerbaijani armed forces made another provocation violating the cease-fire in the North-eastern

13 World Bank, “Europe and Central Asia,” *Global Economic Prospect* (June 2021): 71. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/600223300a3685fe68016a484ce867fb-0350012021/related/Global-Economic-Prospects-June-2021-Analysis-ECA.pdf>.

sector of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said meanwhile that its troops took “adequate measures” after coming under cross-border fire. Later in the day, the two sides agreed, with Russian mediation, to stop the fighting. The Armenian Foreign Ministry accused Baku of deliberately heightening tension on the border. For its part, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry said Yerevan should stop “military provocations” and start talks on demarcating the border between the two states.<sup>14</sup>

That same day, French ambassador in Armenia made a public announcement that France was ready to consider embarking on military cooperation with Armenia that would boost the South Caucasus state’s security.

Armenia’s new Foreign Minister Mirzoyan, in his meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on 31 August, during his first visit abroad, accused Azerbaijan of not fully complying with the Cease-fire Agreement, citing refusal of the release of Armenian soldiers and civilians in Azerbaijani captivity, incursions into sovereign territory of Armenia and “Armenophobic rhetoric” in Azerbaijan. Referring to the enclave in Karabagh, he said, the Armenian government maintains that the disputed territory’s status should be determined only through renewed peace talks mediated by the US, Russia, and France.<sup>15</sup>

The Russian approach to the role of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs was stated by the spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry on 2 September as follows: “In the context of the adequate monitoring of the new regional realities, we believe that the troika (the Co-chairs) can contribute to the strengthening of trust between Yerevan and Baku, as well as to the solution of humanitarian issues”.<sup>16</sup> The Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov was quoted by the TASS Agency on 31 August as saying “Now I proceed from the fact that we are not talking about the resumption of the process; we are talking about the realization of what has already been signed”. The spokesperson of the Ministry said at the weekly briefing on 9 September: “We closely follow the ongoing discussions in Armenia and Azerbaijan on the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries and on the clarification of the Nagorno Karabagh status”. She noted that unfortunately fundamental disagreements over political issues still remain. She said: “Therefore, at this stage, Moscow considers it necessary to strictly adhere to all the provisions of the trilateral agreements of November 9, 2020 and January 11, 2021. Russia hopes that

14 “Three Armenian soldiers killed in heavy border clashes,” *Armenian Weekly*, July 28, 2021, <https://armenianweekly.com/2021/07/28/three-armenian-soldiers-killed-in-heavy-border-clashes/>.

15 “Armenian FM Slams Azerbaijan On Moscow Trip,” *Azatutyun*, August 31, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31436929.html>.

16 “Moscow supports the intensification of OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs’ efforts on Karabakh settlement,” *ArmenPress*, September 2, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1062247/>.

these steps will create conditions for the normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations<sup>17</sup>”.

France made its position known through a message of its Foreign Minister saying France will continue supporting Armenia for overcoming the consequences of Nagorno-Karabagh war, which cost numerous human lives, and as an OSCE Minsk group co-chair country will persistently seek ways to find a lasting solution to the conflict. The French President said in a congratulatory message on the occasion of Armenia’s Independence Day that<sup>18</sup>;

“France stands with Armenia to help it overcome the challenges facing it one year after the deadly conflict in Nagorno Karabagh. France will also remain actively involved in international efforts to resolve the Karabagh conflict spearheaded by the USA, Russian and French co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk group”.

US Secretary of State’s message in that context said;

“As a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains committed to helping the sides negotiate a long-term political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and address the humanitarian impact of the fighting, including the release of all detainees, accounting for those missing, and the full and expeditious exchange of remains.”<sup>19</sup>

The United States ambassador to Armenia declared on 11 September that the status of Karabagh is yet to be resolved, drawing the ire of Azerbaijan. The US President said in the congratulatory message on the occasion of Armenia’s Independence Day that the US will continue to strive for a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

Despite the rhetoric on Karabagh, it was significant and indicative that Armenian government officials declined to attend the official ceremonies on 2 September to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the unrecognized “Nagorno-Karabagh Republic” in the enclave. Pashinyan nevertheless issued a statement congratulating the Karabagh Armenians on the anniversary of the proclamation of their “republic” and reiterated that the Karabagh conflict remains unresolved, and that Yerevan will continue to

17 “At this stage, Moscow considers it necessary to strictly adhere to all provisions of trilateral agreements: Zakharova,” *I News*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.1lurer.am/en/2021/09/09/At-this-stage-Moscow-considers-it-necessary-to-strictly-adhere-to-all-provisions-of-trilateral-agre/553216>.

18 “Macron Wants To Deepen France’s ‘Special’ Ties With Armenia,” *Azatutyun*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31471209.html>.

19 Antony J. Blinken, “Armenian Independence Day,” *US Department of State*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/armenian-independence-day/>.

champion a settlement based on the Karabagh's Armenians' right to self-determination. On the other hand, the ruling party objected and turned down in the Parliament on 10 September an opposition proposal to legally task one of the standing committees with dealing with the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

The foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in New York on 23 September for talks hosted by the US, Russian and French diplomats, an ice breaking event since it was the first face to face meeting of the two ministers since the end of the war. It produced, however, no substantial result. Briefing the meeting at the Armenian Parliament on 6 October, Armenian Minister Mirzoyan had the following to say<sup>20</sup>:

“Of course, the resumption of these format discussions, negotiation process is welcome and is definitely in the interests of Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh. We state once again that the issue is not solved. Azerbaijan likes to say that the issue doesn't exist anymore, but I think that this is one more assurance by the international community that the issue exists and requires solution, and the search for the solution must take place within the format of the OSCE Minsk group co-chairmanship, the body having the only internationally recognized mandate...I positively assess the fact that there was a perception despite the existence of tension and many unresolved issues, we agreed to meet again and first of all discuss the humanitarian issues”.

In a joint statement on the New York talks, the Co-chairs said they “proposed specific focused measures to de-escalate the situation and possible next steps”. Those proposals were not disclosed.

The President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said on 24 September, addressing the UN General Assembly, “The Nagorno Karabagh conflict is a thing of the past. Azerbaijan no longer has an administrative-territorial unit called Nagorno Karabagh”.

It was reported on 1 October that a telephone conversation was held between the foreign ministers of Russia and Armenia where special attention was drawn on the implementation of the trilateral agreements of 9 November and 11 January. The importance of finding solutions to the pressing humanitarian problems such as releasing detainees, sharing mine field maps and preserving cultural heritage sites were also underlined.

On 2 October President of Azerbaijan said he was willing to meet with the Armenian Prime Minister when he was ready for it. He vowed to respond in

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20 “Armenian, Azerbaijani FMs agree to meet under auspices of OSCE MG Co-Chairs to discuss humanitarian issues,” *ArmenPress*, October 6, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1064922/eng/>.

kind should Armenia hand over mine field maps. On 3 October, Armenian Prime Minister said he was prepared to meet with the Azerbaijani President. He added that he was ready to take along all the maps of the mine fields and asked him to take along all Armenian prisoners of war. On 9 October, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs expressed readiness to help organize that meeting. The statement said:

“The co-chairs have taken positive note of President Aliyev’s and Prime Minister Pashinyan’s public statements expressing their readiness in principle to meet with each other under the auspices of the co-chairs. The co-chairs look forward to engaging the sides on modalities and details of such a meeting and reiterate their willingness to visit the region in the near future to discuss next steps in the process.”

It is curious how the Co-chairs jumped up on the occasion as there was no call for their intervention and how they took the opportunity to invite themselves to visit the region.

On the meeting of Pashinyan with the President of Russia Vladimir Putin on 12 October, an Armenian government statement said they discussed “ongoing developments” in and around the conflict zone, efforts to shore up stability in the region and the implementation of Russian-brokered agreements to establish transport links between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pashinyan for his part said, “unfortunately, we still cannot speak of a full stabilization of the situation in our region”. He stressed that Russia continues to play the “key role” in international efforts to solve the Karabagh conflict.

On the initiative of Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, a trilateral meeting of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II and the Azerbaijan based Chairman of the Caucasian Muslims Office Allahshukur Pashazadeh was held in Moscow at the Danilov Monastery, the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church on 13 October. Patriarch Kirill I said;

“I hope that you and I will find the right words which are greatly needed for our peoples. I believe that the fact we are meeting today and your dialogue will become an example for every one”. He also expressed the hope that Karekin II and Pashazadeh’s reputations can have favorable impact on people’s thoughts<sup>21</sup>.

The foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met on 14 October for the second time in less than a month for talks in Minsk mediated by the Russian

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21 “Catholicos Karekin II, Russia’s Patriarch Kirill, Azerbaijan-based Chairman of CMO Allahshukur Pashazadeh meet in Moscow,” *ArmenPress*, October 13, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1065481.html>.

Foreign Minister. The occasion was a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) ministerial meeting. The Russian Foreign Ministry informed that the ministers “reviewed” the implementation of the agreements following the war in Karabagh. The announcement added that “They concluded that most provisions of the agreements are being successfully implemented. They agreed to intensify work on the remaining issues” without further elaborating.<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Pashinyan addressed the ministerial meeting by video and said that Armenia intended to open transport and economic communications with Azerbaijan. He stated that this was “the only way that, we believe, can lead to the goals” of achieving peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

There was speculation in the press that the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan could meet in Moscow at the anniversary of the 9 November Agreement. Armenian Foreign Minister did not explicitly rule out the possibility of such a summit. He said at a Parliamentary session: “Proposals for different meetings in different formats are being discussed. Presumably an agreed text might be released as a result of possible meetings<sup>23</sup>”. However, no such meetings took place. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, Russian Foreign Minister phoned on 2 November his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts to discuss the implementation of the two agreements to stop the war and open Armenian-Azerbaijani transport links. It was reported that the Russian Minister “compared notes” with his counterparts with regard easing tensions along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and “unblocking all transport and economic links in the South Caucasus”. The Russian Minister “stressed the importance of continuing efforts aimed at political and diplomatic settlement of the full range of issues in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia”. The official Armenian readout of the phone call however was that “the ministers agreed on the need to address humanitarian issues resulting from the 44-day war” and that;

“Mirzoyan stressed the need for the unconditional repatriation of Armenian prisoners of war and other detainees as well as the preservation of Armenian religious and historical-cultural heritage in the territories of the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh that fell under Azerbaijani control”.

How can this statement be interpreted as anything other than a pipe dream?

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, who co-heads together with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts the trilateral working group set up by the three respective governments in January 2021, visited Armenia on 5

22 “Azerbaijan says ready to normalize relations with Armenia,” *Anadolu Agency*, October 14, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-says-ready-to-normalize-relations-with-armenia/2392232>.

23 Naira Nalbandian and Marine Khachatryan, “Yerevan Still Vague On ‘Upcoming’ Armenian-Azeri Summit,” *Azatutyun*, October 27, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31532538.html>.

November to talk with Pashinyan about “how and from what the unblocking of roads should start”. Overchuk stated after the talks “We are getting close to concrete decisions, which are first and foremost based on the notion that the countries will retain sovereignty over roads passing through their territory”<sup>24</sup>.

Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan reiterated on 5 November their long-standing position that Armenia must recognize Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and its sovereignty over Karabagh through a “Peace Treaty”. He said “Our proposal is very clear: Armenia must respect neighbour’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. This would help it to get out of an economic and transport deadlock and become a thriving regional country”.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia issued a statement on 6 November to mark the first anniversary of the November 9 Agreement which ended the war in Karabagh. The Russian Foreign Ministry cautioned Western powers to tread carefully when it came to their involvement with Armenia and Azerbaijan, urging them to take the “changed realities in the region” into consideration when advancing their policies. It also said efforts to unblock links in the region by creating transport routes must be based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries which they pass. The statement also noted that Russia is determined to continue actively working with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs in the 3+2 format.

The Armenian media reported that the Minister of Defense of Armenia visited Khankendi in Karabagh on 9 November, the Azerbaijani territory guarded by Russian peace keeping forces. Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan issued the following statement<sup>25</sup>:

“The unauthorized visit of the Armenian Defense Minister to Azerbaijani lands, holding meetings with illegal Armenian formations and expressing an opinion about their combat readiness is a military provocation. The military-political leadership of Armenia, grossly violating the provisions of the trilateral agreement, intentionally destabilizes the situation in the region and endangers the activities of the Russian peace keepers”.

The Azerbaijani Ministry pointed that this provocative visit of the Armenian Defense Minister was deliberately carried out on the eve of the anniversary of the signing of the trilateral Agreement by the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia and the Prime Minister of Armenia. The Ministry added that the Armenian

24 “Russian Official Reports Progress Towards Armenian-Azeri Transport Links,” *Azatutyun*, November 5, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31548083.html>.

25 “Illegal visit of Armenian Defense Minister to Azerbaijani territories is military-political provocation – MoD,” *AzerNews*, November 9, 2021, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/185432.html>.



military leadership, instead of drawing conclusions from the total defeat in the 44-day war and adapting to the new geopolitical situation in the region, strengthening peace and security, is making cheap military adventures. As a matter of fact, following the start of another military adventure on the border shortly after, the Armenian Minister of Defense was abruptly dismissed by the Prime Minister.

Armenian Foreign Ministry issued an extensive statement on the anniversary of the signing of the trilateral agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Karabagh. It proved to be yet another official document denying the acknowledgement of the changed situation and new realities in the region. It reflects words and attitudes dampening the efforts for the implementation of the two trilateral agreements.

US State Department spokesperson also made a statement on 9 November, on the occasion of the anniversary of the cessation of fighting in Karabagh, saying “We urge Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue and intensify their engagement, including under the auspices of the Minsk group co-chairs, to find comprehensive solutions to all outstanding issues related to or resulting from the Nagorno Karabagh conflict<sup>26</sup>”.

Russian Presidential Spokesman told reporters on 9 November that “the trilateral agreement signed a year ago is very important. It is difficult to overestimate its value”. He informed that a meeting between the three leaders is not planned on the first anniversary of the signing of the trilateral agreement. On 23 November, in an online press conference, Pashinyan brought clarity to the subject.

He said the Armenian side was ready to meet online with Azerbaijani side on 9 November if that meeting would solve a specific problem, for example the return of the POW’s. If not, it was suggested to change the day of the meeting, taking into account the painful perception of the Armenian side related to that day. He claimed that, through symbolism or other means, Azerbaijan tries to pursue a policy of aggressive coercion and blackmail against Armenia.

Foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met for the third time in less than two months for talks on 11 November, hosted by their French counterpart, as they were in Paris for the General Assembly meeting of UNESCO. The French Minister tweeted afterwards that he brought them together to help reduce tensions one year after the cease-fire agreement. The French Foreign Ministry said that the Minister sought to “keep up the momentum” in Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations.

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26 Ned Price, “Recognizing the One-Year Anniversary of the Ceasefire Declaration Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *US Department of State*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/recognizing-the-one-year-anniversary-of-the-ceasefire-declaration-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan/>.

Addressing the Parliament, Pashinyan said on 17 November that the whole goal of the negotiation process within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs is to reach the point of concluding a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. He noted that it is strange for him when Azerbaijan says that they offer Armenia to sign a peace treaty but there is no response from Armenia. He claimed that, not only is there a response from Armenia, but it has been said a dozen times that it is not an Azerbaijani initiative. He further underlined that delimitation and demarcation of the border is Armenia's agenda.

Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia announced that Azerbaijan's armed forces launched a military operation at the Armenian border at 1 am on 16 November<sup>27</sup>. He immediately appealed to Russia for military assistance, invoking the 1997 Treaty. Armenia also called on the CSTO for assistance. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense on its part accused Armenian forces of carrying out a large-scale military provocation in the Kalbajar-Lachin area which ended in the disarmament and capture of Armenian soldiers. Russia's Defense Ministry reported that hostilities on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border had ceased after a cease-fire was reached with Moscow's mediation. Armenian Defense Ministry confirmed that the cease-fire became effective at the eastern border with Azerbaijan at 6.30 pm on 16 November in accordance with the agreement reached through Russian mediation.

Pashinyan called on the Russian President for help on 16 November. A second telephone conversation was held on 21 November where the two leaders again discussed the situation in the South Caucasus. In a terse statement, the Russian President's Press Service said that discussions continued the situation in the region and measures aimed at stabilizing the situation in the context of the agreements on Nagorno-Karabagh on 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021.

The 16 November border skirmishes were the third provocation, after the 12 May and 27 July violations of the implementation of the cease-fire agreement, to put into jeopardy the Russian role and aspiration for third party involvement.

The President of the European Council called both leaders to discuss the developments. The Foreign Ministry of France urged the two sides to respect the cease-fire agreement. Swedish Foreign Minister, the current chairperson in office, expressed her full support for the Minsk Group Co-chairs and referred to their statement of 15 November, as did the US Secretary of State, who said: "the recent increase in tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan

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<sup>27</sup> "Armenian PM accuses Azeri forces of breaching border, sacks defence minister," *Reuters*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/armenian-pm-accuses-azeri-troops-violating-border-sacks-defence-minister-2021-11-15/>.

underscores the need for a negotiated, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of all remaining issues related to or resulting from the Nagorno Karabagh conflict<sup>28</sup>”.

The European Union has released a statement calling on the two sides to resume negotiations to work towards a comprehensive settlement of outstanding issues, including border demarcation. The EU stressed that it supports the statement of the Minsk Group Co-chairs of 15 November. The statement concluded that “the EU reiterates its commitment to work with Armenia and Azerbaijan to help overcome tensions and contribute to building a South Caucasus that is secure, stable, prosperous and at peace for the benefit of all people living in this region”.

On 19 November, the EU issued a statement, saying<sup>29</sup>:

“President Charles Michel of the European Council held phone calls on 19 November with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia in follow up to discussions earlier this week on the situation in the region and in the context of preparations of the Eastern Partnership Summit, to be held in Brussels on 15 December.”

“President Charles Michel proposed to host President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for a meeting in Brussels in the margins of the EaP Summit.”

“Leaders have agreed to meet in Brussels to discuss the regional situation and ways of overcoming tensions for prosperous and stable South Caucasuses, which EU supports.”

“During the phone calls, the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders have also agreed to establish a direct communication line at the level of respective Ministers of Defense, to serve as an incident prevention mechanism”.

Both sides were reported to have confirmed their participation.

Recognizing that the Minsk Group Co-chair no longer had the trust of at least one of the sides for being bi-partisan, hence was to be substituted by the EU, assuming the responsibility, Russia was not late in taking the initiative.

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28 Antony J. Blinken, “Fighting Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *US Department of State*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/fighting-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan/>.

29 “Press release following the phone calls of President Charles Michel with leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan on 19 November 2021,” *European Council*, November 19, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/11/19/press-release-following-the-phone-calls-of-president-charles-michel-with-leaders-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan-on-19-november-2021/>.

The announcement of the Brussels meeting was followed by a phone call between the Russian President and Pashinyan on 21 November in which the two sides discussed the situation in the context of the agreements reached on 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021. Then, on 23 November, an announcement came from the Kremlin that a trilateral meeting between Russian President, Azerbaijani President and Armenian Prime Minister would take place in Sochi on 26 November.

The statement said that it was planned to discuss the implementation of the agreements reached on 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 as well as to outline further steps to strengthen stability and establish a peaceful life in the region, adding that the talks would be held upon the initiative of the Russian President.

The two leaders travelled to Sochi where they first held bilateral talks with the Russian President and then had a trilateral meeting which is reported to have lasted about three hours. In a trilateral statement released after their meeting on 26 November, the three leaders agreed

“to take steps to increase the level of stability and security on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and to work towards the creation of a bilateral commission on the delimitation of the state border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia with its subsequent demarcation with the consultative assistance of the Russian Federation at the request of the parties.”<sup>30</sup>

The statement added;

“We have emphasized the need to launch specific projects as soon as possible in order to tap the economic potential of the region. The Russian Federation will continue to provide all necessary assistance in the interest of normalizing relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, creating an atmosphere of trust between the Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples, as well as building good-neighborly relations in the region.”<sup>31</sup>

The three leaders also made statements to the press after the talks, all describing the meeting as positive. The Russian President said;

“We have worked very constructively today. It was a deep analysis of the of the current situation. We have reached agreements on a number

30 “Statement Issued After Russia-Hosted Armenian-Azerbaijani Talks,” *Azatutyun*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31581773.html>.

31 “Russian Proposals On Border Demarcation ‘Acceptable’ To Yerevan,” *Azatutyun*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31567464.html>.

of key issues. The first of them is the creation of mechanisms of the delimitation and demarcation of the border between the two states, which we have agreed to do by the end of this year. I hope it will be done as soon as possible. There are no obstacles to the creation of these mechanisms. We discussed in detail issues of developing economic ties and primarily the issue of unblocking transport corridors. It concerns both railways and road links. I think that here we should thank our vice-premiers who have been working over this issue for quite a long time now”.

He also said that “significant progress” was made on issues of humanitarian nature but did not elaborate. He informed that as part of the agreements made during the November 26 talks, deputy prime ministers of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan will gather in Moscow next week “to summarize some results and announce the decisions we have coordinated today”.<sup>32</sup>

In his remarks, President of Azerbaijan expressed the hope that the Sochi talks would lead to results that would make the situation in the South Caucasus more secure and predictable. He said;

“Today we had a very detailed and I would say, frank conversation on issues of border delimitation and demarcation and unblocking of transport arteries. We openly discussed our plans, we openly discussed issues that cause concern with both sides. The most important thing is that the decisions that we have made in the issue of settling disputes, differences will contribute to a more secure and predictable situation in the South Caucasus. I have repeatedly said that in Azerbaijan we feel like turning over a page of many years of confrontation with Armenia to begin a stage of normal interaction. I think our meeting will lead to good results that won’t make us wait for too long.”<sup>33</sup>

Armenian Prime Minister described the meeting as very positive, saying;

“we have in fact discussed all issues of the agenda”. He said “This wasn’t a meeting to hide problems. This was a meeting during which we openly discussed all issues. I want to point out that it is very positive that on many issues we clarified our positions and it turned out that on some issues we have no misrepresentations as it would seem before this meeting. I want to say that, indeed, we stated that in regards to the issue of opening of all transport and economic links in the region we have a common idea as to how these links will work. On the whole, I too assess

32 “Russian Proposals On Border Demarcation ‘Acceptable’ To Yerevan,” *Azatutyun*.

33 “Russian Proposals On Border Demarcation ‘Acceptable’ To Yerevan,” *Azatutyun*.

today's talks very positively. I think that we can expect concrete results if we manage to build on the dynamics of our talks. I reaffirm the readiness of Armenia and its government that has received a mandate from the people of Armenia to open a peaceful era for our country and our region. This is what we are striving for and today's meeting is beneficial for the realization of this agenda".

He also said that it is necessary to create mechanisms of ensuring security and stability along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan before starting the process of border delimitation and demarcation. He also added that humanitarian issues were also addressed during the talks.<sup>34</sup>

The President of Russia appeared to be much more optimistic and upbeat, speaking about the prospects of an Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement as he addressed high level diplomats in Moscow on 18 November. He praised the role of Russian diplomacy in continuing efforts on settling disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, restoring economic ties in the South Caucasus and unblocking transport corridors.

On 18 November, two days after skirmishes along the un-demarcated border, Pashinyan made a statement saying that the proposals presented by the Russian Defense Ministry regarding "the preparatory stage for the process of delimitation and demarcation" of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border were acceptable. No details about the proposals were given<sup>35</sup>. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said during a news briefing in Moscow that the latest developments demonstrated the importance of that process, including the need for a relevant commission to work on the basis of proposals made by the Russian side.

Prime Minister Pashinyan sparked a public outcry when he called for an investigation of the circumstances in which over a dozen Armenian soldiers were taken prisoner during the 16 November border clashes. Answering a question in the Parliament, he said the following;

"I think it is time for us to investigate every case of captivity properly, because every soldier serving in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia has responsibilities. Perhaps we have been wrong in this because of emotional background, but all cases must be clearly examined<sup>36</sup>".

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34 "Russian Proposals On Border Demarcation 'Acceptable' To Yerevan," *Azatutyun*.

35 "Russian Proposals On Border Demarcation 'Acceptable' To Yerevan," *Azatutyun*.

36 "Pashinian Remarks On POWs Spark Controversy In Armenia," *Azatutyun*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31567906.html>.

### 3. Armenia's Foreign Relations

The foreign policy of Armenia during this period focused on procrastinating the full implementation of the two trilateral agreements of 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 to gain some respite from the bitter defeat and to garner guidance and assistance from its Western supporters for a better deal while not omitting to maintain fealty and due respect to Russia. Relations with two neighbors, Iran and Georgia were intense. Projection of Christian identity was, as ever, in the foreground. Contacts with countries in political adversity with Turkey were conspicuously promoted.

China's interest in upholding its relations with Armenia continued unabated, officially based on the Memorandum on Promotion of Cooperation in Building the Silk Road Economic Belt within the Framework of the Chinese-Armenian Joint Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation of March 2015. The President of China, in his message on 23 June to the Prime Minister Pashinyan on the occasion of his birthday, described Armenia as one of the traditionally friendly countries, praised their joint struggle against the pandemic which gave impetus to further developing bilateral relations and cooperation in various areas. He added "I attach utmost importance to developing our relations. I am ready to exert effort to raise the level of our bilateral relations for the benefit of our peoples". As Armenia is on its way to unblocking transport roads and expressing an interest in a north-south corridor, the Asian Investment Bank, within the framework of its "Transport Sector Strategy", would be the right body to help finance it.

Chinese statistics indicate that the volume of trade between the two countries totaled 994 million US dollars in 2020. 222 million dollars of export from Armenia exports to China, mostly minerals, while 772 million dollars of import from China, mostly consumer goods. As Armenia does not have much underground riches nor direct access to sea or lies in a transit itinerary, it is possible to surmise that the interest lies more in its geopolitical value and its centuries long tradition of availing its services to rising powers.

On 2 July, Ambassador of China to Armenia denied the Azerbaijani media reports according to which, Chinese Ambassador to Azerbaijan talked about the introduction of the "Zangezur Corridor" in the Belt and Road Project. The Ambassador told reporters in Yerevan that he discussed these reports with his colleague in Baku and found out no such remark had been made. He went on to say;

"China has friendly ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. We hope this conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be solved through negotiations, which is better than war. We will take all necessary actions



within our capacities for peacefully solving the issue. Thus, we will try to ensure a border security in the region.”

On the occasion of the opening ceremony of Confucius classroom at the Armenian-Russian University on 28 October, the Ambassador of China told the press that he was very much satisfied with the development pace of the Armenian-Chinese relations. Claiming that the relations between China and Armenia have a history of several thousand years, dating back to the time of the ancient Silk Road, the ambassador said that, in the modern times, the relations between the two countries are developing steadily and further added, “I can say at the moment it’s not enough to say that I am satisfied with the level of development of those relations, but I am very satisfied”.

The Secretary General of CSTO paid a visit to Armenia on 9-10 August and made observations on the border with Azerbaijan. He was criticized again at his talks with Armenian officials because of the reservations he expressed for not providing assistance to Armenia during border skirmishes the previous month.<sup>37</sup>

The Foreign Minister of Uruguay paid an official visit to Armenia on 16 August and promised to open a resident Embassy in Yerevan. He was accorded a privileged welcome for Uruguay to be the first and leading country to have adopted a resolution in its parliament acknowledging the Armenian assertion of genocide.

Armenian Minister of Defense attended on 25 August Army-2021 military industrial exhibition in Moscow and signed army supply contracts with Russian companies. On this occasion, he said that Armenia would stop acquiring old types of weapons and start purchasing new, high-quality weapons. President of Azerbaijan expressed in an interview his expectation that Russia will stop arming Armenia. Responding to his remarks, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said at a news briefing on 19 August, “It is Russia’s sovereign right and the Russian side always takes into account the need to maintain balance of military power in the region”. She added that Russia has supplied weapons not only to Armenia, its key military and political ally in the South Caucasus, but also to Azerbaijan.<sup>38</sup>

Armenia’s new Foreign Minister made his first visit abroad to Russia and met with his Russian counterpart on 31 August. On this occasion he said;

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37 “The CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan met in Yerevan,” *Collective Security Treaty Organization*, August 10, 2021, [https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news\\_odkb/v-erevane-sostoyalas-vstrecha-generalnogo-sekretarya-odkb-stanislava-zasya-s-premer-ministrom-respub/](https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/v-erevane-sostoyalas-vstrecha-generalnogo-sekretarya-odkb-stanislava-zasya-s-premer-ministrom-respub/).

38 Sargis Harutyunyan, “Russian Official Says Armenia Signs Arms Supply Contracts In Moscow,” *Azattyun*, August 25, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31428119.html>.

“Russia is a military-political ally and the main economic partner of Armenia. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm Armenian side’s readiness to continue forging relations with Russia on the basis of the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance<sup>39</sup>”.

He added that closer ties with Russia were even more important for Armenia after the six-week war with Azerbaijan.

Vice President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy sent a congratulatory message to the new Foreign Minister of Armenia on his assumption of office, saying<sup>40</sup>;

“Armenia is an important partner of the European Union. Our relations have intensified significantly since 2018 and the entry into force of our Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement on 1 March was another important, positive milestone. The implementation of this agreement is a central part of our bilateral relations and we stand ready to continue cooperating in areas of mutual interest, including strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights, jobs and business opportunities, the environment, better education and opportunities for research”

“Your appointment comes at a crucial time for Armenia. Following last year’s hostilities, I would like to reiterate the EU’s readiness to contribute, including through the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, in the shaping of a durable and comprehensive settlement, for instance, where possible through support for post conflict rehabilitation and confidence building measures. We continue to support the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group in this regard. In addition, we are also prepared to provide assistance related to border delimitation. Given that all our countries are still grappling with COVID-19 pandemic, let me also emphasize that the European Union continues to be committed to supporting Armenia in dealing with this public health crisis and its consequences”.

The new Armenian and Iranian foreign ministers held a phone conversation on 3 September. Armenian Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying the two ministers had a detailed discussion on productive cooperation between their states. Prospects for expanding cooperation in the economic sphere were especially emphasized. Regional security and ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani

39 “Armenian FM Slams Azerbaijan On Moscow Trip,” *Azatutyun*, August 31, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31436929.html>.

40 “High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell sent a congratulatory message to Ararat Mirzoyan,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, August 28, 2021, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/08/28/congratulatory\\_letter\\_Borrell/11044+&cd=4&hl=tr&ct=clnk&gl=tr](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/08/28/congratulatory_letter_Borrell/11044+&cd=4&hl=tr&ct=clnk&gl=tr).

border disputes were also on the agenda. According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran is ready to deepen relations. It was also noted that Iran's new President pledged to strive for closer Iranian-Armenian ties when he met with Prime Minister Pashinyan in Tehran on 5 August who went there to attend the inauguration ceremonies of the new President. Pashinyan sent his Foreign Minister to Tehran on 4 October, amid mounting tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan underscored by large-scale Iranian exercises along Iran's border with Azerbaijan. The two foreign ministers who had met in New York in the margins of the UN General Assembly in less than two weeks ago sounded satisfied with their latest talks. Armenian Foreign Minister again called on his Iranian counterpart on 25 November. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, the Minister said that "Azerbaijan's latest aggression against Armenia is a serious threat to efforts to establish security and stability in the region". He said he highly appreciated Iran's position on "the territorial integrity of Armenia and the inviolability of its borders". The two also "exchanged views on expanding ties in the areas of trade, economy, infrastructures and energy". "The importance of the implementation of work on the multilateral agreement on the creation of the Persian Gulf-Black Sea international transport corridor was also pointed out" the statement of the Armenian Foreign Ministry said. It is noteworthy that Armenia appears to have no scruples referring to "corridor" here but bemoans when it is used in transport connections with Azerbaijan and Turkey<sup>41</sup>.

Armenia took part in the Zapad-21 Russian-Belarusian military exercises. The Armenian Defense Ministry informed, in a weekend statement that its troops would take part in the exercises. The statement did not specify how many Armenian soldiers would participate. It said that they would be heading to the Mulino training ground about 360 kilometers east of Moscow.<sup>42</sup>

Pashinyan paid a visit to Georgia on 8 September. The Georgian Prime Minister stressed the importance of political stability in Armenia. Pashinyan spoke of new "regional opportunities" that emerged after the Karabagh war. An Armenian government statement said that economic issues were also high on the agenda of talks, including a multilateral deal on a transport corridor that would connect Iran's Persian Gulf ports to the Black Sea via Armenia and Georgia. The Georgian Prime Minister returned the visit on 9 October. The two prime ministers discussed the agenda and prospects of Armenia-Georgia cooperation this time in Yerevan. The parties reaffirmed their readiness to further deepen friendly ties and agreed to continue the active dialogue. On his

41 "New Armenian, Iranian FMs Talk In First Phone Call," *Azatutyun*, September 3, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31442671.html>.

42 Elena Teslova, "Russia, China launch active part of Zapad/Interaction-2021 military exercises," *Anadolu Agency*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/russia-china-launch-active-part-of-zapad-interaction-2021-military-exercises/2331358>.

return to Tbilisi, the Georgian Prime Minister tweeted that they discussed “a new peace initiative for the South Caucasus and Georgia’s readiness to pursue active mediation to create more opportunities for sustainable peace and development in the region”<sup>43</sup>.

Slovakia’s Minister of Foreign and European Affairs paid a visit to Armenia on 14 September. He said that a company in Slovakia is currently in talks to participate in the modernization of the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant. The Foreign Minister of Czechia paid a working visit to Armenia on 30 September. He was also received by the President and the Prime Minister.<sup>44</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan travelled to Tajikistan on 15 September and took part on 16-17 September in the CSTO meeting in Dushanbe as well as the joint meeting of the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). On 16 September, the CSTO chairmanship was passed on to Armenia. The next CSTO summit is planned to take place in Yerevan at the end of 2022 as the 30th anniversary of the Collective Security Treaty and the 20th anniversary of the CSTO will be commemorated.

Armenia applied to the International Court of Justice on 17 September and asked to hold Azerbaijan responsible for what it called anti-Armenian racial discrimination, mass killings and other grave human rights abuses committed during the Karabagh war. Although Azerbaijan reportedly had already been preparing a similar application to the same court, the fact that it officially made the application after Armenia caused news outlets to report it as Azerbaijan’s legal retaliation.

Armenian Foreign Minister went to New York to attend the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. Prime Minister addressed the Assembly with a video message.

Pashinyan paid an official visit to Lithuania on 3 October at the invitation of his counterpart to hold high level talks. He met with the Speaker of the Parliament and was also received by the President who is quoted in the presidential press release to have said<sup>45</sup>;

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43 “Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan Visits Georgia,” *Georgian Journal*, September 9, 2021, <https://georgianjournal.ge/politics/37343-armenian-pm-nikol-pashinyan-visits-georgia.html>.

44 “Foreign Minister of Slovakia to pay official visit to Armenia,” *ArmenPress*, September 13, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1062951.html>.

45 “The President to the Prime Minister of Armenia: we look forward to more active steps in the implementation of democratic reforms,” *President Of The Republic Of Lithuania*, October 4, 2021, <https://www.lrp.lt/en/the-president-to-the-prime-minister-of-armenia-we-look-forward-to-more-active-steps-in-the-implementation-of-democratic-reforms/36738>.

“The upcoming Eastern Partnership summit that will draw cooperation guidelines between the region and the EU is important to Lithuania. We are ready to share our experience and send experts to assist Armenia in making firm steps along the path of democracy”.

He also noted that, thirty years ago, Lithuania was the first country to recognize Armenia’s independence and that this year was special for Armenia and Lithuania as it marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Armenian Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II met with the Pope Francis in the Vatican on 6 October during an international conference of Christian religious leaders held in Rome. He thanked the Pope for his support to the Armenian people and Armenia during the war. Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Sahak Mashalyan, was also in the company of the Catholicos. The delegation led by the Catholicos also met with Vatican’s Secretary of State.

President of Armenia paid a state visit to Italy, from 5 to on October, the first in the history of the Republic of Armenia. He met with the President of Italy, President of the Italian Council of Ministers, President of the Senate, and President of the Chamber of Deputies. He also met with the representatives of the Armenian community at the Levonian College in Rome. During his extended stay, he also attended the opening of the Chair of Armenology at the Sapienza University and delivered a lecture at the University of Bologna.

President of Armenia then paid a visit to the Vatican on 11 October. The Press Office of the Vatican issued the following statement<sup>46</sup>:

“This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the President of the Republic of Armenia, His Excellency Mr. Armen Sarkissian, who subsequently met with His Eminence Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Prolin, accompanied by His Excellency Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States. During the cordial discussions, appreciation was expressed at the development and strengthening of bilateral relations between the Holy See and Armenia, a country of ancient Christian tradition”.

On 15 October, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church announced its decision of establishing the Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, with the location of the Episcopal Chair in Yerevan. The decision to create a chair, with no precedent in Armenia, was agreed to by Catholicos Karekin II.

46 “Holy See Press Office Communiqué: Audience with the President of the Republic of Armenia, 11.10.2021,” *Holy See Press Office*, October 11, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/11/211011d.html>.

On 27 October, the Vatican opened a diplomatic mission in Yerevan. Foreign Minister Mirzoyan inaugurated the Apostolic Nunciature at a ceremony attended by diplomats and senior clergymen. The Catholic and Armenian churches had essentially ended their millennia-long standing theological differences with a joint statement issued in 1996. In 2001, John Paul II became the first Pope to have ever visited Armenia. Pope Francis saluted Armenia for making Christianity an essential part of its identity when he visited Armenia in June 2016. On 28 October Prime Minister Pashinyan received Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State of the Vatican whereby the two sides welcomed the opening of the Vatican Embassy, the Apostolic Nunciature. The substitute for General Affairs was also received by the President A. Sarkissian, to whom he presented, upon the instructions of the Pope, the highest order of Vatican, the Grand Collar of the Papal Order of Pius IX for his contributions to the development of the relations between the Vatican and Armenia as well as for being the first ambassador of Armenia to the Vatican. It was underlined that President A. Sarkissian is the first, both in Armenia and the region, to receive such an order.

On 29 October, Prime Minister Pashinyan received the newly elected Patriarch of Cilicia of Armenian Catholics. On this occasion Pashinyan said<sup>47</sup>;

“We highly appreciate the activity of the Armenian Catholic Church in preserving and developing the identity of our people. The undeniable contribution made by the representatives of the Armenian Catholic Church to the Mekhitarist congregation and the Zmmar Congregation is widely recognized”.

Foreign Minister of India paid an official visit to Armenia on 12-13 October. It was the first ever visit of an Indian foreign minister to Armenia. Armenian Foreign Minister reaffirmed Armenia’s support for India in its long-running dispute with Pakistan. Both ministers who previously met in Tajikistan in September in the margins of the CSTO-SCO joint meeting, stressed the importance of establishing an Armenian-Indian transport link passing through the Chabahar port of Iran.

President A. Sarkissian of Armenia, always fond of visits and contacts abroad and striving to come to the limelight, travelled to Saudi Arabia on 26 October to attend the opening ceremony of the 5th Future Investment Initiative Forum in Riyadh. He was accorded an official treatment and given a photo opportunity with the Crown Prince. The Armenian press described this trip as a historic visit as no diplomatic relations exist between Armenia and Saudi Arabia and it

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47 “PM Pashinyan meets with the newly elected leader of the Armenian Catholic Church,” *President of the Republic of Armenia*, October 29, 2021, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2021/10/29/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting/+&cd=1&hl=tr&ct=clnk&gl=tr>

was the first visit of an Armenian head of state to Saudi Arabia. From there, he went to United Arab Emirates for a brief working visit on 27 October. It was reported that he also made a stop in Bahrain. On 2 November, he went to Scotland-UK to attend the UN Climate Change Conference and to deliver a speech at the World Leaders' Summit. On this occasion, he made use of several photo opportunities with other leaders.<sup>48</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan went to Moscow to meet with the Russian President on 13 October. It was their fourth meeting this year. Armenian government statement said they discussed the ongoing developments.

Co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe visited Armenia from 3 to 5 November for the monitoring of obligations and commitments of Armenia.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia visited Armenia on 17 October. He was received by the Minister of Defense, the Prime Minister and the President. He discussed on ways to further political dialogue and sustain NATO-Armenia dialogue in various domains.<sup>49</sup>

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of the US for Southern Europe and the Caucasus visited Armenia on 3 November on the first leg of her tour of the three states, accompanied by the US Minsk group co-chair and a senior official from the US Agency for International Development. She also participated in Yerevan in an annual meeting of the US ambassadors to the three South Caucasus states. An Armenian government statement on their meeting with the Prime Minister said, Pashinyan discussed with the US officials the processes taking place in the South Caucasus, prospects for a Karabagh settlement, and the Minsk group's peace efforts.<sup>50</sup>

Foreign Minister Mirzoyan paid a working visit to France on 10-12 November to take part in the UNESCO General Conference.<sup>51</sup>

On 18 November, Prime Minister Pashinyan hosted a meeting of the prime ministers of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan forming the Eurasian

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48 "President Armen Sarkissian participates in Riyadh investment forum with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman," *ArmenPress*, October 27, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1066567.html>.

49 "New NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia pays his first visit to the South Caucasus," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, October 21, 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_188208.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_188208.htm).

50 "Senior U.S. Official Visits Armenia," *Azattyun*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/31544499.html>.

51 "Armenian FM to visit Paris, France," *ArmenPress*, November 9, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1067712.html>.



Intergovernmental Council of the Eurasian Economic Union. In his opening remarks, Pashinyan stressed that cooperation within the framework of the EEU is one of the priorities of his government.<sup>52</sup>

On 23 November, President of the French Senate hosted an Armenian delegation led by the Speaker of the Parliament. The sides marked that the meeting was being held one year after almost the unanimous adoption of the resolutions on the necessity of the recognition of the “Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh” by the two chambers of the French Parliament and after 20 years of the adoption of the law recognizing the “Armenian Genocide” by France. The meeting was concluded by signing an Agreement of Cooperation between the two sides.

#### 4. Turkey-Armenia Relations

In its relations with Turkey, Armenia struggled throughout the period on how to tackle the perennial dilemma; on the one hand the necessity and trilateral agreement’s commitment to unblock communications and start cooperation with neighbors for the benefit of all, while on the other hand how to overcome embedded Turcophobia. The interests of third parties in siding with or even inciting Armenia to hold on to its unyielding position also has been a factor in hardening the stand-off. This reflected and had a bearing on Turkey’s relations with those countries as part and parcel of its relations with Armenia.

The US, a major power and also one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, for whatever the reasons may be, acted in a partisan manner on the side of Armenia and blatantly accused Turkey for its legitimate support to Azerbaijan to finally bring to an end the occupation of its internationally recognized territories which the Minsk Group Co-chairs were unable or unwilling to do. The US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs stated on 23 July at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Turkey that during last year’s hostilities in Nagorno-Karabagh, the role of third parties including Turkey exacerbated regional tension. She also informed that Washington had put pressure on Ankara not to get involved in regional conflicts threatening stability. She added that, in addition to differences over regional conflicts, particularly over Nagorno-Karabagh, the approaches of Washington and Ankara are contradictory on several other matters too.

The US based radical, militant organization, ARF-Dashnaksutyun Western US Central Committee issued a statement on 2 August that concluded to

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<sup>52</sup> “Nikol Pashinyan holds meeting with Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan,” *Official Website of the Prime Minister of Armenia*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2021/11/18/Nikol-Pashinyan-Prime-Minister-of-Kyrgyzstan/+&cd=9&hl=tr&ct=clnk&gl=tr>

collectively advance national aspirations and assist in the strengthening of Armenia, “the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh/Artsakh” and their “homeland and call on all Armenians to unite in our common struggle against Azerbaijan and Turkey.”

The Armenian terrorist who assassinated the Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles in 1982 and sentenced to life was pardoned on 28 October and deported from the US. He arrived in Armenia on 29 October and was received with a hero’s welcome. The Armenian press published a message he addressed to the Armenian people, expressing his gratitude for the support and encouragement he received. It was also reported later in the papers that he started lecturing at schools of his views and convictions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey made the following announcement, condemning the pardon<sup>53</sup>:

“We have learnt that the Armenian terrorist Hampig Sassounian, the murderer of Kemal Arıkan, our Consul General in Los Angeles, for whom a parole decision was previously granted, has been deported to a third country.

We consider this decision regarding the aforementioned terrorist as a grave mistake and a concession to terrorism and we once again condemn it.

It is obvious that such decisions will serve to the agenda of circles seeking to glorify terrorism as a functional tool that can be used for political purposes, not to the fight against terrorism.

On this occasion, we pay our respects to the memory of martyred diplomat Kemal Arıkan and all our martyrs who lost their lives in the attacks of Armenian terrorist organizations”.

The President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made groundbreaking statements to reporters on 25 August. He said the following<sup>54</sup>:

“There is a need for new and constructive approaches in our region. Even if there are differences in views and expectations, it will be a

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53 “QA-44, 30 October 2021, Statement of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Tanju Bilgiç in Response to a Question Regarding the Release of Terrorist Hampig Sassounian, the Murderer of Kemal Arıkan, Consul General in Los Angeles,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, October 30, 2021, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc\\_-44\\_-los-angeles-baskonsolosumuz-sehit-kemal-arikan-in-katili-terorist-hampig-sasunyan-in-serbest-birakilmasi-hk-sc.en\\_mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-44_-los-angeles-baskonsolosumuz-sehit-kemal-arikan-in-katili-terorist-hampig-sasunyan-in-serbest-birakilmasi-hk-sc.en_mfa).

54 “Turkey urges Armenia to take constructive steps in region,” *Daily Sabah*, August 29, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-urges-armenia-to-take-constructive-steps-in-region>.

responsible move to show sincere efforts for developing good neighborly relations based on trust, including respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one another. We can work toward gradually normalizing our relations with an Armenian government that states it is ready for such progress”.

He also reiterated his call for a regional cooperation platform of six countries; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia and Turkey, which has come to be dubbed as 3+3.

The six–state regional cooperation proposal was received favorably by Russia and Iran. On October 8, the Georgian Foreign Minister, at an interview with the Public TV Channel said<sup>55</sup>;

“Georgia should at least in some form participate in the 3+3 platform, so as not to lose its position in the region, despite the fact that it will be very difficult to cooperate with Russia. Although, of course the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country is the red line”.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry brought clarification the next day, saying the Minister’s comment was misinterpreted, that in fact, he did not say that Georgia would take part in such a format.

The Armenian Prime Minister said in an interview with Armenian Public Television on 7 November that<sup>56</sup>;

“Armenia is interested in the 3+3 format, like in any other regional Project, if it doesn’t duplicate other existing formats. But it would be pointless to discuss in this format the agenda, which is addressed, say, within the Minsk group or the working group on unblocking communications”.

On 26 November, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister told TASS Agency that Russia hopes that the meeting of 3+3 format will take place in “not too distant future”. He said “While the issue is being elaborated, it is necessary to receive the consent of all participants. When we reach that agreement, we will announce where the meeting will take place”. He added that the chair intended for Georgia will remain vacant if Georgia does not confirm its participation. When Georgia expresses readiness, it can be a full participant.<sup>57</sup>

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55 “‘Not with Russia’ - Georgian Foreign Ministry against Turkey’s idea of creating 3+3 regional format,” *Jam News*, October 9, 2021, <https://jam-news.net/not-with-russia-georgian-foreign-ministry-against-turkeys-idea-of-%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bcreating-a-33-regional-format/>.

56 “Armenian PM highly assesses activities of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh,” *TASS*, November 7, 2021, <https://tass.com/world/1358437>.

57 “Russia hopes that the meeting of “3 + 3” format is a matter of not too distant future,” *ArmenPress*, November 26, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1069258/>.

The Armenian Prime Minister was quick in acknowledging the “positive signals” from Turkey. At the start of his cabinet’s meeting on 27 August, he responded saying “There have been certain public positive signals coming from Ankara in terms of regional peace. We will evaluate those gestures and respond to positive signals with positive signals”.

These remarks and openings caused deep controversy in Armenia throughout the period. The oft repeated cliché of “Armenia wants to normalize its relations with Turkey but will not accept any preconditions set by Ankara” was in the forefront. The Chairman of the Armenian Parliament Committee on Foreign Relations said on 31 August that Yerevan continues to believe that Turkish-Armenian relations must not be linked to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict or the 1915 “Armenian Genocide” issue. He further expressed the opinion that the Turkish President’s statement contained points resembling preconditions, which do not help to launch the normalization process at all.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on 2 September that Moscow took note of a recent exchange of positive signals” between Yerevan and Ankara. In that context she also referred to Russia’s support for the 2009 protocols on normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations. She told reporters, “Now too we are ready to assist in a rapprochement between the two neighboring states based on mutual respect and consideration of each other’s interests”.<sup>58</sup> The Russian Foreign Minister also added his voice on 3 September by recalling some details of the signing of the Zurich Protocols of 2009, citing his personal efforts and contributions. He said the situation is completely different after the Karabagh war and the parties can resume the reconciliation process, that it would be logical if Armenia and Turkey resume efforts to normalize relations. He also stressed that Moscow is ready to assist those efforts in the most active way.

Armenia criticized Azerbaijan and Turkey on 7 September for holding joint military exercises near Armenia. The Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesman said<sup>59</sup>,

“We regard the conduct of the Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercises near the borders of Armenia, Karabagh Republic [“Artsakh”] and the Lachin corridor as an action damaging de-escalation steps and undermining efforts to establish a lasting peace, security and stability in the region”.

58 “Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, September 2, 2021,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, September 2, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4851800](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4851800).

59 Marianna Mkrtchyan, “Armenian Foreign Ministry on holding Azerbaijani-Turkish military exercises in Kashatagh region,” *Arminfo*, September 7, 2021, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=64907&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=64907&lang=3).

Prime Minister Pashinyan described as encouraging the Turkish President's recent statements on normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations and speaking at a government meeting on 8 September, said the following<sup>60</sup>:

“I must note that the President of Turkey has publicly commented on relations with Armenia. We see in those statements an opportunity to talk about normalising Armenia-Turkey relations and reopening the Turkish-Armenian railway and roads and we are prepared for such a conversation. I am happy to point out that the Russian Federation has publicly expressed readiness to actively assist in that process. The European Union, France, and the United States are also interested in that process”.

On 13 September, Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a written statement that<sup>61</sup>:

“At the moment no negotiations are being held for the purpose of normalising relations between our two countries. Contacts between Armenian and Turkish diplomats are currently limited to participation in multilateral discussions on various issues on the international agenda”.

President of Turkey Erdoğan told reporters at a press meeting on 19 September that the Prime Minister of Georgia, who was in Armenia recently, conveyed him the proposal by the Prime Minister of Armenia for a meeting. He is reported to have said that Turkey was ready for talks with Armenia but for that, Armenia must take positive steps. In this connection, he expressed hope that the difficulties in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations will be overcome by opening the Zangezur Corridor.

The response of Pashinyan was voiced on 20 September by the Prime Minister's spokesperson in the *Public Radio of Armenia* in the following manner<sup>62</sup>:

“In all his international contacts, Prime Minister Pashinyan presents to his colleagues the vision of opening an era of peaceful development for Armenia and the region enshrined in the government's program and expresses the readiness of the Armenian government to make efforts in that direction. The Prime Minister spoke about his vision for the start of talks with Turkey during a recent Q&A session with the National

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60 “Pashinian Encouraged By Erdogan's Statements,” *Azatutyun*, September 8, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31450016.html>.

61 Jeyhun Aliyev, “Azerbaijan warns Russia over illegal entry of foreign vehicles into its territories,” *Anadolu Agency*, September 13, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-warns-russia-over-illegal-entry-of-foreign-vehicles-into-its-territories/2362966>.

62 “Erdoğan: Georgian Prime Minister told me Pashinyan asked for dialogue,” *OC Media*, September 20, 2021, <https://oc-media.org/erdogan-georgian-prime-minister-told-me-pashinyan-asked-for-dialogue/>.

Assembly, saying that he believes that high level contacts should be preceded by working discussions and shares this vision with international partners. There has been no contact between Armenian and Turkish officials so far, although the Armenian government is ready for such contacts. In case of such effective work, Armenia will be ready for high-level meetings as well”.

On 24 September, Secretary of Armenia’s Security Council said Yerevan is ready to start a Turkish-Armenian dialogue without preconditions and discuss all thorny issues during a gradual normalization process. He did not explicitly deny that Pashinyan offered to meet with the Turkish President, saying, “We believe that a dialogue at a high and the highest levels is one of the ways of normalizing those relations”.

On 26 October, the Armenian press highlighted the words of the Turkish President Erdoğan at a joint press conference with the President of Azerbaijan following the opening ceremony of the Fuzuli International Airport in Karabagh, that there would be no obstacle to the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations if Yerevan demonstrates a sincere will with Azerbaijan. He was quoted saying;

“Today, the conditions for lasting peace and normalization are more favorable than ever. For that, it is necessary to take steps in accordance with the new situation in the region. We are in favor of lasting peace in the region and comprehensive settlement of relations. However, it is necessary to clarify the state borders and their mutual recognition. The foundation of good relations must be built on it. In these issues, Armenia must show sincere will to solve the problems with Azerbaijan. If Armenia shows sincere will to normalize relations with Azerbaijan, there will be no obstacle to normalizing relations between Turkey and Armenia”.

The President of Armenia A. Sarkissian, known with his anti-Turkey sentiments, made the following remarks in an interview to a Russian press agency on 28 October<sup>63</sup>:

“War in the South Caucasus was not the only problem connected with Turkey. It is part of a regional and global policy. Let’s remember why Turkey entered Libya, why it is so active in Iraq, why it is present in Lebanon and Syria, why it clashes with Cyprus and Greece in the Mediterranean, why it keeps hundreds of thousands of refugees on the

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63 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Artsakh War was the continuation of Turkey’s policy, Armenian President says,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, October 28, 2021, <https://en.armradio.am/2021/10/28/artsakh-was-was-the-continuation-of-turkeys-policy-armenian-president-says/>.

EU border. In some sense Europe is a hostage of Turkey because if those hundreds of thousands of refugees enter Europe, it will be hard to speak about its stability. Last year's Artsakh [Karabagh] war was the continuation of Turkey's policy, its wish to increase the influence in the region. Whether we want it or not, Turkey have become more influential in the South Caucasus. It is very influential in Georgia in the economic sense. Today, Turkey is largely present in Azerbaijan. The influence of the Turkish armed forces on Azerbaijani armed forces after the war is obvious and it has a huge influence on Azerbaijan's sovereignty, its economy and respectively, logistics, transport routes including the oil pipelines stretching from Baku to Tbilisi and Ceyhan. Turkey has become more influential politically and militarily. On the other hand, the Turkish economy is not one of the best ones in the World. As you know, many investment companies leave Turkey. The economic downturn gets compensated by high activity".

In another interview with the editor in chief of the Russian *Arguments and Facts* periodical, the President of Armenia said the following:

"It would be desirable to resolve the issues with Azerbaijan, although it is difficult. It would not be bad to have good relations with Turkey, which is more difficult. We lived for several hundred years in the Ottoman Empire and then in the Russian Empire. As a result, the Armenian Republic, which existed in the Russian Empire, is today independent Armenia. And where is Western Armenia which was in the Ottoman Empire? Where are the Armenians who lived there? There are as many Armenians in Russia today as in Armenia. And in Turkey they were more".

In an interview with French newspaper *Le Figaro* on 20 November, answering the question if Armenia is ready to normalize relations with Turkey, Foreign Minister of Armenia said<sup>64</sup>;

"We have always stated that we are ready to normalize our relations without preconditions, despite the huge support provided by Turkey to Azerbaijan during the war against 'Artsakh', both politically and through the supply of weapons as well as deployment of thousands of foreign mercenaries. We have received positive signals from Turkey to reopen the dialogue, but it remains complicated. Ankara put forward new conditions. Among them is the 'corridor' connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan. It cannot be subject of discussion at all. Countries should

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64 "Turkey's condition for normalizing relations with Armenia cannot be even discussed – FM Mirzoyan," *ArmenPress*, November 20, 2021, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1068744.html>.



allow transit while maintaining their sovereignty over their territory. All communication channels in the region should be opened”.

An Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesperson made the following remarks to an international news agency on 22 November<sup>65</sup>:

“A number of international partners, including Russia, have stated that they are ready to start the Turkish-Armenian settlement process. And we have informed Russia that we are ready to start the Armenian-Turkish settlement process without preconditions. When and if such a process starts, naturally we will provide information on that, At the same time, we want to note that there is no negotiation process with Turkey at this moment”.

The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on 25 November that Russia is ready to promote efforts to repair relations between Armenia and Turkey, confirming that Yerevan has made a request for Russia’s mediation in mending ties with Turkey. She said “I can confirm that Armenia has applied to us for supporting the relations between Yerevan and Ankara as a mediator”. When asked whether Russia has discussed with Turkey the normalization of the Armenia-Turkey relations, given that Armenia has notified Russia that it is ready for normalization without preconditions, she said;

“Russia is interested, as you know, and has made efforts for the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations. Our country is ready to further promote this process in every possible way in the future as well. We believe that the start of this process will definitely contribute to rapprochement of societies in the region and the development of an atmosphere of good-neighborliness and trust, which is especially actual now. We will definitely inform you whenever new details will emerge, but naturally only if it wouldn’t harm the negotiations process itself, given its sensitive nature”.

She also added;

“We are taking all steps to establish a peaceful life and strengthen stability in the region. Special attention, of course, is now paid to the restoration and development of trade and economic ties and transport links”.

In an online press conference on 23 November, Pashinyan reiterated Yerevan’s readiness to normalize its relations with Ankara, but warned that such a process

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65 “Armenia Asks Russia To Mediate In Normalization With Turkey,” *Azatutyun*, November 22, 2021, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31573666.html>.

cannot take place if Turkey presses conditions like Azerbaijan getting an extraterritorial corridor to Nakhichevan. He said “We want to normalize our relations with Turkey. We cannot discuss any corridor issue. But we want to discuss opening of regional transport links”.

On 25 November, the Armenian press reported, under the title, “Turkish aggressor declares that Armenia needs to assess the extended hand for peace as a chance” the statement of the National Security Council of Turkey, the true form of which was quoted as “Armenia needs to assess the extended hand for peace as a chance, fully maintain the ceasefire and be loyal to cooperation”.

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