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REVIEW OF  
**ARMENIAN STUDIES**  
A Biannual Journal of History, Politics, and International Relations

Issue  
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Facts and Comments

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**Yegane BAKHSHIYEVA**

**BOOK REVIEW**

A Flag for Us All

**Berfin Mahide ERTEKİN**



TERAZI  
YAYINCILIK

## REVIEW OF ARMENIAN STUDIES

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**A**s always, the first article in the 40th issue of our journal is “**Facts and Comments**”. This article covers Turkey-Armenia relations as well as the domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period of August to December 2019. During this period, internal problems of the government increased significantly, and domestic opposition assumed a stronger and more organized character. The Armenian government’s indecisive and conflicting statements have further strengthened the international opinion that Armenia is the obstacle to a peaceful resolution. These developments have led the government under Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to open Armenia to international contacts and to introduce foreign relations as evidence of Armenia’s success. At the same time, the Government has undertaken a mission to gather all the Armenians around the World within a concept of Pan-Armenianism. Lastly, the ever-present negative attitude and accusations against Turkey have further sharpened under these circumstances.

In her article titled “**The Implications Of The Karabagh Conflict In The Context Of BSEC As A Regionalism Case**”, F. Didem Ekinici inquires the impact and the implications of the Karabagh conflict in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) context through the conceptualization of regionalism. To lay the groundwork for her article, she provides an account on the concepts of region and regionalism and information on the birth, the evolution, and the stagnation of the BSEC. Ekinici argues that the Karabagh conflict stands as a major reason for why BSEC has failed to progress as a regional cooperation and stability project as originally envisioned.

In his article titled “**An Overview Of The Relations Between The Republic Of Armenia And The Islamic Republic Of Iran**”, Aliyar Azimov analyzes the parameters of the relations between Armenia and Iran and what motivates both parties in their approach towards each other. Azimov indicates that the geopolitical scene of the South Caucasus changed by the dissolution of the USSR, and new opportunities and challenges emerged for both Armenia and Iran. He argues that, to become a regional power, Iran has been interested in cooperation with Armenia to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. Armenia, meanwhile, has tried to get the support of Iran along with Russia to maintain its political presence in the region and maintain access to the outside world.

In her article titled “**Threats And Provocations Originating From The Republic Of Armenia Towards The Water Resources Of The Republic Of**



**Azerbaijan**”, Yegane Bakhshiyeva seeks to assess the magnitude of the damage caused to Azerbaijan’s water resources by the activities of Armenia both within its borders the occupied territories of Azerbaijan that Armenia exercise direct control over. Bakhshiyeva argues that gross negligence, incompetence, lack of inspection, or their combination, Armenia is engaged in grave ecological irresponsibility that is constantly victimizing Azerbaijan. This means that Azerbaijan’s rivers, which form the sources of drinking water for the country, are being constantly polluted by various wastes that is having serious impact on the ecology of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the ongoing occupation means that Azerbaijan is unable to inspect, repair, and utilize some of its important water-related facilities that would normally supply it with irrigation waters, electricity, and tourism money.

Lastly, Berfin Mahide Ertekin analyzes the book titled *Hepimize Bir Bayrak (A Flag For Us All)* by Torkom Istepanyan. Ertekin highlights the importance of the book by drawing attention to the fact that it constitutes a heartfelt effort by a Turkish Armenian to draw attention to the past and present brotherly relations between the Turkish-Muslim and non-Muslim Armenian, Greek and Jewish citizens of Turkey and their will to work together for the betterment of the country. The book is also of critical value in that it contains Istepanyan’s positive memoirs and recollections about the events that transpired during the enactment of the Relocation and Resettlement Law of 1915.

Have a nice reading and best regards,

Editor

## EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

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# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

Alev KILIÇ\*

**Abstract:** *This article covers Turkey-Armenia relations as well as the domestic and international developments of Armenia in the period of August to December 2019. During this period, internal problems of the government increased significantly. On the one hand, domestic opposition assumed a stronger and more organized character. On the other hand, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict came to the fore and the Pashinyan government's indecisive and conflicting statements have further strengthened the international opinion that Armenia is the obstacle to a peaceful resolution and pressure has thus mounted on Armenia for it to make concessions. These developments have led the Pashinyan government, on the one hand, to open Armenia to international contacts and to introduce foreign relations as evidence of Armenia's success. On the other hand, with a view to garnering the potential of the Armenian Diaspora, the Government has undertaken a mission to gather all the Armenians around the World within a concept of Pan-Armenianism. The ever-present negative attitude and accusations against Turkey have further sharpened under these circumstances. Countering Turkey has become the benchmark for nationalistic credentials and adversity to Turkey has reached unprecedented levels.*

**Keywords:** *Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia-Turkey Relations, Nagorno-Karabakh, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, U.S. Congress*

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**Öz:** *Bu incelemede Ermenistan'ın iç ve dış dinamiklerinde ve Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde Ağustos-Aralık 2019 ayları arasındaki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır. Dönem içinde Paşinyan yönetiminin iç sıkıntıları artmıştır. Bir yandan iç muhalefet güçlenmiş ve örgütlenmeye başlamıştır. Diğer yandan Dağlık Karabağ çatışmasında Paşinyan hükümetinin kararsız ve çelişkili söylemler, sorunun çözümüne Ermenistan'ın engel olduğu anlayışını pekiştirmiş ve taviz vermesi baskısını artırmıştır. Bu gelişmeler çerçevesinde Paşinyan hükümeti, bir yandan Ermenistan'ı dışa açmış ve dış ilişkileri Ermenistan için bir başarı olarak gündeme taşımıştır. Diğer yandan ise Hükümet, Ermeni diasporasının potansiyelini elde etmek için tüm dünyadaki Ermenileri Pan-Ermenizm kavramı etrafında toplama misyonu edinmiştir. Türkiye'ye yönelik süregelen olumsuz tutum ve suçlamalar bu sıkıntılar altında daha da yoğunlaşmış, milliyetçilik kartında Türkiye karşıtlığı ölçü haline gelmiş ve daha önce görülmediği oranda artan bir Türkiye karşıtlığı ortaya çıkmıştır.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Nikol Paşinyan, Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri, Dağlık Karabağ, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, ABD Kongresi*

## 1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

In the second year of the Nikol Pashinyan administration coming to power, it started to be seen that optimistic discourses and promises have not been met, that an opposition led by Former President Robert Kocharyan, whose imprisonment continues despite attempts for his hearing and release, has started to become more alive. The opposition was also supported by the financial means of the son-in-law of previous President Serzh Sargsyan, former Vatican Ambassador Mikayel Minasyan.<sup>1</sup> The extremist and radically nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), with a past associated with terror activities and which was a coalition partner of the previous administrations, has also jumped on this opposition bandwagon. For a reprieve from his problems, Pashinyan has been in search of scapegoats to put the blame on domestic and foreign difficulties. The main domestic targets have been former regimes and the high-level bureaucracy and media outlet which he has declared to be still under the guidance of former powers. In this vein, on 5 December, an investigation was opened against former President S. Sargsyan on the grounds of abusing public funds.<sup>2</sup> Sargsyan is accused of embezzling 1 million US Dollars from the Armenian state in 2013. The charge was filed after Sargsyan took part in the EPP Congress in Zagreb in late November where he harshly criticized the government. He also boasted with his military role in the separatist war against Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a side note, back in June his brother, and in July his nephew were arrested on charges of embezzlement and corruption.

In the statement of the ARF Economic Bureau on 3 September, it was asserted that Armenia's economic indicators had dropped significantly in comparison with the previous year, refuting the declarations and statements of Pashinyan regarding the economy making significant progress. According to this statement, if in January-June 2019, the activity was 6.8%, then for the same period in 2018 it was 9.1%, exports for the first half of the year recorded a 0.5% decline, unemployment increased from 21% to 22%, and the resident population of the country decreased by 8,200.<sup>3</sup> According to the report "Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia" released by the country's Statistical Committee (Armstat) in early December,<sup>4</sup> in 2018, the poverty rate in Armenia

1 "Standoff Between Armenian Government and Former Regime Continues," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 19, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/standoff-between-armenian-government-and-former-regime-continues/>

2 "Ermenistan: Halk Protestoları Nedeniyle Görevi Bırakan Sarkisyan Hakkında Yolsuzluk Soruşturması," *EuroNews*, 5 Aralık 2019, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/12/05/ermenistan-halk-protestolar-nedeniyle-gorevi-birakan-sarkisyan-hakkinda-yolsuzluk-sorustur>

3 "ARF-D: Armenian economic indicators this year are much lower compared to last year," *News.am*, September 3, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/531547.html>

4 "Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2018," *Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (Armstat)*, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2095>

was 23.5%, meaning that every fourth person in the country lived below the poverty line.

On 12 December, Russia's commercial representative to Armenia reaffirmed that Russia remains Armenia's main trading partner. Accordingly, in the January-September period, trade with Russia comprised 27% of Armenia's total turnover. The second largest trading partner of Armenia is China, followed by Switzerland, Germany, and Iran. In terms of investment, 43.6% of investments of the same period are made by Russian companies.

The Amulsar gold mining project, for which American and British companies obtained licenses and was halted by the local community's obstructing demonstrations, continued to become a problem: With a directive sent to the authorities on 4 September, Pashinyan instructed all the concerned government departments and institutions to work in a coordinated manner in order to provide a comprehensive analysis and complete data for further probe into the project.<sup>5</sup> It was reflected in the press that Pashinyan met with Jirair Sefilyan, the leader of *Sasna Tsrer* (Daredevils of Sasun), which is a far-right Armenian party whose members had stormed a police station in Yerevan in 2016, killing three police officers. Regarding this issue, Sefilyan warned Pashinyan against giving the green light to the project and using force against the protestors.<sup>6</sup>

On 9 September, it was demanded in the parliament by Pashinyan's party group and forerunners of the party that the Parliament Speaker remove the Constitutional Court President from office. Pashinyan, who went even further on the same day, issued a statement in the press and expressed that the Constitutional Court President and two member judges had acted "illegally" due to their decisions on 4 September towards preventing Kocharyan's arrest.<sup>7</sup>

A prominent event of the period was the unexpected resignation on 16 September of Artur Vanetsyan, Director of the National Security Service, which is the country's all-powerful intelligence institution. In his resignation letter published in the media, Vanetsyan criticized the Pashinyan administration without giving names and stated "State-building has its logic: spontaneity of actions and decisions and a work style of not differentiating between primary and secondary and transient and lasting things is not the path leading to the realization of goals. Let my resignation be a sobering 'Stop'

5 "Pashinyan Again Meets Top Officials On Amulsar," *Azatutyun*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30146556.html>

6 "Pashinyan Raises Some Doubts on Amulsar but Presses Ahead," *Mirror Spectator*, September 12, 2019, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/09/12/pashinyan-raises-some-doubts-on-amulsar-but-presses-ahead/>

7 "PM called the Constitutional Court decision on ex-President Kocharyan's case 'unlawful'," *Panorama*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/09/16/PM/2167394>

step,”<sup>8</sup>. The resignation was welcomed by the leaders of the former administration and the far-right. Pashinyan’s spokesperson implied that Vanetsyan was collaborating with the former administration and stated that there was the impression that his resignation letter was written by the former administration.<sup>9</sup> The mutual arguments did not stop. During his visit to the United States (US) on 23 September, Pashinyan criticized Vanetsyan, who was given the rank of general, of not being an honorable military officer and stated “It appears that being de jure NSS director he made a statement against his commander-in-chief... That means throwing your shoulder marks into a trash bin.” Vanetsyan quickly responded, stating that Pashinyan kept on sending people to him with a request to keep silent for some time until the situation settled down but that he nevertheless continued to speak, that the President was misleading the Armenian and that he was “speaking up without caring for the consequences.” Vanetsyan added: “Imagine what will happen if I suddenly start speaking up without thinking about consequences. I insist with certitude, time will tell who or what will end up in a trash bin”.<sup>10</sup> Speculations regarding Vanetsyan and his resignation did not stop and continued throughout the period.

During the period, Pashinyan made high-level dismissals and new appointments in the law enforcement agency and the military hierarchy.

According to the report published by Armstat on 9 November, Armenia’s population numbered 2,957,500 as of October 2019. This number indicates a drop by 11,700 people over the past year, in other words, it has been officially recorded that Armenia’s population keeps dropping.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the Government’s optimistic statements, Armenia’s economic indicators did not display progress during the period. Armenia’s 2019 fiscal deficit is projected at around %2.5 of the gross domestic product, roughly 316 million Dollars. According to a government statement on 31 January, Armenia obtained 146 million Dollars in foreign funding which is due to finance about half of the country’s state budget deficit. The credit was essentially provided by Germany’s State-Owned Development Bank (KfW), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank.<sup>12</sup>

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

9 “Vanetsyan’s Statement After His Resignation Was A Surprise For The Party And For The Prime Minister”: Vladimir Karapetyan,” *Aravot*, September 19, 2019, <https://www.aravot-en.am/2019/09/19/240909/>

10 “Vanetsyan to Pashinyan: Do You Imagine If I Start Speaking Without Thinking about Consequences?” *Aysor*, September 23, 2019, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2019/09/23/vanetsyan-pashinyan/1609309>

11 “Armenia’s Permanent Population on the Decline: Statistics,” *Panorama*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/11/09/Armenia/2194410>

12 “World Bank Supports Armenian Reforms With New Loan,” *Azattyun*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30287039.html>

In an announcement made by the Ministry of Justice on 27 November, it was stated that a working group will be set up in February to make extensive constitutional amendments in order to assist the realization of reforms.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Nagorno-Karabakh Issue

Nagorno-Karabakh, which is located within the borders and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, has been an issue that has been unresolved for 27 years. The issue originated from its occupation by Armenian armed forces together with its surrounding 7 Azerbaijan provinces, the killing or forced migration of the local Azerbaijani people as a result of the implementation of ethnic cleansing, followed by the forming of a separatist administration. This conflict continues to be one of the most important issues the Pashinyan administration is facing.

In response to the universal reaction to his declaration stating that “Karabakh is Armenia” at an address to the people in Hankendi on 5 August, Pashinyan’s search for a new narrative continued during the period. On 27 August, during his speech to Armenian mission chiefs abroad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Yerevan, under the main title “This issue which has been continuing for 30 years needs to be explained once again to the whole world”, he highlighted the necessity of the Karabakh invasion not being equalized with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in neighboring Georgia.<sup>14</sup> During the same meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan accused Azerbaijan, repeated that the current balance cannot be changed by the usage of military force, emphasized that Azerbaijan constitutes a threat to the separatist Karabakh administration and a danger to peace. He argued that, for a peaceful resolution, Azerbaijan must view the separatist administration as a party and must negotiate with them.<sup>15</sup>

In the response issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, it was highlighted that Nagorno-Karabakh was, is, and will be an integral part of Azerbaijan. It was expressed that as a multi-ethnic state with an internationally recognized multicultural society, Azerbaijan cannot be compared in any way with mono-ethnic Armenia, which committed ethnic cleansings and massacres against the people of Azerbaijan. It was stated that the region’s self-

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13 “Armenia Parliament My Step Faction Head: Working Group to Discuss Constitutional Amendments will be Set up in February,” *News.am*, November 27, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/546687.html>

14 “Armenian Prime Minister – Conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia differ from Nagorny Karabakh,” *First Channel*, August 28, 2019, <https://1tv.ge/en/news/armenian-prime-minister-conflicts-of-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-differ-from-nagorny-karabakh/>

15 “Azerbaijan Continues Being Threat To Existence Of Artsakh People: Armenia’s FM,” *Aysor*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2019/08/27/zohrab-mnatsakanyan/1600392>

governance rights can only be discussed after the Azerbaijani population of the Nagorno-Karabakh region's safe return to their homes and decent living conditions are established there.<sup>16</sup>

During his press conference organized on 6 September, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan stated that, through working actively on the Karabakh issue throughout the year, Armenia has very clearly expressed how serious their intentions were towards the peaceful settlement process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, that the number of the meetings between the leaders and foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan an indicator of this seriousness, that he will once again meet with his Azerbaijani counterpart in the near future.<sup>17</sup> Hence, on the occasion of the UN General Assembly in New York on 24 September, the two ministers met together with the participation of three OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs and the special representative OSCE chairman in office. Following the meeting, other than the continuation of meetings for a peaceful resolution and general wishes of the co-chairs to visit the region, no concrete outcome was announced. On the other hand, despite that they were in the same venue, no meeting took place between the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia.

The next meeting that the two leaders joined was the ten-member Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Ashkhabad summit on 11 October. During the summit, the President of Azerbaijan accused Armenia of being pro-fascism for erecting a statue and heroizing Garegin Nzhdeh who collaborated with the Nazis, while Pashinyan claimed that the aforementioned person was a hero who had fought against the Turks in 1918. Despite this verbal clash, Pashinyan's spokesperson stated to the press that the two leaders had a meeting during dinner and that they discussed the Karabakh issue.<sup>18</sup>

On 13 September, 6 representatives of the French parliament and a senator visited Nagorno-Karabakh and met with the separatist and illegal administration.<sup>19</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan condemned this illegitimate visit to the Azerbaijan lands under occupation. Prime Minister Pashinyan, who met with the French committee in Yerevan stated "We greatly appreciate your doing which displays the special situation in the France-Armenia relations. We are grateful for your support towards the rights of the Karabakh people, our principled, consistent attitude and determination".

16 "Azerbaijan's MFA: There is No "People of Nagorno-Karabakh" Concept," *Trend News Agency*, August 27, 2019, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/3110191.html>

17 "Armenian, Azerbaijani FMs to meet 'soon'," *ArmenPress*, September 6, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/987165.html>

18 "Aliyev and Pashinyan argue on Armenian WWII figure at CIS Conference," *CaucasusWatch*, October 12, 2019, <https://caucasuswatch.de/news/2121.html>

19 "French Lawmakers Visit Karabakh," *Azattyun*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30163201.html>



In between the dates 24 September and 5 October, Armenia and the separatist administration of Nagorno-Karabakh conducted a 12-day-long military exercise, which was of the largest scale in Armenia's history.<sup>20</sup> No statement was made regarding the number of participating soldiers or other technical aspects.

The Chief of the Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Joint Staff, Colonel General Anatoly A. Sidorov, stated on 24 September that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a serious threat to the member states of the organization.<sup>21</sup> During the organization's summit meeting in Bishkek on 28 November, Pashinyan targeted Azerbaijan and Turkey. Like a brazen culprit who makes others believe he is innocent and that the person he has wronged is guilty, Pashinyan claimed that Azerbaijan was making military threats regarding the resolution of the Karabakh occupation, that Azerbaijan could become a convenient springboard for Islamic extremists, that this would be dangerous not only for Armenia, but for all of the organization's members and the region.<sup>22</sup>

During the Valdai Forum organized in Sochi on 2 October, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergei Lavrov criticized Pashinyan's "Karabakh is Armenia" discourse and stated that this statement hampers efforts to end the Karabakh conflict. Lavrov compared this statement of Pashinyan to the statement of "Kosovo is Albania" that the Albanian Prime Minister had made in Tirana. Lavrov also made assessments regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and stated "As regards to the situation on the ground, it is much calmer now than it was one year ago, but the political process is on hold and we have not yet managed to kick-start it." Lavrov added that the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group will continue to press for the conflict's resolution, that this subject is one of the few situations where they have the same vision. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, who was asked of her views regarding Lavrov's statements, attempted to dismiss the criticism and expressed their expectation that each of the mediators avoid one-sided evaluations.<sup>23</sup>

Through a press statement on 28 October, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the Nagorno-Karabakh Document adopted at the 18th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement

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20 "Armenia, Karabakh to Hold Strategic Military Exercises," *Massispost*, September 19, 2019, <https://massispost.com/2019/09/armenia-karabakh-to-hold-strategic-military-exercises/>

21 "Anatoly Sidorov: Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Remains Serious Threat to CSTO Member States," *News.am*, September 24, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/535154.html>

22 "CSTO has Necessary Measures To Prevent New Escalation around Nagorno Karabakh – Armenian PM," *ArmenPress*, November 28, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/996922.html>

23 "Russian FM Critical Of Pashinyan's Karabakh Remark," *Azattyun*, October 3, 2019, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30197687.html>

(NAM) held in Baku and accused Azerbaijan of conveying the issue outside of the location for the resolution, which is the OSCE and Minsk Group, and undermining the process.<sup>24</sup>

Voices opposing Pashinyan continued their activities inside Karabakh. The most striking amongst them was from the separatist administration's former Secretary of the Security Council, Major General Vitaliy Balasanyan, who is regarded as a national hero. Balasanyan, who is a "presidential" candidate in the 2020 elections of the separatist administration, used extremely aggressive language during a statement to the public opinion on 10 October. Not only did he harshly criticize Pashinyan, but he also threatened to physically punish him.<sup>25</sup> In the response from the government, it was stated that Balasanyan connected his political career with former President Sargsyan and that his future will also be in the same political trash bin.

Within the framework of their visits to the region that have become a routine, the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group visited the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Armenia on 15 October.<sup>26</sup> The parties continued the endeavors to monitor and develop the matters discussed by the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia during the New York meetings in September. Two items were striking in the press statements published by the co-chairs after the visit: The co-chairs stated that they met with the Chairman of the Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh during their visit to Baku. This certainly indicates an important development regarding the recognition and existence of the Azerbaijani people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Another item was the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia stating that they would meet again before the end of the year with the participation of the co-presidents.<sup>27</sup> This meeting took place in Bratislava on 4 December, on the margins of the OSCE Foreign Ministers annual meeting. The Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries issued a joint statement following the meeting. The text of the statement is here below:

“On the occasion of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Bratislava, we, the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries (Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei

24 “Statement By MFA Of Armenia On The Final Document Adopted at The 18th Summit of The Heads Of State and Government of The Non-Aligned Movement (Nam) Held in Baku,” *Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Armenia*, October 28, 2019, [https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2019/10/28/mfa\\_statement/9919](https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2019/10/28/mfa_statement/9919)

25 “Karabakh General Threatens To ‘Destroy’ Armenian PM,” *Jam-News*, October 10, 2019, <https://jam-news.net/karabakh-general-threatens-to-destroy-armenian-pm/>

26 “Armenian PM receives OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs,” *ArmenPress*, October 15, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/991658/>

27 “Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,” *OSCE*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/436265>

Lavrov, Secretary of State to the Minister for European and Foreign Affairs of France Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs of the United States Phil Reeker) remain strongly committed to mediating a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Co-Chair Heads of Delegation take positive note of the relatively low level of violence along the Line of Contact and international border and credit the sides for utilizing fully the direct communication links between them to reduce the risk of escalation, as the Foreign Ministers agreed during consultations in Washington in June. We welcome the concrete steps undertaken in the past year to reduce tensions and prepare the populations for peace, as the Co-Chair countries called for in the Milan statement in December 2018 and as the Ministers agreed to do in Paris in January 2019. We commend efforts to implement the humanitarian measures discussed by the leaders during their meeting in Vienna in March and elaborated upon by the Foreign Ministers in Moscow in April, in particular the recently concluded exchange of journalists and the simultaneous release of prisoners on 28 June. Noting that such efforts play an important role in fostering an atmosphere conducive to substantive negotiations to reach a peaceful settlement, the three Heads of Delegation call for additional concrete humanitarian and security measures.

The Co-Chair Heads of Delegation urge the sides to take concrete steps without delay to implement earlier agreements on humanitarian and security measures. Bearing in mind the terrible human suffering of the bereaved, we call on the sides to redouble efforts to assist the International Committee for the Red Cross to exchange data on missing persons, as the two leaders committed to do during the Paris summit of October 2014. Recognizing the essential contribution of the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office (PRCIO) in maintaining the ceasefire, we note the need to resume discussions on expanding the PRCIO's monitoring mission, which the parties agreed in 2016 to do.

We welcome the intention of the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to meet again in early 2020 under Co-Chair auspices to intensify negotiations on the core issues of a peaceful settlement and to facilitate further talks at the highest level. The Co-Chair Heads of Delegation reiterate that a fair and lasting settlement must be based, in particular, upon the principles of the Helsinki Final Act of non-use of force or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples, recalling the joint statement of the Co-Chair country Heads of Delegation and the Azerbaijani and Armenian

Foreign Ministers at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Athens in 2009, which was subsequently endorsed by the OSCE Ministerial Council. It should also embrace additional elements proposed by the Presidents of the Co-Chair countries in 2009-2012.

The Co-Chair Heads of Delegation stress once again that the status quo is unacceptable and there can be no military solution to the conflict. We therefore call on the sides to engage in good faith substantive negotiations without artificial delays or conditions.

The Co-Chair Heads of Delegation express the conviction that the OSCE Minsk Group format remains the indispensable focal point for efforts to reach a sustainable settlement. We call upon the sides to cooperate with each other and with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, whom we will instruct to continue their mediation efforts.”<sup>28</sup>

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov also expressed the hope that his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts will issue a joint statement with the mediating powers. This did not materialize. The statement was signed only by the co-chair officials. Azerbaijani and Armenian Ministers however expressed their own version of the outcome.

The Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Maharram oglu Mammadyarov said “My meeting with my Armenian counterpart lasted for three and a half hours. These were quite tough negotiations. Unfortunately, we still have unresolved problems.” He also underlined the need for “immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan”. He also reiterated that Karabakh’s Armenian population can only be granted the status of self-rule within Azerbaijan.

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan presented his position on seven principles, summing up that the security of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh could not be compromised and must be guaranteed, urging Azerbaijan to recognize the right to self-determination.

All of the above indicated once again that no progress was achieved in the Bratislava talks and the only agreement was for the two ministers to meet again early next year.

On 6 December, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said that the Eastern Partnership Summit declarations

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

clearly state that the EU remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners, including Azerbaijan. In this vein, he added that the EU does not recognize constitutional framework within which so called “elections” held in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the ongoing occupation continued to present Pashinyan with a dilemma. He could not establish a viable strategy for a solution. His indecisive, even contradictory statements further exacerbated the situation. In his statement on 4 November, Pashinyan asserted that there was full consensus with the Karabakh separatist administration regarding the resolving of the issue, that the former government officials have been spending millions of dollars on disinformation aimed at discrediting his government, and lastly, that they are frightening the people by stating that the negotiations are in deadlock and with the prospect of war due to him declaring that territorial concessions will not be made. In that vein, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan also felt the need to state that the meetings on ending the Karabakh conflict were not in deadlock.<sup>29</sup>

A novel discourse that was cultivated by Pashinyan during the period and emphasized in his speech during the UN General Assembly was a suggestion that the solution should entail the acceptance of all three peoples of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Thereby, on one hand, Azerbaijan’s right is acknowledged, on the other hand, the effort to put Karabakh as a party, where the remaining population is solely Armenian as a result of ethnic cleansing, continued. Azerbaijan gave an understandable response to this discourse. It was expressed that Azerbaijan would discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh self-government conditions if the displaced people of Nagorno-Karabakh return to their homes and attain normal living conditions. Armenia perceived this development as a dangerous “equality” in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiation process. This is because the popular opinion in Armenia is that the OSCE Minsk Group believes Nagorno-Karabakh can only possibly become a party in the negotiations if the “Azerbaijani Community of Karabakh” participates as part of the principle of equality. It is reflected in the press that such a development would disrupt the negotiation process for Armenia and would be a practice that will not create positive prospects for the Armenians.

### 3. Armenia’s Foreign Relations

It has become evident that during the period, the Pashinyan administration adopted the practice of obviating or alleviating the domestic difficulties and

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29 “Armenia Should Be A Country Where Person’s Right To Think Is Respected, Says PM,” *ArmenPress*, November 4, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/994112.html>

pressure by directing attention outwards. Within this framework, a foreign policy with emphasis on visits abroad gained momentum. On one hand, bearing in mind the sensitivities of Russia (to which Armenia is dependent with ties that cannot easily be broken), and on one other hand, striving for drawing closer to the EU and the US (attracted by their appeal and glow), yet also, gravitating towards the potential of China (which has been on the rise in Eurasia), require careful and balanced steps. Another striking feature of the period was focusing on the subject of how to benefit, mainly financially, from the full potential of the diaspora Armenians. Zareh Sinanyan, an Armenian citizen elected from the Armenian community of the US State of California, was appointed as the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of Armenia, which is directly subordinate to the Prime Minister, became the visible and prominent figure to attain this end.

During his speech to Armenia's foreign representatives on 27 August, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan explained Armenia's foreign policy guidelines and principles as basis for action.<sup>30</sup> The Minister began with three features exclusive to Armenia: A country that is, firstly, the first nation to adopt Christianity and bridge civilizations, secondly, with rich historical and cultural heritage, thirdly, having identified itself for modern values with the 2018 Velvet Revolution. The Minister also attributed the foreign policy of Armenia to three fundamental principles: The first being Armenia-centered sovereignty, the second being Pan-Armenianism (which is viewing Armenia, Karabakh and the Armenian diaspora as a single entity with a unified agenda), and the third being equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation with any state. In his speech, after emphasizing a strategic alliance with Russia, the Minister cited Iran and Georgia, the trilateral format with the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC, South Cyprus) and Greece, the US, the EU, France, and Germany within the context of important relations.

Pashinyan, who spoke at the same meeting, highlighted that there have been noteworthy changes in Armenia's foreign policy since he took office. The Prime Minister did not specify what these changes were and stated "I repeatedly stated during and after the 2018 revolution that there will be no U-turns in Armenia's foreign policy and there have indeed been no U-turns. But this doesn't mean that nothing has changed in Armenia's foreign policy. In fact, a lot has changed in Armenia's foreign policy". He expressed that what is constant is balance and flexibility policies, that renouncing these would be imprudence.

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30 "Opening Remarks By Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan At The Annual Conference Of The MFA Apparatus And Heads Of Diplomatic Service Abroad," *Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Armenia*, August 27, 2019, [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm\\_opening\\_remarks/9782](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm_opening_remarks/9782)

Armenia's High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Sinanyan visited South Cyprus on 28 August with his counterparts from the GASC and Greece in order to conduct a trilateral meeting and enhance the cooperation between the diasporas of the three actors.<sup>31</sup> His South Cypriot interlocutor stated that the three actors have influential diasporas in the world, notably in the US, France, Britain and Australia, that they could mobilize the diasporas towards the interests of the three actors by trilateral cooperation, that, based on this example, they could also form the Israel, Greece, GASC trilateral model, they could further discuss three historical tragedies, Turkey's 1974 operation on Cyprus, the "Pontic genocide" and "Armenian genocide" in the trilateral meeting to be held. His South Cypriot interlocutor also expressed that his administration has a project to construct a museum of Armenia in Southern Cyprus, to be sponsored with EU funds. On 6 September, the Armenian Commissioner went to Russia, where the largest Armenian population is located, to hold official talks that would last for 11 days. During his meeting with Armenian students in Moscow, Sinanyan stated that Armenia is working on a law that would confer citizenship in Armenia and promote repatriation. After Russia, Sinanyan passed on to Ukraine and met with the representatives of the Armenian community.

Pashinyan faced with an embarrassing situation at the end of August. The Armenian Government had accepted the invitation by the Government of Poland to the 80th Anniversary of the start of World War II and the 29th International Economic Forum on 1 September. Learning afterwards that the Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be attending, at the last moment, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Pashinyan would also not be attending. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan made an elusive explanation regarding the subject and stated "This is an expression of sovereignty. We have not refused. The Prime Minister has his own program of visits, which he implements, as well as his domestic policy priorities." Likewise, in response to the question from the journalists, the Armenian Minister of Economy Tigran Khachatryan, who did not attend the Economic Forum at the last moment, stated that he was not competent to answer why Armenia did not participate in the Forum.<sup>32</sup> The Spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry made a statement on 4 September that they endorsed Armenia's decision not to participate.

Russian President Putin celebrated on 1 September, by telephone and a written congratulatory message, the 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday of former Armenian President

31 "Ermenistan'ın Diaspora İşleri Baş Komiseri Kıbrıs Yolunda," *Ermeni Haber Ajanstı*, 16 Ağustos 2019, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2019/08/16/Ermenistan-Kıbrıs-Diaspora-Kıbrıs/162052>

32 "Armenia's Foreign Minister Explains Why Pashinyan Will Not Travel to Poland," *Massis Post*, August 30, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/ARMENIA-S-FOREIGN-MINISTER-EXPLAINS-WHY-PASHINYAN-WILL-NOT-TRAVEL-TO-POLAND>

Kocharyan, who is jailed pending trial as a result of the accusations lodged against him by the Pashinyan administration.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia Laura K. Cooper visited Armenia on 11 September to discuss the enhancement of the defense and security ties between the two countries. Since 2002, the US' military aid to Armenia, most of which was allocated to Armenia's roughly 160 soldiers in Afghanistan and Kosovo and the peace-keeping troops in Lebanon and Mali, has reached 50 million Dollars.<sup>33</sup>

Germany's former President Joachim Gauck visited Armenia on 16 September upon the invitation of Armenian President Armen Sarkissian.<sup>34</sup> A. Sarkissian thanked him for his speech at the Berlin Cathedral commemorating and acknowledging the "Armenian genocide" when Gauck was in office. Gauck stated that he felt great pleasure that Armenia carefully followed his speech at the Berlin Cathedral.

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan conducted an official visit to the Baltic state Lithuania on 17 September.

Pashinyan visited the US on 21 September to attend the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Before his visit to the US, he strived in an intense and persistent manner and mobilized all possibilities in order to create an opportunity to meet with US President Donald Trump, with no success. In response to the questions asked regarding this subject, the US Ambassador in Yerevan stated that such a meeting will take place at the right time and if needed. On 22 September, the Prime Minister addressed large numbers of the Armenian community in Los Angeles for an hour and emphasized his expectation of the diaspora's support and active contribution. Afterwards, Pashinyan passed on to New York and addressed the UN General Assembly on 24 September. The focus of his speech was his anti-Turkey stance and genocide claims.<sup>35</sup>

The foreign ministers of Armenia, Greece and the GASC conducted a trilateral meeting on 25 September in New York where they visited on the occasion of the UNGA. The parties verified the decision to organize a trilateral summit meeting in Yerevan in 2020 and reviewed the preparatory work.<sup>36</sup>

33 "Laura Cooper: Armenia is an important partner for the USA," *Arminfo*, September 11, 2019, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=45075&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=45075&lang=3)

34 "Almanya'nın eski Cumhurbaşkanı Joachim Gauck Ermenistan'da," *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, 16 Eylül 2019, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2019/09/16/Almanya-Gauck-Ermenistan-Ejmiadzin/164365>

35 "Statement by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at UN General Assembly 74th Session," *Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/09/26/Nikol-Pashinyan-74th-session-of-UN-General-Assembly/>

36 "Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Cyprus and Greece meet in New York," *Armradio.am*, September 26, 2019, <https://en.armradio.am/2019/09/26/foreign-ministers-of-armenia-cyprus-and-greece-meet-in-new-york/>



Armenian President A. Sarkissian visited Italy on 23 September to hold unofficial meetings.<sup>37</sup>

The annual Eurasian Economic Summit, chaired by Armenia in 2019, assembled in Yerevan on 1 October. In addition to the heads of states of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, the President of Moldova and the Prime ministers of Iran and Singapore joined the summit as special guests of Armenia.<sup>38</sup> The Armenian press gave wide coverage for days to the summit and the bilateral meetings conducted on this occasion. The visit of the Russian President Putin became a subject of speculation weeks prior. It was discussed whether the Putin-Kocharyan friendship would overshadow the visit, Putin settled with visiting the wife of Kocharyan whose imprisonment continues in Yerevan.<sup>39</sup>

President A. Sarkissian visited Serbia on 4 October. In his interview with the newspaper *Politika*, Sarkissian stated that the destinies of the Serbian and Armenian peoples have many similarities, that throughout history, they have often fought side by side against the same conqueror for freedom, that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries their national liberation movements and the Hayduk groups closely cooperated. During the same interview, A. Sarkissian also claimed that there were Armenian churches in Belgrade and elsewhere in Serbia and that these were later supposedly destroyed by the Turks in the 18th century.<sup>40</sup>

On 10 October, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan joined the annual Foreign Ministers meeting in Ashkhabad of CIS. Mnatsakanyan also presented Armenian arguments here regarding the subject of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia, during his first official visit abroad, visited Armenia on 15 October following his visit of Azerbaijan.<sup>41</sup> Pashinyan stated that one of the biggest achievements of his 1.5 years in the Prime Minister's post is further strengthening relations with Georgia. Gakharia praised Armenia for recognizing Georgia's sovereignty over two

37 "Armenian, Italian Presidents Hold Meeting," *ArmenPress*, September 26, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/989452.html>

38 "World Leaders from Iran, Russia Converge at Eurasian Economic Summit in Yerevan," *Armenian Weekly*, October 2, 2019, <https://armenianweekly.com/2019/10/02/world-leaders-from-iran-russia-converge-at-eurasian-economic-summit-in-yerevan/>

39 "Putin Meets Kocharian's Wife," *Azattyun*, January 2, 2019, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30195524.html>

40 "President Sarkissian to Serbia Newspaper: 'Serbian Diaspora supports the Armenian Diaspora, especially on the Armenian Genocide'," *Hetq*, October 4, 2019, <https://hetq.am/en/article/108237>

41 "Georgian-Armenian PMs Meet, Vow Further Strengthening of Ties for Mutual Benefit," *Agenda.ge*, October 15, 2019, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/2759>

breakaway regions. Pashinyan expressed that the relations between the two countries must not be hampered by “external factors”, that they discussed regional conflicts in this context, that they stressed the importance of maintaining balanced positions on issues sensitive to each other. It was noted that the Armenia-Georgia bilateral trade volume reached 92 million Dollars with a %5 increase in the first 8 months of the year.

On 22 October, Armenia’s Minister of Defense David Tonoyan had a private meeting with the Minister of National Defense of China on the sidelines of the 9th Xiangshan Forum on International Security.<sup>42</sup> On 17 December, President A. Sarkissian signed the Law on Ratifying the Agreement on Mutual Abolition of the Visa Requirement for Persons Holding Ordinary Passports between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria Ekaterina Zaharieva visited Armenia on 28 October. During the meeting, Pashinyan emphasized the importance Armenia attaches to her relations with Bulgaria, underlined the Armenia-Bulgaria Intergovernmental Commission meeting and business forum which is said to be held in March.<sup>43</sup>

On 25 October, Pashinyan visited Moscow to join the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council. He hereby met with Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Medvedev thanked Pashinyan for Armenia’s presidency of the Eurasian Economic Union, which expires this year.<sup>44</sup> No meeting took place with Russia’s President Putin.

The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan appeared as a guest on the British BBC television’s “Hard Talk” program on 25 October. As part of the program’s nature, the host asked the Minister pressing questions, underlined Armenia playing a double or even a triple game between great powers, to which the Minister stated “... [i]f we declare that we are only going in one direction, will this work immediately or will we wait ten to fifteen years? We can’t even afford a 10-15 minute security vacuum.”<sup>45</sup>

42 “Armenian defense minister meets Chinese counterpart in Beijing,” *ArmenPress*, October 22, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/992472.html>

43 “Zaharieva from Armenia: There Are no Direct Flights between our Countries,” *Novinite*, October 28, 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/201286/Zaharieva+from+Armenia%3A+There+Are+no+Direct+Flights+between+our+Country>

44 “Armenia, Russia PMs meet in Moscow,” *News.am*, October 25, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/540982.html>

45 “Interview of Armenia’s Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan to BBC HardTalk’s Stephen Sackur,” *YouTube*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTGRiBCRkw>

The President of Greece Prokopios Pavlopoulos visited Armenia on 5 November. Following his meeting with Pashinyan, Pashinyan announced that the first Armenia, Greece and GASC trilateral summit will take place in Yerevan in January 2020. The Greek President Pavlopoulos stated that he is pleased with Armenia's efforts for the recognition of the "Armenian genocide" in the international sphere, that this is important and that they support these efforts. He further added that they are happy that Armenia has recognized the "Pontic genocide", that they are pleased with the US House of Representatives' resolution to recognize the alleged genocide. The spokesperson of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to a question asked on 7 November, responded to the Greek President's statements:<sup>46</sup>

"We witness that Greece continues to take side with the hostile circles against Turkey and support their baseless stance and allegations.

Turkey has never forgotten the atrocities committed by Greece against Turks and other citizens of the Ottoman Empire. In this regard, it is a well-known fact that Greece has systematically annihilated Turks and Muslims in the region during and after the period of independence from the Ottoman Empire. Even today, Greece continues its inhumane practices against its Turkish minorities, taking it as far as to punish Muftis with imprisonment for performing a Friday prayer.

Turkey, who believes the necessity of taking lessons of peace and fraternity rather than hostility from history, is well aware of the said historical realities. [...]"

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who has the status of the Vatican's Secretary of Foreign Relations, visited Yerevan on 9 November, met with the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs and afterwards with the Prime Minister. In the statements made after the meetings, it was underlined that religion-based subjects, such as the protection of the Christian minorities in the Middle East, preserving the Christian historical heritage, were discussed.<sup>47</sup> No news reports were available regarding Pashinyan not meeting with the Pope in his visit to Italy that was announced to take place on 20 November or the problems of internal politics of the former Ambassador of Armenia at the Vatican.

46 "QA-69, 7 November 2019, Statement of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hami Aksoy, in Response to a Question Regarding the Statement Made by Greek President Prokopios Pavlopoulos During His Visit to Armenia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, November 7, 2019, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc\\_-69\\_-yunanistan-cbsk-nin-bindokuzyuzonbes-olaylari-hk-aciklamasi-hk-sc.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-69_-yunanistan-cbsk-nin-bindokuzyuzonbes-olaylari-hk-aciklamasi-hk-sc.en.mfa)

47 "The presence of Catholic church to contribute to prosperity of the Armenian public - Archbishop Paul Gallagher," *Panorama*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/11/09/Catholic/2194329>

Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, in an interview given to the Armenian press on 9 November, before his visit to Armenia on 10-11 November (his first after the revolution), stated that the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations would contribute to the healing of the general political atmosphere in the Caucasus. Lavrov stated that the regulation of the Turkish-Armenian relations is, first of all, the issue of bilateral agenda of Yerevan and Ankara, but unfortunately at the current phase Russia's partners have not succeeded in restoring the diplomatic relations. Lavrov stated that Russia hopes that Armenia and Turkey will continue working in that direction, and that such opportunities still exist, and that Russia is ready to provide necessary support to the parties.<sup>48</sup> Lavrov conducted meetings with the Armenian President, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister with emphasis on mutual solidarity. Lavrov stated that, according to the agreement reached, the biological laboratories established in Armenia with the sponsorship of the US have also become accessible to Russian experts. A following visit of Lavrov to Baku took place on December 2-3. There, Lavrov brought up the importance to resume contacts between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Prime Minister Pashinyan visited France on 12 November to attend the Second Paris Peace Conference and, within this framework, met with the President of France Emmanuel Macron. Pashinyan also attended the 40th UNESCO General Conference. Pashinyan also met with the representatives of the Armenian community in Paris and stated that "There is no border between Armenia and the diaspora, we are one whole."<sup>49</sup>

The Armenian President A. Sarkissian visited Qatar on 17 November. On 21 November, he paid a working visit to the UK.<sup>50</sup>

According to the news reports in the Armenian media, the President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda made groundless and unwarranted claims that reflected him being in full agreement with the Armenian allegations and views during a press meeting on 14 November.

Prime Minister Pashinyan started an official visit to Italy on 20 November and met with Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in Rome. On 27-28 November, he visited Kyrgyzstan together with the Foreign and Defense Ministers to join

48 "Russia ready to contribute to normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey – FM Lavrov," *ArmenPress*, November 11, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/994796.html>

49 "Pashinyan Travels to France for Peace Conference, UNESCO Anniversary," *Mirror Spectator*, November 14, 2019, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/11/14/pashinyan-travels-to-france-for-peace-conference-unesco-anniversary/>

50 "President of Armenia arrives in Qatar for official visit," *Armradio.am*, November 17, 2019, <https://en.armradio.am/2019/11/17/president-of-armenia-arrives-in-qatar-for-official-visit/>

the annual meeting of the CSTO. In his speech, he complained about Azerbaijan and claimed that Azerbaijan's position threatens security in the Caucasus.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. Turkey-Armenia Relations

Pashinyan, who is conscious of the necessity to divert the serious and pressing issues he is facing, conscious of the necessity for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict where he is under intense pressure, and striving to find a foreign scapegoat for the concessions, appears to be targeting Turkey to a degree that no other Armenian administration until now had ventured. Armenia under the Pashinyan administration has become the universal conductor of enmity towards Turkey for those who have a score to settle with Turkey. Turkey being situated in a turbulent region in between the universal clash of interests and the existence of challenges outside traditional Turkish foreign policy line creates possibilities for Armenia to play such a role. On the other hand, by stating on every occasion that they are ready to meet with Turkey without preconditions, Armenia's leaders have not given up on their attempts to display themselves as followers of peace and Turkey as the irreconcilable party that wants to impose its demands. Turkey's accepting of the Armenian claims and demands, that is to say, coming to the table without being a "denialist", is not a precondition in the Armenian understanding.

During his speech on 27 August to the representatives of Armenia abroad, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan stated that Turkey creates a security threat to Armenia.<sup>52</sup> As justification for this claim, the Minister put forward Turkey not establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia, Turkey's supposed economic blockade of Armenia, the "denial" of the genocide allegations and recently the supposed discourse regarding the justification of genocidal actions, and the support to Azerbaijan in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In his same speech, he underlined his satisfaction with the trilateral format they established with Greece and the GASC. Again, in the same speech, he emphasized the importance of the efforts made on the topic of preventing genocides being part of the international agenda.

On the subject of relations with Turkey, Pashinyan, who gave interviews to leading Iranian media outlets on 2 September, stated that they are ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without preconditions, but that this

51 "Armenian PM's official visit to Italy continues," *News.am*, November 22, 2019, <https://news.am/eng/news/545804.html>

52 "Opening Remarks By Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan At The Annual Conference Of The MFA Apparatus And Heads Of Diplomatic Service Abroad," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, August 27, 2019, [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm\\_opening\\_remarks/9782](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm_opening_remarks/9782)

does not mean that Armenia retracts from its policy aimed at the international recognition of the “genocide”, that the recognition of the “Armenian genocide” does not only touch upon the relations between the two countries, that Armenia views the issue also from the viewpoint of international security.<sup>53</sup>

During the press conference organized on 6 September, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs repeated the following regarding the impediment in relations with Turkey: “Such realities are the rejection of the Zurich process, the constant blockade, the continuous denialist policy of the Genocide and the highlighted bias on the Nagorno Karabkah issue by Turkey”. The Minister stated that Turkey does not have the similar stance of Armenia regarding the normalization of the relations.<sup>54</sup>

The Armenian press published the case of a process for divesting from Turkish bonds in the pension funds of the US State of California approved on 12 September and completed with the State Governor’s signature on 3 October.<sup>55</sup> This was published as a significant victory achieved by the initiatives of the American minority of Armenian descent.

In his speech at the UN General Assembly on 26 September, Pashinyan registered his opposition towards Turkey with his statement:

“Two out of the four international borders of Armenia, including the one with Turkey, have been closed for almost three decades. By refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia, overtly assisting Azerbaijan against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey remains a serious security threat to Armenia and the Armenian people who had experienced the deep tragedy of the genocide and continue to face the fierce denial of truth and justice”.

Pashinyan also expressed that Russia is their key strategic partner and that Georgia and Iran are their strategic neighbors.<sup>56</sup>

On 10 October, at an emergency meeting chaired by Prime Minister Pashinyan, Armenia’s government condemned Turkey’s Peace Spring Operation in north Syria and characterized it as illegal. In his statement before

53 “Armenian PM gives interviews to several leading Iranian media outlets,” *ArmenPress*, September 2, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/986570/>

54 “Armenian FM comments on establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey,” *ArmenPress*, September 6, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/987127.html>

55 “Assembly Joint Resolution No. 16,” *California Legislative Information*, September 11, 2019, [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200AJR16](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AJR16)

56 “Armenia - Prime Minister Addresses General Debate, 74th Session,” *YouTube*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF691KXhWWA>

the meeting, Pashinyan stated “We are concerned about the situation because we believe that action will further deepen the humanitarian crisis in Syria. We are calling on the international community to take meaningful measures to stop that illegal action and protect Syrian citizens, including ethnic minorities, along the Turkish border”. Pashinyan also indicated that the Armenian military will continue its small-scale “humanitarian mission” in Syria closely coordinated with Russia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia also issued a statement claiming that the Turkish “invasion” would further destabilize the region and result in civilian casualties, calling on the international community to stop the offensive and “prevent mass atrocities”. The statement also expressed that the situation was becoming particularly alarming for ethnic and religious minorities. An official of the Ministry indicated that around 3000 Syrian Armenians currently live in the northeastern city of Qamishli close to the Turkish border.<sup>57</sup>

In a short period of time, the reaction against the Peace Spring Operation turned into a widespread and orchestrated Armenian campaign. On 11 October, the Armenian Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin made a statement embedded with politics and expressed that the danger of the Turkish “attacks” awakens memories of the “Armenian genocide” in 1915-1923. (The response to this came from Turkey’s Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, in which full support was expressed for Turkey’s military anti-terror operation in Syria.) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation also made a statement on 11 October and condemned Turkey’s “attack” on Syria. On 15 October, during the 130th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Speaker of the Parliament of Armenia called on all parliamentarians not to stay indifferent and consider unacceptable Turkey’s operations in Syria, claimed that these disasters were taking place in the same place, the same geographical space where the remnants of the victims of the “Armenian genocide” committed by the Ottoman Empire 100 years ago in the soil and sand. That soil, the fertile lands of Syria, were where the Armenian population was resettled.

In the press conference organized during the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister’s visit on 28 October, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan stated that the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu talked of “terrorists of Armenian nationality in the ranks of the Kurdistan Workers Party [PKK]”, that such statements threaten Armenia’s security, that they condemn and reject such statements. Afterwards, there were news publications in the Armenian media claiming that the Turkish General Staff had prepared secret strike plans against Armenia in 2001 under the code “Altay Operation”. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan commented

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57 “Armenia Condemns ‘Illegal’ Turkish Offensive In Syria,” *Azatoryun*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/30209604.html>

on these news publications on 2 December, stating that the issue is of serious concern, which is why Armenia continues to follow developments in Turkey and that Turkey is pursuing a policy that is damaging to Armenia.

On 29 October, the US House of Representatives passed by a large majority the H.Res.296 resolution titled “Affirming the United States record on the Armenian genocide” which reflects the mindset of the House of Representatives but is not binding: The text of the resolution is as follows:

“RESOLUTION 296 (H. Res. 296)

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

October 29, 2019.

Whereas the United States has a proud history of recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide, the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, and providing relief to the survivors of the campaign of genocide against Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrians, Arameans, Maronites, and other Christians;

Whereas the Honorable Henry Morgenthau, United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916, organized and led protests by officials of many countries against what he described as the empire’s “campaign of race extermination”, and was instructed on July 16, 1915, by United States Secretary of State Robert Lansing that the “Department approves your procedure \* \* \* to stop Armenian persecution”;

Whereas President Woodrow Wilson encouraged the formation of the Near East Relief, chartered by an Act of Congress, which raised \$116,000,000 (over \$2,500,000,000 in 2019 dollars) between 1915 and 1930, and the Senate adopted resolutions condemning these massacres;

Whereas Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” in 1944, and who was the earliest proponent of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, invoked the Armenian case as a definitive example of genocide in the 20th century;

Whereas, as displayed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Adolf Hitler, on ordering his military commanders to attack Poland without provocation in 1939, dismissed objections by saying “[w]ho, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”, setting the stage for the Holocaust;



Whereas the United States has officially recognized the Armenian Genocide, through the United States Government’s May 28, 1951, written statement to the International Court of Justice regarding the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, through President Ronald Reagan’s Proclamation No. 4838 on April 22, 1981, and by House Joint Resolution 148, adopted on April 8, 1975, and House Joint Resolution 247, adopted on September 10, 1984; and

Whereas the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–441) establishes that atrocities prevention represents a United States national interest, and affirms that it is the policy of the United States to pursue a United States Government-wide strategy to identify, prevent, and respond to the risk of atrocities by “strengthening diplomatic response and the effective use of foreign assistance to support appropriate transitional justice measures, including criminal accountability, for past atrocities”: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that it is the policy of the United States to—

- (1) commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance;
- (2) reject efforts to enlist, engage, or otherwise associate the United States Government with denial of the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide; and
- (3) encourage education and public understanding of the facts of the Armenian Genocide, including the United States role in the humanitarian relief effort, and the relevance of the Armenian Genocide to modern-day crimes against humanity.”<sup>58</sup>

The draft resolution, prepared by the US State of California Representative Adam Schiff and Florida Representative Gus Bilirakis, was presented to both wings of the House by Schiff. Anna Eshoo, who is one of the three American House Representatives of Armenian descent, emphasized her religious background and said that her family was a victim of the “genocide” in her speech. Representative Ilhan Omar, of Muslim background, abstained from the resolution and received harsh criticism. State of Arizona Representative Paul Gosar abstained from a vote, stating, “As a Christian I stand with the

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58 “H.Res.296 — 116th Congress (2019-2020),” *U.S. Congress*, October 29, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/house-resolution/296/text>

Armenians, but I will not vote for a lie”. While the resolution did not create jubilation in Armenia, it was nevertheless welcomed. On the other hand, the highest praise came from the officials of the Armenian Catholicosates Etchmiadzin in Armenia as well as Cilicia in Lebanon.

The statement of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejecting the resolution is as follows:

“We reject the resolution H.Res.296 entitled ‘Affirming the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide’ that is adopted today by the U.S. House of Representatives as expressing the sense of the Latter.

The resolution which has apparently been drafted and issued for domestic consumption is devoid of any historical or legal basis.

The resolution itself is also not legally binding. As a meaningless political step, its sole addressees are the Armenian lobby and anti-Turkey groups.

Those who felt defeated for not being able to forestall Operation Peace Spring would be highly mistaken should they thought that they could take vengeance this way.

Since in the eyes of the Turkish government and the people, this resolution is totally null and void.

There can be no further delusion than an attempt to rewrite history according to the ‘sense’ of a political body.

The resolution as it stands is both against the U.S. and international law as it is an incrimination against the principles defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. There is no verdict of a competent court with regard to the 1915 events that establishes the crime of genocide. On the contrary, European Court of Human Rights delivered a milestone judgment which stipulates that 1915 events constitute a legitimate subject for debate.

Hence, the debate on the events that occurred in 1915 belongs to the realm of history, not politics.

It should be remembered that Turkey’s proposal on the establishment of a Joint Historical Commission made in 2005 was rejected by the Armenian side.

The U.S. Administration and politicians as well as the American people are best placed to consider the damages this resolution seeking to disrupt Turkey-U.S. ties does and will inflict upon the U.S. interests at an extremely fragile time in terms of the international and regional security. On the other hand, it is also noted that the attitude of the U.S. Administration on 1915 events remains the same.

Undoubtedly, this resolution will negatively affect the image of the U.S. before the public opinion of Turkey as it also brings the dignity of the U.S. House of Representatives into disrepute.

We believe that American friends of Turkey who support the continuation of the alliance and friendly relations will question this grave mistake and those who are responsible will be judged by the conscience of the American people.”<sup>59</sup>

An article that appeared in the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) criticizing the resolution is as follows:

“On 29 October 2019, the US House of Representatives voted 405 to 11 in favor of a resolution titled ‘H.Res.296 - Affirming the United States record on the Armenian Genocide.’ This resolution resolved that the US should officially recognize the ‘Armenian Genocide;’ reject all ventures to deny ‘the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide’ and support initiatives seeking to raise awareness about the ‘Armenian Genocide’ and its relevance ‘to modern-day crimes against humanity.’ As such, the resolution of the US House of Representatives looked like a great victory for the Armenian lobbies in the US, which have been concentrating almost all their efforts for the passage of a resolution not for years but decades. Hence the passage of the almost unanimously supported ‘genocide resolution’ should have been a justified reason for festivity among these circles. Alas, that has not been the case.

Almost a month has passed since 29 October 2019 and we have been following the print and online media and social media to see the reactions that this resolution elicited among the advocates of the Armenian narrative. What we have seen is quiet and restraint among the rank and file in the US as well as Armenia and other countries. This is quite a contrast with the ecstasy during the sensational times of 2015 and 2016, when some parliaments in Europe had passed resolutions on

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59 “No: 315, 29 October 2019, Press Release Regarding the Resolution Entitled ‘Affirming the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide’ Passed by the U.S. House of Representatives,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, October 29, 2019, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_315\\_-ermeni-soykirimi-konusunda-abd-nin-tutumunu-teyit-baslikli-karar-hk.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_315_-ermeni-soykirimi-konusunda-abd-nin-tutumunu-teyit-baslikli-karar-hk.en.mfa).

the ‘Armenian Genocide.’ Why is it so? Well, the answer is the decades-long strived for victory of 29 October 2019 is no victory or just a Pyrrhic one.

For many people, reading the texts of resolutions, laws, decrees and other official documents is not the most enjoyable activity on earth. Besides, why should one spend time for such a dull thing, when she is informed that the US House of Representatives has passed a resolution on Armenian Genocide? Is this not the main point that we should know? Not really. As said, ‘devil is in details’ and it is that ‘devil’ that Armenian lobbyists try to hide, yet to no avail.

The Preamble of the House Resolution starts with the following:

Whereas the United States has a proud history of recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide, the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, and providing relief to the survivors of the campaign of genocide against Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Arameans, Maronites, and other Christians;

Let’s skip the the factually erroneous claims of the number game of ‘1.5 million’ and the ever extending dates of ‘1915-1923’ and focus on the second part of this statement. Here, the House frames the ‘Armenian Genocide’ within the wider ‘genocide of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire.’ ‘The genocide of the Christians perpetrated by the Muslim Ottomans’ is a relatively new claim forged by the advocates of the genocide thesis in the last couple of years in order to win the hearts of the conservative Christians and the others distressed by the atrocities of the DAESH/ISIS and similar Jihadist terrorists in the Middle East. Likewise, it is an attempt to win comrades in arms among radical Greeks and others in the ‘holy war’ against Turkey. It is obvious to almost all serious scholars that such a comprehensive ‘genocide of the Christians’ is a politically motivated pseudo-academic claim. Besides, the ambiguous expression of ‘other Christians’ which fails to specify who these other Christians are, reflect the haphazard and sloppy approach of the representatives in the House. Regrettably for the Armenian lobbyists, this is the result of their decades-long committed efforts. The House equates the ‘Armenian Genocide’ with equally politically motivated forgeries on the ‘genocide’ of the “Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Arameans, Maronites, and other Christians.” So much effort, so much money have gone up in smoke.

In the preamble of the resolution, the House refers to the reports of ‘Honorable Henry Morgenthau United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916’ as one of the evidences of the factuality of the ‘Armenian Genocide.’ Lamentably for the Representatives in the House and the Armenian lobbyists, this claim has already been disproved long ago, particularly after the publication of Heath W. Lowry’s ‘The Story Behind Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story’ in 1990.

Another reference in the preamble of the resolution is given to Raphael Lemkin ‘who coined the term ‘genocide’ in 1944, and who was the earliest proponent of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, invoked the Armenian case as a definitive example of genocide in the 20th century.’ Referring to Lemkin in order to prove the factuality of the ‘Armenian genocide’ is also a relatively new habit. The reason behind this new habit is the impossibility of characterizing the 1915 events as genocide if one sticks to the valid definition of the crime of genocide stated in the 1948 Genocide Convention. Yet referring to Lemkin is not spineless. Firstly, the definition of the crime of genocide that was proposed by Lemkin and the definition of the same crime finally approved by the UN in the 1948 Genocide Convention are quite different. Hence, Lemkin’s definition can only be regarded as a draft, not the final definition. What is more problematic for the lobbyists and the Representatives in the House is that Lemkin in his ‘Introduction to the Study of Genocide,’ an unpublished book that was made available to the researchers by Steven Leonard Jacobs under the title ‘Lemkin on Genocide’ in 2012 mentions sixty-two cases of genocide in history, forty-one of which took place in modern times. The ninth genocide in the list of the modern genocides is the ‘genocide by the Greeks against the Turks.’ Lemkin also includes the ‘genocide against the American Indians.’ He provides a ninety-eight-page-long assessment of the ‘genocide against the American Indians’ in this study. As such, if we have to take Lemkin’s studies as the reference point to decide which events in history have been genocides, we need to recognize the ‘Turkish Genocide’ perpetrated by the Greeks along with the ‘genocide of the American Indians.’ Would Armenian lobbyists, their Greek comrades in arms or the Representatives in the House welcome such a move? Not, really.

Fourthly, the preamble of resolutions refers to Adolf Hitler’s alleged words ‘[w]ho, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?’ by which he set the stage for the Holocaust. Sincerely, sometimes commenting on this and similar claims feels like *Déjà vu* occurring over and over again. Yet there is no way other than

repeating here once again what has been repeated so many times before. The allegation about Hitler's words on the 'forgotten annihilation of the Armenians' was investigated during the Nuremberg Trials and the judges ruled that the factuality of this statement could not be verified. The judges, accordingly, dismissed that these alleged words could be used as evidence during the trials. Is there anything more that is necessary to say on this allegation?

Lastly, how disappointing for the Armenian lobbyists that Steve Cohen, few days after the passage of the genocide resolution, the Democratic Party representative of Tennessee said 'I've always opposed the Armenian resolution, and I voted for it this week. I voted for it because Turkey doesn't seem to respect the United States at all.' This is an obvious verification of the motives of the Representatives in the House, while voting for the genocide resolution. How deplorable for the Armenian lobbyist that their great cause is after all just a political tool for the American lawmakers to punish Turkey whenever relations between the two countries get intense."<sup>60</sup>

The US Senate adopted a resolution on 12 December, identical to House Resolution 296, repeating the same bias and fallacies.

This was also most welcome by Armenian official and religious circles.

Prime Minister Pashinyan thanked the US Congress on 13 December for recognizing the "1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey" adding that adopted resolutions will help to reduce "Turkish threat to Armenia's security".

In a following address to government officials in Yerevan, he said "For us, international recognition of the Armenian genocide also has a security component. This process is important in terms of ensuring the security of our country and people. The international community should express a clear position on Turkey's actions and also encourage Turkey to reappraise and reconsider its role in our region."<sup>61</sup>

In response to these developments, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey adopted the following resolution on 13 December:

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60 AVİM, "America On The Wane: The House Of Representatives Disgraces Itself and Loses Credibility," *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2019/60, December 4, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/AMERICA-ON-THE-WANE-THE-HOUSE-OF-REPRESENTATIVES-DISGRACES-ITSELF-AND-LOSES-CREDIBILITY>

61 Sargis Harutyunyan, "Pashinian Blasts Turkey, Hails U.S. Recognition Of Armenian Genocide," *Azattyun.am*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/30323998.html>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With these thoughts, it has been approved by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey General Assembly's 32nd Session dated 13 December 2019 that the US Senate's aforementioned resolution is fully condemned, rejected, and declared null and void and that this resolution of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is to be published in the Official Gazette."<sup>62</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan also made a statement assessing the US Senate resolution as biased and without legal justification.

Another official response to the US Senate resolution came from the US Department of State, stating that "The position of the Administration has not changed. Our views are reflected in the President's definitive statement on this issue from last April".

On 8 November, the Armenian press gave a wide coverage to the initiative of a representative of Armenian descent at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to recognize the "genocide".

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia published a statement on 19 November harshly criticizing Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statements regarding the Armenian relocation and resettlement during his visit to the US and accused him of attempting to justify the "genocide".

In an interview with an Italian newspaper on 25 November, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan repeated the well-known discourse and claims:

"Armenia is ready to restore diplomatic relations with Turkey without any preconditions. The international recognitions of the Armenian genocide are not a precondition for us to restore diplomatic relations

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62 "Resolution On The Condemnation And Rejection Of The United States Of America Senate Resolution And Declaration Of The Said Resolution Being Deemed Null And Void," *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Daily Bulletin, December 20, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/RESOLUTION-ON-THE-CONDEMNATION-AND-REJECTION-OF-THE-UNITED-STATES-OF-AMERICA-SENATE-RESOLUTION-AND-DECLARATION-OF-THE-SAID-RESOLUTION-BEING-DEEMED-NULL-AND-VOID>



with Turkey. That recognition is a very important process, which is necessary not for our relations with them, but for the global prevention of genocides. The passage of the resolution in the US House of Representatives recognizing the events of 1915 as genocide is very, very important. It helps to prevent possible future genocides and this decision can change the atmosphere in our region. Those are messages, showing that such aggressive policies will not be accepted by the international community. Unfortunately, a century after the genocide, Turkey is still perceived by Armenians as a possible security threat. It's nearly 30 years the border with Turkey is been closed on their initiative, not ours.”<sup>63</sup>

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Çavuşoğlu, who gave a written response to a question regarding Turkey-Armenia relations at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on 27 November, highlighted that there is no change in the desire for the normalization of the relation with Armenia, that it is essential to take steps towards the resolution of the Karabakh issue for the normalization efforts in the relations to gain ground. Minister Çavuşoğlu underlined that Pashinyan's "Karabakh is Armenia" discourse during his speech in the occupied Hankendi on 5 August is among the indicators that Armenia has begun distancing itself from a peaceful resolution, likewise, that Prime Minister Pashinyan had the audacity to state "Turkey is a serious threat to Armenia" during his speech at the 74th UN General Assembly. Minister Çavuşoğlu recalled that Armenia continues to make baseless claims targeting Turkey regarding the subject of the 1915 events, that they left the call to establish a Joint History Commission for the researching of the aforementioned events unanswered. Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that, despite all of this, if the Armenian side begins to take concrete and sincere steps towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict with a new attitude within the framework of the international community's expectations and international law, Turkey will respond positively.<sup>64</sup>

On 9 December, Pashinyan had a working meeting with President A. Sarkissian where they "commemorated the memory of all genocide victims and discussed the fact that international recognition of the Armenian genocide is not only a matter of historical fact and justice for us but also our important contribution to global genocide prevention."

63 "Nikol Pashinyan Interviewed by Italy's Biggest Newspaper: Il Corriere Della Sera," *Hyetert*, November 26, 2019, <https://hyetert.org/2019/11/26/nikol-pashinyan-interviewed-by-italys-biggest-newspaper-il-corriere-della-sera/>

64 "Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerini değerlendiren Çavuşoğlu: 'Masadan kalkan taraf Türkiye olmamıştır'," *Sputnik Türkiye*, 26 Kasım 2019, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/columnists/201911261040703880-turkiye-ermenistan-iliskilerini-degerlendiren-cavusoglu-masadan-kalkan-taraf-turkiye-olmamistir/>

In that vein, the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced “the need for international recognition of the Ottoman-era genocide of Greek Christians” and slammed Turkey for “its bellicosity in its maritime foreign policy in the Mediterranean” in his talk at the International Conference on the Crime of Genocide.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

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# THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE KARABAGH CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF BSEC AS A REGIONALISM CASE

(BİR BÖLGESELÇİLİK ÖRNEĞİ OLARAK KEİ BAĞLAMINDA  
KARABAĞ ÇATIŞMASININ YANSIMALARI)

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**Abstract:** *This paper inquires the impact and the implications of the Karabagh conflict in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) context through the conceptualization of regionalism. In the framework of the main argument that the Karabagh conflict stands as a major reason for the stagnation of the BSEC since its establishment, it first provides a brief account on the concepts of region and regionalism. Second, it provides information on the birth, the evolution, and the stagnation of the BSEC. Third, it investigates the reverberations of the Karabagh conflict on the basis of the data collected from the national and the international news archives. Fourth, it attempts to construe the data on the basis of the relevant sub-arguments in regionalism. In the final analysis, the high likelihood of the stagnation of the BSEC is affirmed, given the persistence of the Karabagh conflict.*

**Keywords:** *Regionalism, BSEC, Turkey, Armenia, Karabagh.*

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**Öz:** *Mevcut çalışma, bölgeselcilik kavramsallaştırması üzerinden Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü (KEİ) bağlamında Karabağ çatışmasının etkisi ve yansımalarını araştırmaktadır. Karabağ çatışmasının, tesis edilmesinden itibaren KEİ'nin duraksamasının başat nedeni olduğu temel savı çerçevesinde, öncelikle bölge ve bölgeselcilik kavramlarına ilişkin özet bir açıklama sunmaktadır. İkinci olarak, KEİ'nin doğuşu, evrimi ve duraksamasına dair bilgi vermektedir. Üçüncü olarak, ulusal ve uluslararası haber arşivlerinden elde edilen veriler temelinde Karabağ çatışmasının yansımalarını incelemektedir. Dördüncü olarak, söz konusu verilerin, bölgeselcilik dahilindeki ilgili alt savlar temelinde yorumlanmasına çalışılmaktadır. Nihai tahlilde, Karabağ çatışmasının devamlılığı dikkate alındığında, KEİ'nin gelecekte yüksek durağanlık olasılığı teyit edilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Bölgeselcilik, KEİ, Türkiye, Ermenistan, Karabağ.*

## Introduction

It has become conventional wisdom since the 1990s that, as an idea and practice in international relations, regionalism can bring about new cooperation schemes in different issue areas, after the long years of Cold War which held the states captive with its bi-polar world imperatives. The 1990s witnessed a distinct rise in the number of regional formations in the economic and the political domains, among others. This decade was also proof that both the liberal and the former communist states could participate in the newly emerging regional organizations, despite the many differences they had. Although the ultimate objective was the provision of sustained momentum in development and cooperation in as many fields as possible, in reality, regionalism attempts turned out to be protracted and conflictual in practice.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is a regional organization that fits into this context both in terms of timing and substance. Being a regional attempt of the early 1990s, it was formed by the liberal and the post-communist states of the larger Black Sea basin, where overall pre-regional links were weak, with the aim of establishing trade and investment links and with the expectation that this would eventually evolve into political cooperation. Although all the members thought they would gain and therefore should join (the alternative being left out of such a regional initiative), it soon turned out that pre-existing problems between the members worked to hinder the aspired cooperation levels in the BSEC.

Contrary to the initial plans, the BSEC embarked into a stagnation phase after its establishment. Upon this backdrop and given the lack of relevant research in Turkish and English literature on the topic, this paper argues that the Karabagh conflict, imported into the BSEC when Armenia became a member, is a major issue that has plagued progress in the BSEC since its inception and one which still holds the organization captive.

As such, the present paper is an attempt to explain and understand the repercussions of the problem in the BSEC context. Accordingly, the first part of the paper provides a conceptual summary of the concepts of “region” and “regionalism” in the discipline of International Relations, with a number of relevant sub-arguments derived from the regionalism literature. The second part looks at the emergence, evolution, and stagnation of the BSEC. Part three attempts to manifest the reverberations of Armenia’s membership and the Karabagh conflict (touching upon the genocide claims where necessary) in three periods, based on the national and the international news archives. In the fourth part, the empirical data provided in the third part is construed on the basis of the four explanatory sub-arguments in the regionalism literature which are of high relevance -stimulus of diffusion, identity factor, macro crises

and economic intentions. In the final analysis, it affirms the dim prospect for progress in the organization as long as the Karabagh conflict remains.

### 1. Region and Regionalism: Definition, Emergence, Evolution

Given the mostly elusive and multifaceted nature of the concepts of “region” and “regionalism”, the need to provide a relevant descriptive account is obvious, as is the case with almost all the concepts in social sciences. The lexicological roots of the concept “region” lie in the Latin words “regio” and “rego”, meaning “direction” and “to steer, to rule”, respectively. Geographically speaking, a region may denote both a border that surrounds it and a defined space within those borders.<sup>1</sup> The exact geographical borders of a region may not always be fixed; it may be the case that naturally dividing landscape formations -such as rivers, mountains, seas- demarcate a given region. The exact opposite may well be the case wherein man-made, plain border arrangements are a matter of concern. Any other border demarcation conceptualization and practice would fall between these two, which has the potential to render the subject more convoluted than it is, as it brings in politics. The emergence and evolution of regions arguably reflect a conglomeration of drivers and impediments, which are, of course, open to argument. The same conglomeration offers the potential to aptly put into perspective our understanding of “region” in the discipline of International Relations. Marek Koter’s<sup>2</sup> concise presentation can be referred to as a starting point, which is provided in Table 1.

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1 Fredrik Söderbaum, “Exploring the Links between Micro-Regionalism and Macro-Regionalism,” in *Global Politics of Regionalism*, eds. Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne and Luk Van Langenhove (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005), 90.

2 Marek Koter, “The Geographical-Historical Region: Its Notion, Origin and Factors in its Development,” in *Region and Regionalism: Social and Political Aspects*, ed. Marek Koter (Opole, Lodz: Silesian Institute in Opole, 1995), 24-25.

**Factors in Regions' Birth, Development and Survival**

Geographical	Territory, frames, landscape, conditions
Historical	Name, symbols, tradition, heritage, organization
Ethnic	Language, dialect, feeling of separateness
Religious	Values, ideas, ceremonials, mentality
Other cultural	Customs, habits, folklore, music, art
Settlement	Housing, architecture, settlement patterns and networks
Communicational	Inner oriented supplying ties center-periphery
Focal center	Historic core, center of rule, power
Economic	Base of existence, productive bonds, social-professional structure, type of economic structure

**Table 1: Factors in Regions' Birth, Development and Survival**

Of importance is the fact that these factors are likely to have impact on regional formations with varying degrees, much as they were in the past. Of equal importance is another fact that regions are not objective entities but are constructed socially. More neatly explained, “regions are social constructions that make reference to territorial location and to geographical or normative continuity”.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, it is possible to maintain that regions are by no means homogeneous or unitary. They are likely to go through processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, under the impact of internal and external factors, ranging from system to unit-level.<sup>4</sup>

“Regionalism”, on the other hand, can be defined as a primarily state-led process of building and sustaining official regional organizations with the participation of at least three states, which includes the transfer of at least some degree of sovereignty to the organization.<sup>5</sup> A swift glance at the evolution of regionalism discloses that the first identifiable examples appeared in Europe, as “early regionalism”, in ancient Greece, based on internal and external threat perceptions of the time. The regionalism attempts of former colonies and similar attempts between the colonial empires and colonies ensued in the subsequent eras, which would be followed by the post-war European regionalism, known as “old regionalism”.<sup>6</sup> The third type of regionalism, referred to as “new regionalism”, emerged roughly in the mid-1980s, reflecting a more multidimensional nature, which was not solely

3 Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-7.

4 Söderbaum, “Exploring the Links,” 91.

5 Börzel and Risse, “Introduction,” 7-8.

6 Fredrik Söderbaum, “Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18-23.

focused on protecting economies, trade and security but previously not-so-often-included sectors as business, civil society and university collaboration, for instance. Proving that all regionalism attempts are products of the conjuncture in which they are born, the birth of new regionalism demonstrated the factors brought by the globalization process as of the mid-1980s: economic links, in/stability of the global trade system, the newly independent countries, and rising criticism of the neoliberal system, etc.<sup>7</sup>

The diffusion of regionalism is an aspect that is integral in the regionalism literature. It is posited that there must be a stimulus for the diffusion of regionalism, which is obviously the other regional formations in different regions. What is diffused will potentially cover the idea of regionalism, the internal organizational structure, and the policy areas to be handled. In addition, diffusion should be understood as both the outcome and process. Diffusion may occur by direct influence mechanisms, also labelled as “sender-driven”, wherein an actor directly promotes its policies among a given group of actors. Also, actors in the existing regional organizations may emulate other regional organizations’ policies and institutional functioning, which is labelled as “recipient-driven” diffusion.<sup>8</sup> That said, it would not be wrong to maintain that both approaches contain lesson-drawing for the benefit of the concerned actors in a given region, related to various policy areas. To give an example, from an international political economy viewpoint, preferential trade agreements and free trade agreements are said to be effective instruments that stimulate regional diffusion. Yet, one should also be reminded that the thorough adoption in recipient-driven diffusion cases is reportedly rare and, as such, lesson-drawing in these cases may result in selective adoption, arrangements, and local behavior in a regional formation.<sup>9</sup>

Identity is another key issue which is problematized in the relevant literature. Do regions lead to homogeneous/collective identities or vice versa? Whereas there is yet no uniform answer to this categorical question, certain observations do exist. The argument that regional organizations may have an indirect effect on the identity of its members merits mention. The main idea here is that a regional organization can produce a base on which the member states can communicate, and thus can lead to security and communication communities.<sup>10</sup> However, whether an identity formation will occur or not will

7 Söderbaum, “Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism,” 26.

8 Thomas Risse, “The Diffusion of Regionalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 88-89.

9 Risse, “The Diffusion of Regionalism,” 101-102.

10 Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) ; Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); cited in Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Regional Identities and Communities,” *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 568.

be much dependent on the absence or presence of pre-existing collective identities among the members. Needless to say, a minimal level of pre-existing collective identity among a region's states can be expected to lead to a collective identity formation in a hypothetical regional organization, while the exact opposite will not leave much room to argue for a positive outcome.<sup>11</sup> As mentioned before, it is also important to be aware of the fact that no region can construct a clear-cut, neatly defined, single identity; rather all regional formations are bound to manifest multiple and evolving identities.<sup>12</sup> Overall, irrespective of other drivers, commonalities in identity are said to condition regional formation outcomes, the absence of which is likely to produce weak institutionalism.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the history of regionalism discloses that macro crises in the international system have led to the emergence of regional formations.<sup>14</sup> Both the end of World War II and the beginning of the post-Cold War era are cases in point. These two system-level shocks provided a critical juncture for institutionalization on a regional scale, giving birth to the European and other regional formations, such as the European Union (EU - 1958), League of Arab States (LAS - 1945), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS - 1983), North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA - 1994), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN - 1967), and Southern Common Market/Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR - 1991). Moreover, the existing domestic, regional and international milieus can act as drivers of regionalism. The democratic states are said to be more likely to aspire for regional integration compared to the authoritarian states and, as such, they would be willing to take part in regionalism efforts<sup>15</sup> -although this line of thinking obviously fails to notice the regionalism examples among authoritarian states such as the Arab League.

The existing regional organizations may also be an impetus for the formation of similar structures elsewhere, due to being perceived as a model.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the success of the new regional organization will by no means be certain, given the observation that the regionalism examples which are outcomes of

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11 Checkel, "Regional Identities and Communities," 562.

12 Nikki Slocum and Luk Van Langenhove, "Identity and Regional Integration," in *Global Politics of Regionalism*, eds. Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne and Luk Van Langenhove (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005), 148, 151.

13 Louise Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration: Historical and Comparative Perspectives," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 42.

14 Paul Gillespie, "Crises as Drivers of Integration in Europe and Asia: Crisis as Threat," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 85-101.

15 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 42-43.

16 Fawcett, "Drivers of Regional Integration," 43.



emulation can manifest a gap between discursive aspirations and practices, implying a partial or incremental emulation.<sup>17</sup> It is thus worthy to keep in mind that “while [regional] institutions are a crucial component of regional integration they are not always ‘drivers’ in a strict sense. They are not themselves responsible for the success or failure of regional integration projects.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the pre-existing international organizations may also act as drivers for regional organization attempts, as seen in the United Nations (UN) Charter, Chapter VIII, Articles 52-54,<sup>19</sup> which explicitly promote regional gathering efforts.<sup>20</sup> Then again, obvious core states or a hegemon in a region might pioneer in the formation of regional organizations, although this is not a rule; since not all core states may be willing, and not all regions may have core states. Yet, if and when they do pioneer an establishment of a regional organization, they mostly end up assuming key roles in the organization.<sup>21</sup>

By and large, regionalism with economic intentions would be shaped by economic considerations and, more precisely, by the logic of capital that can offer the states some incentives for uniting to benefit from the regional market

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17 Laura Allison, “Exogenous Factors: Are Other Regions Drivers of Integration?,” in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 361.

18 Edward Moxon-Browne, “The Role of Institutions in Regional Integration: A Comparative Reflection,” in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 70.

19 ARTICLE 52: (1) Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations. (2) The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council. (3) The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council. (4) This article in no way impairs the applications of Articles 34 – 35.

ARTICLE 53: (1) The Security Council shall, where appropriate, utilize such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority. But no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without authorization of the Security Council with the exception of measures against any enemy state, as defined in paragraph 2 of this Article, provided for pursuant to Article 107 or in regional arrangements directed against renewal of aggressive policy on the part of any such state, until such time as the Organization may, on request of the Governments concerned, be charged with the responsibility for preventing further aggression by such a state. (2) The term enemy state as used in paragraph 1 of this Article applies to any state which during the Second World War has been an enemy of any signatory of the present Charter.

ARTICLE 54: The Security Council shall at times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, 1945, accessed on October 21, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>

20 Fawcett, “Drivers of Regional Integration,” 44.

21 Fawcett, “Drivers of Regional Integration,” 46-47.

and to boost trading and investment possibilities.<sup>22</sup> As can be expected, the historical record of regionalism is known to reflect trade and investment as important drivers of regional integration. While initial trade and investment links may be considered as factors that pave the way for and subsequently facilitate regional integration, the aftermath may be a different story altogether: it has recently been shown that the *entire* trade and investment links between countries in a regional organization might not guarantee a sustainable regional economic integration and might not stay unharmed if economic and political crises emerge. Likewise, it has been shown that the *most intensive* trade links in (a) given sector(s) between states in a regional organization may not always guarantee sustainable economic integration. What do these inferences entail? For a sustainable economic regional integration to develop, two prerequisites should be provided: balanced and converging current accounts in the member states and an established, satisfactory level of similarity in trade; in particular, export competitiveness between the member states.<sup>23</sup>

It must also be borne in mind that initially intense and unproblematic trade relations may not suffice to keep a regional organization firm due to the possibility of economic crises in the future. This implies that attention must be paid to other integration sectors in order to help the survival of the regional organization. Besides, the necessity of employing a gradual approach should be recognized as any regional organization naturally goes through a preliminary phase which involves adjustment and learning in economic and trade integration.<sup>24</sup> In other words, no regional formation should be expected to produce miraculous outcomes in a short time-frame.

Finally, from a trade and investment viewpoint, one other visible characteristic of regionalism is the commitment to open regional formations as opposed to occasional fears that regional gatherings might lean towards closed regional formations. Open regionalism denotes elimination of trade and investment hurdles within a given regional organization and most notably, the external

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22 James Mittelman and Richard Falk, "Global Hegemony and Regionalism," in *Regionalism in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Stephen C. Calleya (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 5.

23 Bernadette Andreosso-O'Callaghan, "Trade and Investment Drivers: Qualifying The Type of Economic Integration in a Historical Perspective," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 228. See also: Imtiaz Hussain and Roberto Dominguez, *North American Regionalism and Global Spread* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-12. For a perspective emphasizing the importance of international business in regional integration, see: Louis Brennan, "International Business as a Driver of Regional Integration in Asia," in *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray (London: Routledge, 2015), 199-214. For the role of preferential trade agreements in regional governance, see: Soo Yeon Kim, Edward D. Mansfield and Helen V. Milner, "Regional Trade Governance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, eds. Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 323-350.

24 For these factors, see: Sheila Page, *Regionalism Among Developing Countries* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), 283-284.

tariffs.<sup>25</sup> However, despite this positive probability, there is always a pessimistic one that there is no evidence that regionalism in trade and investment sectors brings together all different parts of a certain region at all times.<sup>26</sup>

Without doubt, the literature on regionalism is much broader and richer than this volume of arguments. Notwithstanding, for the purposes of the present paper, the compact account above should suffice for inquiring the subject matter at hand, i.e. the implications of the Karabagh conflict and Armenia's membership since the early phases of the BSEC. That necessitates understanding the birth and evolution of the BSEC in the first place. A compact account on BSEC is thus in order here.

## 2. BSEC: Backdrop, Emergence, Evolution, Stagnation

The idea of a Black Sea cooperation framework was launched by Şükrü Elekdağ, former Turkish ambassador to the United States (US), in 1989. Elekdağ publicly pronounced his proposal at a panel titled "Global Changes and Turkey", arranged by the Turkish Henkel, attended by journalists Mehmet Barlas and Çetin Altan from Turkey, former Soviet ambassador Albert Chernishev, and Elekdağ himself as speakers, on January 9, 1990. The proposal was first met by silence in the audience, except for Chernishev who stated that he had found the idea positive and yet did not know how Moscow would react.<sup>27</sup> Elekdağ was of the opinion that amidst the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the weakening of the Soviet Union, a suitable climate had emerged for international economic cooperation, which had the potential to turn the Black Sea basin into a region of economic cooperation and to promote peace and stability, benefiting from the geographical proximity and the complementary nature of the regional states' economies. Elekdağ published a series of articles in newspaper columns on the idea, the first of which was published by the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet* on February 20, 1990. The idea, as he notes, was not fully embraced by all the bureaucratic units and the business world in Turkey initially, but later was.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, "Conclusion: The New Regionalism," in *Regionalism and World Order*, eds. Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996), 251.

26 Gamble and Payne, "Conclusion: The New Regionalism," 259.

27 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), *Minutes of Plenary Session*, Term 22, Legislative Year 1, Session 31, February 2003, accessed September 30, 2019, [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak\\_g\\_sd.birlesim\\_baslangic?P4=8545&P5=B&page1=43&page2=43](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_g_sd.birlesim_baslangic?P4=8545&P5=B&page1=43&page2=43)

28 TGNA, *Minutes of Plenary Session*, Term 22, Legislative Year 1, Session 31; Şükrü Elekdağ, "Cumhurbaşkanı Özal'a Açık Mektup," *Milliyet*, June 28, 1992, 13.

Viewed retrospectively at the actor level, on the one hand, the Black Sea initiative can be described as a product of the newly born regional orientation in Turkish foreign policy in the concerned period when arguments, claiming Turkey's role and importance in its region had waned, were in the air. The European Community (EC) had rejected Turkey's application for full membership in 1989 and even before that, it had declared that it would not accept any new members until 1993. The importance of Turkey's geostrategic location, and thus, its identity as a valued Western ally were also questioned by the West by the end of the Cold War. Therefore, Turkey sought alternative orientations in its foreign policy, one of which was the Black Sea basin (next to the Balkans and Central Asia), as observed in the statement of a former cabinet member, Kamran İnan: "For the first time in 400 years, Turkey is no longer under military threat from Moscow. The Turkish nation is now full of self-confidence and no longer must accept whatever we are offered. We can look all directions."<sup>29</sup> The emphasis that the Black Sea project was not an alternative and/or supplementary formation of the EC was also an integral part of Turkish foreign policy rhetoric in the given period, a view also shared by the other members partaking in the project.<sup>30</sup>

Viewed at the international level, on the other hand, chances for liberal economy to spread into the Soviet space had already become an issue often debated, including forecasts about the Black Sea region. This was because the regional cooperation attempts after the dissolution of the Soviet Union had by then emerged as a new trend based on flexible forms of trade arrangements which encouraged better market access in lieu of more official, binding preferential trade agreements and/or free trade zones, with a less pronounced necessity of political cooperation (despite the undeniable existence of the unresolved political problems/conflicts between Armenia and Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Greece, Moldova and Romania, and, at later stages, between Russia and Ukraine, and Russia and Georgia).<sup>31</sup>

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29 Jonathan C. Randal, "Turkey Woos Its Ex-Communist Neighbors," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1992, A10, LexisNexis Academic ; "Turkey Hopes Its Ship is Coming in," *The Guardian*, February 3, 1992, 6, LexisNexis Academic.

30 Hugh Pope, "Black Sea States Lay Aside Rivalries in Pursuit of Unity," *The Independent*, February 4, 1992, 8, LexisNexis Academic ; Faruk Şen, "The Black Sea Economic Cooperation: A Supplement to the European Community," *Aussenpolitik* 44, no. 3 (1993): 281-287 ; John Palmer, "Turkey Offers EC Delay in Return for Regional Role," *The Guardian*, March 9, 1992, 8, LexisNexis Academic ; Hugh Pope, "Summit Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation Signed Today," *The Independent*, June 25, 1992, 14, LexisNexis Academic ; Hugh Pope, "Black Sea States in Search of a Joint Identity," *The Independent*, June 26, 1992, 12, LexisNexis Academic. In the subsequent phases when Turkey-EC/EU relations became tense, Ankara is also known to have stated that the BSEC objectives included removal of customs barriers (although this was contrary to the Customs Union arrangement with the EU and the establishment of a free trade zone, Turkey apparently used the BSEC card in relations with the EC/EU): "Tansu Çiller'den Avrupa'ya KEİ Kozu," *Milliyet*, February 2, 1997.

31 Gülnihal Mahmutoğlu, "Trade Creation and Trade Diversion in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Area: A Gravity Approach," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Economics, Bilkent University, 1998, 8-10 ; "Black Sea Pact," *Journal of Commerce*, June 26, 1992, 6A, LexisNexis Academic.

Reflecting the *zeitgeist*, for instance, Gerald Robbins wrote that the Soviet Caucasus, made up of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, presented a promising market potential due to its entrepreneurship tradition and geographical proximity to Turkey, which was an emerging regional trade actor. These three Caucasus republics of the Black Sea region, wrote Robbins, had twice the population of the Baltic republics, which was an economic asset. Supporting the same view was Ronald Linden, former senior advisor at Political Risk Services, who stated that “the Caucasus character has an intuition for knowing what business wants” and wrote of the often-heard informal and out-of-the-record suitcase trade between the Black Sea regional states as the starter of future intense trade links.<sup>32</sup> Robbins thus reflected the forecast at the time that joint ventures with Turkey were an option which could minimize the investment risks in the Black Sea region because Turkey’s cultural ties and geographic location could enable the Turkish firms to establish distribution links after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In fact, in a way to confirm this approach, former Turkish President Turgut Özal had already announced that the Black Sea initiative was not an attempt to create a Black Sea common market *per se* but rather an area where people, goods, services and capital could move freely.<sup>33</sup>

Although Özal’s statement was no news to the concerned state and business communities, an interesting argument likening the ties between the US and Mexico to those between Turkey and the Caucasus emerged anew in 1992, which deserves mention. It was argued that the US paid insufficient attention to the Caucasus -as one of the hinterlands of the Black Sea basin- by merely providing agricultural credits, humanitarian airlifts and conferences at the time and yet a more robust approach was recommended by the former US President Richard Nixon. Nixon put forward the idea of establishing twinned “maquiladora” plants where the parts of products made in Turkey would be assembled across Turkey’s border in the Caucasus; just as the US produced parts to be assembled in Mexico, which was cheaper in terms of labor cost, and also employment-generating in the US view. Nakichevan (Nakhchivan) was named as the ideal locus for this effort because it bordered Turkey, Armenia and Iran and, of course, because it was not a conflict-ridden area (yet). It was further argued that such a Black Sea pact-supported project could be sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), to be backed by US advisors.<sup>34</sup> Evidently, such an approach indicated that the Black Sea project was right

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32 Gerald Robbins, “Turkey, Gateway to Soviet Trade,” *Journal of Commerce*, September 27, 1991, 1A, LexisNexis Academic.

33 “For the Record,” *The Washington Post*, July 24, 1991, A18, LexisNexis Academic.

34 Gerald Robbins, “Maquiladoras in the Caucasus,” *Journal of Commerce*, March 23, 1992, 12A, LexisNexis Academic.

from the beginning a US-backed one, apparently with high economic expectations.<sup>35</sup>

It was upon such backdrop that the first negotiation for the establishment of the organization was held on December 19, 1990 in Ankara, made up of Turkish, Soviet (Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), Bulgarian and Romanian representatives which produced an initial consensus, to be followed by meetings in Bucharest, Sofia and Moscow in 1991 that resulted in a declaration to be signed in İstanbul. The declaration could not be signed as planned owing to the break-up of the Soviet Union but was eventually signed, after a short period of uncertainty, on February 3, 1992. It was declared that Greece and Yugoslavia could join the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region upon application and an invitation was extended also to Albania. Finally, the Summit Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Bosphorus Statement were issued on June 25, 1992, which highlighted the importance of free market economy, good-neighborliness, peaceful settlement of disputes in line with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) principles and documents.<sup>36</sup> Following the 1998 Yalta Summit, it acquired the status of an official regional organization.

The BSEC is an intergovernmental organization in which subsidiary bodies function in specific issue areas. States and NGOs are sometimes allowed to participate in the BSEC as observers. As the name of the organization implies, the main issue area of the BSEC is economic and trade cooperation, but the BSEC is not a free trade area. The BSEC has its own bank; the Black Sea Trade and Economic Development Bank, located in Thessaloniki. The members of the BSEC are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia (which joined in 2004), Turkey and Ukraine.<sup>37</sup>

The decision-making procedures of the BSEC are based on specific types of majority. The decision-making in the BSEC is, apart from the Summit, bestowed upon the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The cooperation areas of the organization are energy, transportation, communication, trade and development, banking and finance, institutional renewal and good governance, combatting organized crime, environmental protection, agriculture, healthcare,

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35 "Black Sea Countries Plan Meeting in Tampa," *St. Petersburg Times*, July 24, 1993, 11A, LexisNexis Academic. The earliest concrete indicator of this support was the venue of one of the earliest BSEC meetings, Tampa Bay, the US on September 24-26, 1993, where the US businesspeople -and state officials- would be offered an overview of the trade and investment opportunities in Black Sea region.

36 Tunç Aybak, "Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and Turkey: Extending European Integration to the East?," in *Politics of the Black Sea: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*, ed. Tunç Aybak (London, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 31-32.

37 Aybak, "BSEC and Turkey: Extending European Integration...", 40 ; Marc Cogen, *An Introduction to European Intergovernmental Organizations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 93-98.

emergency, research and development, education, tourism, culture, exchange of statistical data and the promotion of small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs).<sup>38</sup> Among the cooperation issue areas, science and technology cooperation is viewed as a success story compared to other areas in the BSEC history, which is implemented by a BSEC organ, the International Center for Black Sea Studies, on a project basis.<sup>39</sup>

Based on such an institutional setting, at the outset, three progressive stages for the BSEC were envisaged, the first of which was the transitional stage that began right after its establishment in 1992. The completion of the reestablishment of governmental institutions in the former communist states, the resolution of ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the start of free movement of people in the BSEC area, and the introduction of the liberal market economy in the former communist countries were the tasks that required urgent implementation. The second stage would require focusing on qualitatively augmenting the regional production capacity as well as improvement of regional infrastructure. Finally, in the third stage, the BSEC would aim at integration with the EC and Asian economies.<sup>40</sup>

Ambitious as it might be, viewed through the Turkish perspective, the aspired progress did not take place. This was because the domestic political confrontations, among other problems, in Turkey by 1997 pointed to a loss of government interest. Government interest had been lost to such an extent that the 1997 BSEC meeting in Turkey was organized with the contributions of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) and efforts of the business world, who criticized the incumbent Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan -who backed economic cooperation with the Arab world but failed to back the BSEC.<sup>41</sup> It was observed that the BSEC was in a stagnation phase. Not surprisingly, Elekdağ, as the brainchild of the BSEC project, was the first to eloquently lay out the components of the stalemate in the BSEC by 1997: settling for merely preparing the common infrastructure projects awaiting financing, the failure of devising and implementation of even the most simple measures required for augmenting the intra-regional trade and investment that constitute the backbone of economic cooperation, the lack of the elimination of double taxation, the lack of mutual promotion of investments and the lack of visa exemption agreements for businesspeople.<sup>42</sup>

38 "Black Sea Economic Cooperation," RhodesMRC, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://www.rhodesmrc.org/2010bsec.php> ; Cogen, *An Introduction to European Intergovernmental Organizations*, 99-107.

39 Panagiota Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 75.

40 Ayşenur Toptaş, "The Fundamentals of the European Economic Community and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: A Renewed Institutional Architecture for the BSEC," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Management, Bilkent University, 1993, 112-116.

41 Yavuz Kılıç, "İşbirliği Karadeniz'de Battı," *Milliyet*, May 1, 1997.

42 Şükrü Elekdağ, "KEİ'nin Zaafiyetleri," *Milliyet*, May 5, 1997.

In an effort to launch a “Black Sea Police Organization”,<sup>43</sup> certain attempts in the BSEC ensued following the change of government in Turkey by July 1997,<sup>44</sup> although the members of Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) could not attend the BSEC meetings due to the more urgent sessions of votes of confidence at the TGNA at the time. Moreover, the composition of the Turkish parliamentary delegation to be sent to the Yalta meeting was still uncertain by January 1998.<sup>45</sup> After the tenth anniversary of the BSEC, a self-criticism from the business community that political instability, low budgets, inadequate capital savings, absence of institutions and instruments required by the market economy in the member states, including Turkey, continued to plague the BSEC process as far as low trade volumes and GDP levels were concerned, was not surprising. Occasional arguments among the business community were heard that the BSEC did not receive much attention after Özal’s death and that it was not given the attention it deserved out of the official apprehension that Turkey’s EU bid might recede into the background.<sup>46</sup>

By 2007, Turkey participated in the bi-annually held BSEC Foreign Ministers meeting in İstanbul, for the first time at the ministerial level since the former Foreign Minister Tansu Çiller’s term of office. The meeting was considered as different in comparison to the former ones in respect of the possibility it offered for a new focus on the acceleration of the BSEC, specifically in terms of turning the Black Sea Ring Road project into a reality and prospects for energy cooperation, also in terms of the participation of the EU and the US representatives among the observers,<sup>47</sup> who were inclined to closely monitor the Russian and Turkish positions regarding the Black Sea in the then existing conjuncture.<sup>48</sup> The need for a new orientation and vision was stressed, by both Turkish and other members, as would be in the ensuing meetings.<sup>49</sup>

43 “Teröre Karşı Büyük İşbirliği,” *Türkiye*, October 22, 1997.

44 “Gözler KEİ Pastasında,” *Milliyet*, July 4, 1997; “Demirel: İpekyolu Bu Kez Batı’dan Doğu’ya Uzanacak,” *Milliyet*, September 16, 1997.

45 Ferai Tınç, “Dış Politikanın da Hesabı Sorulmalı,” *Hürriyet*, January 11, 1998.

46 “KEİ Fırsatını İyi Kullanamadık,” *Yeni Şafak*, April 7, 2003.

47 “Türkiye’nin Karadeniz Atağı,” *Milliyet*, October 30, 2006 ; “Karadeniz Yükseliyor, KEİ de Beraberinde,” *Hürriyet*, February 14, 2007 ; “Minister Says Black Sea Organization to be Reformed Under Turkish Presidency,” *BBC Monitoring Europe*, April 20, 2007, LexisNexis Academic ; “Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği veya Barış Mantiği,” *Radikal*, June 5, 2007 ; “Asrın Projesi,” *Star*, June 17, 2007 ; “Artık Karadeniz’e Yelken Açma Zamanı!” *Cumhuriyet*, June 19, 2007 ; “Kaybedilen Karadeniz,” *Sabah*, June 24, 2007 ; “KEİ’ye Yeni Vizyon Gerek,” *Hürriyet*, June 25, 2007 ; “KEİ Doruğuna Enerji Gölgesi,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007 ; “Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği!” *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007 ; “Karadeniz’de Enerji Savaşları ve Rusya-Türkiye İlişkileri,” *Yeni Şafak*, June 26, 2007 ; “Rusya Ne Yapmaya Çalışıyor?” *Hürriyet*, June 27, 2007 ; “Black Sea Countries Sign Declaration on Transport Cooperation,” *BBC Monitoring Kiev Unit*, April 11, 2008.

48 The US aimed at a strong existence in the Black Sea while Russia -already stronger in economic and military terms by then- did not want an elevated role for the US in the Black Sea. The rivalry was most evidently observed in respect of the US-backed Nabucco and Russia-backed South Stream gas pipeline projects and the ongoing fuss on the military presence in the Black Sea at the time.

49 “Turkish President Says Black Sea Organization Needs New Dynamism,” *BBC Monitoring Europe - Political*, June 25, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.



Keeping in mind the account on regionalism narrative in the first section, one feels compelled to infer upon the short descriptive account in the present section that although it started out as a quite ambitious regionalism endeavor, the Black Sea project did not live up to the expectations in the later phases, and thus has not been a game changer so far. The BSEC is now at a point where it can neither be given up as an idea and practice, nor is it observed to produce any grassroots change that can remarkably boost its efficiency due to the chronic problems it has come to endure. Significantly, the challenges bound with the Karabagh conflict as an issue that is linked to Armenia's membership and their implications, as the subject matter of the paper, constitute a case in point, which the following section explores.

### **3. Armenia's Membership, the Karabagh Dispute, and the Genocide Claims in the BSEC: Litmus Test for Cooperation or Conflict?**

In hindsight, the acceptance of Armenia as a member in the BSEC looks quite puzzling indeed, given mainly the chronic issues of the Karabagh conflict and the genocide claims of Armenia, which necessitates inquiring the state-of-affairs back then. The relevant timeline since 1990 demonstrates three interrelated periods which disclose observable mindsets and attitudes in accordance with the leadership changes in Armenia in the course of BSEC membership. A chronological unfolding of developments is provided below, based on the available news archival data.

#### *Phase 1: 1990-1997*

This initial period in the BSEC context is characterized by the preliminary attempts of Armenia's first President Levon Ter Petrossian's leadership to establish Armenia's relations with the outside world within the limits of possibilities. Cognizant of the fact that Armenia was a territorially and economically isolated and landlocked country in want, Ter Petrossian took efforts for a new Armenia and one possible opening for Armenia in this respect seemed to be the burgeoning Black Sea project engineered by Turkey. From the Armenian official viewpoint, membership in the Black Sea Cooperation Region could help reduce the trade barriers Armenia faced, increase the number of partner countries in its neighborhood, diversify its market, induce trade creation, settle the Karabagh conflict and, perhaps, finally establish diplomatic relations with Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

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50 Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 242-250; Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism*, 97.

Upon such background, already in 1990, the first encounter between Özal and Ter Petrossian had taken place in Ankara. Özal did include Armenia in the opening discussions of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone. Murat Sungar, the former spokesman of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that “in principle, we are open to economic cooperation with Armenia”, stressing that this must be conditional on mutual respect, including that for shared borders.<sup>51</sup> By February 1992, at the meeting on the Black Sea project, the former Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Hüseyin Sadıkov and the former Armenian acting Foreign Minister Armand Navassardyan accepted an offer by the former Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev at a side-meeting for discussing the Karabagh conflict, viewed by the former Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin as a first step, which could develop if regional cooperation in the Black Sea gained a real momentum.<sup>52</sup>

On February 26, 1992, Çetin gave a speech at the TGNA in which he explained that the Azerbaijani and the Armenian representatives got together in Moscow (with Russian and Turkish initiatives) on February 20, 1992 and declared their consensus on a ceasefire in Karabagh. He also clarified that the contacts between the Turkish and Armenian officials did not mean in any way the establishment of diplomatic relations.<sup>53</sup> This was followed by a talk over a proposal that Turkey open its Black Sea port in Trabzon to Armenian access in return for Armenia opening its highways to Turkish commercial trucks heading for Azerbaijan and further east. Armenia went so far as to request a facilitator role -for the proximation of the trade communities of two states- from a prominent Turkish businessperson, which did not materialize. The Armenian massacre of Azerbaijani Turks in Karabagh at the time had arguably been the factor behind the result.<sup>54</sup>

Such pre-BSEC practices remained in the following stages of this period. Even during the signing of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation agreement on June 25, 1992, although they acknowledged that the Karabagh conflict would cloud cooperation efforts in the Black Sea region, the former Azerbaijani leader Ebulfez Elçibey and his Armenian counterpart Ter Petrossian avoided mention of the Karabagh war in the speeches they delivered<sup>55</sup> and also refrained from

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51 Hugh Pope, “Turkey in Tentative Talks with Armenia,” *The Independent*, December 29, 1990, LexisNexis Academic.

52 “Azeris, Armenians Accept Peace Invitation,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 4, 1992, LexisNexis Academic.

53 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), *Journal of Minutes*, Term 19, Volume 4, Legislative Year 1, Session 41, February 26, 1992, 405-406.

54 Blaine Harden, “Brief Turkish-Armenian Thaw is Chilled: Unforgiving Memories, Region’s New Hostilities Derail Attempt to Erase an Old Antagonism,” *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1992.

55 “11 Sign Economic Accord ... Pledge Includes Six Old Soviet Republics,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic ; “Summit Silence Reflects Hopes for CIS Solution,” *Courier-Mail*, June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic ; Robert Haupt, “Black Sea Pact Aims at Peace and Prosperity,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), June 26, 1992, LexisNexis Academic.

speaking with each other at the Summit meeting, indicating a silent awareness or consensus that there was no need for the statement of the obvious. Thus, the war remained unaddressed at the meeting.

By 1993, hopes for a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia in and outside of the Black Sea context became dimmer due to mounting attacks on the Turkish territories by the terrorist organization PKK, which was proven to have received assistance from Armenia, and among, allegedly, other neighbors.<sup>56</sup> The former head of Democratic Left Party (DSP) Bülent Ecevit stated that it was necessary to prevent foreign assistance to the PKK and, later, to stage military operations against Armenia and the north of Iraq, if necessary, under Article 51 of the UN Charter.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, ambassador İnal Batu, Turkey's former Permanent Representative at the UN, almost simultaneously criticized the Armenian invasions of Zengilan and Horidis and called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian fighting groups. Batu openly stated that the UN supported Armenia.<sup>58</sup> Increased atrocities in Karabagh perpetrated by Armenia only attenuated the already fragile cooperation prospects within the Black Sea context. Concurrently, Özal's death in April the same year heralded a slower Black Sea integration process. By May 1994, the Bişkek Protocol provided a ceasefire in Karabagh, which ended up being violated,<sup>59</sup> giving hints that the conflict had not yet run its course.

Within the Black Sea cooperation context, the unresolved conflict with the ongoing ceasefire violations found expression for the first time in the speeches of former President of Azerbaijan Haydar Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Ter Petrossian at the 1997 Black Sea Economic Cooperation meeting in İstanbul, upon which former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze called for refraining from politicization of the trade meeting.<sup>60</sup> An unofficial 45-minute pull-aside meeting was held between the two leaders upon the initiatives of the former Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, and yet the meeting did not amount to anything.<sup>61</sup>

Such unofficial pull-aside meetings and/or mediation/facilitation attempts by Ankara in the BSEC context would continue, with unsatisfactory outcomes. It is also worthwhile to take note of the fact that the 1997 meeting served as

56 "Hain Füzelerin Parasını, Rum Kilisesi Vermiş," *Hürriyet*, June 8, 1997 ; "Komşular Terör Suçu İşliyor," *Milliyet*, June 8, 1997.

57 "DSP Genel Başkanı Bülent Ecevit, Güneydoğu'daki Terörü Önlemek İçin Dış Desteği Kesmek Gerektiğini Söyledi," *Hürriyet*, October 27, 1993.

58 "İnal Batu'dan BM'ye Ermeni İşgalleri Hakkında Eleştiri," *Türkiye*, November 14, 1993.

59 "Azeriler Ağlıyor," *Türkiye*, April 23, 1997.

60 "Demirel: KEİ Hayal Olmaktan Çıktı," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 1997.

61 "Baba, Süper Arabulucu," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 1997.

an occasion to question the balance sheet of the words and deeds of the Black Sea project in a wider sense. The outweighing answer as to why the BSEC could not gain real momentum broadly implied the domestic political and economic turmoil in Turkey (as the owner of the project) that absorbed Turkey's political and economic agenda since the early 1990s. Equally importantly, the initial hopes that the Karabagh conflict could be ended quickly due to the BSEC's possible impact of cooperation were dashed as Armenia continued to intensify its attacks and invasions in Karabagh border lines and no meaningful economic integration ensued. In sum, this first phase stands as a period during which the initial mutual willingness for dispute settlement did not materialize both in and out of the BSEC context.

### *Phase 2: 1998-2008*

A new period began in the political history of Armenia in March 1998 when radical hardliner Robert Kocharian, of Karabagh origin, became the new president of the country. Kocharian pressed for a non-compromising stance in relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, unlike his predecessor, and this attitude had its own ramifications in the BSEC context. Kocharian wanted the Karabagh conflict to be settled in a way that only Armenia would prefer, as he insisted that it was Armenia that won the war on the battleground and therefore it had the right to dictate its own terms on Azerbaijan at the negotiating table, although it was plain and clear that legally and according to international norms Karabagh was still Azerbaijani territory. This uncompromising approach would unfold in expected ways in the years to come.

Already as prime minister after February 1997, Kocharian was known to have stated that the ceasefire process had lasted longer than it should and therefore the Karabagh problem had to be solved in line with Armenia's demands. Similarly, he declared that he "will not beg that Turkey open its border and start trade cooperation."<sup>62</sup> The previously witnessed war of words was once again seen at the June 1998 Yalta Summit at which the BSEC acquired a legal status. After Aliyev explained the Azerbaijani stance on Karabagh and demanded that Armenia bring an end to invasion, Kocharian blamed Azerbaijan as the starter of the problem. This time, it was the former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma who interrupted by stating that the Summit was intended to be a forum to discuss regional issues, and not bilateral problems.<sup>63</sup> The second event of importance at the Summit was Kocharian's pull-aside meeting request from Demirel. In reply to Kocharian's emphasis on the

62 Ardan Zentürk, "Ermenistan Sorunu," *Dünya*, February 7, 1998.

63 "Karadeniz'e KEİ Mühürü," *Radikal*, June 5, 1998.

“weight of history” in relations, Demirel stated that as a state with a long past, Turkey did not take decisions with sentiments and that it did not have problem with a state that is only six-years old.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the most striking statement from Kocharian was when he said that Armenia would not recognize the functions of the OSCE Minsk Group (tasked with overseeing the resolution process of the Karabakh conflict) and would not act in parallel with its negotiation method.<sup>65</sup> Apparently, Kuchma’s mediation had failed at the Yalta Summit.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a period when Armenia stepped up its activities concerning genocide claims against Turkey at the global level and yet this problem was not one that was as frequently mentioned as the Karabagh issue at the BSEC gatherings. In face of augmenting anti-Turkish global pressure and accusations related to genocide claims in this period, it was occasionally heard that the early 1990s were a period of opportunities in bilateral relations with Armenia under Ter Petrossian, that it was Turkey that accepted Armenia in the BSEC despite the latter not being a Black Sea littoral state, and that it did not cut relations with Armenia in the BSEC -which it could.<sup>66</sup> Amidst the high tension, the very day the European Parliament (of the EU) criticized Turkey on the genocide claims, Turkey hosted the opening ceremony of Armenia’s diplomatic mission at the BSEC headquarters in İstanbul. While this could be interpreted as a softening in relations, the participation of the Swedish parliamentarian Per Gahrton at the event seems to be open to debate as Gahrton was the politician who signed and submitted the alleged genocide-related report (the Caucasus Report) to the European Parliament which accepted it.<sup>67</sup> In a “business as usual” climate, the 2002 Summit of the BSEC did not witness the participation of Armenia at the presidential level. Former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian and Turkey’s mediation efforts continued whereas no meeting took place between Haydar Aliyev and Oskanian.<sup>68</sup>

By 2004, as Arsen Avagian, the representative of Armenia at the BSEC in İstanbul, concurred, a softening in bilateral relations was observed in the contacts between the two states’ foreign ministers at the June 2004 NATO summit, whose reflections were vaguely seen in the BSEC. Avagian

64 Yalçın Erdoğan, “Demirel – Koçaryan Restleşmesi,” *Milliyet*, June 6, 1998; Tufan Türeç, “Koçaryan Kafası İşte...,” *Hürriyet*, June 6, 1998; Cüneyt Arcayürek, “Her Şey – Hiçbir Şey,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 6, 1998.

65 İsmet Berkan, “Ermenistan’la Sil Baştan,” *Radikal*, June 6, 1998; Hulusi Turgut, “Çankaya’da En Sıcak Yıl 12B: Ermeniler, Tarihten Husumet Çıkartıyor,” *Sabah*, June 10, 1999.

66 Şahin Alpaz, “Hakemliğe Gidelim,” *Milliyet*, November 4, 2000.

67 “Medeniyet Dersi: İstanbul’da Ermeni Bayrağı,” *Hürriyet*, March 2, 2002.

68 “Dorukta Gündem Enerji,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 25, 2002; Özgen Acar, “Karadeniz Ekonomi Kuşağının 10. Yılı,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 25, 2002; “Karadeniz’in Kalbi İstanbul’da Atıyor,” *Yeni Şafak*, June 25, 2002; “KEİ’nin 10’uncu Yaşı,” *Radikal*, June 25, 2002.

apparently supported the view that the intense economic and trade links eventually would lead to political dialogue and considered the indirect trade between Turkey and Armenia via Georgia and Iran raised hopes in this respect, by confirming that the Armenian domestic market was full of Turkish products, as well as the existence of direct flights by the companies Tower Travel, Fly Air (Turkey) and Armavia (Armenia). The establishment of diplomatic relations without any pre-conditions was considered of utmost concern by Avagian.<sup>69</sup>

Diplomatic exchange of words ensued at the June 2006 Bucharest meeting of the BSEC which constituted a platform for the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents İlham Aliyev (who had assumed presidency in October 2003) and Kocharian to resume dialogue concerning Karabagh and yet no positive result was obtained. The former Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht as mediator concluded that the two presidents continued to see more risks than opportunities.<sup>70</sup> The news in 2007 that Turkey would participate at the ministerial level at the foreign ministers summit for the first time since Çiller's term of office in the 1990s and the establishment of a working group on cultural exchange programs were topics in the BSEC agenda, enough to raise hopes in terms of rejuvenation of the BSEC and the progress in the two states' relations in the BSEC context. The officials, as it seemed, resorted to the traditional preference of starting out with low political issues such as culture, as an accustomed practice in handling chronic political problems.<sup>71</sup> The subsequent June 2007 BSEC Summit again witnessed a Karabagh-related tension between Azerbaijani and Armenian representatives Aliyev and Oskanian.<sup>72</sup> Seemingly, as a result of the "zero problems with the neighbors" policy being tested at time, Turkey proposed the establishment of history committees to investigate the genocide claims. However, this was tied by Armenia to the pre-condition of the opening of common borders, as Avagian declared at the press conference at the summit, who also described this proposal as just a "tactic" by Turkey.<sup>73</sup> In sum, the Kocharian period was characterized by intensified adversarial positions of Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia in the BSEC context.

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69 "Bölgesel İşbirliğine Doğru," *Cumhuriyet*, October 4, 2004.

70 "Romania: Black Sea Forum Discusses "Frozen Conflicts" in Armenia, Moldova," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political*, June 5, 2006, LexisNexis Academic ; "Armenian, Azeri Presidents Fail to Agree on Conflict – Belgian Report," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political*, June 6, 2006.

71 "Türkiye'nin Karadeniz Atağı," *Milliyet*, October 31, 2006.

72 "KEİ Doruğuna Enerji Gölgesi," *Cumhuriyet*, June 26, 2007.

73 "Hepimiz Karadenizliyiz," *Hürriyet*, June 26, 2007; Hilal Köylü, "Karadeniz Ülkeleri Zirvesine Enerjide Rus-Türk Çekişmesi Damgasını Vurdu," *Radikal*, June 26, 2007 ; Yalçın Erdoğan, "İsrara Rağmen Putin Terk Etti," *Hürriyet*, June 26, 2007.

*Phase 3: 2008-2019*

This period roughly started with the presidential take-over in April 2008, by Serzh Sargsyan, another political figure who also belonged to the so-called hardliner Karabagh clan. This period would be characterized by the trials and tribulations of the above-mentioned zero problems policy of Turkey, yet this time for a longer period, leading to mixed results.

In 2008, a project to stimulate investments and trade in BSEC was presented at a meeting organized by the BSEC, UNDP and the Armenian Development Agency (ADD), which was the first project funded by both Turkey and Armenia. The main aim of the project was to develop foreign trade and exports of Armenian products.<sup>74</sup> Shortly after, a Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC meeting on terrorism was held in Yerevan, attended by the Turkish delegation as well. Despite the apprehension that such a delicate issue area might lead to tension given the ASALA and Justice Commandos terrorism of the past that targeted Turkey and the often-heard news that the PKK was aided and abetted by Armenia, no war of words was recorded.<sup>75</sup> Another conciliatory step had already been noticed the same month when the BSEC members signed a declaration on the topical transport cooperation.<sup>76</sup> The former foreign ministers of the two states held a side-meeting in İstanbul in November 2008 in the BSEC context at a time when the repercussions of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war were quite visible: Ali Babacan and Edvard Nalbandian exchanged views on the proposed Caucasus Security and Cooperation Platform in addition to the possibility of the normalization of relations.<sup>77</sup> As another proximation effort, the football match between the two states' teams had already been played in Yerevan by then.<sup>78</sup>

The will to negotiate did not go beyond words as the April 2009 BSEC meeting in Yerevan demonstrated. At this meeting, former President Abdullah Gül's proposal for the resolution of Karabagh conflict was rejected by Armenia on the grounds that the Karabagh negotiations continued in the Minsk Group, between Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Armenian administration in Karabagh and there was no other negotiation context.<sup>79</sup> The contacts whose

74 "New Project for Black Sea Countries Presented in Armenia," *BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit*, April 3, 2008.

75 "Tarihi Konuları Tarihçiler Çözmeli," *Yeni Asya*, April 27, 2008.

76 "Black Sea Countries Sign Declaration on Transport Cooperation," *BBC Monitoring Kiev Unit*, April 11, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

77 "Armenian, Turkish Foreign Ministers Discuss Ties in İstanbul," *BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit*, November 25, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

78 "Nalbandyan: Sınır Koşulsuz Açılsın," *Cumhuriyet*, November 25, 2008.

79 "Türkiye Arabulucu Değil," *Cumhuriyet*, April 17, 2009. It is worthwhile here to note that in the official Azerbaijani stance, Armenia has direct control over Karabagh and as such, there is no separate, recognized, and official "Karabagh administration" in Karabagh that can be a party to the Karabagh resolution process.

way was paved by the BSEC eventually gave way to the signing of protocols in Switzerland between Turkey and Armenia, through the end of 2009. However, the political climate by 2012 permitted the observation that the opening in relations was left in words and the affairs turned to the default level. The striking development in this regard was Armenia's refusal to participate in the BSEC meeting in Baku,<sup>80</sup> not to mention the former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's attendance in the BSEC meeting in 2013 which did not last long and took place in a cold political environment, although news reflecting mixed observations were served in the respective media regarding the meeting.<sup>81</sup> It may be argued that the timing of the meeting was perhaps not well-planned, since it took place only four months after Davutoğlu had warned Armenia over its renewed land claims from Turkey, stating that "Armenia should know the limits of its capacity".<sup>82</sup>

The April 2016 War (the "Four Day War") in Karabagh between Armenia and Azerbaijan had a visible impact on the aggravation of the constant war of words at the BSEC meetings, which implied a higher tension with a different rhetoric, this time including the recent war. Mutual accusations over Karabagh of Azerbaijani and Armenian representatives at Belgrade (December 2016) and İstanbul (May 2017) meetings were cases in point.<sup>83</sup> Specifically, one curious development at the 2016 Sochi meeting of the BSEC -shortly after the war- was the continuation of Armenian representatives' constant calls against the politicization of the BSEC around the Karabagh problem, after which the Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian added the following statement, in which the foreign minister himself practiced the same politicization:

"In regard to the NK conflict, I would like to remind that the [OSCE] Vienna and St. Petersburg summits first and foremost were aimed to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone... It is necessary to implement what was... emphasized and agreed upon in the framework of the Summits... to create conditions for the continuation of the negotiation process, i.e. the exclusively peaceful settlement of the conflict, the unconditional adherence to the 1994-1995 ceasefire agreements which

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80 "Armenia Cannot Explain Refusal to Participate at BSEC Meeting," *Trend News Agency*, November 28, 2012.

81 "Armenia Will meet Davutoğlu with Exclamations 'Renegade Has No Place in Armenia'," *ArmenPress*, December 9, 2013, LexisNexis Academic; "Davutoğlu Gives Interview to Turkish Journalists in Yerevan," *ArmenPress*, December 12, 2013, LexisNexis Academic; "No Meeting to be Held between Armenia's President and Ahmet Davutoğlu," *ArmenPress*, December 13, 2013, LexisNexis Academic; "Davutoğlu: Erivan'da Psikolojik Eşik Aşıldı," *Milliyet*, December 13, 2013; "Davutoğlu's Visit Won't Give Anything: Giro Manoyan," *ArmenPress*, December 11, 2013, LexisNexis Academic.

82 "Turkish Foreign Minister Warns Armenia over Land Claims," *BBC Monitoring Europe – Political* (from the text of report in English by *Hürriyet*), July 18, 2013.

83 "Turkish President Agrees with Armenian Deputy FM – BSEC is Not Platform for Discussing NK Conflict," *ArmenPress*, May 22, 2017, LexisNexis Academic.



have no time limitations, the creation of mechanism for the investigation of ceasefire violations, the expansion of the team of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.”<sup>84</sup>

While the customary battle of words of this kind had been known, an extraordinary development followed in 2017, which also had to do with the Karabagh issue. According to the Armenian allegations, the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly adopted a pro-Azerbaijani amendment to its Declaration of Regional Conflicts, in the absence of the Armenian delegation at the Kiev meeting. Allegedly, before the start of the session, the heads of all delegations and the BSEC secretary-general conducted a private meeting, during which the Armenian delegation was outside the meeting hall and were not informed that a meeting was being held. The Armenian delegation stated that this was a breach of code of ethics in BSEC, something that was never recorded before, claiming that an amendment regarding the conflicts in the region was made, which in the Armenian viewpoint, contradicted with the principles of international law such as “non-enforcement of the force and force threat, territorial integrity and the law of the peoples’ free self-determination”.<sup>85</sup> The amendment was “on the need to promote the restoration of the territorial integrity of the BSEC states.”<sup>86</sup>

Shortly after, the former dissident journalist Nikol Pashinian seized power in Armenia through a popular protest-fueled “Velvet Revolution” in the spring of 2018, giving way to arguments full of high expectations for a change in Armenian foreign policy, in addition to changes in domestic politics of the country. After the initial and short-lived contacts between Aliyev and Pashinian on the Karabagh conflict, it soon became clear that the latter was no reformer when it came to Karabagh, hinting at an unchanging approach in the ensuing years of his administration. To give but an example, the expected ramifications of the Kiev episode were easily observed at the 2018 BSEC meeting in Yerevan, only a month after Pashinian’s rise to power, when the Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Karen Nazarian accused Azerbaijan of trying to get the BSEC to adopt pro-Azerbaijani amendments and statements regarding the Karabagh dispute, just as they allegedly had done in the 2017

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84 “Armenian FM Participates in OBSEC FMs’ 34th Session,” July 1, 2016, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/852996/armenian-fm-participates-in-obsec-fmsE28099-34th-session.html>.

85 “During BSEC Assembly Armenian Delegation Left Room as Protest,” *112.international*, November 29, 2017, <http://112.international/politics/during-bsec-assembly-armenian-delegation-left-room-as-protest-23152-print.html> ; “BSEC Declaration on Regional Conflicts Amended ‘Without Armenia’s Consent’,” *Gagrule.net*, November 29, 2017, <http://gagrule.net/bsec-declaration-regional-conflicts-amended-without-armenias-consent/>

86 Abdul Kerimhkanov, “Armenia’s Hopes for BSEC are Meaningless,” *AzerNews*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/140546.html>.

Kiev meeting.<sup>87</sup> A similar accusation towards Turkey regarding the closed borders had been heard at the Tirana meeting only a week before.<sup>88</sup> In sum, the ongoing last period implies the existence of the accustomed discord over the Karabagh dispute and the genocide claims. Ultimately, politics seems to have taken over the economic agenda in the BSEC, as opposed to the initial plans.

While the above account *per se* is informative in terms of revealing the substance and impact of the major conflict in the BSEC, re-reading it in conjunction with the previously mentioned factors that shape regionalism will help the reader grasp a better understanding, which the ensuing section attempts to do.

#### 4. The BSEC in a Quadro-Dimensional Perspective: More Impediments Than Drivers?

*Stimulus of Diffusion.* The emergence of the BSEC as an idea in the late 1980s reflects visible inspiration from the EC as a successful regionalism attempt, at a time when the appropriate scope of conditions for creating a similar institution in the Black Sea basin were thought to exist. In the circumstances of the time, the outweighing idea was that the Black Sea basin that was freed from the Soviet threat could now be turned into one of economic cooperation based on particular policy areas limited to economics and technical issues and this clearly emulated the line of thinking that created the European Economic Community (EEC). The diffusion in the case of the BSEC took place via a sender-driven mechanism, wherein Turkey -as the pivot- directly put forward and promoted the idea and sent the invitation to the littoral states and to certain others. However, although the process reflected an ambitious start, the supposed lesson-drawing for the benefit of all did not follow; in fact, the BSEC case turned out to reflect selective adoption and local behavior, affirming Risse's arguments.<sup>89</sup>

How does the subject matter fit into this argument? To a great extent, the answer to this question has to do with the two most ignored and sidelined facts concerning the Karabagh dispute and the genocide claims:

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87 Artak Hambarzumian, "Azeri, Turkish Diplomats Attend Regional Meeting in Armenia," *Azatutyun*, June 27, 2018, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29323580.html>; "BSEC Ministerial Meeting Kicks Off in Armenia's Capital," *HyeTert*, June 28, 2019, <https://hyetert.org/2018/06/28/bsec-ministerial-meeting-kicks-off-in-armenia-capital>.

88 "Azerbaijan's and Turkey's Blockade of Armenia Contradicts Fundamental Principles of PABSEC, Sharmazanov Says in Tirana Sitting," June 21, 2018, *ArmenPress*, LexisNexis Academic.

89 See footnote 9.

i) The fact that the Karabagh dispute was still a low intensity conflict by 1990<sup>90</sup>, one that had not yet reached the level of an outright war, which implied that a perception of a room for a cooperative maneuver existed on the part of warring states and, also by Turkey at the time concerned. Also, officially, the conflict was taking place on the Soviet territories which meant there was a low probability for the conflict to escalate while still under Soviet rule.

ii) In addition, the genocide claims were relatively a dormant issue in the initial Turkish-Armenian contacts by 1990, compared to the later phases in the relations, in and outside of the BSEC context. This boils down to the argument that Turkey's initiative to invite and include Armenia in the BSEC project at the outset was arguably compatible with the hopes that a war that was still in its early phases could be ended if parties in the conflict participated in this cooperative structure. However, the escalation of the conflict by Armenia as of 1992 resulted in the importation of the conflict into the BSEC. As the claims and accusations by Armenia in the previous section reveal, aspired regional cooperation was marred due to Armenia's diametrically opposing views with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Therefore, one can only speak of a selective -and not a thorough- adoption to the BSEC structure and of a local behavior -and not harmonious regional one-, which make the institution go around in circles at the end of the day. Hypothetically thinking, what kind of a diffusion process would develop if it had been Armenia that had applied to be included in the BSEC project upon its own initiative and if the two problematic issues had already been at their highest? This question deserves another research endeavor in its own right.

*Identity Factor.* To reiterate the previously stated identity-related arguments, hypothetically, there is always the possibility that a regional organization can develop a collective identity which can produce a common ground on which to communicate and cooperate.<sup>91</sup> Also, whether an identity formation will occur or not will largely depend on the absence or presence of any pre-existing identities among the states of a region.<sup>92</sup> In practice, the BSEC is a regionalism case which attests to the fact that no collective identity developed in it, as opposed to the initial hopes. This is because no pre-existing and large-spanning collective identity existed among the members of the organization. The organization is a platform where states with different abstract and concrete identity traits -such as cultural, political, structural, economic and several others- got together. All the other dyads (Turkey-Greece, Moldova-Romania, Russia-Ukraine, Russia-Georgia) aside (since they fall out of the

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90 The conflict turned into an outright war when the Soviet Union disintegrated and Karabagh Armenians declared unilateral independence on January 6, 1992. Subsequently, Armenians got hold of the weapons and ammunition left by the Soviet Army and escalated the war.

91 See footnote 10.

92 See footnote 11.

scope of the present paper), Turkey-Armenia and Azerbaijan-Armenia have come to manifest constant conflictual identity perceptions and practices and so, no visible identity reconstruction took place because of the most chronic problems of Karabagh and alleged genocide issues between Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as laid out in the preceding sections. As things stand, the only collective identity among the BSEC members seems to be geographical proximity. Likewise, as things stand, the solution for the said two problems can be a change of mind on the part of Armenia which needs this organization more than any other member, as a landlocked small state with unpromising macro- and micro-economic indicators.<sup>93</sup> And yet, remembering that even the relatively more cooperative Armenian leadership in the early phases of the state in the 1990s could not make it happen, the prospects seem to be dim for an identity evolution.

*Macro Crises.* The previously stated argument<sup>94</sup> that macro crises in the world have led to regional formations also seems to be related in that it helps understand Armenia's foreign policy decision-making concerning the pre-BSEC and post-BSEC periods. When the Cold War came to an end and a tumultuous new era began, Armenia began to attach great importance to the Black Sea region which it considered as a strategic bridge for reconnecting and restoring Armenia's ancient ties with Europe, as well as for reestablishing communication with the brethren of forefathers.<sup>95</sup> This new era also prompted Armenia to try to reinforce its sovereignty just as the other former communist states of the region, by establishing links among each other and with Europe. Likewise, it forced Armenia to take steps with a view to establishing friendly ties with the Black Sea states, which was particularly the case, given the Karabagh conflict,<sup>96</sup> since with its eastern and western borders closed, cooperation seemed to be a must with the Black Sea basin in the Armenian viewpoint.

Thus, the macro crisis of the time, i.e. the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, prompted Armenia to make preferences which would eventually approximate it to the emerging Black Sea project. It prompted Armenia to reciprocate the initiative of Turkey -as the core state-, a development which would have been unthinkable a few years before 1990. Overall, the BSEC example attests to the fact that a regional integration attempt induced by a macro crisis may lead to regional organizations and yet their aftermath may not be as promising. The main reason for this is again,

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93 F. Didem Ekinci, "Küçük Devlet Dış Politikasında Zafiyet ve Dirençlilik: Ermenistan Örneği," *Ermeni Araştırmaları* no. 61 (2018): 71-106.

94 See footnote 14.

95 Styopa Safaryan, "Armenia and the Black Sea Region: 16-Year-Old Variable Geometry with Remaining Local Constants," *Xenophon Paper*, no. 2 (2007): 11-12.

96 Safaryan, "Armenia and the Black Sea Region," 13.

the Karabagh conflict. The conflict has a life of its own, in and outside of the BSEC context. Therefore, it seems quite difficult to be settled within the BSEC - with or without the stimulus of any macro crises.

*Economic Intentions.* The economic considerations, more precisely, the logic of neoliberal trade and global capital constitute significant drivers for regional formations.<sup>97</sup> However, as stated previously,<sup>98</sup> neither the entire trade and investment nor the most intense trade relations within a regional formation can guarantee a successful regional integration. Rather, it has been shown that the major determinants of a sound regional economic integration are balanced and converging current accounts of regional states as well as the similarity in trade or, more precisely, the export capacities of the regional states.<sup>99</sup>

The relevant World Bank data on current account balance since 1989 concerning the BSEC members reveal ambivalent figures until 2019. Some quick observations can be made here. There are no available data in the case of some states, which are post-communist. Only three states currently display no current account deficit: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, and Russia. There is no constant upward or downward trend as a pattern among the members, the yearly figures are quite volatile. The same is true for the individual yearly record of the members, taken separately. Russia leads the head in terms of current account balance, with surpluses, after suffering a quite problematic period in the 1990s. The current account figures of even the EU members are not similar, as data on Greece, Romania and Bulgaria disclose. Table 2, which reflects these and potentially other observations, can be taken to be in line with the argument that converging current account balance figures will be a major determinant for a successful regional economic integration. In this context, the BSEC figures clearly imply discord rather than convergence. The relevant data (in Table 3) on exports of goods and services by the BSEC members in the same period point to more or less similar assessments, also implying non-convergence. By and large, the relevant data are likely to remain so long as a free trade area is not established and, that again, will most probably be obstructed due to the chronic Karabagh conflict. The annual intra-BSEC trade volume which is around 187 billion US\$<sup>100</sup> is far from being satisfactory in the current state-of-affairs.

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97 See footnote 22.

98 See footnote 23.

99 See footnote 23.

100 "BSEC at a glance," *Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)*, accessed November 8, 2019, [www.bsec-organization.org/bsec-at-glance](http://www.bsec-organization.org/bsec-at-glance)

## The Implications Of The Karabagh Conflict In The Context Of BSEC As A Regionalism Case

Country Name	Albania	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Georgia	Greece	Moldova	Romania	Russian Federation	Serbia	Turkey	Ukraine
1989	-3930000			-76900000		-256100000		251400000			938000000	
1990	-118300000			-171000000		-353700000		-325400000			-2625000000	
1991	-168000000			-76900000		-1573700000		-101200000			250000000	
1992	-5070000			-35990000		-214000000		-150600000			-97400000	
1993	1490000			-109880000		-74700000		-117400000			-643330000	
1994	-157300000			-3180000		-14600000	-8202600	-42800000	894189000		263100000	-116300000
1995	-1150000	-22677007	-400650000	-2580000		-286400000	-8461000	-177400000	743791000		-233800000	-115200000
1996	-107300000	-32209053	-931182000	1570000		-45400000	-19183000	-257100000	1010252000		-243700000	-118400000
1997	-272232500	-335738765	-915755000	42690000	-51420000	-486000000	-27489000	-210400000	-83524000		-263800000	-133500000
1998	-6507000	-416148343.9	-1364521000	-61912460.85	-27570000		-33471000	-291700000	7106000		200000000	-129600000
1999	-155400000	-312542932.9	-599703000	-652131909.3	-198400000	-7294252083	-6788000	-129700000	228542000		-9250000	168800000
2000	-156300000	-301667882.5	-167773000	-703685705.9	-175899687.6	-9817441651	-9819000	-135500000	4538238000		-992000000	134200000
2001	-217400000	-221164164.3	-51755000	-804648255.4	-197094537.6	-940309988	-9780000	-222900000	3205382000		376000000	132400000
2002	-407520000	-147810525.6	-768373000	-319039031.1	-216912821.5	-9598594261	-1980000	-152500000	2747295000		-6260000	318000000
2003	-406814698.3	-173510013.1	-2020854000	-1022155147	-382208826.1	-12812812180	-13013000	-331100000	3312811000		-755400000	290100000
2004	-357925427.3	-78841446.25	-2589213000	-1671124320	-356204277.4	-13492562448	-4613000	-638200000	5855984000		-141980000	691100000
2005	-571475353.7	-123899753.9	167315000	-3346998840	-695658032.2	-18218753984	-225810000	-8540555217	8438875000		-2098000000	253400000
2006	-670904254.7	-152931434.5	3707605000	-5863231595	-1191302771	-29576385911	-38642000	-12909857014	9231557000		-311680000	-161900000
2007	-1150813004	-677270882.4	9018885000	-11437006354	-1992056361	-44579249236	-671100000	-23924307027	7219302000	-7524009950	-3694900000	-525100000
2008	-2013166061	-1658884234	16452805000	-11875334885	-2811210944	-51297053502	-97557000	-24986071301	1.03935E+11	-10537199511	-3942500000	-1278100000
2009	-1852457562	-1425501011	10174876000	-4256328503	-1141145836	-35945594306	-48519000	-8234134436	5038364000	-2799441099	-1135800000	-173600000
2010	-1355598479	-1261431338	15040436000	-96462000	-1198803819	-3026261052	-481468750.4	-8478450857	6745220000	-2692243536	-4461600000	-301600000
2011	-1667175109	-105869760	17144935000	27249000	-1843079774	-28599315729	-851953937.8	-9726545444	9727394000	-5088222385	-7440200000	-1023300000
2012	-125664800	-1057931945	14975987000	-52862000	-1882741234	-6172097059	-64362000	-8200067936	7128219000	-4726567861	-4796300000	-1433500000
2013	-1184891052	-813035673.3	12231737000	678640000	-955224423	-4949141209	-490310000	-2076328542	3342820000	-2794170204	-6364200000	-1651800000
2014	-1425385680	-901811470.9	1020803000	74723000	-1784162188	-3734712057	-56830000	-1382752070	5751276000	-2634686972	-4361000000	-459660000
2015	-979825099.4	-287060199.6	-2242495000	-19070000	-1767038407	-1611391808	-462840000	-2155841637	6777718000	-1370173586	-3214500000	161600000
2016	-900363040.5	-217365563.9	-1363404000	141272000	-1890075885	-3261057770	-284690000	-3960512150	2446881000	-1190023037	-3313900000	-134000000
2017	-982237928.3	-344442864.5	1684559000	184729000	-1331512551	-3327132229	-56207000	-6754854305	3242959000	-2322731263	-4734700000	-244200000
2018	-1008356472	-11663303576	6051077000	295885000	-12461192742	-6372398341	-1186710000	-10756662845	1.13455E+11	-2630427634	-2725200000	-428700000

**Table 2 (author's compilation): Current Account Balance - BSEC members (US Dollars), World Bank data compiled from**

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BN.CAB.XOKA.CD?end=2018&locations=AZ:AM:AL:BG:GE:GR:MD:RO:RU:RS:TR-UA&start=1971&type=points&view=chart>

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Country Name	Albania	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Georgia	Greece	Moldova	Romania	Russian Federation	Serbia	Turkey	Ukraine
1989	418924987.5			10207166667		12624099454			1.10935E+11		17360346518	26529048348
1990	312500000	789960888.4	3885196372	6833181818	3101400747	14466921969	6522727273	954687654	93864126142	1357994350	20138041278	22517259875
1991	82300000	842829165.1	4014478402	4758064516	1754966887	14929959806	5103947368	956724067	68740740741	3145121043	20765547619	20230191965
1992	81519209.68	506749951.3	4302724069	4876288660	1315854563	17292882374	6981666667	956724067	2.80684E+11	3782199821	22808811594	17732031955
1993	189399541.5	567247790.5	2281805933	4137681159	1266549923	15285243460	6067763158	802562992	1.66222E+11	2753174611	24636054545	16988498859
1994	225407481	517226119.4	8192426497	4368450185	1452315945	16843840590	7488942598	956724067	1.09676E+11	1357994350	27918206081	18596682378
1995	302465325.4	35133781.3	991644243.4	6138392857	686925691.1	19745092367	1053997132	956724067	1.15849E+11	3782199821	33713478166	22695834207
1996	371808988.5	371135631.4	791908858.4	5962338392	412437375.3	20839186297	937881521.7	956724067	1.02134E+11	3145121043	39094658477	20341623020
1997	230303544.6	332378715.8	11505664617	5610024377	548000077.1	23223405591	1003110491	84595569294	1.00138E+11	46664617512	46664617512	20356667178
1998	291949986.8	359865213.1	1009305139	6304078618	594736066.9	23536857604	764754748.6	956724067	84595569294	3868004698	56721036300	17543987601
1999	540977914.6	383089748.7	1281380203	5825651630	533561622.9	27447755167	612534634.5	9585664906	84670999188	2159833641	47537823331	16959999991
2000	700083398.1	446832960	2118054168	4797485047	703050128.5	30865641238	639062444.7	802562992	1.14292E+11	644428402	53091138041	19521221885
2001	836717875.5	539539869.6	2368624503	4947406967	787530921.4	310836299329	74111801.5	892562992	1.13116E+11	2753174611	53222799558	19941549859
2002	910729685	697610534.6	2666940959	5519114107	992546704.9	30939794466	871854564.2	11061866686	1.21649E+11	3327354915	58321176142	22091578117
2003	116988303.11	902545052.4	3056403991	7277486005	1270728946	37446013995	1056084948	13996536145	1.51698E+11	6021306443	69359206198	27388564892
2004	1596261929	1063499859	4235066653	10713415021	1617346672	49807418301	13301456000	19300916138	2.03415E+11	7741608183	92090931046	39057153600
2005	1853029971	1411788277	8337000212	12703259005	2163550063	52808084318	1528946395	24155609706	2.68957E+11	9563351691	1.05387E+11	41949382403
2006	2242666086	1491343148	13954555630	16150901045	2545570153	57872321666	1542446634	30226593094	3.39008E+11	11781287690	1.19616E+11	47525544554
2007	3016116154	1766287388	22516839529	23262841148	3174516791	71726594580	2006082999	43141451011	3.92044E+11	14845675523	1.434E+11	60543960396
2008	3259293924	1754799663	32133276534	28588393658	3661938154	82807605390	2471513953	56054468220	5.20004E+11	1899419360	1.74469E+11	79896529465
2009	3040048285	1338222814	22870241354	21963744935	3201993714	62641263962	2005630356	45308070705	3.41584E+11	11899419360	1.45519E+11	51428149707
2010	3337085378	1928927462	28728665753	25395559767	4067800483	66165509707	1941104509	53854746845	4.45513E+11	13489123093	1.57845E+11	69998815464
2011	3769487586	2409446528	32714511840	33916530395	5231456092	73490370905	27380714005	67931903169	5.73992E+11	16256082494	1.8534E+11	81280184748
2012	3566036151	2927398423	36914842159	32774007306	6045512869	70468159317	2711411398	64042731180	5.94193E+11	15524118113	2.06849E+11	83884244773
2013	3694429571	3153950546	35907329509	36404706884	7212863112	72806344159	3047734293	76137353887	5.92497E+11	19285832720	2.11715E+11	78744026005
2014	3732085757	33162737474	32560882315	36882851716	7089693096	7673682179	2964401451	82174728293	5.58283E+11	19802613644	2.22003E+11	64873261713
2015	3104919070	3137295852	20059340230	32181251417	6260426872	62031002052	2470376597	7296870073	3.91451E+11	17941275455	2.00728E+11	47880172307
2016	3437170828	3495833404	17580998935	34062839367	6269425402	38691179424	2607823959	77632415254	3.30136E+11	19752651695	1.89717E+11	46023210040
2017	4110273661	4303143626	19839356263	39222875252	7580731381	66998728401	3007175631	89790277606	4.11264E+11	22298811513	2.1122E+11	53867411624
2018	4776973438	4663968198	25484470588	42007181654	8927350578	78773229216	3440576854	97754135376	5.09551E+11	25715543084	2.26982E+11	59149280344

Table 3 (author's compilation): Exports of Goods and Services – BSEC members (US Dollars), Worl Bank data compiled from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.CD?locations=AZ-AM-AL-BG-GE-GR-MD-RO-RU-RS-TR-UA&type=points>

## In Lieu of Conclusion

Regionalism is an old idea and practice in international relations, with the potential to end up a success, a failure or somewhere in between the two, depending on the particularities of the given regional attempt. There seems to be consensus that regions are not homogeneous entities. The drivers and impediments in the course of regional formations are said to be shaped by the stimulus of diffusion, evolving identities, macro crises, and economic intentions, among other factors. The BSEC, as a regionalism case, emerged in the late 1980s as an idea put forward by Turkey upon an amalgam of considerations at the national, regional and global levels, with high expectations. The main objective was to initiate economic cooperation by establishing intense trade and investment links between the Black Sea states and then turn the Black Sea into a sea of peace. The initiative was backed by the US.

However, the members came to realize soon that the BSEC entered a stagnation phase, although it had started out as an ambitious regionalism endeavor. The major underlying factor was the Karabagh conflict, which plagued progress in the BSEC. The conflict, already having assumed a chronic character, unfolded in the three periods displaying more or less distinct attitudes and mindsets on the part of the Armenian leadership. The first (1990-1997) period, the second (1998-2008) period, and the third (2008-2019) period clearly expose how the conflict was imported into the BSEC, and how even the allegedly relatively more conciliatory Armenian leadership, not to mention the hardliners, ended up being unable to make a change.

The assessment of the conflict against the background of the four above-mentioned factors that are at work in regionalism processes, as well as in the BSEC context, showcases four inferences.

First, the stimulus of diffusion turned out to be prevalent only in the formation phases of the BSEC because the Karabagh conflict was still a low intensity conflict -and not an outright war- and the propaganda related to the genocide claims had not yet been such an inflated issue unlike the case today. Yet, the escalation of the conflict by Armenia as of 1992 brought about selective adoption to the BSEC structure and more local behavior than a regional one, increasing discord.

Second, the regional states did not have a pre-existing collective identity. This implied that no positive identity reconstruction was to take place; which was the case, indeed. In the absence of a collective identity, chances for the Karabagh conflict to end remained quite low.



Third, as a macro crisis, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union had its own share of impact in the creation of the BSEC. At a time when Armenia was inclined to establish as many international links as possible, it became a member of the BSEC. However, the aftermath did not prove to be promising; the major reason was, again, the Karabagh conflict, which has a life of its own in and outside of the BSEC context.

Fourth, the regional trade concerns are another factor that encourage regionalism. However, rather than the entire trade volume or investment and the most intense trade links in a regional formation, balanced and converging current accounts as well as similarity in trade, more specifically, the export capacity of the members, will make all the difference. The relevant data for the BSEC members does not allow arguing for a positive forecast since the compiled data manifest diverging figures. As long as there is no free trade area in the BSEC, the unsatisfactory figures are likely to remain. Since the Karabagh conflict will most likely obstruct the creation of a free area, no quick solution seems to be in sight.

In the final analysis, the initial intention that economic cooperation would lead to political cooperation in and around the Black Sea basin was left unfulfilled. The Karabagh conflict, as presented based on the news archives within the limits of the paper, still stands as a litmus test for understanding the roots of the internal imbroglio in the BSEC, on the basis of the four fundamental factors taken as *explanans*. On a final note, hypothetically, a BSEC without a Karabagh conflict right from the start would also contain problems of different sorts. The difference would be that cooperation in various issue areas would proceed without a major, constant obstacle, at different paces.

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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

(ERMENİSTAN CUMHURİYETİ İRAN İSLAM CUMHURİYETİ  
ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİLERE GENEL BİR BAKIŞ)

Aliyar AZIMOV\*

**Abstract:** *Radical changes took place in the international relations system in the 1990s. In particular, the collapse of the USSR necessitated the formation of a “new world order.” The South Caucasus started to be governed by three states in the post-Soviet period. The geopolitical scene of the South Caucasus changed by the dissolution of the USSR, and new opportunities emerged for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran had deep historical ties with the South Caucasus and new conditions in the region brought the need for a new direction in terms of pursuing an active foreign policy to gain credibility in the international arena. The formation of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on political, economic, and security factors. In an effort to step on the path of becoming a regional power a long time after the collapse of the USSR, Iran has been interested in cooperation with Armenia to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. Armenia, meanwhile, has tried to get the support of Iran along with Russia to maintain its political presence in the region.*

**Keywords:** *Armenia, Iran, South Caucasus, geopolitics, Iran-Armenia relations*

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**Öz:** 1990'lı yıllarda uluslararası ilişkiler sisteminde meydana gelen köklü değişiklikler, özellikle SSCB'nin çöküşü, bir "yeni dünya düzeninin" kurulmasını gerekli kılmıştı. Güney Kafkasya, Sovyet sonrası dönemde üç devlet tarafından yönetilmeye başlandı. Güney Kafkasya'nın jeopolitik sahnesi SSCB'nin dağılmasıyla değişmiş ve İran İslam Cumhuriyeti için yeni fırsatlar ortaya çıkmıştı. İran, Güney Kafkasya ile derin tarihsel bağlara sahipti ve bölgedeki yeni şartlar İran için uluslararası arenada güvenilirlik kazanmak adına aktif bir dış politika izleyebilmek açısından yeni bir yön gerektirmekteydi. Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti ile İran İslam Cumhuriyeti arasındaki ilişkilerin kurulması politik, ekonomik ve güvenlik faktörlerine dayanmaktadır. İran uzun yıllardan sonra SSCB'nin dağılması ile bölgesel bir güç olma yolunda adım atmak için Ermenistan'la iş birliği yapmak istemektedir. Ermenistan ise bölgede siyasi varlığını korumak adına Rusya'yla beraber İran'ın da desteğini kazanmaya çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ermenistan, İran, Güney Kafkasya, jeopolitik, İran-Ermenistan ilişkileri

## **Introduction**

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century was a period of complexity and dynamism for the international political setting. The Caucasus region has always played a significant role in the foreign policy of Great Powers due to its natural resources and geopolitical position between the East and the West. The fundamental changes took place in the international relations system in the 1990s, in particular, the collapse of the USSR necessitated the formation of the “new world order”. With this change, the South Caucasus witnessed the rise of three states, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, all of which restored their independence after the dissolution of the USSR.

On the other hand, after the collapse of the USSR, new opportunities occurred for the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had deep historical ties with the South Caucasus, regarding pursuing effective foreign policy in the region. It is important to note that the new regime which came into power in 1979 with the Islamic revolution faced the isolation from the Western countries and its political reputation had considerably weakened. Therefore, the establishment of political and diplomatic relations with newly independent states could have led to the Islamic Republic of Iran to restore its previous reputation and to get alleviate isolation from the West.

Diplomatic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia initiated on December 25, 1991, by the recognition of the independence of Armenia by Iran.<sup>1</sup> In February 1992, Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister Raffi Hovannisian paid a visit to Tehran, and two weeks later Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Akbar Vilayati officially visited Yerevan. Thus, the start of formal talks between the two sides initiated the practical phase of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The relations between Iran and Armenia have been shaped on the axis of alliances in the context of the Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline, Armenia’s electricity sales to Iran, and Iran-Armenia rail and road lines, Armenians in Iran as the most beneficiaries of fundamental rights and freedoms, and the connection of the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea.<sup>2</sup> Relations between Iran and Armenia can be divided into three periods according to their development trends:<sup>3</sup>

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1 Nikolay Hovhannisyan, *The foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia in the Transcaucasian-Middle Eastern Geopolitical Region* (Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Institute of Oriental Studies, 1998), 43.

2 Onur Okyar, “İran ekseninde Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkileri: Anlaşmazlıktan kazanca,” *Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Sayı 2 (2017): 1182

3 Vusal Gasimli, Zaur Shiriyev and Zulfiyya Valiyeva, *Iranian-Armenian Relations: Geopolitical Reality versus Political Statements* (Baku: SAM, 2011), 11.

*Phase I (1991-2001):* In this period, there was no major conflict between Iran and Armenia on political, economic, religious, or ethnic grounds, but some minor troubles occurred. This period can be characterized by the possibilities for strengthening the relations between the two countries and several projects in the field of transport and energy that were implemented between the two countries.

*Phase II (2001-2008):* This stage coincided with the presidency term of Robert Kocharian of Armenia. At this stage, Armenia tried to gradually develop relations with the US and the EU countries alongside Russia and Iran, but unequivocally could not get out of Russia's political orbit.

*Phase III (post-2008):* In the post-2008 period, Armenia again started to strengthen relations with Iran. Due to the military conflict between Russia and Georgia that led to the abolition of the railway project between Armenia and Abkhazia, the conflict prevented Armenia from accessing the world market through Georgia. Therefore, Armenia sought to restore relations with Turkey.<sup>4</sup> However, the failure of these attempts resulted in Armenia restoring its relations with Iran. Since 2009, agreements have been signed between the two countries for establishing close ties in energy, agriculture, science, and culture.

### **The factors influencing to the Iran-Armenia relations**

The main aim in the foreign policy strategy of Iran was to establish political-economic relations with the Caucasus region. From this point of view, cooperation with Armenia was of great importance for Iran.

As for Armenia, internal processes, especially the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, played an essential role in the formation of Armenia's foreign policy. Therefore, Armenia's regional and international relations were shaped on this format. Iran is a significant partner for Armenia in terms of its presence in South Caucasus both economically and politically. Also, accessing Central Asia, China, and the Middle East and building political-economic relations with these regions are only possible through Iran.

Moreover, the occupation of the lands of Azerbaijan, problems with Turkey, and unsuccessful attempts to establish good relations with Georgia resulted in the isolation of Armenia in the region. Therefore, the failure of the normalization of relations with Iran could completely undermine Armenia's access to the international arena and make it fall into a political and economic

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4 Aybars Görgülü, *Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri Bir Kısr Döngü* (Istanbul: Tesev Yayınları, 2008), 23-26.

crisis. Considering that after the collapse of the USSR, Russia has been a major partner and important actor for Armenia, however, the non-existence of physical borders with Russia revealed the importance of cooperation with Iran for Armenia.

According to researchers, several vital factors shape the relations between Armenia and Iran.<sup>5</sup>

*Political interests.* Nearly 30 years after the dissolution of the USSR, Iran became one of the most reliable political and economic partners of Armenia. On September 21, 1991, 99.5% of voters voted in favour of the independence of Armenia and on that day, Armenia declared its independence.<sup>6</sup> Political and diplomatic relations between Iran and Armenia started with the signing agreement in Tehran on February 9, 1992.<sup>7</sup> Armenia's effort to build close relations with Iran in a short period was not a coincidence. During the Soviet period, Armenia had managed to stabilize its economy thanks to the internal economic policy of the USSR. Under the Soviet system, private ownership was banned and replaced by centralized industrialization process. However, Armenia faced economic and political difficulties following the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as in the existing economic system, because it was no longer a part of the centrally planned Soviet economy and it could thus no longer receive support of the economic infrastructure that came along with it.

At the same time, territorial claims against Azerbaijan and conflicts around its borders had a pernicious impact on Armenia's political influence. The first and foremost reason was Armenia's transformation into an aggressor state by the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. When the conflict started in 1992, initially Iran was neutral and emphasized the importance of ending the conflict by ensuring peace between the two sides. However, the economic support provided by Iran during the conflict served to strengthen Armenia as an aggressive country and helped it to escape from its isolation and political-economic crisis.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that Armenia also could not properly regulate relations with Georgia due making implicit claims over Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Georgia was one of the two openings for Armenia that allowed

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5 Sühban Talıblı, *İran İslam Respublikasının Qafqaz Siyasətində Dağlıq Qarabağ Problemi (1991-2005-ci illər)* (Bakı: Elm və Təhsil, 2016), 112

6 Dieter Nohlen, Florian Grotz and Christof Hartmann. *Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook*. Vol. I-II - Elections Worldwide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 329

7 "Bilateral Relations. Islamic Republic of Iran." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, Accessed February 03, 2019, <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/ir>

8 Brenda Shaffer, "Iran's Role in the South Caucasus and Caspian Region: Diverging Views of the U.S. and Europe," *Iran and Its Neighbours* (2013): 17-22.

9 Vahid Ömarov, Elnur Kəbizadə, və Nəsimə Mirzəyeva. *Gürcüstan: daxili ictimai-siyasi şərait* (Bakı: Mütərcim, 2018), 100-108, 117-123.



Armenia to establish and maintain its relations with the West. After independence, Armenia has tried to revive its economy by importing natural gas and oil resources over Georgia. However, the implicit territorial claims to Javakheti by Armenian governments has damaged these relations. Armenia supported separatist groups in Samtskhe-Javakheti region through various means and contributed to the participation of Armenians in the separatist activities.<sup>10</sup> In line with this, the Armenian minority living in Samtskhe-Javakheti pursued active secessionist claims and separatist movements towards the region. Especially during Russian-Georgian conflict, Armenia supported the social, cultural and political organization of Armenians living in Georgia and helped coordinate their activities.<sup>11</sup> As a result, tensions between Armenia and Georgia has noticeably weakened access of Armenia to the West and left it isolated. Therefore, it has been important for Armenia to cooperate with Iran in order to gain its lost reputation in the world arena. The reasons why Iran is essential for Armenia can be grouped as follows:

First, cooperation with one of the biggest actors in the region might restore Armenia's political reputation. Moreover, getting the political support of Iran would allow Armenia to pursue its policy with confidence;

Second, the only way to save Armenia from the economic and political collapse was to establish relations with neighboring countries. However, the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan, conflicts with Turkey and failed relations with Georgia led Armenia to keep relations with Iran more stable in order to maintain its interests in the region, to restore the degraded economy, and to continue territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

*Economic interests.* After the overthrow of the Shah regime in Iran, many sanctions were imposed on Iran by the West. After the dissolution of the USSR, the new chance occurred for Iran in the region. Iran's economic interests on Armenia was to get rid of the West's pressure and restore its reputation in the international arena through Armenia. Even for this purpose, Iran tried to get the support of the Armenian lobby in the Western states by establishing closer relations. Economic relations between Iran and Armenia have been intensified with the establishment of the Armenian-Iranian relations Development Commission in 1992.<sup>12</sup> The Iran-Armenia Business Organization and the Iranian-Armenian Business Council were established in

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10 Эльнур Кальбизаде, "Криптомиацум," *Kaspiy.az*, accessed March 01, 2019, [https://www.kaspiy.az/news.php?id=96094#.XQC\\_2IgzblV](https://www.kaspiy.az/news.php?id=96094#.XQC_2IgzblV)

11 Nilgün Atıcı Köktaş, "Saakaşvili dönemi Gürcistan: iç ve dış politika üzerine bir değerlendirme," *Ardahan Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Sayı 2 (2015): 101

12 Tiffany G. Petros, "Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy," *Armenia International Policy Research*, 2003, doi:10.1.1.489.5895., 9

order to further strengthen economic relations between the two countries.<sup>13</sup> Since their inception, these two organizations have closely cooperated and played a vital role in the deepening economic relations between Iran and Armenia by being the basis of political relations between the two states as well. For instance, in the one of the meetings of Iran's ambassador to Armenia in 2014, the ambassador emphasized the following: "We discussed the issue of transportation of Iranian gas through the Armenian territories. With this cooperation, we want Armenia to get rid of the Turkish-Azerbaijani blockade and Western sanctions to be taken over Iran."<sup>14</sup>

Such kind of statements by Iranian officials have already become a factor in support of the development of the Iran-Armenian relations. The reason is that Armenia and Iran cannot participate in all projects happening in the region and try to offer alternatives to these projects in order to draw attention to themselves. Although a number of large-scale projects were taken into consideration to be implemented between the two states, it was not possible to fully realize it as they did not meet existing geopolitical realities. This is because Iran could not participate in major projects in the region and has tried to play a leading role in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus by offering alternative options. However, Iran has not been able to become a leading actor in the region due to existing political conditions, Azerbaijan-West relations, and sanctions imposed by Western states on Iran.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it was not possible for Iran's proposed projects to compete with regional projects initiated by Azerbaijan. These projects included a high-voltage power line, oil pipeline, and a railway network between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> In addition, both sides have taken positive steps to create a free economic zone.

Economic relations between Iran and Armenia are based on energy, transport, agriculture, machinery, and food industry cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Statistical analysis shows that in the post-Soviet period, most of the investment in the economy of Armenia belonged to Iran and Russia.<sup>18</sup>

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13 Petros, "Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy."

14 Yücel Tanay, "İran-Ermeni İlişkileri Tarihi Ve İranlı Mollaların Bir Millet İki Devlet Tezi," *TürkHareketi.org*, accessed March 10, 2019, [http://www.turkhareketi.org/m\\_31\\_iran-ermeni-iliskileri-tarihi-ve-iranli-mollaların-bir-millet-iki-devlet-tezi.html](http://www.turkhareketi.org/m_31_iran-ermeni-iliskileri-tarihi-ve-iranli-mollaların-bir-millet-iki-devlet-tezi.html)

15 Zafer Yıldırım, "İran-Ermenistan ilişkileri: Ortak sorunlardan doğan işbirliği," *Demokrasi Platformu*, Sayı 35 (2014): 7

16 Şakir Batmaz, "Ermenistan'ın Bölge Ülkeleri İlişkilerinin Tarih, Ekonomi Ve Nüfus Gibi Parametrelerle Analizi," *Marmara University*, accessed March 14, 2019, <http://turksandarmenians.marmara.edu.tr/tr/birinci-dunya-savasından-gunumuze-ermenistanın-bölge-ülkeleri-iliskilerinin-tarih-ekonomi-ve-nüfus-gibi-parametrelerle-analizi/>

17 Sübhan Talıblı, *İran İslam Respublikasının Qafqaz Siyasətində Dağlıq Qarabağ Problemi (1991-2005-ci illər)* (Bakı: Elm və Təhsil, 2016), 115

18 "1995 Country Reports on Economic Policy and Trade Practices," *US Department of State*, accessed March 20, 2019, [https://1997-2001.state.gov/issues/economic/trade\\_reports/russia\\_nis95/ARMENIA.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/issues/economic/trade_reports/russia_nis95/ARMENIA.html)

Economic competition with Turkey, which is another geopolitical actor in the region, also boosts relations between Iran and Armenia. Iran sees Turkey as a rival in the region and Azerbaijan as a threat since 1990.<sup>19</sup> The political influence of Turkey in this region is undesirable for Iran because of its desire to gain a reputation as a regional power. In addition, given the economic impact of Azerbaijan's influence on the Azerbaijani population living in Iran, official Tehran has viewed the rapid growth of Azerbaijan, in terms of it becoming a strong state in the region, as a threat to its security. Iran's inability to improve its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan increased the importance of Armenian-Iranian economic cooperation.

*Security factor.* After the collapse of the USSR, one of the most critical issues for Armenia was security. Armenia had been offered protection by Moscow during the Soviet period, and Armenia has been unable to ensure its own security without the help of Moscow since its independence. Meanwhile, the new geopolitical scene in the Caucasus created severe threats to the security of Russia. Therefore, membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) spearheaded by Russia was of great importance for Armenia. That is why Armenia first joined the CSTO within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>20</sup>

Armenia's cooperation with Russia has always been in the spotlight of Iran. Iran must indirectly take into account Russia's interests in the region and pursue a policy that is compatible with it. Armenia was in need of Russian support to keep its troops in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In this regard, according to the treaty signed between Russia and Armenia in 1992, the Russian Border Troops Command undertook the protection of the borders of Armenia with Turkey and Iran.<sup>21</sup>

One of the main issues worrying Iran was Armenia's cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the military alliance of the Western countries. Although the cooperation with NATO was on the agenda after gaining independence, Armenia was more interested in CSTO membership and took more serious steps in this area. However, Armenia has begun to cooperate with NATO within NATO's Partnership for Peace program.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Mehran Kamrava, *The Great Game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey and the South Caucasus* (London: London Hurst & Company, 2017), 58.

20 "International Organisations - Collective Security Treaty Organization," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, accessed April 01, 2019, <https://www.mfa.am/en/international-organisations/1>.

21 *Ermənistan Respublikası (məlumat Sorğu Kitabçası)* (Bakı: QESAM, 2006), 54

22 "Relations with Armenia," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, accessed April 04, 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics\\_48893.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_48893.htm)

## An Overview Of The Relations Between The Republic Of Armenia And The Islamic Republic Of Iran

From the initial periods of independence, Iran was considered as a strategic partner in terms of security policy of Armenia, therefore Armenia was interested in military cooperation with Iran. On the other hand, Armenia was necessary for Tehran, because maintaining good relations with Armenia could stabilize relations between Russia and Iran. As a result of the cooperation in the military field, Iran supported Armenia in the South Caucasus. In particular, when Armenia occupied lands belonging to Azerbaijan, Iran's policy towards South Caucasus allowed Armenia to change the balance in the region in favor of the Armenians.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Armenia relied on Iran besides Russia to ensure its security by attracting Tehran's attention on economic, political, and security spheres.

The establishment and further consolidation of cooperation among Iran, Armenia, and Greece is also a crucial issue in the Iran-Armenia relations.<sup>24</sup> The basis of this cooperation was the relations established in military and security spheres. The interests of Greece and Armenia were in line with each other. Armenia needed support and unity in order to continue the occupation of lands of Azerbaijan. Greece, along with the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (who claim to act on behalf of all Cyprus), also claimed to the islands in the Aegean Sea by bringing Cyprus problem to the agenda. Thus, the problem between Turkey and Greece prompted Greece to come closer to Armenia and form an official relationship.

On the other hand, Iran was very much interested in this cooperation. Because Armenia's aggression towards Azerbaijan and the problem between Turkey and Greece over the island of Cyprus have reduced both Turkey's and Azerbaijan's activities in the region, Turkey's isolation from the political standpoint of the region and the weakening of political and economic relations with the Caucasian countries could strengthen Iran's position and power in the South Caucasus.

### **The place of Armenia in the foreign policy of Iran towards South Caucasus**

Iran is one of the most important actors in the Middle East. Its energy resources, geostrategic position, and desire to be one of the most influential countries in the region play an important role in Iran's foreign policy activities. After World War II, Western states, especially the US, were interested in

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23 Njdeh Asisian, "An Overview of Iran-Armenian Relations in the Post-Soviet Era and Their Impact on Caucasus Regional Stability," *Journal of the European Society for Iranian Studies* (2018): 39

24 "Greece Announces Pending Defense Pact with Iran and Armenia," *Stratfor*, June 1, 1999, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/greece-announces-pending-defense-pact-iran-and-armenia>.

cooperating with Iran in the energy sphere. However, the revolution in 1979 led to radical changes in the domestic and foreign policy of Iran and damaged relations between the West and Iran. After the revolution, sharia laws were adopted, and foreign policy was declared according to the conceptual basis of Islam.<sup>25</sup> The economic relations between Iran and the US were at the highest level during the Shah period. Especially in the field of energy, the US maintained its influence and presence in the region by close cooperation with the Iranian government. However, the overthrow of a US ally government and the anti-Western regime led to a shocking effect for the US. In 1979, besieging of the US embassy by the Iranian students and keeping the diplomats captive for 444 days completely shook the ties between Iran and the US.<sup>26</sup> After this incident, Western states began to impose sanctions on Iran, and the relations between Iran and the West remained strained until the 1990s.

Following the collapse of the USSR, a new era began in the foreign policy strategy of Iran. Iran started to pursue an active policy to restore its damaged reputation to enter the world markets, to be one of the main actors in the region and strengthen ties with new independent states as well as European countries. Firstly, Iran started to solve the problems with the Middle East countries, and then tense relations with Germany, Canada, and the UK were further improved through diplomatic negotiations.<sup>27</sup> After that, Iran concentrated its attention on the South Caucasus region. The South Caucasus was a turning point for Iran in the way of becoming regional power and entry to the international arena.

In the foreign policy of Iran, the Caucasus has always been defined by the concept of “security” as Iran always described the Caucasus as a corridor of “ideological revolutions.”<sup>28</sup> The presence of Russia here has always blocked Iran’s political growth and instead Iran had to comply with the interests of Russia in its foreign policy. Despite the collapse of the USSR, Iran’s security concerns remained the same, but its policy towards the Caucasus transformed to a very different level according to the geopolitical changes in the region.

At initial periods after the dissolution of the USSR, Iran was not aware of what exactly it faced. One of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR was the growing nationalist movements inside of the Soviet republics. During this

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25 “Iran (Islamic Republic Of)’s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989,” *ConstituteProject.org*, accessed April 14, 2019, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran\\_1989.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en)

26 “Iran Hostage Crisis,” *History.com*, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/iran-hostage-crisis>.

27 Semira N. Nikou, “Timeline of Iran’s Foreign Relations,” *IranPrimer.usip.org*, accessed December 19, 2019, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/timeline-irans-foreign-relations>

28 Hamed Kazemzadeh, *The Overview of Iran & Caucasus Ties*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: GeoWel Research, 2016), 5.

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period, similar protests increased in Iran. The main direction of these protests was to criticize the current regime and to urge Iranian government to integrate to the West. One of the biggest concerns of Iran was that the nationalist movements in the USSR would spill over the Iranian borders. Therefore, Iran was cautious with all three Caucasus states, both in the last periods of the Soviet Union and in the early years of independence of these states.

In terms of political interests in the Caucasus, the fall of USSR has created both opportunities and threats for Iran. It could be considered as an opportunity because of Iran's largest and most dangerous neighbor does not exist anymore, Communism has collapsed, and the biggest threat to political Islam was eliminated. Back to historical root of this phenomena, Iran had always seen Tsarist Russia and later on the USSR as a "mighty power to occupy Iranian lands," and this fear was a decisive factor in its relations with them. In fact, with treaties in 1813 and 1828, Azerbaijani lands were distributed between Tsarist Russia and Iran (Persia), however, the boundaries of the territories were more determined explicitly by Russia.

Another concern of Iran was the strengthening of the Turkish presence in the region and the impact of growing relations of Azerbaijan with the Turkish world to the geopolitical scene of the South Caucasus.<sup>29</sup> At the end period of the USSR, the rising nationalism ideology spread to the inside of Iran and 25-30 million Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran gave significant support to the independence of Azerbaijan. Therefore, Iran tried to be cautious in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which occurred as a result of the occupation of the Azerbaijani lands by Armenia, because people inside Iran condemned Iran for its silence in this conflict. This reaction was the biggest threat to Iran's internal stability.

Another threat in the Caucasus policy of Iran was the possibility of the US's intervention to and influence on the region as a result of the dissolution of the bipolar world order of the bygone Cold War. The fact that the US remained the only superpower after the post-Soviet period and lack of good relations with Western countries have been a significant obstacle to becoming a regional power for Iran.

If so, three main elements united Russia and Iran in terms of the Caucasus and Central Asia. First, the transformation of the US into the sole superpower in the international system was contrary to the foreign policy course and national interests of both countries. Secondly, the emergence of a nationalist ideology with the independence of Azerbaijan and strong Turkish presence in

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29 Mehran Kamrava, *The Great Game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey and the South Caucasus* (London: London Hurst & Company, 2017), 58

the region was unacceptable in terms of national security of both countries. Third, both states were dissatisfied with NATO's access to the region and its activities there.

While the principles of the Iranian foreign policy doctrine are radical, revolutionary, and based on Islamic values,<sup>30</sup> it is clear that these principles are not applied to the relations between Armenia and Iran, given the importance of Armenia for Iran. After the revolution of 1979, the basis of Iranian foreign policy doctrine was the slogan "Neither East nor West."<sup>31</sup> However, in the post-1991 period, it is clear that this principle put Iran under the political and economic pressure and was preventing the growth of Iran in the region.

Thus, the reasons why Iran approached Armenia were mostly geopolitical interests:

- The isolation from the international arena due to sanctions imposed by the West;
- Iran's rivalry with Azerbaijan and Turkey and its inability to establish warm relations with these countries;
- Iran's desire to get rid of the results of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 through Armenia;
- To fill the gap in the region with the collapse of the USSR;
- Bringing energy resources to the world markets through Armenia in order to recover its financial situation.

In the post-1991 period, Armenia also was interested in approachment and expansion of relations with Iran. Lack of oil and gas resources and access to sea routes had a negative impact on Armenia's trade and economic relations. Cooperating only with Russia was not enough to boost economic well-being in Armenia. In this case, Iran was an access point to the world as well as the political and economic partner.

Official relations between Iran and Armenia covered economic, trade and cultural spheres between the two countries and resulted in a series of treaties in these fields. Moreover, Iran perceived Azerbaijan's growth in the economic and political spheres as a threat to its security. Therefore, Iran has intensified its relations with Armenia by implementing an active policy. The

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30 Mehdi Mozaffari, *Islamist Policy* (Aarhus: CIR, 2009), 10

31 Mozaffari, *Islamist Policy*, 10.

rapprochement between Iran and Armenia intensified during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia damaged Turkish-Armenian relations as well. As a result, Iran has become one of the most critical “doors” along with Georgia in terms of Armenia’s access to the international arena. The condemnation of the Iranian authorities by the ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran due to Iran’s double-position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict made the government worry. As a result, Iran has officially declared its impartiality in this conflict and sought to pursue a policy in that direction.<sup>32</sup> However, Iran provided economic assistance to Armenia by supplying gas and fuel in 1992.<sup>33</sup> In 1993, Iran supplied food, raw materials, and electricity to Armenia and prevented its weakening against Azerbaijan.<sup>34</sup> It was essential in terms of two major issues; first, Iran’s assumption was to become the leader of the region and provide regional balance. Thereby, Iran has tried to soften relations with Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; at the same time, Iran understood that losing Armenia would restrict its access to the West. In the second place, when Azerbaijan declared its independence, the Azerbaijani minority, who accommodate in Iran, would have been supported the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan. Fearing that Azerbaijan would influence the ethnicity of Azerbaijanis there, Iran was trying to counter this process by protecting Armenia.<sup>35</sup>

Cooperation with Iran was of great importance to Armenia. Due to the occupation policy, Armenia has become economically and politically isolated in the region. Armenia lost influence in the political sphere, and economic condition began to gradually deteriorate. Armenia has seen Iran as access to Asia and the seas. By establishing economic relations with Asia through Iran, Armenia also desired to be free itself from isolation in the region. Moreover, Armenia’s other aim was to get its support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by cooperating with Iran.<sup>36</sup>

Analysis of the Iran-Armenia relations shows that religion (Islam), which has a dominant position in the foreign policy doctrine of Iran, does not affect these relations. Article 4 of the Iranian constitution clearly states: “All civil, penal,

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32 Geoffrey Gresh, “Coddling the Caucasus: Iran’s Strategic Relationship with Azerbaijan and Armenia,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Issue 1 (2016): 3.

33 Soner Cagaptay and Alexander Murinson, “Good Relations between Azerbaijan and Israel: A Model for Other Muslim States in Eurasia?” *Washington Institute*, March 30, 2015, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/good-relations-between-azerbaijan-and-israel-a-model-for-other-muslim-state>

34 Emil Souleimanov and Ondrej Ditrych, “Iran And Azerbaijan: A Contested Neighborhood,” *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (2007): 106

35 Kamer Kasım, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Kafkasya* (Ankara: Uşak Yayınları, 2011), 146.

36 Vusal Gasimli, Zaur Shiriyev and Zulfıyya Valiyeva, *Iranian-Armenian Relations: Geopolitical Reality versus Political Statements* (Baku: SAM, 2011), 7.



financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the fuqaha' of the Guardian Council are judges in this matter."<sup>37</sup> However, economic and political relations with Armenia do not comply with these indicators, contain principles based on secular values. In fact, one of the reasons of the West's reaction was that Iran was applying extremist religious principles widely in its domestic and foreign policy. These principles were regarded as being totally contrary to human rights, democracy, peace, and regional security; the growth of such a system (deemed as being totalitarian) in the region was undesirable for the West.<sup>38</sup> Despite all of this, Iran did not apply its Islamic principles to its relations with Armenia in order to change the situation in the South Caucasus in its favor. Also, Iran tried to strengthen the relations between two countries by giving privileges and religious freedom to Armenians within Iran. The Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Diaspora have great importance for Iran in terms of restoring the reputation and becoming an active actor in world politics.

One of the essential aspects of Armenia-Iran relations is energy cooperation. Iran's desire was to gain access to Georgia, the Black Sea basin, and through passing these regions to expand its pipeline projects into the European market. The pipeline project between Iran and Armenia was officially announced by the Energy Minister of Armenia Armen Movsisian on April 15, 2002, and it started to operate from December 20, 2006. On March 19, 2007, President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan and President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad participated in the official opening ceremony of the pipeline project.<sup>39</sup> However, the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict overthrew Iran's plan to turn Armenia into a gas corridor and enter the Western market.

### The Armenian Diaspora and the Islamic Republic of Iran

Lobbies are the mechanisms used by the members of diaspora groups that have the power of political influence by using various tools.<sup>40</sup> Ethnic lobbies, which are able to operate more freely than diplomats in the international system, focus on bilateral cooperation in order to have policies adopted in the direction of their home country's interests. For instance, in the United States,

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37 "Iran (Islamic Republic Of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989," *ConstituteProject.org*, accessed April 14, 2019, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran\\_1989.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en)

38 Mozaffari, *Islamist Policy*, 10.

39 "Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline Inaugurated," *Tehran Times*, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/183993/Iran-Armenia-gas-pipeline-inaugurated>

40 Seyfettin Aslan, "Siyasal İktidarı Etkileme Yöntemlerinden Biri Olarak Lobcilik," *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 23 (2009): 113.

where ethnic lobbies are one of the most active, the diaspora groups of Armenia, Greece, China, India, Israel, and Ireland are vying for influence in Washington in order for the US pursue their interests.<sup>41</sup>

The Armenian Diaspora and Armenian lobby groups operate in different countries around the world and can influence political regimes of their place of residence. This factor plays an essential role in the process of rapprochement of Armenia with Iran in terms of the development of relations between Armenia and Iran. Iran is one of the most important centers of the Armenian Diaspora in the Middle East. Armenians have special political privileges in the Islamic Republic of Iran; they can even be represented in public administration bodies (for instance, they have two MPs in the Iranian Parliament). In fact, Iran is interested in activities of Armenians here. The reason is that Armenians living in Iran have relations with Western countries in art, culture, politics, and business spheres. Armenian society is indirectly or directly influencing the relations between Turkey and Iran as well. Iran is located on the strategic position in terms of import and export to Armenia. A limited number of products imported from Turkey to Armenia are exported via Georgia or Iran. Armenia's occupation of territories of Azerbaijan, closed borders with Turkey and implicit territorial claims to Georgia from time to time make Armenia cautious in its relations with Iran. From this point of view, the main objective of the Armenian Diaspora is to manage relations between Iran and Armenia, to cooperate with Iran in the implementation of geopolitical plans, and to establish connections with Asian countries by getting the support of Iran in the international arena.

Common interests of the two countries are based on the strategic nature of Iran-Armenia relations. First and foremost, the interests of these countries overlap in terms of policies towards Azerbaijan. Like Armenia, Iran also does not want to see Azerbaijan as an independent, political, and economically stable country, which has ensured its territorial integrity (as in, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict). In this context, Iran and Armenia have similar approaches to Turkey as well. Although some differences in political courses from time to time, the presence of Turkey in the region, its policies towards the South Caucasus, and increasing influence among Turkic nations are unacceptable to both Armenia and Iran. The activities and the role of Turkey in the Western bloc, intensification of relations of both Azerbaijan and Georgia with West are contrary to the interests of Iran. At this point, the attempts of the Armenian Diaspora to influence the West over genocide claims correspond to the anti-Turkish policy of Iran.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the Iranian

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41 John Newhouse, "Diplomacy, Inc.: The Influence of Lobbies on U.S. Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 3 (2009): 73.

42 Nilüfer Narlı, "Cooperation or Competition in the Islamic World: Turkish-Iranian Relations from the Islamic Revolution to the Gulf War and beyond," *CEMOTI*, 1993, 266

government uses Armenians for its interests by giving special privileges to the Armenians.

Another issue is the isolation problem which both states face. The occupation of Azerbaijani territories caused Armenia to be left out of important economic projects in the region after the closure of its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey. In this regard, by using political means, the Armenian Diaspora seeks to help the Armenian economy and involve Armenia to the large-scale projects in order to change the situation. Besides that, because of the tension between Georgia and Russia as well as implicit territorial claims of Armenia to the Javakheti region of Georgia<sup>43</sup> prevent Armenia cooperating with Russia over Georgia. At the same time, Iran has been condemned and heavily sanctioned by the Western states, including the US, for the policy pursued in the region, especially in the development of its nuclear energy program alleged by Western countries to be a front for a nuclear weapons program. In this case, Iran needed Armenia to continue its nuclear program, and Armenia also gave support to Iran, because both countries were cooperating in the field of electricity within this project.<sup>44</sup> The main aim of Iran was to get rid of the pressures of the West through Armenia and politically penetrate, where it could not reach, by using Armenian Diaspora in the Western countries.

The Armenia lobby is operating in Iran freely, and by promoting the claims of the “Armenian Genocide” through Armenian churches, they try to achieve recognition of the claimed genocide by Iranian authorities. Although Iran does not officially recognize the genocide claims, it allows Armenians to hold events promoting these claims, and does not interfere with the broad propaganda carried out by the Armenian Diaspora in Iran on this issue.

## Conclusion

Diplomatic relations between Armenia and Iran were established on December 25, 1991, when the Islamic Republic of Iran officially recognized the independence of the Republic of Armenia. On February 9, 1992, a declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Iran was signed in Tehran. On that day, the statement was made on the principles and goals of the relationships between Armenia and Iran. The official opening ceremony of the Iranian embassy in Yerevan was held in April 1992, and the opening of the Armenian embassy in Tehran took place in December 1992. More than 180 documents were signed between the two countries in 1992-2018.

43 Vahid Öməröv, Elnur Kəbizadə, and Nəsimə Mirzəyeva. *Gürcüstan: daxili ictimai-siyasi şərait* (Bakı: Mütərcim, 2018), 103

44 “Country Nuclear Power Profiles,” *International Atomic Energy Agency*, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/cnpp2018/countryprofiles/Armenia/Armenia.htm>

The relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia have developed in the frame of practical cooperation in the spheres of science, culture, sport, nature protection, health, agriculture, and education. Since Armenia is in isolation from the region, its primary support in science, humanitarian, and tourism is received from Iran. Although these attempts have been previously awkward due to sanctions against Iran's economy, subsequent processes and particularly the European Union's interest in the South Caucasus, push Iran to be more active towards Armenia.

Iran has been interested in cooperation with Armenia to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus by stepping on the path of becoming a regional power with the collapse of the USSR after long years. As for Armenia, it has been tried to get the support of Iran along with Russia to maintain its political presence in the region. Armenia, which has strong support from Iran to prevent the recession of its economy, uses the Iranian ports, railways, and highways as a transit line for the transportation of its products while Iran hopes for the establishment of relations with Europe and the export of resources on the Armenian-Georgian line. The offer of Iran to Armenia to access the seas and creating conditions for Armenia to establish relations with the Asian countries are also factors that bring both sides closer.

As a result of the study of the interests of Iran in the Caucasus and the place of Armenia in its foreign policy, it is possible to conclude that in the foreign policy of Iran, the Caucasus has always been defined by the concept of "security." One of the major reasons why Iran's Caucasus interests are shaped in such a specific direction is the role of the Caucasus in the history of Iran. One of the main threats to certain groups in Iran was the strengthening of the Turkish presence in the Caucasus and the spread of the relations of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the Turkish world after restoring its independence.

An analysis of Iran's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that has emerged as a result of Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan indicates that in the first years of the war, Iran carried out an intermediary mission to increase its influence in the region, win confidence of the parties and resolve the conflict within its interests. However, Iran's attempt has failed, and despite Iran trying to be closer to both sides, the Armenian side has not sincerely accepted its efforts. Studies show that the Armenian Diaspora in Iran is trying to make a significant impact on the formation of the Caucasus policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the contemporary period, Armenians living in Iran have great privileges as Iranian citizens. Coming to the interests of Iran in the Armenian Diaspora, it is necessary to point out that some groups in Iran are interested in Armenians' activities here because Armenians have trade relations with Western countries. At the same time, their cooperation

with Western countries in art, culture, politics, and business spheres contributes to Iran's integration with the West. Iranian Armenians are indirectly or directly influencing the relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Armenian Diaspora has played an essential role in strengthening the relations in the political, economic, cultural, and scientific fields between two countries over the past period. At the same time, the Armenian Diaspora widely uses the Armenian media for the anti-Turkish propaganda in Iran, something that Iran allows to continue based on its regional interests.

Armenia, which seeks to create a friendly image towards Muslim countries by using its relations with Iran, also uses the way of information manipulation to deceive the society of Iran in its favour. In some instances, Iranian mass media showcases bias because of the overlapping interests of both countries. Herein, Armenia gets to benefit from these diplomatic maneuver policies thanks to the official position of Iranian media, which is influenced by the Iranian ruling class.

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# THREATS AND PROVOCATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TOWARDS THE WATER RESOURCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

(AZERBAIJAN CUMHURİYETİ'NİN SU KAYNAKLARINA  
YÖNELMİŞ ERMENİSTAN CUMHURİYETİ KAYNAKLI  
PROVOKASYONLAR VE TEHDİTLER)

Yegane BAKHSHIYEVA\*

**Abstract:** *Ecological irresponsibility and ecological terrorism are concepts discussed both in terms of ecology and politics. While ecological irresponsibility entails negligence of varying magnitude on part of an actor that results in environmental harm or destruction, ecological terrorism involves an actor deliberately damaging a country's flora and fauna and destroying its natural resources for specific purposes. For more than 25 years, the Republic of Azerbaijan has suffered from the ecological harm and destruction committed by its western neighbor, the Republic of Armenia. At present, the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan is carried out in different ways, morphing from a hot war involving active armed struggle to a cold war phase. This irresponsible and belligerent policy pursued by Armenia against Azerbaijan has cybercrime aspects, and has implications in ideological, scientific, cultural, moral and social*

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*spheres. Polluting of the rivers, which form the sources of drinking water of Azerbaijan, by chemical, biological, and radioactive waste has a continuous character. This factor deeply violates the right of the regional population to live securely.*

**Keywords:** *water resources, ecology, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kur-Aras basin, Sarsang reservoir*

**Öz:** *Ekolojik sorumsuzluk ve ekolojik terörizm, ekoloji biliminde ve siyasette tartışma konusu olan kavramlardır. Ekolojik sorumsuzluk bir aktörün farklı çaplardaki ihmali sebebiyle ortaya çıkan çevresel zarar veya yıkımı kapsarken, ekolojik terörizm belirli amaçlar doğrultusunda bir aktör tarafından kasıtlı olarak bir ülkenin florasına ve faunalarına zarar verme ve doğal kaynaklarını imha etme eylemidir. 25 yıldan fazla bir süredir, Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Batı komşusu Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti'nin yarattığı ekolojik zarar ve yıkımdan mağdur olmaktadır. Günümüzde, Ermenistan'ın saldırganlığı aktif silahlı mücadele içeren sıcak savaştan soğuk savaş aşamasına geçerek farklı şekillerde yürütülmektedir. Ermenistan'ın Azerbaycan'a karşı yürüttüğü sorumsuz ve kavgacı politika; ideolojik, bilimsel, kültürel, manevi ve sosyal alanları kapsamış ve siber-suç öğeleri de barındırmaktadır. Ermenistan'ın topraklarından akan nehirlerin kimyasal, biyolojik ve radyoaktif atıklarla kirletilmesi Azerbaycan'da içme suyu kaynaklarına sürekli zarar vermektedir. Bu faktör, bölge halkının güvenli yaşama hakkını derinden ihlal etmektedir.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *su kaynakları, ekoloji, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan, Kura-Araz havzası, Sarsang baraj gölü*

## **Introduction**

The water-related aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan in international law, as well as the use of fresh water sources and hydrotechnical devices in the conduct of hydrological, hydropower and ecological sabotage actions are not sufficiently studied. The irresponsible and belligerent policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan is quite diverse in terms of its essence and its implementation mechanisms. In this context, two concepts can be used to categorize Armenia's actions: ecological irresponsibility and ecological terrorism. Both concepts have rising importance in terms of ecology and politics. While ecological irresponsibility entails negligence of varying magnitude on part of an actor that results in environmental harm or destruction, ecological terrorism involves an actor deliberately damaging a country's flora and fauna and destroying its natural resources for specific purposes.

The sheer scale of the damage and destruction towards the ecology of Azerbaijan emanating from Armenia gives the impression that Armenia's actions are deliberate and as such may be deemed as "ecological terrorism". However, there is no definitive proof that Armenia's ecological harm and destruction towards Azerbaijan is based on a deliberate policy. We can therefore state that, at the very least, due to gross negligence, incompetence, lack of inspection, or a combination of these, Armenia is engaged in grave ecological irresponsibility that is constantly victimizing Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the unconstructive approach shown by international organizations in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict serves to deteriorate the situation in the region. Armenia, by taking advantage of the ineffectiveness of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group and its co-chairs' (Russia, the US, and France) lenient approach towards Armenia regarding the resolution of the conflict, extends the settlement of the conflict by baseless excuses. By support given by third party countries that serve as its patrons, official Yerevan is delaying the conclusion of any contract with the regional states on the management, utilization, protection of the transboundary water resources and the determination of water quotas. This further intensifies ecological harm and destruction directed against Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Armenia makes up excuses on being a legitimate successor of the USSR, and thus continues to lean on the provisions of the USSR's agreements with Turkey in 1924 and with Iran in 1957.<sup>1</sup>

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1 "Russia ii. Iranian-Soviet relations (1917-1991)," *IranicaOnline.org*, July 20, 2009, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-ii-iranian-soviet-relations-1917-1991>

## Ecological problems of the Kur-Aras basin

75% of Azerbaijan's territory is located downstream of the Kur River basin. Each year, 350 million cubic meters of water passing through Armenia is polluted with tons of chemical and biological items and flow into the Kur River basin. Moreover, microflora and microfauna in the territory of Azerbaijan along the 43 km of the Aras River has been completely destroyed.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the direct impact of Armenia's ecological irresponsibility, the level of water pollution in the Aras River has reached abnormal levels. The acidity indicator in the river -the pH level- has decreased to 2.4, and the microflora by decreased by 180-200 times. At the same time, valuable fish species have been cut off in the Aras River. It has been determined that 21 species of fish were reduced to 16 species in the last 10-15 years.<sup>3</sup>

Organic contaminants that are detected in the Aras River are also at abnormal levels. The amount of phenols in the indicated area is 220-1160 times, heavy metal salts (copper, molybdenum, etc.) 36-48 times, nitrogen-phosphorus salts 26-34 times, chlorides 28 times, and oil hydrocarbons are 73-113 times higher than the solids. At the same time, high-temperature industrial wastewater has a negative impact on the temperature and gas regime of the river. The results of the analysis of samples taken from the bottom of the river indicate that the amount of heavy metals in the Aras River is much higher than normal. The amount of toxic substances in the water is more than 50% above the norm. Therefore, contamination of the Aras River with various toxic wastes threatens the existence of flora and fauna.<sup>4</sup>

The main sections of the Aras River flow through Armenia and despite all international pressure, the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant operates in the territory of the country and its waste is flowing through the left tributary of Aras – Zangi (Razdan) river.<sup>5</sup> The activities of Metsamor NPP have direct impact on Aras River, as 12-16,000 m<sup>3</sup> pollution is discharged to the river per day. So, it will eventually cause great harm for Aras and its arms in the future.<sup>6</sup>

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2 Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, "Country Study on Biodiversity of the Republic of Azerbaijan - First National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity," *UN Convention on Biological Diversity* website, Baku (2004): 27, 38, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/az/az-nr-01-p1-en.pdf>

3 Azərbaycan ərazilərinin Ermənistan tərəfindən işğalı nəticəsində itki və tələfatların qiymətləndirilməsi üzrə İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin məlumat materialları əsasında erməni silahlı təcavüzü və işğal nəticəsində ətraf mühit və təbii sərvətlərə vurulmuş zərərlərin qiymətləndirilməsi (hesabat)* (Bakı: Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyi, 2015), 156-158, <http://eco.gov.az/az/nazirlik/xeber?newsID=6574>

4 A. Qurbanov, *Hidrobohlan, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya* (Bakı: Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti yanında Strateji Araşdırmalar Mərkəzi, 2013), 97-100.

5 P. Велизиде, *Мецаморская АЭС-экологическая бомба для региона* (Баку: ЭЛМ, 2017), 69, 110.

6 Q.Ş. Məmmədov və M.Y. Xəlilov, *Ekologiya, ətraf mühit və insan* (Bakı: Elm, 2006), 362-364, [http://files.preslib.az/projects/azereco/az/eco\\_m2\\_3.pdf](http://files.preslib.az/projects/azereco/az/eco_m2_3.pdf)

## Threats And Provocations Originating From The Republic Of Armenia Towards The Water Resources Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan

Considering that Armenia has not joined the 1992 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) “Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes” and the amount of highly hazardous substances flowing from Armenia into Azerbaijan, it is possible to conclude that the region is heading towards an ecological catastrophe.

Additionally, there are wide-spread opinions both in neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan that the activity of the Metsamor NPP is a serious threat to the health of the population living in the Iğdır region of Turkey, which is located only 15 km away from the powerplant.<sup>7</sup> According to experts, Armenia’s Metsamor and Bulgaria’s Kozladuy nuclear power plants are the most dangerous energy enterprises in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The Okhchuchay River, flowing through Shirikan village of Zangilan region, is polluted with chemical contaminants of Qajaran copper-molybdenum, Gafan copper ore-extraction plants and biological polluted waters of Gafan-Qajaran cities (including villages, hospitals, agricultural facilities) located in Armenia. This has turned the river basin into a “dead zone.” The 43 km<sup>2</sup> area of the river falling into the territory of Azerbaijan and 455 km<sup>2</sup> of the catchment area are constantly polluted. As a result, microflora and microfauna have been destroyed, and the self-cleaning process of the river water has stopped. The main reason for the pollution of Agstafachay, the right bank of the Kur River, is the discharge of one million cubic meters of waste from Armenia’s Ijevan and Dilican settlements, and industrial enterprises. Thus, the amount of phenol in the river has exceeded the norm by 35-45 times. The water reservoir built on it is a serious threat to the population of the North-West region of Azerbaijan.<sup>9</sup>

The Armenian population in the Khojavand region of Azerbaijan, which is occupied by Armenia, discharge wastewater from industrial enterprises to the transboundary water. The Hanashan River, flowing from the west to the east, is contaminated by wastes of the central hospital of Khojavend (Martuni) 200-300 meters away. It is also situated 200 meters away from the pig and cattle complex in that area. It should be noted that, as a result of the intervention by Armenian farmers who cross the occupied area, a small lake has emerged. This water source is the sole source of water in the area and is used for

7 “Metsamor Nükleer Santrali Iğdır İçin Son Derece Tehlikelidir,” *Türksam*, Haziran 29, 2006, <http://turksam.org/metsamor-nukleer-santrali-igdir-icin-son-derece-tehlikelidir>

8 “Is Armenia’s Nuclear Plant the World’s Most Dangerous?” *National Geographic*, April 14, 2011, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2011/04/110412-most-dangerous-nuclear-plant-armenia/>

9 V. Vəliyev, “Araz çayının ekoloji durumu həyəcan təbili çalır,” *Azərbaycan Milli Kitabxanası*, May 31, 2014, <http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/zaman/2014/may/374173.htm>

drinking water, as well as for various purposes (e.g. planting areas, watering animals, etc.). In the ecological and sanitary specimens taken from that water source, microbes have been found to be more than the norm. Especially in the rainfall, the river is even more polluted due to the increased water as a result of floods, all of which flow into the Khangızı (Orcenikidze) Channel.<sup>10</sup>

Other rivers, flowing from the west to the east, are fed mainly by rains and snow waters and are polluted with various waste near Agdam, Asgaran, Khankendi and other settlements. The absence of any information about the current ecological situation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan creates great difficulty. Armenia, which exercises effective control over these areas, seems to be concealing the real ecological situation there, and it is only possible to make general judgments about the situation.

Hydrometeorological observations have a great importance in the study of the environmental conditions of any country, especially for meteorological forecasts. This is also true for the assessment of water resources in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. It previously had long-term observation equipment in meteorological stations such as in Khankendi, Shusha, Lachin, Kalbajar, Agdam, Fuzuli, Madagiz, Khargonchay, Lachin, Minkend, Sarsang water reservoir in Umutlu, and Khachinchay Vankeli Bridge. The hydrometeorological stations possessed all manner of high-end equipment of the time, such as the one in Oxfar Jayla, but as a result of occupation, hydrometeorological observations were discontinued in the 17 hydrological sites that were destroyed. The forced stopping of observations at stations does not allow the study of hydrometeorological conditions of the area. When calculated at market value, the loss of the hydrometeorological observation stations in the occupied territories and the related infrastructure amounts to about 7.7 million Manats (approximately 4.5 million US Dollars).<sup>11</sup>

The water resources of Kalbajar and Lachin districts, occupied by Armenia, are of strategic importance, because the Lachin district was a buffer zone that protected the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan from Armenian occupation. After the occupation of Lachin district on May 16, 1992, Armenia was easily able to enter the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Armenian statistics predicted that in the future, the population of the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region could reach 200,000 people and estimated that annual freshwater demand for agricultural and domestic use would be 365 million m<sup>3</sup>. This was 59% more than the reserves of Sarsang reservoir. It is no coincidence that

10 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 156-158 ; E. Paşayev və F.H. Həsənov, "Azdövsütəsləyihə" *Institutunun Tarixi Və İnkişaf Yolu* (Bakı: Şərqi-Qərb, 2010), 38, [http://anl.az/el/p/pe\\_ait&iy.pdf](http://anl.az/el/p/pe_ait&iy.pdf)

11 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

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official Yerevan alleged that the water problems of the Kalbajar and Lachin regions are somehow due to Azerbaijan's hydro-politics towards these regions.<sup>12</sup>

The control of the flow of water resources into Azerbaijan by Armenia entails significant risks for Azerbaijan. Armenian politician Melik-Shahnazaryan explains the essence of the situation of the water resources and how it is hoped to affect Azerbaijan as follows:

“The Armenian state must limit the supply of water to Azerbaijan by all means, and should take the example of Turkey in the transformation of water resources into political influence and should not ignore the complaints addressed to international organizations by Azerbaijan. Today, Armenia's activities should be directed against the food security of Azerbaijan and create serious water shortages in the country to achieve social-political tensions, mass protests and clashes on the national ground. The sharp reduction of water resources flowing from the territory of Armenia will have a crushing blow to Azerbaijan's agriculture. At the same time, the population living in Armenia's and Nagorno-Karabakh's border areas (Agstafa, Tovuz, Gazakh, Goranboy, Terter, Barda, Agjabadi, Beylagan, Aghdam and Fuzuli) will be displaced voluntarily after the deprivation of irrigated lands and pastures. The water crisis will have a serious impact on the socio-economic situation of Shamkir, Gadabay and Imishli regions. Moreover, Armenia must minimize the transboundary water supply to Azerbaijan by building new water reservoirs and hydroelectric power stations on transboundary rivers.”<sup>13</sup>

Melik-Shahnazarian proposed the idea of firstly cutting off the rivers. According to him, the part of Agstafa, Tovuz, Gazakh, Goranboy, Terter, Barda, Agjabedi, Beylagan, Agdam and Fuzuli regions controlled by Azerbaijan depends on the rivers starting from the territories completely controlled by Armenian and Armenian groups. Therefore, Armenia should make use this “advantage”. The Armenian author writes that if at least half of these rivers can be cut-off, then Azerbaijan will face severe shortage of water, and the volume of water in Aras and Kura Rivers will be sharply reduced.<sup>14</sup>

The National Environmental Monitoring Department of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources conducted further monitoring for

12 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

13 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.

14 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.



the first quarter of September 2015 to study pollution of Kur and Aras transboundary rivers. In the first quarter of September, water consumption in the Kur River increased by 15 m<sup>3</sup>/sec to 124 m<sup>3</sup>/sec in the third quarter of August. According to the results of the monitoring, the amount of biogenic substances in the Kur River has exceeded the norm by the impact of wastes and industrial wastewater discharges directly to water bodies from Georgia and Armenia. Specific pollutants in water contain phenols at multiple times the normal levels: 4.6 in Shikhli-2, 4.3 in Agstafachay and 3 in Agstafachay water reservoir (YVQH). Again, according to the results of the monitoring, the phenol crossed the HVDC on the Aras River by multiple times the normal level; 3.3 in Horadiz, 2.7 in Shahsevan, and 2.2 times in Bahramtepe. Meanwhile, copper compounds in the Kur and Aras Rivers have varied within the norm at every point. The oxygen regime of water has changed at all points within the sanitary norms of 6.74-7.43 mg/l. In general, it is possible to monitor the contamination of copper compounds in all three stations of the Araz River throughout the year.<sup>15</sup>

The occupation of Azerbaijan villages, Gulustan and Talish, are another episode of irresponsible acts by Armenia. On November 19, 2010, there was severe pollution in the İnçiçay which is not far from Murov Mountain. Harmful activity was detected emanating from Tapkaragoyunlu Village, where water flowed to İnçiçay, and this was reported to the Territorial Ecology and Natural Resources Department of Azerbaijani Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (Goranboy, Naftalan, Samukh, Dashkasan, Goygol). A team of experts from the Ministry was created to assess the environmental situation. Analysis were made at the central analytical laboratory of hazardous chemicals in the samples taken from the water and a considerable deterioration in the quality of river water was recorded. The analysis shows that the hydrogen indicator in the giant water of the hydrocarbonated water group has dropped sharply from the alkaline to the acidic environment and the water oxygen regime has been severely damaged. The amount of active synthetic organic substances (detergents), nitrogen compounds, mainly ammonium and metal compounds, from harmful contaminants, was higher than the norm.<sup>16</sup>

The next significant event by Armenia occurred on August 31, 2011, was the presentation of a series of new environmental sabotage actions against Azerbaijan. Thus, the territory of the Voskepar River flowing from Armenia to Azerbaijan has been changed, the water is directed to the newly constructed concrete irrigation canal. The river, which had previously been poured into the Joghaz reservoir, would now “meet the needs of thirsty Armenian villages”

15 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

16 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

without reaching the borders of Azerbaijan. The project and construction work of the new channel was funded by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development, with a total budget of 5.4 million US Dollars. Armenian President of the time Serzh Sargsyan, who attended in the opening ceremony, congratulated the Armenian people on the “historic event,” adding that besides the Voskepar Project, more than eight hydropower facilities would be built and put into operation in the near future.<sup>17</sup>

The territory of Azerbaijan is rich in various types of mineral waters. It is known that more than 200 mineral water springs, distinguished by the diversity of chemical and gas composition, variety of heat, and containing more than 1,000 natural output, depend on the geological structure and hydrogeological formation conditions. The hundreds of diverse mineral-water springs in the occupied areas constitute 39.6% of the total geological reserves of Azerbaijani mineral waters. The area, especially the Shusha, Lachin and Kalbajar regions, have very large mineral resources. In the Lachin-Kalbajar region, 63 springs are divided into two areas, Istisu (Kalbajar region) and Ilisu (Lachin region).

Because of their composition, quality and therapeutic properties, these waters are on par with world-famous “Karlov Vary”, “Narzan”, “Kislovodsk”, and “Jeleznovodsk” springs, even though they are some of their properties. The mineral waters in the Kalbajar region differs especially in terms of their favorable gas and chemical composition, high temperatures, and great natural resources. These mineral waters have healing properties for both external and internal diseases. Thus, a large spa and mineral water filling plant was built over the Istisu Spring in the 1980s. That plant produced 800,000 liters of water a day. Different internal diseases were treated with Turşsu mineral spring, located 17 kms from Shusha City. Water was supplied from the Turşsu mineral spring to Shusha. The polluting of the natural water basins such as Big Alagol, Small Alagol, Zalkhagol, Canligol, Garagol, Alagol, Illigli Garagol in the occupied territories also caused additional environmental problems for the Azerbaijan in the proceeding years.<sup>18</sup>

The thermal waters of the area distinguished by their unique composition. Hydrogeological exploration works were being carried out in Kalbajar District, Upper and Lower Istisu, Bağırsağ, Kashdek, Lachin, Tursu, Shirilan and other mineral water fields in Ilisu, Minkand, Shusha regions to build lucrative factories and health facilities. By the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR dated November 1, 1990 on reconstruction

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17 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.

18 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 152-155.

of mineral water disposal enterprises and construction of new plants, the reconstruction of Istisu and Turshsu mineral water plants was resumed. Unfortunately, the occupation of the territories did not allow the realization of the mentioned project. Very precious resorts located in the central part of the Lesser Caucasus, 1500-2800 meters above sea level -Top Istisu, Low Istisu, Goturlu, Chartakar, Ilisu, Turshsu and other mineral springs- are vacant today.

The destruction of forests that are an integral part of the biosphere is also causing serious damage to nature. The fires in the occupied territories have damaged the land cover. Forest areas of Kalbajar, Lachin, Aghdere regions of Azerbaijan are currently occupied. These forests are used for various purposes by cutting Eldar pine, oak, peanut, pine, lime and other valuable trees. Also, the decline in forest spaces also affects the water cycle in the ecosystem. Destruction of the plant cover accelerates the flow of water because trees, bushes and herbs have the ability to catch water and deaccelerate its flow. Thus, forests play an indispensable role in the protection of lands and water resources. Destruction of forests also causes erosion, increased flood risk and water scarcity.

The damage caused to nature of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan does not end there. Armenia has occupied several preserved sites and many valuable natural-historical monuments in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan Republic. These include the Basitay State Reserve, Karagöl State Reserve, Lachin, Gubadli, Dashalti, and Arasbay. Besides, 269 thousand hectares of forest areas and 6 geological objects have been destroyed. The preserved sites in the occupied zone are in a very poor state. In the place called Argunash, near the Fuzuli region, the forest area was completely destroyed by Armenian groups in order to carry out construction, cut valuable trees, and to construct a road between Hadrut and Tug.

### **Occupied Sarsang Water Reservoir**

The development of irrigation agriculture in Azerbaijan, which is considered as a dry region, is an important issue for the city and villages to supply water. Small Caucasus Mountains, currently under the occupation of Armenia, are of great importance for the formation of water resources of Azerbaijan. All the rivers deriving their source from these mountains, especially Tartar, Hakari, Khachinchay, Kondalanchay and others, which are the right sides of the Kura, bring plenty of water to the flat areas. Artificial lakes and irrigation canals have been created on some of them. One of such complexes used for irrigation and electricity generation is the Tartar Hydrocomplex. The Tartar River begins in Kalbajar region and passes through the territory of Agdere,

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Tartar and Barda and flows into the Kur river. Tutqu, Lev and Ayrim are the rivers of the Tartar River. The Sarsang Reservoir was built on the Tartar River in 1976 on the octaves known as the Garia Bridges. There are 3 bridges in Agdere region. The first bridge is located in the Sarsang Valley where the present water reservoir was built. That bridge was built in such a safe location that it was planned to construct a corridor in the 1970s, just as the bridge was built. Because in this section and in the area, the right and left coast of the Tartar River consisted of rocky cliffs and favorable geographical location, which could be used in the future.<sup>19</sup>

The Sarsang reservoir was created by the capital investment allocated to the Azerbaijan SSR. Its total water capacity is 560 million m<sup>3</sup> and the height of the dam is 125 meters. Sarsang Water Reservoir is the highest water reservoir in the country. This reservoir is currently in the occupied Agdere region.<sup>20</sup> It provided irrigation water to nearly 100,000 hectares of land in 6 districts of Azerbaijan (Terter, Agdam, Barda, Goranboy, Yevlakh and Agjabedi). Regular maintenance work had been carried out by Azerbaijani specialists to ensure the safety of the projects. However, ecological and technical crisis in the water reservoir is continuing because of the disruptive activities of Armenia in the region. The use of this water is extremely dangerous for the population of the nearby villages.<sup>21</sup>

It should also be noted that the Sarsang Hydroelectric Power Station, established at the Tartar Hydroelectric Complex, produces electricity for Armenians. The so-called Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh regime does not fulfill any responsibility regarding the protection of the ecological situation in the occupied territories, so the environmental conditions are getting worse in these territories.

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19 İ. Qasimov, "Qarabağ müharibəsi veteranı, II qrup Qarabağ əlili, yerli sakin. Sərsəng su anbarı," *Yeni Tərtər qəzeti*, Noyabr 15, 2017.

20 R. Rzayev, "The Occupied Sarsang Water Reservoir As A Means Of Hydro-Diversion And Hydro-Terror By Armenia Against Azerbaijan" (Global And Regional Hydropolitical Problems In The Context Of International Cooperation And Security, International Conference, Baku, 2014): 33-36.

21 Tuğba Evrim Maden, *Weaponization of Water: The Case of Sarsang Reservoir* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2017), 111.



Sarsang Water Reservoir in Agdere

Due to the occupation of the Sarsang Reservoir, the inability to supply irrigation water to 100,000 hectares of land has had an irreversible damage to this region of Azerbaijan. At present, the Sarsang Reservoir is in a state of emergency for over 25 years due to the lack of technical maintenance. That is why, the Sarsang Reservoir remaining under occupation causes serious problems for the 138,000 people of Nagorno-Karabakh (located in its low-relief) and the 400,000 people in the Lower Karabagh region whom rely on it for drinking water. It should be noted that, if a dangerous situation arises, the destruction of the dam can destroy the territory and population within one hour.<sup>22</sup>

There are two approaches to calculating the damage to Azerbaijan's economy as a result of the impossibility of using the Sarsang Water Reservoir: electricity generation and irrigation of cultivated lands.

As mentioned above, the Sarsang reservoir gathers 125 million m<sup>3</sup> per year for electricity production. According to the Decision of the Tariff (Price) Council of Azerbaijan, the retail price of electricity is 0.06 manats/kWh for all consumers. This means: 125,000,000 kwh/year x 0.06 kWh = 7,500,000 Manats (4,400,000 US Dollars) per year of economic damage.

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22 H. Sarikaya, "How to Reduce the Water Shortage Problem in the Context of the Global Water Analysis" (Global And Regional Hydropolitical Problems In The Context Of International Cooperation And Security, International Conference, Baku, 2014): 21-26.

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Also, the Sarsang reservoir was designed to irrigate 120,000 hectares of land: 120,000 hectares of planting area x 220 kg/ha crop/year x 0.25 Manats = 6,600,000 manats/year (3,900,000 US Dollars)

In this case, the amount of damage in other reservoirs was estimated at 7,700,560 Manats/year. Thus, the loss of water dams approaches 219,560 Manats/year, or for 22 years of occupation – about 480 million Manats (282 Million US Dollars).<sup>23</sup>

The Sarsang Water Reservoir was very important for agriculture in Azerbaijan. However, 20% of Tartar (Agdere) Region was militarily occupied by Armenia and Azerbaijan lost control of the highest water reservoir, of which the total water capacity was about 80 million m<sup>3</sup> in the Caucasus. Other water reservoirs among them are the Khachinkay Water Reservoir built in 1964, Ganligol Water Reservoir built in 1965, Arpachay Water Reservoir built in 1977, Agdamkend Water Reservoir built in 1962, and more than 160 other water reservoirs turned that have turned into a real threat for Azerbaijan. The water tanks in the Zangilan Region are also occupied and the Azerbaijani side is deprived of their use.

According to the Azerbaijan State Committee for Treatment and Water Management, 29 irrigation systems, 26 main facilities, 1202 km-long 112 inter-farm canals, 713 installations on canals, 5580 km of permanent domestic irrigation canals, 84 pumping stations, 74.4 km of drainage network, the Mil-Mugan watercourse, the Tortchak right-lane channel etc. have been occupied.

In response to such inhumane and destructive acts that are contrary to international law and norms - a delegation of the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA) started to inform the international community about the project “Sarsang-Humanitarian Disaster Prevention” in May 2013. The project aims at to attain prevention against the danger for life and possessions of people who live near the Armenian occupied zones with all water reservoirs including Sarsang Water Reservoir. The intense activity of the Association in numerous meetings and conferences resulted in the mobilization of European circles into the region’s monitoring processes in 2015. Representatives of the Association have informed the world community that the Sarsang reservoir, which has been under no care for more than 20 years, is in an emergency condition.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 152-155.

24 “YUNESKO-nun ‘Ümumdünya mədəni və təbii irsin qorunması haqqında’ Konvensiyasına Azərbaycan Respublikasının qoşulması barədə - Azərbaycan Respublikası Milli Məclisinin qərarı,” *UNESCO.preslib.az*, Dekabr 6, 1993, <http://unesco.preslib.az/az/page/ZkBp5YPq2F>

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, the Sarsang Reservoir has now become a major threat to Azerbaijan. The Reservoir constitutes a potential ecological crisis that may lead to the destruction of 400,000 civilians residing in the untouched surrounding areas of Azerbaijan. Thanks to regular meetings of the Delegation of ACSDA, Azerbaijani representatives sent the proposal of resolution to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Committee on Social Issues, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) on September 1, 2013. A draft resolution to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and to the meeting in Dubrovnik (Bureau) to be appointed as rapporteur was recommended. The Bureau approved the proposal of the resolution “On the humanitarian disaster which could create a hazardous situation for the Sarsang reservoir in the occupied Azerbaijani territories”. The final decision of the Committee also noted that the chemicals and pollutants of water entering Azerbaijan from Armenia were many times higher than normal and drew attention to the growing and spreading of various diseases among the Azerbaijani population living in path of the waters.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, Armenia, which has not yet been identified by international law as an aggressor despite its actions against Azerbaijan, continues to violate the legal regime and international law by keeping one-fourth of the territory of Azerbaijan, especially the Sarsang Reservoir. Official Yerevan has refused to accept international commitments and has cited financial difficulties as an excuse but has not hesitated to prevent European authorities from monitoring the relevant border areas. In spite of the obstacles created by Armenia, the resolution of PACE titled “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water” was adopted by the majority of MPs with 98 yes and 71 no votes during the winter session (January 26, 2016). The document outlines the lack of control over the obsolete technical facilities of the Sarsang Water Reservoir for more than 20 years, the limited access of the population to water, and the inevitable poor social conditions of the population as a result of the abandonment of land. The said PACE resolution states the following issues:<sup>26</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reminds all its member States that the right to water is essential to life and health, in accordance with the 1966

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25 Gülnar Bəşirova, “Ermənistandan növbəti təhdid: Sərsəng su anbarı partladıla bilər,” *Modern.az*, Fevral 5, 2014, <https://modern.az/az/news/51485>

26 “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water,” *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Resolution 2085 (2016), January 26, 2016, <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22429&lang=en>. Also see the relevant report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development that indicates that Armenia is “using water resources as a political tool”: Milica Marković, “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water,” *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Doc. 13931, December 12, 2015, <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-en.asp?FileID=22290&lang=en>

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Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers and the 2004 Berlin Rules on Water Resources, and thus constitutes a prior condition for the enjoyment of other human rights. The Assembly emphasises the obligation of States to secure their population's access to sufficient, safe and affordable water resources.

2. The Assembly regards unimpeded access to drinking water, which cannot be restricted by the existence of borders, as a basic right, a source of life and an asset of strategic importance to every State. It confirms that deliberate deprivation of water cannot be used as a means to harm innocent citizens.
3. The Assembly considers that the deliberate creation of an artificial environmental crisis must be regarded as “environmental aggression” and seen as a hostile act by one State towards another aimed at creating environmental disaster areas and making normal life impossible for the population concerned.
4. It deplores the fact that the occupation by Armenia of Nagorno-Karabakh and other adjacent areas of Azerbaijan creates similar humanitarian and environmental problems for the citizens of Azerbaijan living in the Lower Karabakh valley.
5. The Assembly recalls that, in their statement of 20 May 2014, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs expressed their hope that the sides would reach an agreement to jointly manage these water resources for the benefit of the region.
6. It notes that the lack of regular maintenance work for over twenty years on the Sarsang reservoir, located in one of the areas of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia, poses a danger to the whole border region. The Assembly emphasises that the state of disrepair of the Sarsang dam could result in a major disaster with great loss of human life and possibly a fresh humanitarian crisis.
7. In view of this urgent humanitarian problem, the Assembly requests:
  - 7.1. the immediate withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the region concerned, thus allowing:
    - 7.1.1. access by independent engineers and hydrologists to carry out a detailed on-the-spot survey;
    - 7.1.2. global management, throughout the catchment area, of the use and upkeep of the Sarsang water resources;



- 7.1.3. international supervision of the irrigation canals, the state of the Sarsang and Madagiz dams, the schedule of water releases during the autumn and winter, and aquifer overexploitation;
  - 7.2. the Armenian authorities to cease using water resources as tools of political influence or an instrument of pressure benefiting only one of the parties to the conflict.
8. The Assembly firmly condemns the lack of co-operation of the Armenian parliamentary delegation and the Armenian authorities during the preparation of the report on this issue. The Assembly regards such behaviour as incompatible with the obligations and commitments of a country which is a full member of the Council of Europe. The Assembly will consider what measures to take in this case and in any similar cases which may arise during the terms of office of its parliamentarians.
  9. The Assembly calls on all sides concerned to step up their efforts to co-operate closely in the joint management of the resources of the Sarsang water reservoir, as such co-operation can constitute a confidence-building measure necessary for the solution of any conflict.

It should be noted unambiguously that the problem with the Sarsang Reservoir cannot be viewed as a problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This problem was caused by the armed aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan, the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and other territories by Armenia. Thus, long-term solution to this problem cannot be achieved without the liberation of Azerbaijani territories from occupation. Just as the world community demonstrates respect and objectivity to international norms, the fact of occupation must be abandoned, and the Sarsang Water Reservoir should be rebuilt in accordance with the modern requirements after appropriate restoration and reconstruction.

## Conclusion

In the modern times, ensuring environmental security, preserving the environment, and the rational use of its resources are based on international legal regulations. The magnitude of the risks of political, socio-economic and environmental problems related to water issues are widely accepted. So, the pollution of the Kur and Araz Rivers, the destruction of the occupied mineral springs of Azerbaijan, the destruction of forest areas, and the illegal acquisition of mineral and raw material resources by Armenia, the occupation and potentially lethal neglect of the Sarsang Reservoir are serious threatening

## Threats And Provocations Originating From The Republic Of Armenia Towards The Water Resources Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan

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factors for Azerbaijan. According to the analysis of Armenia's hydro-strategy, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh must be resolved before regional water shortages become a real threat to peace and security. Otherwise, the process of environmental degradation can have regional and perhaps global consequences. The only way out of this situation is for Armenia to immediately put an end to its ecologically irresponsible behavior and then to relinquish control over the occupied territories, through which Azerbaijan will be able to build a useful, efficient, and sustainable relationship with the resources of the relevant territories.

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## A FLAG FOR US ALL\*\*

### (HEPİMİZE BİR BAYRAK)

**Author:** Torkom Istepanyan

**Title:** Hepimize Bir Bayrak

**Published:** İstanbul, Tarla Yayınları, May 1967

**Language:** Turkish

**Number of Pages:** 140

*“Under the rays of a sun named Atatürk that arose from the horizons of Samsun on the morning of 19 May 1919, the young Mehments, Ayşes, Nubars, Maris, Yanis, Elisos, Kohens, and Klaras of today who have found their selfness, you will one day assume your duties together in many fields on the path towards this sacred country’s forthwith development, hug each other so tight in advance that no foreign provocation and influence can ever pluck yourselves away from one another. As this plucking has always involved losses for both sides that cannot be atoned for. As such, I wish that the Almighty God does not show this separation to the beloved Turkish People ever again.” (p. 82)*

*Torkom Istepanyan, May 1967*

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\*\* This is the English translation by Ahmet Can Öktem of a book review by Berfin Mahide Ertekin titled “Hepimize Bir Bayrak” that was originally published in the *Ermeni Araştırmaları* journal. To view the original book review: Berfin Mahide Ertekin, “Hepimize Bir Bayrak,” *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Sayı 64 (2019): 83-87.

**T**orkom Istepanyan, who was a citizen of the Republic of Turkey of Armenian origin from Adapazarı, published his Turkish-language book titled *Hepimize Bir Bayrak* (EN: *A Flag For Us All*) on May 1967 following a decision he made after publishing an article in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. It is understood from these articles of Istepanyan, who published many articles on Turkish Armenians in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, that he took pride in being a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. In a reader's letter he wrote in the *Cumhuriyet* on 1978 titled "Ermeni Kurtuluş Ordusu" ("The Armenian Liberation Army"), he mentions the freedom enjoyed by Armenians living in Turkey and that entities such as the Armenian Liberation Army attributed to all Armenians are utilized by other (foreign) powers in order to increase inter-communal tension.<sup>1</sup> The author also has another book titled *Atatürk'ün Doğumunun 100. Yılında Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri* (*Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 100. Year of Atatürk's Birth*) published on 1984.

Istepanyan's *Hepimize Bir Bayrak* published on 1967 is a book written in the format of memoirs-analysis and mostly contains Istepanyan's memories and recollections. The book is formed of two parts; the first part comprises various memories and recollections that take place during the periods of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey including Istepanyan's childhood years. The second part comprises biographies of Armenian, Jewish, and Greek non-Muslim citizens and excerpts of how these citizens served the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey.

In his book, Istepanyan indicates the reason for the outbreak of tensions between the Muslims and Turks and the non-Muslims, the World War I events and the enactment of the Relocation and Resettlement Law was due to *domestic and foreign enemies*, and aims to display the message that despite this, after the relocation, the Muslim community and the Turkish Army had a tolerant and welcoming attitude towards the non-Muslims. Istepanyan conveys these messages to the reader through expressing his memories and recollections. Moreover, in the second part of the book, while presenting examples of Turkish citizens of Armenian, Jewish, and Greek origin serving the country, the author stated that the non-Muslim minority embraced the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey as their homeland as much as the Turks and Muslims and worked in areas such as state sector, trade, art, and academia for the advancement of the country. In this regard, Istepanyan asserts that, during World War I and the period in which the Relocation and Resettlement Law was implemented, as well as the period of the Republic's establishment and the subsequent periods, the Muslim and non-Muslim communities lived *fraternally*

1 Torkom Istepanyan, "Ermeni Kurtuluş Ordusu," *Cumhuriyet*, November 19, 1978, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/38321227.pdf>

and behave as *one* community in the same country. However, in his book, the author unfortunately names the Relocation and Resettlement Law as *tehcir* (exile), a common and mistaken way to refer to the Relocation and Resettlement Law, and uses this term throughout his book to explain the aforementioned law.

Additionally, the author states that he has dedicated his book to the Turkish Army, whom he describes as being “heroic and honorable”. The reason for this is that Istepanyan had witnessed the Turkish Soldiers’ embracing and protective attitude towards the Armenians in the places where they were transferred due to the Relocation as well as Cemal Pasha’s support for the Armenians arrived in Damascus due to the Relocation and Resettlement (p. 72). Within this scope, it is clearly seen in the book that Istepanyan bears admiration and gratitude towards the Turkish Army and Atatürk.

The author Istepanyan, who arrived in Simav district of Kütahya together with an Armenian group that included his family due to the Relocation and Resettlement Law and stayed there for more than 6 months, witnessed the Armenian group being embraced and protected by the local community in Simav (p. 19). Istepanyan describes in detail this period of his childhood within the framework of the Muslim citizens’ attitudes towards the Armenian group and their social interactions. The people of Simav looking after the Armenian group as people who need safekeeping and opening their doors, working together with them in the fields and providing them earnings is described by Istepanyan as “Turkish Nobility”. In this regard, it is seen that Istepanyan had feelings of gratitude for the Muslim Turkish people and held them in high esteem.

Istepanyan’s mother, Marizaruhi Istepanyan, was a Turkish citizen of Armenian origin served under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk both in Adapazarı and Ankara after the Relocation and Resettlement Law. The book also has a memoir straight from the mouth of Istepanyan’s mother regarding Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It is understood from the memories and recollections of Istepanyan that his underlining of unity and solidarity also came from his mother instilling Istepanyan with patriotism and a sense of Muslim-non-Muslim brotherhood during his childhood – including the years when the Relocation and Resettlement Law was implemented.

Istepanyan’s childhood was spent close to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for some time and Atatürk had contributed to his education (p. 55). For this reason, it is possible to see many of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s teachings in Istepanyan’s memories and recollections. Among these teachings, the aspect that Istepanyan emphasizes the most, together with the importance of education and the Turkish Muslims and non-Muslims cooperating and working together for the country,



is the importance of Atatürk's principles and reforms. According to Istepanyan, the Muslims and non-Muslims should come together and work fraternally for the country's interests in line with Atatürk's principles *in order to not fall into the trap set by foreign powers again*. Istepanyan, who stated that he was in the palace during Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's funeral ceremony, described the ambiance with detail and indicated a spirit of complete unity.

Istepanyan, who also narrates Gülbenkyan taking the citizenship of the Republic of Turkey, states that kinship should be of secondary importance and that the *country* should be of primary importance. He indicates that if the Republic of Turkey was to enter a state of war and engage in battle, the Muslims and non-Muslims would fight together again and gives the example of the Battle of Gallipoli (Dardanelles) (p. 42). Other than embracing and appropriating the Republic of Turkey as homeland, it is made obvious many times in his sentences that he Istepanyan felt great pride and happiness in being a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. In this context, Istepanyan took various individual initiatives towards subjects such as children's education in order to, in his own words, pay his "debt of gratitude" to the Turkish people, the Turkish Army, and Atatürk.

In the second part of the book, Istepanyan gives space to non-Muslim Turkish citizens, their activities and photos encompassing the period of the Ottoman Empire and as well as the Republic of Turkey. He summarizes their education, which positions they served in, and how their services benefitted the country. It is stated that the Republic of Turkey would develop more with the efforts of the non-Muslims. He underlines that the Jews, being successful in commerce, and Armenians, being successful in arts, would benefit the Republic of Turkey (p. 80). A striking case in Istepanyan explaining the non-Muslim individuals with their biographies is that, although most of the non-Muslim individuals had received their education abroad, they returned to their homeland after completing their education and worked for the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. As such, Istepanyan approaches the emphasis on *unity and solidarity* differently in the second part and attempts to send the message of the non-Muslims embracing the both Ottoman Empire and later the Republic of Turkey as their homeland.

Within this context, by presenting his memories and recollections to the reader, Torkom Istepanyan aims to create awareness regarding the phenomenon of non-Muslim and Muslim fraternity. Therefore, with this book, in addition to providing evidence and sample documents regarding the unity and solidarity between the Muslim Turks and non-Muslim minorities, it is reminded that the Armenians were the "Loyal People" (*"Millet-i Sadıka"*). This book being based on Istepanyan's testimony and comprising memoirs from his childhood serves as evidence against the extremist views that highlight on every occasion the

lies regarding the Turkish soldiers and people of the period being oppressive. This book, written from the mouth of a non-Muslim Armenian who was proud to be a citizen of the Republic of Turkey and was loyal to his homeland and comprising pictures of real people and events, provides a response against the arguments of groups that are trying to create “Turcophobia” by using the minorities of the Republic of Turkey.

The relevant book has been written in a literary, elegant language and, due to its contents, is both instructive enough for academic works and is accessible enough for the general consumption of the public.







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