

ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: SMALL STATE IRREDENTISM

(ERMENİSTAN'IN DIŐ POLİTİKASI:
KÜÇÜK DEVLET AYRILIKÇILIĐI)

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Abstract: *Armenian foreign policy showed how small states can also be source of instability in their regions if they became a part of the regional power struggle and if they are supported by one of the major regional power. With the existence of Diaspora in various countries, Armenia could follow multi dimensional foreign policy and become important country for the transportation of regional energy resources. However the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia's irredentist policy regarding the conflict and its relations with the neighbors did not allow Armenia to strengthen its sovereignty and to have constructive relations with its neighbors. In this article Armenia's policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia's relations with its neighbors and particularly its relations with Russia and Turkey will be analyzed.*

Keywords: *Armenia, Russia, Turkey, Protocols, Sarkisian*

Öz: *Ermeni dış politikası küçük devletlerin bölgesel güç mücadelelerine taraf olmaları ve bölgesel güçlerden biri tarafından desteklendiklerinde nasıl o bölgelerde istikrarsızlık kaynağı olabileceklerini açıkça göstermektedir. Birçok farklı ülkede diasporaya sahip olduğundan Ermenistan çok yönlü bir dış politika izleyebilecek ve bölgesel enerji kaynaklarının iletilmesi açısından önemli bir ülke konumuna gelebilecekti. Ancak Dağlık Karabağ ihtilafı, Ermenistan'ın bu çatışmada ayrılıkçılığı destekleyen konumu ve komlu ülkeler ile ilişkileri, Ermenistan'a egemenliğini güçlendirme ve komşuları ile yapıcı ilişkiler kurmasını engellemiştir. Bu makalede Ermenistan'ın Dağlık Karabağ ihtilafına yönelik politikası komşuları ve özellikle Rusya ve Türkiye ile ilişkileri değerlendirilecektir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ermenistan, Rusya, Türkiye, Protokoller, Sarkisyan*

Introduction

Armenia became independent after the collapsed of the Soviet Union. This is the case when a big power and/or empires disintegrate, many small states enter international politics. In the Caucasus region, three small states, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia became independent. There are many definitions of small states. One such definition is that “*a small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so.*”¹ However, smallness is a relative concept and it depends on the international society to which a state is a member of.² Small states exhibit certain common foreign policy behavior such as a low level of participation in world affairs, limit their behavior to their immediate geographic area, and rely on superpowers for protection, partnership, and resources.³ Having a limited capacity to implement foreign policy and insecurities regarding their survival does not mean that small states cannot become security threats in their region. In fact irredentist claims of small states in the post-Cold War era created instability and regional conflicts. Armenian irredentism became a part of country’s foreign policy and it was this foreign policy that worsened the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and contributed to the destabilization of the Caucasus.

In this article, certain aspects of Armenian foreign policy will be analyzed in terms of their impact on shaping the post-Cold War Caucasus. The article will try to evaluate the fact that although Armenia is a land-locked state and lacks strategic depth in its relations with Russia, Diaspora’s role in Armenian politics differentiated it from a typical small state. Armenia followed irredentist policy with the Russian support, particularly until 1994 when the ceasefire agreement was signed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Besides its alliance with Russia, Armenia managed to get substantial amount of aid from the US thanks to its Diaspora. Thus, in this article, the role of Diaspora in Armenian foreign policy, Armenia’s policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia’s relations with Russia and Turkey will particularly be focused due to their impact to Armenian foreign policy.

1 Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, p. 29. See also Jeanne A.K. Hey, *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003. Robert O. Keohane, “Liliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics”, *International Organization*, Vol. 23, Issue 2, 1969, pp. 291-310, published online, 22 May 2009.

2 See Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, edited by Hedley Bull and Holbrood C., Leicester University Press, 1978.

3 Jeanne A.K. Hey, *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, p. 5.

Basic Parameters of the Armenian Policy

When Armenia became independent, the most important issue for its foreign policy was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In fact Nagorno-Karabakh problem affected Armenia's relations with its neighbors, particularly, with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenia gave special priority for its relations with Russia. Armenia's irredentist foreign policy and aggravation of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem as a result, made Armenia extremely dependent on Russia. Occupation of Azerbaijan's territories created insecurity in Armenia since there is possibility that Azerbaijan might try to get back its territories using military means. In this atmosphere Russia is considered as a military protector. However, this situation prevented Armenia to strengthen its sovereignty after the independence.

Diaspora is also a factor that should be taken into account analyzing Armenian foreign policy. Diaspora engaged to dictate its agenda on Armenian foreign policy. Diaspora was particularly eager to include genocide allegations into the Armenian foreign policy priorities.

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As a land-locked state Armenia needed to establish good neighborly relations, which would open new opportunities for trade and Armenia would feel more secure through constructive relations with other regional countries. However, Armenian irredentism and its impact on domestic politics prevented Armenia to follow foreign policy accordingly. Armenia's first President Levon Ter-Petrosian aimed to normalize relations with Turkey and his advisor Libaridian argued that "... *what if having normal diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey is in the interest of Armenia as well as of Karabakh? Would not improved Armeno-Turkish relations weaken the Azerbaijani negotiating position, the rigidity of which is based on a policy of struggling the Armenian economy? Should the answer to these questions be positive... then the normalization of relations with Turkey would facilitate Armenia's role as a transit route of Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources.*"⁴

Ter-Petrosian refrained to put genocide allegations in Armenia's foreign policy in order to normalize Armenia's relations with Turkey. However,

4 Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood, Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence*, Blue Crane Books, Watertown, 1999, p. 116.

Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan's territories continued during Ter-Petrosian's Presidency, as it will be discussed below, which at the end led to the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border. While Ter-Petrosian at least in his statements emphasized the importance of the normalizations of relations with Turkey, his policies created diversion with certain Diaspora organizations and their associates in Armenia. In fact Ter-Petrosian's conflict with Diaspora supported Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) started with his election as a President. In 1994 the ARF was banned to operate in Armenia. However, the ARF's campaign against Ter-Petrosian continued abroad particularly in the US. After the election of Ter-Petrosian as a President of Armenia second time in 1996, campaign was hastened against Ter-Petrosian arguing that elections were rigged and the process which resulted the resignation of Ter-Petrosian started. After the 1996 Lisbon Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which called the withdrawal of all occupying Armenian armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas of Azerbaijan, and the return of all refugees to their homes, criticisms by Armenians both home and abroad against Ter-Petrosian intensified. In 1997 OSCE Minsk Group proposed a new peace plan for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Ter-Petrosian faced even more pressure when he gave impression that he might accept the proposal and at the end he resigned.⁵

After the Ter-Petrosian era Kocharian became President of Armenia and the reign of "Karabakh Clan" started in Armenia. Armenia followed more rigid policy regarding the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia's relations with Turkey. Kocharian allowed reactivation of the ARF. Genocide allegations and international recognition was prioritized in Armenian foreign policy. During Kocharian's two term Presidency one of the important events which has implications of the Armenian foreign policy was the attack on Armenian Parliament in 1999. Including Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian and Speaker of the Parliament Karen Demirciyan, 8 members of the Parliament were killed. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian was against Ter-Petrosian's Karabakh policy, he gave the impression that he was ready for compromise in the problem and he would be the person who might support Kocharian, if Kocharian were ready for the settlement. However, his assassination ended this possibility.⁶

In 2008 Ser Sarkisian became the President of Armenia. Sarkisian was born

5 Kamer Kasım, "Armenia's Foreign Policy: Basic Parameters of the Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan Era", *The Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2002, pp. 95-97. Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian (eds.), *Armenia at the Crossroads*, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, pp. 112-114. "Armenia Agrees in Principle to Karabakh Peace Plan", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines*, 8 October 1997.

6 Kamer Kasım, "Armenia's Foreign Policy: Basic Parameters of the Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan Era", *The Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2002, pp. 99-100. Gerard Libaridian, "Armenia in the Wake of Assassination", *BCSIA Documents*, <http://ksgnotes1.harvard.edu/BCSIA/Library.nfs/pubs/ArmeniaTalk>, 8 November 1999.

in Nagorno-Karabakh like his predecessor. Sarkisian served as a Defence Minister of Armenia and in 2007 he became Prime Minister. When Sarkisian was elected as President, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem continued to be the most important issue in Armenian foreign policy. Another important issue is the rapprochement process with Turkey, which will result in signing the protocols between the two countries. About the process between Turkey and Armenia Sarkisian argued that *“Armenia’s position is clear: in the 21st century borders between neighboring countries must not be closed. Regional cooperation could be the best means of supporting stability. The Turkish side offers to form a commission that would study historical facts. We don’t oppose the creation of such a commission, but when the border between the states is open.”*⁷

Sarkisian continued the policies of Kocharian in the case of genocide allegations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, Sarkisian needed to reconsider current situation of closed border with Armenia’s two neighbors during the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. During the conflict Armenian-Georgian border was closed, which impacted on the Armenian economy badly since 2/3 of foreign goods come to Armenia from Georgian way.⁸ Thus opening of the Turkish-Armenian border would become important for Armenian economic and politic stability.

Although the Armenian administration argued that Armenia was not a part of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it was obvious that without the support of Armenia, the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian forces could not occupy the territory of Azerbaijan.

Armenia’s Relations with Other Regional Actors under the Shadow of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

As an independent state Armenia faced the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which started before its independence. When Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent in 1991, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict transformed from the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union to the regional conflict. Although the Armenian administration argued that Armenia was not a part of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it was obvious that without the support of Armenia, the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian forces could not occupy the territory of Azerbaijan. Armenia refrained from recognizing the self declared “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”. As Levon Ter-Petrosian stated

7 European Stability Initiative web site, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=322&debate_ID=2&slide_ID=12

8 Naira Melkumian, “Armenia: Economy Hit by Georgian War”, *IWPR*, 16 October 2008.

that “We want to make every effort to ensure that the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh is not regarded as a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is wrong to say that Armenia has territorial claims on Azerbaijan. But if we officially recognize the ‘Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh’, we could be accused of interference or even provocation.”⁹ However, Ter-Petrosian was a leader of the Karabakh Committee, which aimed to put Nagorno-Karabakh under the control of Armenia. In fact Ter-Petrosian was arrested together with other members of the Karabakh Committee in December 1988. Ter-Petrosian was one of the leading instigators of the secessionist movement in Karabakh. During his Presidency Armenia’s support enabled the Armenian forces occupied about 20 % of Azerbaijan’s territory and one million people became Internally Displaced Person (IDP) as a result.

In 1994 ceasefire agreement was signed and the Nagorno-Karabakh problem turned into “Frozen Conflict”. During the peace process Ter-Petrosian tried to change status quo. However there was disagreement within the Armenian administration. The process resulted with the resignation of Ter-Petrosian. Before his resignation Ter-Petrosian insisted the necessity for finding solution to the conflict. He stated that “It is not possible to maintain the status quo for a long period of time because neither the international community nor Armenia’s economic capabilities will permit it. To solve the question of Karabagh we have only one option, a compromise solution, which does not mean that one side is the victor and the other the loser; it does mean finding an agreement based on what is possible when the conflict has reached maturity.”¹⁰

With Kocharian’s Presidency Armenia followed more rigid policy towards the Karabakh conflict. Besides the fact that he is from Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharian’s special ties with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and its supported organizations made more difficult for Armenia to accept the withdrawal of at least the territories outside the Nagorno-Karabakh. Kocharian first even rejected to meet with the President of Azerbaijan Aliyev to discuss solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, Kocharian met with Aliyev in Paris in March 2001 and in Key-West Florida in April 2001.¹¹ These talks did not result with an agreement. During Kocharian era the most important event regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the introduction of Madrid Principles in November 2007 OSCE Summit.

9 Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict Causes and Implications*, London: Preager, 1998, p. 70.

10 Levon-Ter-Petrosian, “War or Peace? Time for Thoughtfulness”, http://khosq.com/hy/article/2009/08/06/war_or_peace_time_for_thoughtfulness_by_levon_ter_petrosian_1998.

11 Kamer Kasım, “Armenia’s Foreign Policy: Basic Parameters of the Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan Era”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2002, pp. 98-99.

Although it did not lead to result, the next important attempt regarding to find solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict came after August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. Moscow Declaration was signed in November 2008. The Declaration stated that parties will try to solve the conflict on the basis of the norms and principles of international law and of the decisions documents adopted within that framework. Since all adopted documents of UN, OSCE, Council of Europe and other organizations indicated that the solution would be based on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, it might be argued that the Declaration confirms the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The Moscow Declaration referred to the Madrid Principles and committed to the political solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. This means that the Moscow Declaration disregards the Azerbaijan's warning to the use of military force to get back its territories.¹²

The Moscow Declaration was important since the both sides agreed with the document. However, the Moscow Declaration and subsequent attempts did not achieve breakthrough in the peace process. The breakthrough in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict needed to put pressure on the Armenian side, since the Nagorno-Karabakh and seven districts are under the Armenian occupation. Russian role is particularly important in this context. Russia is the only power which can put a real pressure on Armenia to force it for concession in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia in many ways acted as a supporting actor of Armenia, which damaged the position and effectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group. Azerbaijan questioned the Russian role as one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group.¹³

Armenia's Relations with Russia

Armenia established special economic, political and military relations with Russia. This relationship made Armenia depend on Russia in many ways. Russian foreign policy impacted on Armenian domestic and foreign policies. Russia used mechanisms such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Common Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to manipulate regional events. Azerbaijan's rejection of the membership of CIS and Russian military presence in its territories encouraged Russia to support the

12 Liz Fuller, "Moscow Declaration A Victory for Armenia", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow_Declaration_A_Victory_For_Armenia/1337592.html, 3 November 2008. Liz Fuller, "Azerbaijan Floats Principles for Karabakh Peace Settlement", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijan_Floats_Principles_For_Karabakh_Peace_Settlement_/1357686.html, 9 December 2008. Fariz Ismailzade, "Moscow Declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh: A View From Baku", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2008, http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2008-03-tpq/fariz_ismailzade.pdf.

13 Michael J. Baranick and Samuel Schwabe, "In Pursuit of Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh", *The Cornwallis Group XI: Analysis for Civil-Military Transitions*, pp. 321-322. For the Third Party Mediation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict see Bahar Başer, "Third Party Mediation in Nagorno-Karabakh: Part of the Cure or Part of the Disease", *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2008, pp. 86-114.

Armenian side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Until the ceasefire in the conflict, Russian direct or indirect support helped the Armenian forces to occupy Azerbaijan's territories. The most important event, which publicized the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in international media, was Hocali massacre. The role of Russian 366 Motor rifle regiment in the Hocali massacre is generally accepted. With the help of the Russian regiment the Armenian forces attacked and 613 people were killed in February 1992. Another important event, which indicated open Russian support to the Armenian side, came with the Armenian forces attack to Nakhichevan. When Armenian forces attacked Nakhichevan in May 1992, the possibility of military intervention was discussed in Turkey with the reference to the 1921 Kars Treaty. Russia reacted against possible Turkish intervention and the Commander of the CIS Joint Armed Forces Shaposhnikov indicated that such intervention could trigger a Third World War.¹⁴

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict provided Russia an opportunity to control Armenian foreign policy and to check Azerbaijan as Russia wanted Caspian energy resources to pass through its territory. The ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was managed with the Russian initiative and after this, Russia tried to be a part of the solution of the conflict. However, its ties with Armenia and military presence made Russia an unreliable and a biased actor from Azerbaijan's perspective. Russia made a proposal through the OSCE Minsk Group in November 1998 called "common state" proposal, which gave the Nagorno-Karabakh its own constitution, flag, seal and anthem. Nagorno-Karabakh would form its own legislative, executive and judicial authorities. The proposal even gave right to the Nagorno-Karabakh to establish direct external contacts with foreign states. This proposal was rejected by Azerbaijan on the grounds that it would violate its territorial integrity.¹⁵

The next important Russian attempt came to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem after the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008. This produced Moscow Declaration as mentioned above. The Presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia met in Kazan on 24 June 2011 and this meeting did not produce any agreement. Russian President Medvedev was disappointed and stated that he would organize another summit only if both sides firmly

14 See Michael P. Croissant, *the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, Causes and Implications*, Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 1998, pp. 78-81. Kamer Kasım, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict From Its Inception to the Peace Process", *Armenian Studies*, Issue 2, June-July-August 2001, pp. 170-185. Kamer Kasım, "Azerbaycan ile İlişkiler", *USAK Stratejik Gündem*, <http://www.usakgundem.com/yazar/1990/azerbaycan-ile-ilişkiler.html>, 1 March 2011.

15 For the details of the proposal See Ali Abasov and Haroutiun Khachatryan, *The Karabakh Conflict, Variants of Settlement: Concepts and Reality*, Baku/Yerevan 2006, http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/books/book-1/Abaso_Khachatryan.pdf, Appendix 19. See also Kamer Kasım, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Regional Implications And The Peace Process", *Caucasus International*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 93-110.

express their readiness to sign up to the principles of the settlement.¹⁶ If Russia wanted to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and put pressure on Armenia, the problem would have been solved. Considering the fact that Armenia depended on Russia economically, it would be very difficult for Armenia to resist the Russian pressure. However, Russia should be convinced that the solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is to the benefit of Russia.

On the Armenian side, although it might be argued that Russian military presence provides security for Armenia, the same military presence and Russian influence prevents Armenia from following multi-dimensional foreign policy and establishing constructive relations with its neighbors.¹⁷ How can the structure of Armenian-Russian relations change? The structural change in the Armenian-Russian relations require both the will for change in both sides and also certain adjustment in regional and sub-regional systems, which will impact on Armenia's foreign relations in return. One important change might be the Armenian integration with the West. This idea particularly was put forward by the US administration after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war. In this strategy the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations is the priority, since Turkey is a gateway to the West for Armenia.

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Armenia's Relations with Turkey

Armenia's relations with Turkey have been problematic since the independence of Armenia despite Turkey's quick recognition of Armenian independence. There are obstacles for normal diplomatic relations. Armenian genocide allegations and Armenia's policy regarding genocide allegations became the main obstacle in Turkey-Armenia relations. Armenian Declaration of Independence stated that "*The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.*"¹⁸ This

16 "Russia's Medvedev Frustrated with Karabakh Impass", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_medvedev_frustrated_karabakh_impasse/24248417.html, 27 June 2011.

17 Kamer Kasim, "Russian-Armenian Relations: A Strategic Partnership or Hegemonic Domination", *Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2003, pp. 34-35.

18 For the text of Armenian Declaration of Independence see <http://www.gov.am/en/independence/>

Declaration and statements of Armenian officials also indicated another problem in Turkish-Armenian relations. The term “Western Armenia” is referred to the territories within Turkey. Armenia’s obscurity regarding the Kars Treaty, which was drawn the Turkish-Armenian border created rift in the relations. Ter-Petrosian and Armenian National Movement were criticized for their arguments against putting the genocide claims in the Declaration of Independence. At the end Armenian Declaration of Independence was accepted including genocide allegations and hint of territorial claims.

Armenian irredentism regarding the territory of Turkey continued and expressed from the Armenian leaders since the independence of Armenia. For example, when a student asked Armenian President Sarkisian whether Armenia could regain “Western Armenia” he said that “*Armenia’s present generation has successfully resolved the matter of Karabakh ‘a part of our homeland’ and the next generation now growing up, has its own responsibility to fulfill with honor.*”¹⁹

Sarkisian’s respond to the question indicated Armenian territorial claims and its ambiguity about Turkish-Armenian border and the related treaties about it. This type of Armenian irredentism existed before the independence of Armenia and continued after its independence as well. This atmosphere prevented Armenian politicians and political parties to have different approach towards Armenian-Turkish relations. However international atmosphere forced Sarkisian reevaluate Armenia’s policy towards Turkey. The most important event was the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict, which caused all regional countries to reevaluate their regional policies.

In the case of Turkish-Armenian relations before the August 2008 conflict there was a pressure to normalize Turkish-Armenian relations. The US is particularly eager for normalization. One objective of this policy was to strengthen the US administrations’ hand against the Armenian Diasporas’ attempts for the adoption of genocide resolution from the Congress.²⁰ Another objective was to bring Armenia closer to the West and “rescue” her from Russian control. For the first objective the US administration thought that if Turkey-Armenia relations were normalized, it would be easier to convince the congress members that genocide resolutions are against the US interest and also will damage the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. The objective of bringing Armenia closer to the West was given more

19 Vladimir Socor, “Armenian President Casts Doubt on Ongoing Negotiating Processes”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 8, Issue 148, 2 August 2011.

20 Kamer Kasım, “Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri: Protokollere Giden Süreç ve Sonrası”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 10. Yıl Özel Sayısı, 2011, pp. 83-99.

importance after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. The conflict indicated that Russia could easily use military power in the region and Armenia's peculiar position as provider of military base to Russia that weakens the US influence and gives upper hand to Russia. To reverse this situation, normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and particularly the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border were crucial.²¹ Thus international pressure existed for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations.

Turkey and Armenia had an important step for rapprochement in April 2009 when the two sides agreed on a framework to normalize their bilateral relations. With the road map in Turkish-Armenian relations the two countries committed to develop good neighborly relations in mutual respect and progress peace, security and stability in the Caucasus. At the beginning of the normalization process Armenian domestic politics was affected from it and Armenian Revolutionary Front left from the coalition protesting the road map. After the road map, the US President Obama used the term "Mets Yeghern" ("Great Disaster" in Armenian language) in his 24th April speech. Diaspora criticized Sarkisian arguing that due to the rapprochement process with Turkey, Obama did not say "genocide" in his speech.²² Despite this criticism Armenian administration continued the rapprochement process and the protocols between Turkey and Armenia were signed on 10th October 2009 in Switzerland. Sarkisian came to Turkey to watch football match between Turkish and Armenian national teams on 14th October 2009.

There are two protocols: 1. The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey and 2. the Protocol on Development of Relations between the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Turkey. According to the protocols, Turkish-Armenian border will be opened within two months after the ratification of the protocols. Regarding the issue of genocide allegations, which is also one of the obstacles in bilateral relations, a sub-commission of historical dimension would be established in order to provide an impartial scientific examination of historical records. With regard to the recognition of borders, the protocols emphasized to respect and ensure to respect for the principles of equality, sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs of other states, territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers. Protocols also confirmed the mutual recognition of the existing border between the two countries as defined by the relevant treaties of international law.²³ Despite the fact that protocols mentioned the opening of

21 Kamer Kasım "Turkey, Russia and the US's Policy Towards the Karabakh Problem", *International Conference on Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Its Solution Ways*, Azerbaijan/Baku, Qafqaz University International Conflict Research Center, 28-30 May 2010.

22 Gayene Abrahamyan, "Armenia: Obama Escapes Blame For Omission", *Eurasia Insight*, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050109_pr.shtml, 1 Mayıs 2009.

23 See for the text of the protocols, Turkish Foreign Ministry, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/t%C3%BCrkiye-ermenistan-ingilizce.pdf>

the Turkish-Armenian border within the two months after entry into force, it was not clear how the border would be opened without a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Protocols did not mention any direct reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while it is necessary to recall that Turkey closed its border with Armenia after the occupation of Kelbecer by the Armenian forces. Turkish Prime Minister before the protocols in May 2009, clearly stated in Baku that Turkey would not open its borders as long as occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan continued.²⁴ Despite promises from the Turkish authorities at the highest level, Azerbaijan was disappointed that protocols did not mention the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Azerbaijan lobbied to prevent Turkey opening the Armenian border before the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. While Turkey continued its effort to convince Azerbaijan that Armenian border would not be opened without solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan was criticized by the US. As a reaction Azerbaijan did not include joining NATO as Azerbaijan's strategic goal in its military doctrine adopted on June 8th 2010.²⁵

Protocols and rapprochement with Turkey disturbed Armenian parties, which support Armenia to continue its irredentist claims and policies. Armenian Revolutionary Front criticized the protocols as undermining the international recognition of the Armenian genocide, legitimizing the current border between Turkey and Armenia, and linking the normalization of the relations with the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.²⁶ Armenian Diaspora also criticized the protocols particularly due to the article about the establishment of the sub historical commission.

For the ratification of protocols in Armenia, Armenian Constitutional Courts approval is needed. While the Armenian Constitutional Court approved the conformity of the protocols with the Armenian Constitution, its interpretation of the protocols was against the spirit of the protocols and created a great debate about the meaning of the articles. For example Armenian Constitutional Court stated that the provisions of the protocols cannot be interpreted or applied in the legislative process and the application practice of the Republic of Armenia as well as in the interstate relations in a way that would contradict provisions of the preamble to the Republic of Armenia Constitutions and the requirements of Paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Independence of Armenia.²⁷ Since the Declaration of

24 Mina Muradova, "Azerbaijan: Turkish Prime Minister Offers Strong Support For Baku's Position on Karabakh", *Eurasia Insight*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav051309a.shtml>, 13 Mayıs 2009.

25 Maxim A. Suchkov, "Re-engaging the Caucasus: New Approaches of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Region", *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2011, p. 144.

26 "ARF Issues Statement on Constitutional Court Ruling", *Armenian Weekly*, <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2010/01/13/arf-issues-statement-on-constitution-court-ruling/>, 13 Ocak 2010.

27 For the Armenian Constitutional Courts decision see <http://concourt.am/english/decisions/common/pdf/850.pdf>

Independence referred to the genocide allegations and mentioned the “Western Armenia”, this put questions about Armenia’s view of territorial integrity and sub-historical commission. Turkey’s expectations from the protocols are to discuss genocide allegations in a scientific platform and to receive a clear recognition of the borders from the Armenian side. If these expectations were not to be fulfilled, the protocols would be meaningless for Turkey.

In the end, the process of ratification of protocols was suspended by the Armenian side. The Armenian administration could not stand the criticism from domestic politics and Diaspora. Sarkisian also realized that Turkey would not open the border before the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia had no intention to take a step for the solution of the conflict. Sarkisian was also aware of the fact that Armenia would not face international pressure in suspending the protocols. Armenia directed the blame towards Turkey arguing that Turkey is putting condition for the implementation of the protocols.

The countries putting pressure on Turkey to open the Armenian border underestimated the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which continue to prevent the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement process.

Armenia’s policy towards Turkey was quite contradictory. Armenian administration wanted the Turkish-Armenian border to be opened. However, Armenia continued its policy about genocide allegations and recognition of the Turkish-Armenian border. Besides the Armenian administration was very reluctant to take steps about the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It became clear that Turkish-Armenian border could not be opened before the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. The countries putting pressure on Turkey to open the Armenian border underestimated the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which continue to prevent the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement process.

Other Factors and Parliamentary Elections

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Russia and Turkey are important factors in Armenian foreign policy. Besides the above discussed factors Armenia’s relations with Iran and Georgia also played a role in Armenia’s policy. Iran provided important channel for Armenia particularly before the ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Iran’s perceptions of threat from Azerbaijan due to the Iran’s ethnic structure resulted in Iran’s

improvement of its relations with Armenia. Armenia's relations with Iran are indicated in very diverse fields from security to energy. Common visits of military and security officials, cooperation in natural gas are the examples of close relations. Armenia-Iran natural gas pipeline was opened in 2007. Railway projects and plan to construct hydro-electric power plant on Aras River are other instruments to establish strong ties between Armenia and Iran.²⁸

Georgia became important for Armenian trade since Turkey and Azerbaijan borders were closed. This importance became obvious during the Russian Georgian conflict of August 2008. During the conflict Armenian-Georgian border was closed and the Armenian economy suffered as a result. Armenian irredentism targeting the Armenian minority in Georgia is potential diverging issue between Armenia and Georgia. However, Armenia can not afford to have problem with Georgia while not having any relations with two of its neighbors. During the August 2008 conflict, the rumor that Russia used its base in Armenia to attack Georgia created rift in the relations. Karabakh Armenians' support of the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia despite the fact that Armenia did not recognize these breakaway republics created suspicion in Georgia.²⁹

The basic parameters in Armenian foreign policy and its relations with neighbors did not show major breakthrough or change. Parliamentary elections of 6 May 2012 also indicated that Armenian policy would continue in the same direction. Republican Party received 45 % of the vote and continued to be a major force in Armenian politics. This strengthens Sarkisian's hand, which means that if Sarkisian wants to take step to normalize its relations with Turkey, he will face fewer obstacles in domestic politics. In fact Armenian Revolutionary Federation was one of the losers of the election. The ARF fiercely opposed the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and protocols and they questioned the validity of the Turkish-Armenian border. The party encourages and supports the Armenian irredentism. However, this election result does not mean that Armenian political parties and particularly the Republican Party are ready and willing to normalize Armenia's relations with Turkey.³⁰

28 Vladimir Socor, "Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline: Far more than Meets the Eye", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*; Vol. 4, No. 56 <http://www.jamestown.org/single/?nocache=1&txtnews%5Bttnews%5D=32607>, 21 March 2007.

29 Kamer Kasım, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Kafkasya*, Ankara: USAK Yayınları, 2011, pp. 85-86.

30 See Marilisa Lorusso, *The 2012 Armenian Parliamentary Elections: Implications for Armenian Foreign Policy*, IAI Working Papers 12, May 2012. Kamer Kasım, "Ermenistan Parlamento Seçimleri: Değişim Uzak", *Analist*, June 2012.

Conclusion

Although Armenia is a small state, which became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it spread instability in the Caucasus with its irredentist policy. Armenian policy managed to separate Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions from Azerbaijan. The same policy was the main obstacle for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As was the case for many small states Armenia became a tool in the competition and power struggle among the regional powers. In this struggle, its special relations and partnership with Russia provided Armenia protection and security. However, at the same time this relationship damaged Armenian sovereignty. Armenian irredentism limited its foreign policy options despite Armenia had great advantage of having a large Diaspora in different countries. A more compromising stand in Armenian policy regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its relations with Turkey would give Armenia a chance to have a role in transportation of Caspian energy resources to the international markets.

Armenian domestic political actors restricted themselves with the narrow and irredentist interpretation of the Armenian Declaration of Independence. This prevented Armenia to openly recognize its border with Turkey and to reach an agreement for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the end Armenia became a state which has no diplomatic relations and closed borders with two of its neighbors. This can hardly be considered as a successful foreign policy.

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