ARMENIA IS ON THE RIGHT TRACK

AVİM

In connection with his efforts to finally demarcate the border with Azerbaijan and thus recognize the latters territorial integrity (hence return the Azerbaijani villages under Armenian occupation to Azerbaijan), Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is facing a nationalist backlash headed by the clergy and extreme nationalist elements in Armenia and the Diaspora. These elements place the Armenian cause at the center of their political agenda. By extension, they stand against formally recognizing existing borders and establishing friendly relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The idea of border recognition hits a raw nerve with the Armenian nationalists since it means the defeat of their Historical Armenia ideology.

However, unlike these nationalist demagogues, Pashinyan, to his credit, seems to have learned from past mistakes, and is now actively trying to remedy them in order to guarantee a peaceful future for Armenia and the Armenians.[1] Speaking on the issue, Pashinyan stated with remarkable candor that Historical Armenia is also a guarantee that we will not have the ability and knowledge to live in our environment without outside help and, therefore, we will always need a sponsor, an elder friend. Elaborating further, he noted that:

> I consider myself obliged to note and speak out, we should focus on serving the interests of Real Armenia. Moreover, recording the impossibility of ever returning to the practices and thinking of Historical Armenia in the future. Otherwise, we will not even have a chance to address the external security challenges because we will have a permanent source of generating external threats within ourselves, in our daily reality, without a deep and complete understanding and assessment of this fact.

The rhetoric of Greater or Historic Armenia permeated the political discussions within the Armenian diaspora since the end of the First World War and within the Armenian Republic since its independence. Often simply hidden behind the euphemism of the Armenian cause, this Armenian nationalist political narrative aims at the restoration of Armenian sovereignty over a wide region covering Eastern Türkiye (Turkey) down to the Gulf of Iskenderun, northwestern Iran, and parts of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Over the decades, the Armenian cause blossomed into an industry masquerading as a strategic political analysis or a sound possibility in the Armenian politics, academia, and

media both in the Diaspora and Armenia itself. Often fueled by the enmity to Türkiye and Azerbaijan, the proponents of the Armenian cause believe that if a lot of parliaments recognize the 1915 Events, then it will open the door for Armenia to gain territories from Türkiye. They childishly believe that, after more than a century, they have the chance to resurrect and enforce the discarded Treaty of Sevres and thus control not only Eastern Türkiye and the Çukurova region but also large parts of Azerbaijan, including Karabakh and Nakhichevan as well as. They also naively believe that because Armenians are a Christian nation, the predominantly Christian Western countries will realize all of these fantasies for the Armenians, thus sparing them the necessary pain and hard work.

To an outsider, all of these fantastic ideas might sound as delusions of a fringe movement or as extremist frenzy. Unfortunately, they represented the prevailing opinions among the Armenian politicians, academics, and the press until quite recently. In 2011, no less a person than Serzh Sargsyan, the then President of Armenia, unveiled the widespread nature of these thoughts when he told a group of Armenian students that his generation had liberated Karabakh and it was up to the younger generations to gain Eastern Anatolia from Türkiye. This was a thoroughly scandalous and unheard-of behavior in the 21st century from the head of a state that extolled a war of aggression and ethnic cleansing against a neighboring country, advising his young citizens to follow the same path with regard to another neighbor.

The Armenian nationalists cannot seem to comprehend that in the historical process, states and nations sometimes expand into and sometimes withdraw from territories that they once controlled or inhabited. This a process true for almost all nations, but the Armenian nationalists seem to think they must be the exception.

Once upon a time, Russia had controlled Alaska and some Russians inhabited the land, but to claim it as historic Russia and then seek its return would bring the world to the brink of destruction. Likewise, the Germans once inhabited Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg), Wroclaw (formerly Breslau), and some territories in France and Denmark, but to claim it as historic Germany and then seek a war of aggression against neighbors to return these to Germany would not serve the purpose of peace and, as the tragic events of the Second World War have shown, would result in utter mutual destruction. Not unlike Germany, Austria once controlled large territories in Central Europe. Laying claim to these territories in the name of historic Austria, however, would be comical.

Similarly, the Balkans were historically called European Turkey or Turkey in Europe, but to claim sovereignty over these territories on that basis would destroy the entire stability in the region. Likewise, Azerbaijani dynasties once controlled Yerevan and all the territories of modern Armenia or Iran, but again, laying claim on these territories on the basis of history would be fraught with peril for the entire region. These examples could be extended almost to all nations and states.

In almost all of these cases the commonsense has prevailed, and rather than making their foreign policy dependent upon past glory or ancient grievances; these nations reconciled themselves to the new realities and borders. Peace, then, was maintained to everyones benefit.

It would be wise for the Armenian decision makers and public to notice and recognize that they are not an exception. Armenias failure to notice and realize this prevented them from making the most of what they have and enjoy peace and prosperity. Since independence, Armenias population has dropped more than 25 percent because of the countrys dire economic situation (and incidentally, some of these Armenians migrated to the supposedly hostile Türkiye for a better life). Instead, they displayed an everlasting and unreasonable state of hostility to their neighbors and had been dependent upon other nations for the security of their country and had to give humiliating concessions to them to maintain the façade of security.

It is to be hoped that Pashinyans efforts to bring commonsense to the Armenian extremist, radical nationalist thinking will be successful and that Armenia will permanently abandon its unrealistic and counter-productive claims of territorial expansion at the expense of its people, and that finally, friendly and neighborly relations based on peace and mutual recognition will be established for Armenia with Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

**Picture: A map in a Yerevan metro station, displaying the territories of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran as part of a Greater Armenia.*

[1] AVİM, Armenias Desperate Search for Foreign Intervention and its Historical Antecedents: Threads Of Continuity, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Analysis No: 2020/29, October 14, 2020, https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/ARMENIA-S-DESPERATE-SEARCH-FOR-FOREIGN-INTERVENTION-AND-ITS-HISTORICAL-ANTECEDENTS-THREADS-OF-CONTINUITY

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