

ON THE PERSPECTIVES OF ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI PEACE AGREEMENT AND SOME SECURITY ISSUES

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The paper aims to analyze the prospects of peace in South Caucasus after the aggression launched against Artsakh in September of this year and the violent displacement of the Armenian population from there. In spite of the recent exchange of prisoners, the policy of Azerbaijan conducted in the last 30 years does not inspire great optimism from the viewpoint of establishment of stable peace in the region. “Zangezur corridor” continues to stay in the Turkish-Azerbaijani agenda. The implementation of that idea can be prevented by deepening the cooperation with Iran in the sphere of communication infrastructures, particularly, by the construction of Iran-Armenia railroad.

After the two-day war in September 2022 the official circles of Armenia sounded optimistic viewpoints, according to which the conclusion of peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan was possible by the end of the year. The peace treaty was not concluded. Instead, in this year – on September 19 – Azerbaijan launched a new largescale war against Artsakh, the aftermath of which has become the utter deprivation of the last of its Armenian population. After this the authorities of Armenia continue to state, that they stay committed to the peace agenda, and continue to express hope, that in the near future a peace treaty will be concluded with Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the Armenian authorities have proclaimed the “Crossroads of Peace” project¹ and are actively promoting



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¹ See: The Government of the Republic of Armenia presents “Crossroads of Peace” project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eysnq8lmQak>

it on various international platforms². Shortly, the essence of the project entails the following: by means of creating new transport and logistic infrastructures on the territory of Armenia and improving the quality of existing ones to establish active land communication between Persian Gulf and Black sea on the one hand (south-north) and between Caspian Sea and Mediterranean Sea on the other hand (east-west). The functioning of all infrastructures must be in full accordance with international laws and under the sovereignty of the states, across the territory of which they pass.

Keeping an optimistic glance on the possible Armenian-Azerbaijani peace agreement the authorities of the RA, however, speak with reservation about its final result, taking into consideration the approaches and the policy of the Azerbaijani side. There is no reason to doubt, that the authorities of the RA are absolutely honest in the issue of conclusion of peace agreement with Azerbaijan. The reason for the failure to achieve this goal up to nowadays is the destructive policy of Azerbaijan. Only the refusal of Baku to participate in the five-sided negotiations foreseen on October 5 of this year in Granada, then in the negotiations with Charles Michel’s intermediation foreseen in the end of October in Brussels, then in the negotiations with the US intermediation foreseen in November is already a sufficient reason to make such a claim. The aim of this paper is to examine Azerbaijan’s policy in the Artsakh issue and make some suggestions.

The policy of Azerbaijan in Artsakh issue during the last 30 years

In order to understand the policy of Azerbaijan in the current stage it is necessary to consider it in historical continuity, i. e. to understand the policy of Baku in the Artsakh issue during the recent 30 years. The cornerstone postulate of Azerbaijan’s policy since 1990s has been the conviction that the time works in its behalf. According to that approach, during the time Azerbaijan

would become more and more mighty, richer and richer at the expense of oil dollars, would arm its military forces with super contemporary equipment, the population would grow numerically. Whereas Armenia being deprived of any possibility to develop under the conditions of blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, not having an access to sea would become weaker and weaker during the same period.

Hence, why to hurry and to resolve the Artsakh issue by means of compromises? Let these trends continue, let Azerbaijan continue to become more and more mighty, and Armenia – weaker and weaker. And when the critical moment comes, favorable international conditions emerge, Azerbaijan would restart the war and resolve the Artsakh issue with a much more favorable variant. Once the president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev used the expression of “strategic patience”, taking in mind the abovementioned.

It is a pity, but this strategy essentially worked. Not another person, but just the president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has confessed, that if the Artsakh issue was settled according to the achieved-in-negotiations agreements, Qarvatchar and Qashatagh would stay under the Armenian control until the final clarification of Artsakh’s status. Whereas by means of the 44-day war Azerbaijan received not only formerly liberated seven regions, including Qarvatchar and Qashatagh, but also the town of Shushi, the region of Hadrut fully as well as a number of settlements occupied from other regions of Artsakh – Mardakert, Askeran, Martuni. In fact, by means of the war Azerbaijan received approximately the double than it was foreseen by the agreement achieved as a result of negotiations. And during the interview to CNN Turk Ilham Aliyev has confessed that just Baku launched the 44-day war in 2020.

Why did this happen? Why couldn’t the Armenian side find the counter game of Azerbaijani strategy? Were we at fault, or was it exclusively the result of objective

² Ararat Mirzoyan presented “Crossroads of Peace” project, New Marmara, 12.12.2023. (in Armenian).

factors independent of us? These questions can be discussed on another occasion. Generally, much has been written about these issues, and the discussion will likely continue. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss them. Here let's acknowledge the fact, that the strategy of Baku has proven to be quite effective.

And if a strategy has withstood the test of history, why renounce it? Why not continue it to ultimately defeat Armenia? That is why Baku with its continuous provocations has been trying to precept the implementation of three-party statement of November 9, 2020 and following it other statements, particularly, the unblocking of regional communications.

Azerbaijan has not been alone in its policy. Contrary to the return of seven liberated regions, the occupation of Hadrut and Shushi, Turkey also was not hurrying to open the border with Armenia and normalize its relations with our country making its position essentially more severe in comparison with that of 1990s. In fact, we have to deal with the Turkish-Azerbaijani joint and coordinated policy. This fact is not concealed by just Turkey and Azerbaijan. Official Ankara has obviously stated for a number of times, that its measures towards Armenia are coordinated and agreed with the Azerbaijani side. Such a statement occurred, for example, on July 5, 2022. The Turkish minister of foreign affairs Mevlut Cavuşoğlu stated, that Ankara works consultatively with Baku at every stage of normalizing its relations with Yerevan, emphasizing at the same time, that Ankara wants the Armenian-Turkish process to be continued stage by stage³.

Thus, the aim of Azerbaijan has been clear – to obstruct the reopening of regional communications, and in case of impossibility to sell it at the highest possible price, according to the Turkish-Azerbaijani custom, i. e. to secure at least the “Zangezur corridor”. This means that Baku after the 44-day war had two alternative strategic aims in its relationships with Yerevan, which can

be conditionally named as **plan A** and **plan B**. **Plan A** involved continuing Armenia's blockade and its eventual defeat. The relationships between two countries were not regulated, which means that the war has not yet concluded. **Plan B** involved receiving the “Zangezur corridor” and securing the recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity by Armenia, including Artsakh. In return, Armenia would be unblocked and diplomatic relations would be regulated.

As Armenia categorically rejects the second variant, plan B, Azerbaijan would proceed consistently with the implementation of plan A. This implies that Baku would: a) not return Armenian prisoners, b) obstruct the process of reopening communications, c) impede the process of demarcation and delimitation, d) consistently engage in provocations, resulting in human victims. This, in turn, means that the establishment of stability and peace in the region has been postponed for an uncertain period of time. Instead, the probability of a new war was growing. If the process was not moving in a positive direction – the establishment and reinforcement of peace, as outlined in the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020, and subsequent statements – it would move in the opposite direction, escalating and increasing the likelihood of a new war.

All escalations after the 44-day war, including the two-day war on Armenian-Azerbaijani border in September 2022, as well as the Azerbaijani aggression on Artsakh in September 2023 with its tragic consequences, must be observed in the abovementioned context. Despite somewhat optimistic Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement regarding the exchange of prisoners⁴, the probability of a new escalation cannot be considered to have disappeared, since the “Zangezur corridor” continues to be Azerbaijan's dream on the one hand and there is not a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the other hand.

There is no reason to doubt the honest

³ Small but visible agreements in the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation process, New Marmara, 06.07.2022. (in Armenian).

⁴ Azerbaijan is liberating 32 Armenian military servants, Armenia – 2 Azerbaijanian military servants, <https://www.ilur.am/արդրեցանն-ազաւն-է-արծակու՛մ-32-հայ-զինձաւա/> (in Armenian).

strivings of international actors – Russia and Western countries, concerning the establishment of peace and stability in Transcaucasia, reopening communications. However, taking into consideration Azerbaijan’s policy and the fact that Baku is not alone in its policy, with support from Turkey, a very cautious optimism must be demonstrated towards the issue of peace and stability in our region.

Of course, on the one hand injecting panic among the Armenian society by means of conversations about a new war in the visible future is unacceptable. However, it is also unacceptable to undermine the people’s caution by disregarding and trivializing the imminent threat. Since the ceasefire in May 1994, for 26 years, we were told, that the new war was excluded. Up to the last day, September 26, 2020, Armenians did not believe in the inevitability of a new large-scale war. Repetition of the same mistake is unacceptable.

How to prevent the “Zangezur corridor”?

It is already emphasized that the “Zangezur corridor” is a strategic aim for Turkey and Azerbaijan⁵, and they will never abandon that idea. Given this situation what steps should be taken?

Obviously, the only power, for which the implementation of the “Zangezur corridor” is practically unacceptable, is Iran. The president of Turkey Rejep Tayyip Erdogan has also spoken about this in the aircraft on the way back home from his visit to Azerbaijan after his reelection this year. Therefore, this circumstance must have a key place in the analyses around the issue.

The construction of Iran-Armenia railroad will become the most crucial circumstance, which will put an end to the speculations about the “Zangezur corridor”. At the present moment, when there are no serious transport infrastructures connecting Iran to Armenia, which will also have transit significance for Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan

can easily raise and speculate on the issue of the “Zangezur corridor”. When infrastructures with strategic significance both for Iran and Armenia exist, Ankara and Baku will realize on practical grounds that the implementation of the “Zangezur corridor” is not prospective or, more concisely, realistic. This might finally close the issue and remove it from the agenda.

Moreover, the construction and launch of the Iran-Armenia railroad will be a very serious precondition for the comprehensive development of the Syunik district, also contributing to the improvement of the demographic situation there. As history has shown, the construction of transport infrastructures such as roads, railroads, and ports in certain territories leads to their development. This, in its turn, will be an important additional factor to curb the long-standing territorial ambitions of Turkey and Azerbaijan in that region.

Before the 44-day war, the construction of Iran-Armenia railroad was one of the most discussed issues among Armenians. It can be said, whoever was not lazy, spoke about its necessity, strategic importance, and more. However, in practice nothing was made towards that direction. After the war, conditioned by the emergence of the issue of the unblocking transport communications in the region or its inclusion into the agenda, the issue of the construction of Iran-Armenia railroad was somewhat sidelined and forgotten, which was not in line with our interests. Even in case of complete unblocking and launching of regional communications, which is still questionable the current moment, the issue of the construction of the Iran-Armenia railroad must remain on the agenda and be implemented, as it has a strategic importance for Armenia and Iran, especially in terms of security. Moreover, today it must be declared a national priority and measures must be undertaken to implement it as soon as possible.

Generally, the fact that the Iran-Armenia

⁵ Hovyan V., About Speculations on the “Zangezur Corridor”, “Amberd bulletin”, № 5, 2022, pp. 90-95 (in Russian).

railroad has not been constructed up to this day can be considered as the greatest failure of Armenia's more than 30-year period of independence. After the victorious conclusion of the first Artsakh war in 1990s, and overcoming the food and power crises, establishing a direct railway communication with Iran should have been prioritized and resolved. That would fundamentally change the logic of processes in our region.

It would be naïve to say that sums did not exist. Even the richest countries of the world grapple with the problem of fiscal insufficiency. Therefore, states distribute their resources, including fiscal ones, according to their priorities. It depends on what they consider as most important. While it is not too late, the issue of establishing the Iran-Armenia railroad must be declared a national priority and resolved.

Parallel to or following the construction of the Iran-Armenia railroad we can

consider the development of other essential infrastructures as well. Particularly, we may consider increasing the diameter of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline or constructing a new pipeline parallel to it. We can also consider reviving such forgotten ideas or programs as the construction of hydropower plant on the Araks River, and the construction of oil refining factory in Meghri. Fortunately, the construction of the third high voltage line between Iran and Armenia is in progress and will be completed soon. Generally, the higher the number of transport and logistic infrastructures connecting Armenia with Iran having a transit significance for Iran, the higher the security level in Armenia. This is especially crucial, as it may guarantee the security of the Syunik district from Turkish-Azerbaijani ambitions. In other words, projects that may initially seem economic are significant for Armenia from the point of security.

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Վահրամ ՀՈՎՅԱՆ

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ԱՆՎՏԱՆԳՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ԵՎ ՄԱՐՏԱՀՐԱՎԵՐՆԵՐ

**ՀԱՅ-ԱՂԻՐԵՋԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԽԱՂԱՂՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ՀԵՌԱՆԿԱՐՆԵՐԻ
ԵՎ ՈՐՈՇ ԱՆՎՏԱՆԳԱՅԻՆ ԽՆԴԻՐՆԵՐԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ**

Հոդվածը նպատակ է հետապնդում վերլուծել խաղաղության հեռանկարները Հարավային Կովկասում այս տարվա սեպտեմբերին Արցախի դեմ սանձազերծված ագրեսիայից և այնտեղից հայ բնակչության բռնի տեղահանությունից հետո: Չնայած վերջերս տեղի ունեցած գերիների փոխանակմանը, վերջին երեսուն տարում Ադրբեջանի վարած քաղաքականությունը մեծ լավատեսություն չի ներշնչում տարածաշրջանում կայուն խաղաղության հաստատման առումով: «Չանգեզուրի միջանցքը» շարունակում է մնալ թուրք-ադրբեջանական օրակարգում: Այդ գաղափարի իրականացումը կարելի է կանխել հաղորդակցային ենթակառուցվածքների ոլորտում Իրանի հետ համագործակցության խորացմամբ, մասնավորապես Իրան-Հայաստան երկաթուղու կառուցմամբ:

Հիմնաբառեր. *Հայաստան, Ադրբեջան, արցախյան խնդիր, խաղաղության համաձայնագիր, «Չանգեզուրի միջանցք», Իրան-Հայաստան երկաթուղի*

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БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬ И ВЫЗОВЫ

**О ПЕРСПЕКТИВАХ АРМЯНО-АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОГО МИРНОГО ДОГОВОРА
И НЕКОТОРЫХ ПРОБЛЕМАХ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ**

Цель статьи – анализировать перспективы мира на Южном Кавказе после развязанной в сентябре сего года против Арцаха агрессии и насильственного перемещения армянского населения оттуда. Несмотря на то, что на днях был произведен обмен пленными, проводимая Азербайджаном в последние 30 лет политика не внушает большого оптимизма с точки зрения установления стабильного мира в регионе. «Зангезурский коридор» продолжает оставаться в турко-азербайджанской повестке дня. Осуществление этой идеи можно предотвратить углублением сотрудничества с Ираном в сфере коммуникационных инфраструктур, в частности, сооружением железной дороги Иран-Армения.

Ключевые слова: *Армения, Азербайджан, арцахская проблема, мирный договор, «Зангезурский коридор», железная дорога Иран-Армения*