

# FACTS AND COMMENTS

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## A SUMMARY OF 2002

**T**he year 2002 witnessed frequent meetings between the foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia. The foreign ministers saw the international organizations' meetings as an opportunity to hold bilateral talks in Reykjavik<sup>1</sup> in May, in İstanbul in June<sup>2</sup> and in New York in September. During these meetings, Turkey focused on finding a solution to the issue of Karabagh conflict, while the Armenian side concentrated on the question of establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey and of opening the borders. Although no progress was made in these meetings, the Armenian side, in particular, stated on numerous occasions that they favored the continuation of these talks. However, the general election in Turkey and the presidential election in Armenia halted the meetings of the foreign ministers.

Throughout the year 2002, the Armenian foreign minister stated on numerous occasions that Armenia was ready, without preconditions, to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey. There are many reasons for Turkey not to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and of her closure of the Armenian border. Some of the important ones are the Armenian occupation of Karabagh and other Azerbaijani territories; the Armenian unjust allegations of genocide directed against Turkey; and the reluctance of Armenia to officially recognize the territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Turkey. If the unconditional diplomatic relations are to be established between the two countries, Armenia needs to show her good will by acting towards the solution of these problems. Because of these problems, the exchange of diplomatic relations with Armenia and opening of the border are against the interests of Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 25-27.

<sup>2</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, pp. 7-8.

**The Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul published a statement protesting the report.**

In 2002, unlike 2000 and 2001 and despite the efforts of the Armenian militants, no foreign parliaments passed any resolution to recognize the alleged genocide claims. In this context, the efforts made in the parliaments of Sweden<sup>3</sup> and Switzerland<sup>4</sup> were not materialized. Though initially the Canadian Senate did pass a resolution on this subject,<sup>5</sup> it was not enacted because the necessary vote was not secured in the House of Commons. Also, no draft resolution on the alleged Armenian genocide was presented to the US Congress, although, an unsuccessful attempt was made to include this matter in a resolution on the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>6</sup>

On February 28, 2002 the European Parliament, in a report on the Caucasus, restated that the alleged genocide was recognized by the Parliament and made a request from Turkey to lift the blockade on Armenia. This sparked great protests in Turkey. The political parties in the Turkish Grand National Assembly published a statement on the same day stating that the European Parliament intentionally distorted the historical facts.<sup>7</sup>

The Forum of Armenian Associations in Europe, which works in order to forward Armenian views in the organs of the European Union, commissioned by Tessa Hofmann, who is well-known for her continuous pro-Armenian stance, prepared a report on Turkey's Armenians. The report entitled as "Armenians in Turkey Today: A Critical Assessment of the Situation of the Armenians in Turkey Today". It was published in late 2002 and contained numerous errors regarding the position of the Armenians in Turkey. The Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul published a statement protesting the report.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 17-19.

<sup>5</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, pp. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ermeni Arařtırmaları*, Issue 4 (December 2001-January, February 2002) pp. 238-242.

<sup>8</sup> *Review of Armenian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2, pp.17-19

The most significant vehicle for the Armenian propaganda in 2002 was the movie of "Ararat" directed by Atom Egoyan. The themes of the movie were based on many historical falsifications and distortions, and it contained many scenes of violence. Due to its confused and complicated storyline, this movie failed to attract audience even in the countries with an Armenian population. A book published by the Institute for Armenian Research displayed the propaganda aspects and historical inaccuracies of this movie.<sup>9</sup>

Although Presidents Aliyev and Kocharian privately met several times, no progress has been made on the Karabagh issue. The Minsk Group that had been formed by the OSCE to specifically address this conflict was practically not active in 2002. The French, American and Russian co-chairs of this group visited both Azerbaijan and Armenia, but they failed to produce new proposals. This fact leads one to question the value of the co-chairs' activities and of the Minsk Group they represent. It must be borne in mind that the failure to find a solution serves the interests of Armenia that has already occupied Karabagh and considers it as an Armenian land. New measures are needed to be put on the Karabagh problem which is currently at a deadlock. If the problem is to be solved within the OSCE system, a new negotiating mechanism which will sustain the balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia must be created. If the creation of such system is not possible, then the issue must be taken to the United Nations whose prior mission is to solve the conflicts. The presence of Muslim states in this body will give Azerbaijan such needed balance.

It seems that there is tacit agreement between the parties to postpone the solution of the Karabagh conflict until the end of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Armenia and presidential election in Azerbaijan. However, it must be borne in mind that as the integration of Karabagh with Armenia rapidly progresses, each day that goes by is in the interest of Armenia and against the interest of Azerbaijan.

Regarding the study of the Armenian question in Turkey, the year 2002 contained a number of important activities. The Turkish Congress of Research on Armenian Studies was held in April. Over 130 scholars and writers, who presented 115 papers on a wide

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<sup>9</sup> Şenol Kantarcı, Sedat Laçiner, *Ararat, Ermeni Sanatsal Propagandası (Ararat Artistic Armenian Propaganda)* (Ankara: ASAM, 2002).

range of topics concerning the various aspects of the Armenian question attended the Congress. The Congress was the largest one organized in Turkey. Taking into consideration the number of papers presented, the congress is likely to be the largest congress on this topic in the world. The Institute for the Armenian Research will publish the papers of the Congress in 2003.

The Institute for the Armenian Research has been publishing the bilingual quarterly "Ermeni Arařtırmaları" (Armenian Studies) since May 2001. As a result of an increase in the number of English articles in this quarterly and in order to reach to the non-Turkish readers as well, the Institute began to publish by the end of 2002 a quarterly in English titled as "Review of Armenian Studies".

Samuel A. Weems, a former District Attorney and judge from Arkansas, published in mid-2002 a highly praised book entitled as "Armenia, Secrets of a 'Christian' Terrorist State". After publishing the first volume of "The Armenian Great Deception Series", Mr. Weems unfortunately died on January 24, 2003. May he rest in peace.

#### **PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN ARMENIA**

The presidential election in Armenia was held on February 19, 2003. As none of the candidates was able to secure the necessary vote to be elected, the run-off was held on March 5, 2003 and Robert Kocharian was re-elected as President for a five-year term.

##### *The Election Campaign*

Although the 16 opposition parties had declared that they would agree on a single candidate,<sup>10</sup> they were unable to do so. The main reason for this is the fact that there is no single prominent politician in Armenia, which all parties can agree on. Although it was believed that the former President Ter Petrosian could have played a unifying role, the opposition did not support him either.<sup>11</sup> Shortly before the election, some parties decided to support the leader of the People's Party, Stephan Demirchian. However, finally, 9 candidates including Kocharian declared their candidacy.

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<sup>10</sup> AREA, January 28, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> RFE/RL November 16, 2002.

On the other hand, the candidature of Kocharian was widely supported by many quarters. That includes the Prime Minister (from Republican Party) and Andranik Markarian as well as by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the Dashnak Party), the Land of Rule of Law Party and a dozen of other small parties and political organizations.<sup>12</sup>

President Kocharian gave a series of promises during his election campaign. The most significant of these was to create 30-40 thousand new jobs in the country every year. Other promises included the construction of new roads and houses for the refugees, increasing the supply of gas to the Soviet regime era's level, reinstating continuous water supply to houses and raising the water level of the drying Lake Sevan by 60 cm.<sup>13</sup> Kocharian also promised that if elected, he would stop the migration of Armenians and ensure the return of those already were abroad.<sup>14</sup>

A remarkable development during the election was the refusal of the candidature of the first Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia Raffi Hovhannisian on the grounds that he was not a citizen of Armenia. Armenian law requires that, to be eligible for the presidency, candidates must have held citizenship for at least 10 years and be resident in Armenia for the same duration.

This brings to the agenda the citizenship of Kocharian himself who was born in Karabagh. Kocharian was at the head of the Karabagh State Defense Council during 1992-1994 period. He became the president of the so called Republic of Karabagh during 1994-1997. As he was holding official positions in Karabagh during 1992-1997 term, it is physically impossible for him to have resided in Armenia. However, the claim of some candidates that Kocharian is not an Armenian citizen, was refused by the courts.<sup>15</sup>

Some acts of violence were witnessed during the election. Unknown assassins killed the President of the Armenian Public Television and Radio Council Tigran Naghdalian on December 27, 2002. It has been claimed that this killing was linked to the murder of eight people, who were attacked in the Armenian

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<sup>12</sup> *Armenia This Week*, February 14, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> *La Lettre de L'UGAB*, January 14, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> *Noyan Tapan*, January 31, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, January 9, 2003.

Parliament on October 27, 1999. Naghdalian was one of the prime witnesses of this attack.

Alex Harutiunian who was appointed as the Chairman of the Armenian Public Television and Radio Council after Naghdalian was arrested as an accomplice of the murders in Parliament's attack. He was later released due to lack of evidence. Harutiunian was the Chief of Cabinet to Kocharian, when he was arrested.<sup>16</sup>

The second act of violence during the presidential election was the stabbing of the parliamentarian Hayk Babukhanian on February 4, 2003, while he was attending a rally for the presidential candidate Aram Karpetian.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately the Armenian political life has a tradition of violence. From 1998 (Kocharian was elected President at that time) to the current time, we can list the following acts of violence: the slaying of Chief Prosecutor General Henrik Khachatarian in 1998; the murder of eight persons including the Speaker Demircian and Prime Minister Sarkasian in 1999 in Parliament; the killing of the Prime Ministerial Aide Gagik Poghosian in 2001; the wounding of the well known journalist Mark Grigorian; and as mentioned above, the murder of Tigran Naghdalian in 2002. Furthermore, the year 2003 started with the stabbing of Babukhanian. The reason for the unabated continuation of these attacks is the fact that none of the assassins have been caught.<sup>18</sup>

The central theme of the harsh criticism carried out by the media during the presidential election was the unlawful actions conducted by the supporters of President Kocharian. Based on the news from the Armenian media, these can be listed as follows: State television widely broadcasted in favor of President Kocharian while paying little attention to the other candidates;<sup>19</sup> misinformation was given about the other candidates;<sup>20</sup> while the posters of Kocharian were to be seen on the walls of many buildings including the official ones, the other candidates faced difficulties in showing up their own posters,<sup>21</sup> and sometimes

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<sup>16</sup> *La Lettre de l'UGAB*, January 11, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> *Yerkir Online*, February 4, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> *Le Monde*, February 19, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> *Armenia Now*, January 31, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> *Review an Outlook*, February 2, 2003, "The Noyan Tapan Highlights" N4, February, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

these were torn off;<sup>22</sup> the propaganda headquarters of President Kocharian was in a government building;<sup>23</sup> soldiers participated in the election campaign in favor of President Kocharian. Also, their other actions: school children were taken to Kocharian's election

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campaigns;<sup>24</sup> the Minister of Justice David Harutiuiian held conferences with teachers and parents forcing them to vote for Kocharian;<sup>25</sup> only Kocharian's TV advertisements were shown during prime time; the electricity, gas and water bills of numerous people were paid in return to secure their votes for Kocharian.<sup>26</sup>

Defense Minister Serge Sargisian's management of President Kocharian's election campaign without resigning from his official post, led observers to think that Kocharian wanted to use governmental sources and facilities during his campaign. Some even claimed that Sargisian had ordered the security forces to ensure that Kocharian was re-elected.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Foreign Policy Issues in the Election Campaign*

Foreign policy issues were barely touched upon during the election campaign. It's a fact that the large number of poor people in Armenia is longing for the days of the Soviet regime, when a form of stability had been established. 13.7 percent of respondents in a poll stated that they wished to see Armenia joining the Russia-Belarus Union, while 6.3 percent expressed the desire for Armenia to become a part of the Russian Federation itself. A majority of the population, as large as 53.6 percent, believed that the close relations with the Russian Federation must be preserved.<sup>28</sup> One source claimed that it was this extraordinary

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<sup>22</sup> *Arminfo*, January 29, 2003 and *Orran*, February 1, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *Orran*, February 1, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Eurasianet Organization* February 11, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> *Ria Orienda* January 28, 2003 and *Review and Outlook*, February 2, 2003 "The Noyan Tapan Highlights" 4 February, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, January 16, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> *AZG Daily*, December 10, 2002.

standing of Russia in Armenia that led Kocharian to visit Moscow for no apparent reason on 16-18 January.<sup>29</sup> Kocharian most probably intended to prove that relations with Moscow are perfect and thus ensure the votes of those Armenians favoring Russia.

Besides the very clear pro-Russian stance, Armenia wishes good relations with also the USA and Europe as well. As Armenia is in need of support from all these nations, it has dubbed this policy as "equilibrium". Foreign Minister Oskanian stated in an interview that this is one of the most successful pillars around which their foreign policy was built.<sup>30</sup> He also added that departure from this policy would have negative repercussions. It is worth noting that Armenia does not consider either Turkey or Azerbaijan, neither even Georgia as an element in its balance policy.

On the other hand, in the same interview the Armenian Foreign Minister stated that, if he were to be elected, Kocharian would be ready to knock on the European Union's door to begin membership negotiations in 2008, which would be the final year of Kocharian's second term. However, the fraud and irregularities witnessed during the presidential election prove that European Union membership is not so close.

#### *The Karabagh Issue in the Election Campaign*

The Karabagh issue was also not taken up much during the election campaign. The main reason for this is the general approval by the public opinion of the hardline policy adopted by Kocharian towards the issue. However, even if it was nothing more than a rumor, the possibility that the Megri area may be given to Azerbaijan in the framework of a settlement was enough to attract criticism. Indirectly referring to Megri, Kocharian's election program also states that<sup>31</sup> an "exchange of territory" with Azerbaijan is unacceptable. The program also states that Karabagh must have safe borders, which have a geographical connection with Armenia. In other words, while Kocharian wishes to see Karabagh connected to Armenia via the Lachin corridor, he refuses a corridor through Megri that connects Nahchivan to Azerbaijan.

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<sup>29</sup> Noyan Tapan, February 10, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> H1 TV, *Orakarg Program*, February 8, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> *La Lettre de L'UGAB*.



During the visit to Moscow mentioned above, Kocharian stated in a conference on January 16, 2003 that the Karabagh events of 1991-1992 proved that it was not possible for the Armenians to live in Azerbaijan, and added 'We are talking about some sort of ethnic incompatibility'. This statement attracted strong protests.<sup>32</sup> The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Walter Schwimmer, made a comment that this expression of hate was amounted to war mongering and ran counter to the principles of ethnic tolerance and diversity. He also made the following statement: "Europe to which Armenia and Azerbaijan belong, begins with the acceptance of European diversity-be it ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic."<sup>33</sup>

*Relations with Turkey in the Election Campaign*

Since the public opinion generally accepts Kocharian's hardline policy towards Turkey, this issue has not been dwelled upon much during the election campaign.

The leader of the pro-Russian National Unity Party Gegemian criticized the Kocharian Government because Turkey would be participating in NATO military exercises, which will be held in Armenia next summer and made a demagogic as well as historically inaccurate statement by saying 'After 1915, a Turkish soldier will set foot on Armenian soil for the first time in 2003.'<sup>34</sup>

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation said that they had decided to support Kocharian because he was "raising national issues in the international arena with dignity." This refers surely to Armenian diplomacy starting to make accusations of alleged genocide against Turkey in some international organizations after Kocharian assumed power.<sup>35</sup> Viken A. Hovsepian, a member of the Dashnak Party, said in a statement that it must be remembered that Kocharian for the first time in Armenian history requested from the United Nations to recognize the genocide and that this constituted a major break with the previous regime of Ter Petrosian, who had made continuous efforts to avoid talking about the so-called 'genocide' issue.<sup>36</sup> In conformity with Dashnak

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<sup>32</sup> RFE/RL Armenia Report, January 31, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Noyan Tapan*, January 28, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> *La Lettre de L'UGAB*, novembre 30, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> *AWOL*, February 8-14, 2003.

demand, Kocharian in his election program<sup>37</sup> unwisely reiterated that he would work for the international recognition of the "genocide".

*Results of the First Round*

After the first round of the election, Robert Kocharian obtained 49.48 percent of the votes, while Stepan Demirchian received only 28.22 percent.

Participation in the election remained as low as 62 percent. However, this percentage should be considered to be normal for Armenia, since it was 60 percent in the previous presidential election.

*Developments between the Two Rounds*

When the voting started on February 19, 2003 some voters were unable to find their names on the voters' registration lists and they went to the courts asking for their right of voting to be restored. The number of these persons exceeded ten thousand.<sup>38</sup>

Opposition parties complained about ballot box stuffing in favor of President Kocharian. In addition to this, a significant number of the election observers from the opposition were arrested. Nevertheless, the Central Election Commission reported to have received very few written complaints.<sup>39</sup>

The presidential election was monitored by some 470 foreign observers some of which were members of international organizations. Yuri Yarov, who headed the observer mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States stated that there was no proof of the violations that the opposition was claiming.<sup>40</sup> Yarov also said that the presidential election was being conducted in a free, fair, open, democratic and legitimate fashion.<sup>41</sup>

In the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions<sup>42</sup> issued by the International Election Mission, which was jointly established by the OSCE and Council of Europe it was stated that "the 19 February 2003 presidential election in the Republic of

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<sup>37</sup> *La Lettre de L'UGAB*, Novembre 25, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> *Arminfo and Armen Press*, February 19, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> *Armen Press*, February 19, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> *Arminfo*, February 19, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> *Arminfo*, February 20, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Press Release, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Yerevan, February 20, 2003.

Armenia was generally calm and well administered, but the counting process was flawed and the long-term election process fell short of international standards in several key aspects". It was also said that the election had been marred by intimidation and a serious instance of violence, that there was evidence of manipulations, that public resources were heavily used in support of the incumbent President and that public TV failed to provide balanced and unbiased broadcast on candidates.

Supporters of the opposition parties staged large rallies to protest the outcome of the first round of the election. In response to this, President Kocharian said in an official statement that the authorities would vigorously respond to any action aimed at disrupting public order.<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Defense issued a statement in which it was stressed that the opposition's actions broke the internal stability of Armenia and jeopardized the country's constitutional order. The same statement reminded that Armenia was still living in conditions of temporary armistice.<sup>44</sup>

In the meantime, some participants of the unauthorized rallies were arrested. According to the Speaker of the Ministry of Justice, Ara Saghatalian, 150 persons had been arrested by February 27, 2003.

There were concerns that the Armenian presidential election was being conducted in an atmosphere of violence. Peter Schieder, the Chairman of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe stated on February 26th that he was seriously concerned about the shortcomings and irregularities of the election adding that if Armenia wants to live in accordance with the democratic obligations as a member country of the Council of Europe, such irregularities should not be reproduced during the second round. Schieder also demanded the public order to be maintained without resorting to disproportionate means and all persons arrested to be released immediately.<sup>45</sup>

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and the OSCE Chairman in Office, raised his concerns about the election and requested the arrested persons to

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<sup>43</sup> *Noyan Tapan*, February 22, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> *Arminfo*, February 22, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> *Council of Europe Press Release*, 26 February 2003.

be released. He called upon the Armenian authorities to respect the OSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990 on election. This document demands that election campaigns be conducted in a free and fair atmosphere and that neither administrative action, and violence nor intimidation prevents parties and the candidates from freely presenting their views.<sup>46</sup>

An important development between the two rounds of the election was the participation of Kocharian and Demirchian in a TV debate on March 3, 2003. In the debate during which a number of issues were taken up, Kocharian followed a tactic in which he showed his own knowledge of state affairs and sought to portray his rival as an inexperienced politician lacking in-depth knowledge in the same field. Demirchian, on the other hand talked about Kocharian's involvement in corruptions, frauds and scandals and stated that 'What I lack is an experience of involvement in illegalities and intrigues'.

During the debate, a journalist asked Kocharian and Demirchian the probability of improving the relations with Turkey and the possible cost of doing so. In his answer Demirchian said that the improvement of ties would not be at the expense of national values and he believed that ties with regional countries and neighbors in the future must be improved. On the issue of the alleged genocide, Demirchian stated that this is a national issue. Kocharian on the other hand stressed that none of the candidates including Demirchian had any word related to the genocide issue in their election programs.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of this televised debate for the Turkish-Armenian relations is that none of the candidates, with the exception of Kocharian, made use of the alleged genocide claims during their election programs. This development, in principle, may show that in the era after Kocharian, Turkish-Armenian relations may be constructed upon more realistic foundations.

Before the second round of voting, Walter Schwimmer, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Lord Russell Johnston, the Head of the Consultative Assembly Observer Mission and Peter Eicher, the Head of the OSCE Observer Mission demanded fair and free election in Armenia.

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<sup>46</sup> OSCE, The Hague, February 28, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> *Ann Groong*, March 5, 2003, Armenian Presidential Candidates TV Debates, Public Television of Armenia, Yerevan, March 3, 2003.

### *Results of the Presidential Election*

There were no serious acts of violence during the second round of voting on March 5, 2003. According to the results declared by the Central Election Commission the following day, Kocharian received 67.5 % and Demirchian 32.5% of the total votes.

The Armenian press and news agencies published numerous reports claiming that many irregularities had occurred during the second round of voting as well. The most important allegations were in relation to ballot-box stuffing in favor of President Kocharian. According to one of the reports 600.000 fake ballots bearing the name of Kocharian had been printed.<sup>48</sup> The second allegation was that significant number of observers belonging to the opposition had been arrested, thus preventing them from objecting to the vote count. Besides these allegations, the pro-Kocharian broadcasts of the state TV must also be mentioned.

The Council of Europe issued a statement<sup>49</sup> immediately after the second round of voting stressing that the second round marked by serious irregularities, adding that the overall election process had fallen short of international standards.

Yuri Yarov who headed the observer mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States said that there had been no irregularities after the second tour and that the election had been well organized.<sup>50</sup> The contradictions between Yarov's statement and the views of the other observers can be explained with the Russian desire to contribute to the election of Kocharian. In this context, it is safe to assume that Vladimir Putin's congratulation of Kocharian as the first foreign statesman is a result of Russian attempt to give legitimacy to the election.

However, the reaction to the election by the USA, which usually supports Armenia in every field, has been quite harsh. Richard Boucher, the Speaker of the State Department, agreed with the international observers' conclusion that presidential run-off fell short of international standards. He stated that the leadership of Armenia missed an important opportunity to advance democratization by holding a credible election and added that "we

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<sup>48</sup> *Arminfo*, March 5, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> *Council of Europe Press Release*, March 6, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> *Arminfo*, March 5, 2003.

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confidence.”<sup>51</sup>

One may ask the possible impacts of the above-mentioned statements of fraud in the election? As Lord Russell Johnston has said personally, the Council of Europe (and OSCE) has no power to apply sanctions to any country in the case of undemocratic elections.<sup>52</sup> Also it must be remembered that according to international law no country or organization has such power. A report regarding this election will be prepared and submitted to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Armenians will most probably refuse any criticism that will be directed at them during the deliberations and will try to defend themselves by sheltering behind the report of the Observer Mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States which claims that no irregularities occurred during the election. In this context, it should be remembered that fraud took place also in 1998 during the Armenian presidential election and that reports were prepared on that occasion too and all of these were later forgotten.

Although his election is questionable, it is clear that Robert Kocharian will be leading Armenia during the next 5 years. It is hoped that in this long period of time Kocharian will implement the much needed domestic reforms. In the sphere of foreign policy, he must heed Armenian interests and resolve the Karabagh problem with Azerbaijan. It is also hoped that to normalize the relations with Turkey adopting a realistic policy and abandon allegations of genocide, and recognize the territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Turkey. This will open the gate to an era of peace and cooperation in the southern Caucasus.

<sup>51</sup> *RFE/RL*, March 7, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> *Arminfo*, March 6, 2003.

## **TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS**

There were Armenian press reports in the second half of December 2002 stating that the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Yaşar Yakış had said that in spite of Azerbaijan's dissatisfaction, Ankara might improve relations with Armenia.<sup>53</sup> When asked questions on this statement, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Oskanian welcomed the intention of Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. He added that Armenia was ready for cooperation without any preconditions<sup>54</sup> and that establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia and lifting the embargo would make the perspective of Turkish membership to the European Union (EU) more real.<sup>55</sup> Another source claims that Oskanian said, "I hardly believe that the EU will admit Turkey having no diplomatic relations with Armenia."<sup>56</sup>

According to an Armenian news agency<sup>57</sup> in the same days the Deputy Secretary of State of the USA Marc Grossman stated: "I call on the Turkish government to continue efforts on Armenian-Turkish reconciliation as well as to individual steps being taken to that end so that Turkey and Armenia can advance on the way of accord and joint economic development". This led to the opinion that soon there would be developments in Turkish-Armenian relations.

This situation created serious concerns in Azerbaijan. The speaker of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Metin Mirza declared that these were a part of the lies of the Armenian press and stressed that Ankara had stated on numerous occasions that it would not cooperate with Armenia in any field until the Azerbaijani territories under occupation were liberated and the Karabagh conflict settled.<sup>58</sup>

The leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Tayyip Erdoğan visited Azerbaijan on January 7, 2003 and he and those with him made statements that clarified the policies of the new Turkish government regarding Armenia and the Karabagh conflict, thus allaying certain fears in Azerbaijan.

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<sup>53</sup> *Pan Armenian Net and ArmTV* dated December 17, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> *ITAR-TASS News Agency*, December 17, 2002.

<sup>55</sup> *Arm TV*, December 17, 2002.

<sup>56</sup> *ARKA*, December 18, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> *Pan Armenian*, December 18, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> *ANS TV*, December 18, 2002.

Erdoğan stated in Azerbaijan that in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, the new Turkish Government will continue to support the rightful policy of Azerbaijan.<sup>59</sup> Turkey will not develop relations with Armenia before a resolution is reached on the Karabagh conflict.<sup>60</sup> Turkey supports the idea of direct talks between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia with the aim of finding a solution.<sup>61</sup> Turkey also supports the efforts of the Minsk Group<sup>62</sup> despite she considers this Group ineffective.<sup>63</sup> A trilateral dialogue between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey may have a positive impact on the solution of the Karabagh conflict.<sup>64</sup>

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yaşar Yakış, who accompanied Erdoğan on his visit to Azerbaijan said that Armenia must evacuate the territories of Azerbaijan, and that Armenia was the only country that did not recognize the borders of the former USSR, and the borders of Turkey, which had been established in 1921. He also drew attention to the fact that Eastern Anatolia was called West Armenia by Yerevan, adding that the article of the Armenian constitution regarding the alleged genocide must be removed.<sup>65</sup> He also said that Turkey would open her border with Armenia if Azerbaijan gives its consent.<sup>66</sup>

The above statements indicate that the new Turkish government will follow the same basic policies as the previous Turkish governments did. In other words, it is understood that no diplomatic relations will be established with Armenia the border will not be opened as long as she does not resolve her problems with Azerbaijan, such as Karabagh. Relations also will not be established as long as Armenia fails to recognize the territorial integrity of Turkey and continues its false allegations of genocide.

The clarification of Turkish policy led to disillusionment in Armenia. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oskanian organized a press conference, where he stated that the AKP government had initially sounded ready to reconsider the Armenian policy followed

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<sup>59</sup> *Azerbaijan TV Channel One*, January 7, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> *Arm TV*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> *Armen Press*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>62</sup> *Pan Armenian News*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> *Arm TV*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> *Trend News Agency*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> *ANS Radio*, January 8, 2003.

<sup>66</sup> *Pan Armenian News*, January 8, 2003.



by previous Turkish cabinets and that signals testifying to this had been received but that Erdoğan's statements in Baku had cast a shadow over those hopes, adding however that they wished direct contacts which had been initiated in the Ecevit era to be resumed with no pre-conditions attached.<sup>67</sup>

About a week later, on January 16, 2003 while visiting Russia, President Kocharian touched upon this matter during a speech at the Moscow Academy of Foreign Affairs. After saying that Turkey continued to blockade Armenia and that there were no diplomatic relations between the two states, he said that bilateral relations should not be tied with the resolution of the Karabagh conflict, and that Turkey had nothing to do with the conflict and that relations should not be burdened with Azerbaijani-Armenian problems. He also said that Turkish-Armenian cooperation would be beneficial for both countries and the region as a whole and that they had expressed their preparedness for a dialogue with Turkey without any preconditions on a number of occasions and that Armenia continued to stand by this position.<sup>68</sup>

Kocharian's insistence on the idea that the Karabagh conflict is of no interest to Turkey is an answer to Erdoğan's aforementioned statements in Baku about his concerns on the ineffectiveness of the Minsk Group and the idea of establishing trilateral dialogue between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey; which will have positive effect on the solution of the Karabagh conflict. The Armenians believe that it will not be in their interest to take up the Karabagh conflict to a trilateral meeting, where the Turks will support the views of Azerbaijan.

As a result, some Armenian officials interpreted the statements of the Turkish politicians in line with their own expectations. When Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish Premier, clarified the matters during his Baku visit, Armenians are disappointed. Considering the importance of the issues that divide two countries, Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Armenia should resume their meeting as soon as possible. It's likely that after the parliamentary elections in Armenia on May 25, 2003 such a meeting will take place.

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<sup>67</sup> RFE/RL Armenia Report, January 11, 2003.

<sup>68</sup> <http://news.president.am/eng/>