

The Positions of Political Parties in Armenia on the Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and
Turkey-Armenia Relations

The Positions of Political Parties in Armenia on the Resolution of the Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict and Turkey- Armenia Relations

David Galstyan

This publication has been produced in the framework of the project “Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus” of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation in partnership with the Center for Independent Social Research – Berlin.

IMAGINE

Center for Conflict Transformation

The Imagine Center is an independent, non-political organization that is dedicated to positively transforming relations and laying foundations for lasting and sustainable peace in conflict-torn societies.

www.imaginedialogue.com, info@imaginedialogue.com



The Center for Independent Social Research – Berlin (CISR-Berlin) is a non-governmental organization focused on social research, civil society development and education in cooperation with Eastern Europe and

post-Soviet states.

www.cisr-berlin.org, info@cisr-berlin.org

The project “Joint Platform for Realistic Peace in the South Caucasus” is funded by ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) / Funding program zivik with resources provided by the German Federal Foreign Office.



Federal Foreign Office

Contents

THE POSITIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN ARMENIA ON THE RESOLUTION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT AND TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS.....	1
Introduction	4
Proactive Policy in Relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan	6
Armenian National Congress (HAK, Hay Azgayin Kongres)	6
Stabilization of Relations with Turkey Without Preconditions and Ambivalent Compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.....	8
Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)	8
Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan Bloc and the “Heritage” (Zharangutyun) Party	10
“Yelk” bloc (regarding polices towards relations with Turkey)	11
A Tough Stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey	12
“Yelk” Bloc (regarding polices towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict).....	12
Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)	13
Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhagan Dashnaktsutyun) Party	15
Founding Parliament Movement	16
Lack of a Clear Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey	18
“Tsarukyan” Bloc	18
“Armenian Renaissance” (Haykakan veratsnund) Party	18
Conclusion	18
Bibliography	19
Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	27
Author	27

Introduction

There are 79 parties registered in Armenia, most of which are inactive and unknown to the public (Armlur.am 2016). Five parties and four party blocs participated in the parliamentary election on April 2, 2017. Two parties and two blocks entered the Parliament. The Republican Party of Armenia (*Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun*, HHK) with its 58 seats and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Hay Heghapokhagan Dashnaktsutyun*, HHD) Party with its 7 seats formed the ruling coalition. The “Yelk” bloc comprised of “Bright Armenia” (*Lusavor Hayastan*) Party, Civil Contract (*Kaghakatsiakan Paymanagir*) Party, and Republic (*Hanrapetutyun*) Party (with 9 seats) and the “Tsarukyan” bloc (31 seats) formally formed the opposition. (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017)

The Armenian National Congress (*Hay Azgayin Kongres*, HAK) Party, the Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan (ORO) bloc (with its nucleus of the “Heritage” (*Zharangutyun*) Party), the “Armenian Renaissance” (*Haykakan Veratsnund*) Party, the Communist Party of Armenia (*Hayastani Komunistakan Kusaktsutyun*), and the Free Democrats (*Azat Demokratner*) Party¹ also took part in the elections, yet did not pass the threshold (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017).

This analysis looks at all the parties and blocs in the Parliament as well as extra-parliamentary HAK, ORO, and the “Armenian Renaissance” Party. The “Founding Parliament” (*Himnadir Khorhrdaran*) movement was also reviewed because of the upheaval they caused in the country’s political and social life by seizing the Patrol-Guard Service Regiment in Yerevan in Summer 2016. Their agenda on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in particular differs from the other opinions discussed in this paper.

Based on the positions of the parties regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia-Turkey relations, several model positions have been identified.

¹ The Communist Party and the Free Democrats Party were not included in this paper due to a marginal electorate (0.75 percent and 0.94 percent respectively in the last parliamentary elections of 2017 (Republic of Armenia Central Electoral Commission 2017). Their stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Turkey do not provide a significant alternative to the other parties discussed in this paper either.

These models are presented according to increasing harshness in policies towards neighboring countries.

Thus, the model of “Proactive Policy in Relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan” entails an explicit and blunt discussion of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement on the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group and the Madrid Principles² and an increased transparency of this processes in the eye of the public.

The second model, “Stabilization of Relations with Turkey Without Preconditions and Compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, emphasizes the reciprocal concessions of the sides towards the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict further conditioning the start of these substantive discussions with a confidence- and security-building measures. Within the same model, the establishment of relations without preconditions with Turkey is a requirement set from Yerevan to Ankara; the latter demands concessions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a precondition for the establishment of further relations.

The third model, “A Tough Stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey” covers the parties and one movement that stand on a radical position towards Turkey and Azerbaijan. This means a varying degree of militaristic rhetoric and setting of harsh preconditions before substantive talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or no such talks at all. This position also entails a harsh reaction towards Turkey’s attempts at influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict coupled with conditioning normalization with demands to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The fourth model, “Lack of a Clear Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey” covers the parties whose agenda includes mainly internal political issues and that follow the official line of the authorities in regard to foreign policy. The electorate of these parties has little interest in foreign policy, therefore its role in the programs of those parties is minimal.

The HHK appears in two models because the different echelons of the party use different positions depending on whether statements are made for an external audience, or internal. The “Yelk” bloc, on the other hand, appears in two models

² For the full text of the Madrid Principles, see (Madrid Principles – Full Text 2016). For the Basic Principles of the OSCE Minsk Group, see (OSCE 2009).

because its position regarding to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict fits with the tougher stance, while its approach to Turkey-Armenia relations is on a more constructive path.

The sources according to which the positions have been teased out are the pre-election programs as well as the speeches, interviews, and statements by the party leaders and spokespeople. Analytical articles and other sources have also contributed to this analysis.

Proactive Policy in Relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan

Armenian National Congress (HAK, Hay Azgayin Kongres)

The HAK party – in a bloc with the People’s Party of Armenia (HZhK, *Hayastani Zhoghovrdakan Kusaktsutyun*) – became the only political force out of the 9 blocs and parties running for the April 2017 elections to focalize the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in their pre-election program. The HAK party, also referred to as “Congress”, ran in the elections with the bold slogan of “Peace, Harmony, Good-neighborliness” that stood in stark contrast with all other party slogans.

“The imperative of Armenia’s and Nagorno-Karabakh’s security, and even existence, is to leave the economically suffocating state of the blockade and confrontation with neighboring countries and to transform into a country that peacefully coexists with neighbors, engages in free trade and mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and has open communication links”; this was the vision stated in the bloc’s program (Anc.am 2017). The program claims that only through the establishment of peace is it possible to save the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians, to halt the arm race, and reduce the military budget. As a result, Armenia will be able to participate in major regional projects, attract investments, ensure economic growth, and so on. (Anc.am 2017)

In a much-debated pre-election interview on the Public Television of Armenia, HAK leader, first President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan³ said that both Armenia and Azerbaijan are ready for mutual concessions, and that there are only a few points on which the parties need to agree (Dashtents 2017) (Public Television of Armenia 2017).

When asked how HAK's willingness to go for a compromise differs from all other parties' visions, Ter-Petrosyan has stressed that no party can now offer a new peace plan; negotiations take place around an existing plan on the table – the Madrid Principles (out of which the first President cited “the return of territories”, “the assurance of non-use of force”, and “defining [sic!] the right of the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh”) elaborated on the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group. The first President also noted that if Armenia does not accept the current plan in the form of the Madrid Principles, then the next one will be even worse (Dashtents 2017) (Public Television of Armenia 2017). Earlier at the HAK party convention in December 2016, Ter-Petrosyan had also said that there is no other solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than the stage-by-stage or phased solution that he was negotiating in 1997 (Aslanyan 2016).

In another appearance on the “Kentron” (“Center”) TV channel, Ter-Petrosyan reiterated his statement that the current authorities are conducting the negotiations around the Madrid Principles, and he qualified those who say “not an inch of land”⁴ as “the grave-diggers of this nation” (Panarmenian.net 2017) (Kentron TV 2017). Ter-Petrosyan also criticized the current government – the HHK and its coalition – for not making clear public statements on the readiness for mutual concessions and stressed that the peace deal on the table can be implemented only if the Congress wins in the elections or gains a significant number of seats in the Parliament (Ilur.am 2016). At the same time, the first President has stressed that the Congress will support the current President and his government in the question of the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in line with the current negotiated plan – the only issue upon which a

³ It is worth noting that first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan resigned from his position in 1998 because of disagreement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement with an influential part of the Armenian political and military elites of the time.

⁴ This is an-often used phrase to characterize the constituencies against any territorial concessions.

shared position between the two powers is deemed plausible, according to Ter-Petrosyan (Kentron TV 2017).

HAK supports the establishment of Armenia-Turkey relations and views them through the prism of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. “The elimination of contradictions with Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the establishment of good-neighborly relations, depends only on one issue – the settlement of the Karabakh conflict”, was Ter-Petrosyan’s argument at the party convention where he also harshly criticized the concept of the “army-nation” that the ruling HHK started implementing in 2016. (Ilur.am 2016)

The rating of popularity of the Congress had already been on a continuous decline in the years preceding the April 2017 elections, and this position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict worsened the situation. After the elections, Ter-Petrosyan stated that it would be “political illiteracy” to expect a different result given that the power and wealth in the country is accumulated in a few families (Ter-Petrosyan 2017).

Stabilization of Relations with Turkey Without Preconditions and Ambivalent Compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)

The HHK fits under more than one category in the analysis of its positions on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Turkey. The different and sometimes divergent positions expressed by the party members are not accidental. Unlike all other parties, the HHK must present its position for audiences in Armenia, on the international arena, as well as in official

negotiations. That is why very often the statements made by party affiliates within Armenia (for domestic consumption so to speak) and the official position of the party, hence the official position of Armenia in the negotiations, can differ significantly from each other, a tactic often criticized by the media (Are We Handing Over 5 or 7 Regions? Is This the Only Debatable Question of Today? What is the Real Size of the Concession on the Armenian Side Going to Be? 2016). HHK leader, President Serzh Sargsyan himself admitted in an appearance on the “Armenia” TV that his critics should take into consideration “the audience towards which [his] messages are directed and the aims of the messages” (Armenia TV 2017). On the other hand, the power and resources of the HHK allow for the easy manipulation of the public opinion, among other means through “pocket” political scientists and experts, before the party’s position shifts in one direction or another.

President Sargsyan stresses periodically Armenia’s readiness to continue engaging in negotiations and doing so within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, seeing war as the alternative to negotiations (Armenia TV 2017). According to analysts, the same Madrid Principles lie on the negotiating table – the transfer of areas around the former NKAR (except a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh) to Azerbaijan in exchange for the status of Nagorno-Karabakh through the will of the people (referendum). Armenia’s foreign policy on the international arena is based on the formula “we are ready for negotiations and are also ready for high-level meetings albeit with little to no expectations, but Azerbaijan torpedoes them” (Armenia TV 2017) (Panorama.am 2017).

In the same TV appearance, President Sargsyan rejected that his government has ever expressed readiness to make unilateral concessions; their statements have always been about the readiness for reciprocal concessions and compromise (Armenia President: We Never Talked About Concessions 2017). The President also stressed that there is no “principled change” in the position of the government after the “four-day April war” and that the latter only showed that Azerbaijan is rejecting the Madrid Principles (Armenia TV 2017).

The vertex of the party and all official documents usually adhere to a discourse in line with the stabilization of relations with Turkey and mutual concessions with Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The more rigid voices coming from HHK are discussed in a later section.

As for relations with Turkey, eight years ago, the HHK could be placed within the first category of this analysis – active supporters of establishing relations with Ankara. However, President Sargsyan’s initiative to sign the Armenia-Turkey protocols, which should have led to the opening of the border, failed (Panarmenian.net 2015). After the failure in this matter, the ruling HHK decided not to rush things. As a result, there was no place for Turkey in the foreign policy of the pre-election program (Foreign Policy Aimed at Progress 2017). However, as President Sargsyan has stated in one of his interviews, Armenia still wants to open borders with Turkey, yet do so without preconditions: “Unfortunately, after some time it became clear that the Turks are not ready to ratify these protocols and are in fact not ready to establish relations with Armenia without preconditions.” (Armeniasputnik.am 2016).

Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan Bloc and the “Heritage” (Zharangutyun) Party

The Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan⁵ (ORO) bloc spoke with a similar platform of compromise during the election campaign. Similar to the HHK, that deems Russia’s arms trade to Azerbaijan one of the “painful points of Armenian-Russian relations” (Armenia TV 2017), ORO also insisted on the preservation of a military equilibrium with Azerbaijan and the rejection of unilateral concessions. On the other hand, they believed it was necessary to activate people’s diplomacy (Armlur.am 2017).

Like the current authorities, the bloc stated that without taking into account the wishes of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, the resolution of the conflict is impossible. Former Foreign Minister of Armenia and one of the formal leaders of the bloc, Vartan Oskanyan stated that it is possible to achieve international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh or its accession to Armenia (Vardan Oskanyan Prefers the Reunification of Armenia and Artsakh 2017).

In general, at the time of its creation, the bloc already had left an impression of something artificial, as the political views of the “companions” gathered in one force differed significantly from each other before. After the April 2017 parliamentary elections, the bloc de fact disintegrated.

⁵ The *éminence grise* of the bloc was the former Commander of Self-Defense Forces of Nagorno-Karabakh and Minister of Defense Samvel Babayan.

Out of the three forces that hastily formed the bloc, the only full-fledged party with a certain electorate, albeit melting from year to year, is the “Heritage” Party. Its position on Nagorno-Karabakh is similar to the position of the bloc as a whole. As for Turkey, the “Heritage” party aims to establish an “open and honest dialogue with Ankara”: “Armenia-Turkey relations presuppose an open, honest dialogue through cultural, economic, and social cooperation. The two nations should gradually amend the archetypes governing over them, adopt universal human and European values, recognize their own history and resolve the Genocide and the issue of its heritage [...]”. So, while the party is for the normalization of relations with Turkey, it proclaims the recognition of the Armenian Genocide as a foundation for partnership. (Heritage.am 2005) (Heritage.am 2012)

“Yelk” bloc (regarding policies towards relations with Turkey)

In the issue of the Armenian-Turkish relations, the bloc stands for their normalization without preconditions. There is one modest line in their program devoted to this issue: “Measures will be undertaken to open the Armenian-Turkish border without preconditions” (Brightarmenia.am 2017).

In one of his interviews, leader of the “*Lusavor Hayastan*” party, MP Edmond Marukyan gives a short explanation, where he calls the identity of the leaders of the two countries the main problem: “We affirm that the thesis existing until today, that is the restoration of the Armenian-Turkish relations without any preconditions, should remain on the agenda, but remain on the active agenda. We think that the absence of any steps in the current Armenian-Turkish relations, or the freezing of these relations (since, after the protocols no steps have been taken) is also connected with the leaders of two countries, in other words, it is a matter of leadership. And if it is changed, then the new political forces can be able to achieve a settlement in this direction.” (Armedia.am 2017).

Overall, the stance of the three parties discussed in this section bears the mark of “compromise” and “mutual concessions” with a reservation. For the HHK, it is a stance that can be acceptable to the international community; yet it does not open place this stance in the spotlight of public debate. Domestically, the HHK uses a harsher discourse discussed below, hence rendering its readiness for compromise ambivalent. While HHK uses the more diplomatic voice especially

for foreign audiences, ORO and Yelk air what HHK cannot “afford” to say diplomatically.

A Tough Stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey

“Yelk” Bloc (regarding policies towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict)

The agenda of the “Yelk” bloc focuses foremost on internal political issues, and foreign policy takes a modest share, perhaps out of caution not to lose its “pro-Western” stance. “Yelk”, the political force identifying itself as the only opposition force in the Parliament, uses the Nagorno-Karabakh issue extensively to criticize the authorities.

In their opinion, the restoration of the military balance should become the first step for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Additionally, they set other preconditions for the conversation on concessions to start: “There can be no question of mutual concessions in the issue of Artsakh under the conditions of Azerbaijan’s military rhetoric and its aggressive policy. The condition for the effective discussion of the option of mutual concessions is the clear readiness of Azerbaijan to recognize Artsakh’s right for self-determination” (Brightarmenia.am 2017).

In one of his interviews, one of the leaders of the “Yelk” bloc, Edmond Marukyan stated that there are no political forces ready for compromise at this stage in Azerbaijan. In his opinion, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict directly depends on the economic, military, and political development of Armenia. (Armedia.am 2017) He also deemed the Madrid Principles obsolete⁶ (Girgoryan 2016).

⁶ Several analysts have also disqualified the Madrid Principles as obsolete and not corresponding to the realities of today. See, for example, (Arzumanyan 2015)

Another leader of the bloc, Nikol Pashinyan, believes that HAK supports the ruling HHK's program, and talking about compromise, these parties mean unilateral concessions (Aysor.am 2017).

Republican Party of Armenia (HHK, Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)

Along with statements about the readiness for negotiations with Azerbaijan, the ruling HHK, using state resources and institutions of power, is actively promoting "patriotism". Some evaluate these policy as the promotion of nationalism, others qualify it as militarism.

In its pre-election program, the HHK states, "Our goal is that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is finally determined by the people of Artsakh⁷. We shall never forego this principle". Along with this, the program pledges "to continue working on the involvement of the Republic of Artsakh as a fullfledged party in peace negotiations". (The Electoral Program of the Republican Party of Armenia 2017).

The ruling HHK obviously cannot openly disqualify the negotiations or refuse to engage in them on the level of the vertex of power – the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yet other leaders such as Spokesperson of the party and Vice-President of the Parliament Eduard Sharmazanov make cautious statements that there is no progress in resolving the conflict, putting the blame entirely on Azerbaijan for that (Martirosyan 2017).

In their turn, the leaders of foreign policy tie the deadlock in the negotiations on substantive matters to the war rhetoric of Azerbaijan putting de-escalation before discussions on content. Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Nalbandyan calls for the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to take measures against Azerbaijan for the threat of use of force (Nalbandyan. The International Community

⁷ In February 2017, a referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh changed the constitution of the unrecognized republic that declared that both "Republic of Artsakh" and "Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh" can be used. This discursive device has since accelerated the rate at which "Artsakh" – the Armenian name of the region – has been used in political discourse as a marker of rigid positioning that, among other aims, fulfills that of erasing any traces of understanding Nagorno-Karabakh as NKAO and adjacent territories and frames it as one unit.

Should Take Measures Against Azerbaijan 2017). Returning from the May 2016 talks in Vienna, President Sargsyan said his main task was to minimize the danger of a new escalation, and only then move toward a step-by-step resolution of the conflict (International Crisis Group 2017).

Another thesis, actively replicated both by the HHK and in Nagorno-Karabakh is that Azerbaijan is no different from the “Islamic state”, and it is a terrorist state. Sharmazanov cited the mutilations of the bodies of civilians by Azerbaijani soldiers in the village of Talish as well as the dismembering of the corpses of soldiers to support his thesis. (Armtimes.com 2017)

Since Azerbaijan views bringing back Stepanakert to the negotiations as a legitimization of the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, Baku sharply opposes this. Yet, along with the willingness to negotiate, the HHK in its turn declares the need to return Nagorno-Karabakh to the negotiations: “The participation of Karabakh in the document forming the principles is mandatory,” said President Sargsyan in his interview in July 2017 (Karabakh's Participation in the Document Forming Around the Principles is Mandatory. Serzh Sargsyan 2017).

In the issue of Turkey, the HHK, as already mentioned above, officially supports the opening of the border without preconditions. However, the inevitability of the recognition of the Genocide by Ankara is constantly broadcasted into the society by party officials.

The opening of the border and the recognition of the Genocide are not directly related. Yet, relations with Turkey cannot be considered without addressing the history that divides the two societies and people. On the level of the official discourse, “opening the border without preconditions” is understood as demanding a non-involvement of Turkey into the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey not posing the withdrawal from any territories as a precondition to the opening of the border.

Official Yerevan reacts sharply whenever Turkey attempts to intervene in the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: “Turkey should keep its hands away from the Karabakh issue. Turkey has nothing to do here and that country must one day – whether they want it or not – recognize the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh as an international subject, since the world is moving by the victorious path of the right of self-determination. And if it is speaking about occupation, it should bring out as soon as possible its troops from occupied

Cyprus, which is, by the way, an EU member state”, said Sharmazanov (Armenian Official: Turkey Should Keep its Hands Away from Karabakh Issue 2017).

In these conditions, the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is receding into the background, and the main criticism of Turkey is connected with the support to Azerbaijan. Ankara’s union with Baku, according to Sharmazanov, turns Turkey into an instigator of instability in the region, and this should have brought about a sharp critique from the international community (Azatutyun.am 2017).

The HHK is rather skeptical of the latest statement of MP and Deputy Chairwoman of the ruling Justice and Development Party Ravza Kavakchi Kan about Ankara’s desire to normalize relations with Yerevan (Mkrtchyan 2017). “I believe that this statement is more about imitation, since Erdoğan’s behavior suggests the opposite. If the Turkish side wants to develop relations with Armenia, it should ratify the Armenian-Turkish protocols, open the border, raise the blockade, abolish article 301, refrain from prosecuting those who speak loudly of the Armenian Genocide,” said Spokesperson of the HHK Sharmazanov (Sputnikarmenia.am 2017).

Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhagan Dashnaktsutyun) Party

Everything is much clearer with the “Dashnaktsutyun” party. Their programs state that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh⁸ “continue to struggle for the liberation from the yoke of Azerbaijan and the international recognition of its right to self-determination” (Arfd.info 1998) (HHD Pre-Election Program 2017).

In a July 2017 interview, the leader of the parliamentary faction for the “Dashnaktsutyun” party Armen Rustamyan said that Azerbaijan is preparing ground for large-scale military operations. According to him, it is necessary not only to show the world the “true face” of Azerbaijan, but also to take retaliatory actions. He is sure that Azerbaijan is not ready for peace talks. (Stepanyan 2017)

The “Dashnaktsutyun” party considers Azerbaijan and Turkey to be one in integrity. According to Rustamyan, the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem created a

⁸ The program uses exclusively “Artsakh” in reference to Nagorno-Karabakh.

hostile environment towards Armenia in the region: “We stand before an unceasing threat. It is precise that we should rely on ourselves. Peace is not to be begged for, but to be conquered, and to conquer means to be ready for war.” (Sukiasyan 2017).

In the “Dashnaktsutyun” pre-election program, it is noted that there has not been any retribution for the Armenian Genocide. The party sees the Genocide as continuing today as well, especially since the Armenians of the Diaspora, being deprived of the opportunity to live in their homeland, are in danger of assimilation. The program of the party also indicates that Turkey destroys and distorts all those historical monuments that testify to the historically Armenian belonging of the regions of these monuments. Finally, the program’s far-reaching plans envision a “Free, Independent, and United Armenia that must encompass Armenian lands that the Treaty of Sevres provides for, as well as the regions of Artsakh, Javakhk, and Nakhijevan”. (Arfd.info 1998)

It is noteworthy that during the signing of the Armenian-Turkish protocols the party left the coalition with the Republican Party of Armenia.

Founding Parliament Movement

The presence of the opposition movement “Founding Parliament” among the Armenian parties is not accidental. The representatives of the “Founding Parliament” movement created the “Sasna Tsrer⁹” group, which seized the premises of the Patrol-Guard Service Regiment of the Police of the Republic of Armenia in Yerevan in July 2016. The leader of the movement, Zhirayr Sefilyan, who is currently in prison (like the other members of “Sasna Tsrer” group), has repeatedly stated that Azerbaijan has adopted the strategy of exhausting Armenia, that the Madrid Principles should be abandoned, and that time has come to “solve the issue once and for all” (Azatutyun.am 2016).

In a 2003 interview, he expressed confidence that Azerbaijan should not be conceded “a single inch of land” and signing the resolution deal on the table would be “a national treason” and “it is well-know what happens to a traitor” (Armtimes.com 2003 (2016)). According to Sefilyan, he understands and accepts the concept of concessions, but the Armenian side made its share of concessions in 1994 when agreeing to sign the truce that Azerbaijan was requesting: If the

⁹ The group took its name from the Armenian epic “Sasna Tsrer” (“The Daredevils of Sassoun”).

war continued for a few more days, Azerbaijan would completely disintegrate, and the Armenian troops would easily reach the depths of Azerbaijan. [...] Concessions beyond this [agreeing to the ceasefire] are unacceptable for us" (Armtimes.com 2003 (2016)).

Sefilyan thinks that, after the April battles in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian side should not have agreed to peace, but moved to offensive actions. (Azatutyun.am 2016)

The "Founding Parliament" movement (and members of the "Sasna Tsrer" group) see the current government of Armenia as the culprit of the country's socio-economic problems, emigration, and many other issues. However, above all they are frustrated by the willingness of the current government to cede land. The representatives of the movement are confident that this cannot be a solution to the problem.

After his arrest, a well-known veteran of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, member of the "Sasna Tsrer" group, Pavlik Manukyan addressed all those who hold power in Armenia expressing a deep skepticism towards the concept of concessions: "Do you really believe that there will be mutual concessions, and not a [unilateral] concession, and that after the surrender of the liberated lands, certain forces will ensure the safety of our compatriots?" (Lragir.am 2016).

Regarding Turkey, the "Founding Parliament" movement's framework document says that Ankara not only does not recognize the Armenian Genocide, but also tries to prevent other countries from recognition. In addition, the framework document says that Turkey is trying to facilitate the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the interests of Azerbaijan keeping Armenia under a blockade. "The formal confirmation of the actual border between Armenia and Turkey will not ensure the security of the Armenian state. Unless Turkey recognizes the Armenian Genocide and carries the responsibility for it, it will remain a threat to the security of Armenia and its people," says the framework document of the organization. At the same time, it calls for the removal of the Russian Military base from Armenia bringing the Russian-Armenian relations to a more "normal and collegial" format as opposed to the current "neocolonial dependency" of Armenia (Himnadir.am 2014 (2016)).

Lack of a Clear Position on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Relations with Turkey

“Tsarukyan” Bloc

The Tsarukyan bloc and its base – the “Prosperous Armenia” (*Bargavach Hayastan*) Party, exist around one person – Gagik Tsarukyan. The party has always been a de facto a satellite of the HHK throughout its existence and does not have a clear foreign policy agenda.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or foreign policy topics are not mentioned in the 15-point priority list of the party’s pre-election program (The Program of the "Tsarukyan" Bloc. Free the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises from Taxes for 3 Years, Remove the Speedometers and the Red Lines 2017).

The bloc’s positions in the Parliament on fundamental issues are the same as those of the HHK demonstrated by the voting history of its MPs (It Happened by Itself. A Funny Episode from the New National Assembly 2017).

“Armenian Renaissance” (Haykakan veratsnund) Party

The “Armenian Renaissance” party does not have a pronounced position on either the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or Turkey-Armenian relations. In the party’s pre-election program, a link to which is no longer available (since the failure in the 2017 elections and to this day, the company’s website has ceased to function), journalists found only one mention of “Artsakh” in the commitment to “Strengthen the Armenia-Diaspora-Artsakh trinity” (Armlur.am 2017).

Conclusion

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be said to be the most sensitive sphere of not only foreign policy but also the social life of Armenia. Practically, the life of

every citizen is in one way or another impacted by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Yet, most political parties, with the exception of HAK, avoid specific vocal programs for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, mainly referring to general principles that are naturally euphonious for the people.

The would-be state of the party system and political culture in the society has led to the fact that the pre-election programs and party platforms were pushed to the background. The situational statements of parties and politicians play the main role for the public perception. Opposition parties, that do not bear foreign policy responsibility for their statements, often come out with a tougher stance.

The authorities, however, being involved in the negotiation process within the OSCE Minsk Group, behave much more cautiously, often using this fact in their defense. At the same time, the HHK tests the society's reaction to the possibility of implementing the Madrid Principles through various means and often through the mouths of others.

On the other hand, against the backdrop of the growth of militant propaganda in Azerbaijan, similar militaristic sentiments are cultivated by the authorities in Armenia. The existence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from time to time allows the ruling party to write off on it the difficult economic situation and the brutal oppression of opposition actions.

As for Turkey, it is, first of all, considered (or proclaimed) as an ally of Azerbaijan, which will take advantage of any case to assist Azerbaijan in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Political parties consider Turkey exactly in this way. Despite the fact that the program of some parties has "the establishment of relations without preconditions", this is more a nominal statement, no one party, except HAK, has made serious aspirations by this moment. In addition, the parties unanimously declare that Turkey, in the end, will have to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Bibliography

Anc.am. 2017. *Election Programs (Նախընտրական ծրագրեր)*. Accessed August 12, 2017. http://www.anc.am/?page_id=1060.

2016. "Are We Handing Over 5 or 7 Regions? Is This the Only Debatable Question of Today? What is the Real Size of the Concession on the

Armenian Side Going to Be?" (5 շրջան ենթ համաձեռնում, թե՛ 7. սա՛ է միակ վիճակահարույց հարցը, որ այսօր քննարկվում է, իրականում ո՞րն է լինելու հայկական կողմի փոխզիջման չափը). December 1. Accessed August 17, 2017. <http://armlur.am/620962/>.

Arfd.info. 1998. *Program of Armenian Revolutionary Federation (1998) (Ծրագիր Հայ Եղևիտիական Դաշնակցության (1998))*. Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://www.arfd.info/hy/?p=3602>.

Armedia.am. 2017. "Yelk" Alliance and Their Foreign Policy Priorities: An Interview with Edmon Marukyan. April 6. Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://armedia.am/eng/news/45819/yelk-alliance-and-their-foreign-policy-priorities-an-interview-with-edmon-marukyan-exclusive.html>.

2017. *Armenia President: We Never Talked About Concessions*. July 17. Accessed August 12, 2017. <https://news.am/eng/news/400658.html>.

Armenia TV. 2017. "R-Evolution, 203rd Edition (Ռ-Էվոլյուցիա, Թողարկում 203)." *YouTube.com*. July 16. Accessed August 12, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ea24VhcCHc>.

2017. *Armenian Official: Turkey Should Keep its Hands Away from Karabakh Issue*. June 20. Accessed August 12, 2017. <https://news.am/eng/news/401387.html>.

Armeniasputnik.am. 2016. "Sargsyan on the Relations with Ankara: Any Wedding Requires the Consent of Two." (*Саргсян об отношениях с Анкарой: любая свадьба требует согласия двоих*). November 17. Accessed August 12, 2017. <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/armenia/20161117/5508739/armeia-president-tyrciya-otnosheniya.html>.

Armlur.am. 2017. "Artur Baghdasaryan's Party Has Bypassed the Most Important Question. 'Dzhoghovurd ['People' Newspaper]." (*Այդոյր Բաղդասարյանի կուսակցությունը շրջանցել է ամենակարևոր հարցը*).

«*Ժողովուրդ*»). March 8. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://armlur.am/663054/>.

— . 2016. *There Are 79 Parties in Armenia. Most of Them Are "Single-Person-Parties"*. "*Zhoghovurd*" [*"People" newspaper*] (Հայաստանում 79 գրանցված կուսակցություն կա. մեծ մասը «մարդ կուսակցություններ են».
«*Ժողովուրդ*»). February 12. Accessed August 17, 2017.
<http://armlur.am/484449/>.

— . 2017. "What is the Pre-Election Program of 'Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan' Bloc Like." (*Ինչպիսին է «Օհանյան-Րաֆֆի-Օսկանյան» դաշինքի նախընտրական ծրագիրը*). March 6. Accessed August 12, 2017.
<http://armlur.am/662018/>.

Armtimes.com. 2017. "Azerbaijan is By Essence a Terroristic State." (*Ադրբեջանը իր էությունը ահաբեկչական պետություն է. Էդուարդ Շարմազանով*). July 6. Accessed August 12, 2017.
<http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/116999>.

— . 2003 (2016). "Without Nakhijevan, There is no Karabakh. This is More or Less Zhirary Sefilyan's View." (*Առանց Նախիջևանի չկա Ղարաբաղ. մոտավորապես այսպիսին է Ժիրարյր Սեֆիլյանի տեսակետը*). Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/93958>.

Arzumanyan, Hrachya. 2015. "An Argument to Revised the Principles Governing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution." Edited by Frederic Labarre and Ernst Felberbauer. *Apprehending Shifts in Status over Time: The Quest for Strategic Patience in the South Caucasus* 97-105. Accessed August 17, 2017.
http://www.academia.edu/24590828/An_Argument_to_Revised_the_Principles_Governing_the_Nagorno-Karabakh_Conflict_Resolution.

Aslanyan, Karlen. 2016. "Ter-Petrosyan. 'There is no solution to the NK question other than the phased one.'" (*Տեր-Պետրոսյան. «ԼՂ հարցի լուծման այլ տարբերակ, քան փուլայինն է, գոյություն չունի»*). December 17.

Accessed August 12, 2017.

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28181684.html>.

Aysor.am. 2017. *Nikol Pashinyan. With the Resolution Offered by Levon Ter-Petrosyan Karabakh Will Never Be Independent* (Նիկոլ Փաշինյան. Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյանի առաջարկած բանաձևով Ղարաբաղը երբեք ինքնորոշված չի լինելու). March 30. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://www.aysor.am/am/news/2017/03/30/Փաշինյան-Տեր-Պետրոսյան/1236271>.

Azatutyun.am. 2016. "Sefilyan. It is Time to Solve the Karabakh Issue Once and For All." (*Սեֆիլյան. Ժամանակը եկել է՝ մեկընդմիջտ Ղարաբաղի խնդիրը լուծելու*). April 14. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/27674712.html>.

—. 2017. "Sharmazanov. Azerbaijan and Turkey are the Main Threats to Regional Security." (*Շարմազանով. Ադրբեջանը և Թուրքիան տարածաշրջանային անվտանգության հիմնական սպառնալիքն են*). June 29. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28585784.html>.

Brightarmenia.am. 2017. *The Program of the YELK Bloc* (ԵԼԲ դաշինքի ծրագիր). March 6. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://brightarmenia.am/am/24/693/elq-dashinqi-tsragir.htm>.

Dashtents, Anush. 2017. "There are Two-Three Disagreements Between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Artsakh Question. Levon Ter-Petrosyan." (*Արցախյան հարցում Հայաստանի ու Ադրբեջանի միջև ընդամենը 2-3 տարածայնություն է մնացել. Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյան*). March 22. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://www.tert.am/am/news/2017/03/22/levon-ter-petrosyan/2316445>.

2017. "Foreign Policy Aimed at Progress." (*Առաջընթացին միտված արտաքին քաղաքականություն*). Accessed August 12, 2017.

<https://www.lovearmenia.am/hy/programs/7>.

- Girgoryan, Mariam. 2016. *A Dew Document and New Principles Should be Conceived for the Karabakh Settlement* (Ղարաբաղյան կարգավորման նոր փաստաթուղթ է պետք մտածել և նոր սկզբունքներ. Էդմոն Մարտիրոսյան). April 21. Accessed August 2017, 2017.
<http://www.1in.am/1896309.html>.
- Heritage.am. 2005. *Program*. Accessed August 17, 2017.
<http://www.heritage.am/en/about/program>.
- . 2012. *Resolution for a New Armenia*. Accessed August 17, 2017.
<http://www.heritage.am/en/about/resolution>.
2017. "HHD Pre-Election Program." (ՀՅԴ նախընտրական ծրագիրը). March 6. Accessed August 17, 2017. <http://www.arfd.info/hy/?p=34346>.
- Himnadir.am. 2014 (2016). *Framework* (Հայեցակարգ). Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://himnadir.am/փաստաթղթեր/հայեցակարգ/>.
- Ilur.am. 2016. "Levon Ter-Petrosyan's Speech at the Convention of the Congress." (Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյանի ելույթը Կոնգրեսի համագումարում). December 17. Accessed August 12, 2017.
<http://www.ilur.am/news/view/56849.html>.
- International Crisis Group. 2017. *Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds*. June 1. Accessed August 17, 2017.
<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/244-nagorno-karabakhs-gathering-war-clouds.pdf>.
2017. "It Happened by Itself. A Funny Episode from the New National Assembly." (Ինքնաբերական ստուգվեց. Չավելչուսալի դրվագ նոր ԱԺ-ից). May 20. Accessed August 17, 2017.
<http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/view/153954>.
2017. "Karabakh's Participation in the Document Forming Around the Principles is Mandatory. Serzh Sargsyan." (Ղարաբաղի մասնակցությունը սկզբունքների շուրջ ձևավորվող փաստաթղթին

պարտադիր է. Սերժ Սարգսյան). July 17. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://www.aysor.am/am/news/2017/07/17/դմասնակցություն/1289515>.

Kentron TV. 2017. "Urvagits ['Contour'] 28.03.2017 Levon Ter-Petrosyan (Ուրվագիծ 28.03.2017 Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյան)." *YouTube.com*. March 28. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iI6c0DHIJGs&t=14s>.

Lragir.am. 2016. "Pavlik Manukyan to the Authorities. Do you Believe that There will be Compromise?" (*Պավլիկ Մանուկյանը իշխանավորներին. Մի՞թե դուք հավատում եք, որ փոխզիջում է լինելու*). August 8. Accessed August 12, 2017.

<http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/rss/137406>.

2016. *Madrid Principles – Full Text*. April 11. Accessed August 16, 2017.

<http://www.aniarc.am/2016/04/11/madrid-principles-full-text/>.

Martirosyan, Tigranuhi. 2017. "The Culprit is Hidden in Azerbaijan's Destructive Logic, Philosophy and Politics. Eduard Sharmazanov." (*Շան գրուխը Ադրբեջանի սալակառուցողական տրամաբանության, փիլիսոփայության ու քաղաքականության մեջ է. Էդուարդ Շարմազանով*). June 8. Accessed August 17, 2017.

<http://www.tert.am/am/news/2017/06/08/Sharmazanov/2396661>.

Mkrtchyan, Marianna. 2017. *Justice and Development: Ankara Wants to Establish Normal Relations with Armenia*. July 13. Accessed August 17, 2017.

http://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=26589&lang=3.

2017. "Nalbandyan. The International Community Should Take Measures Aganst Azerbaijan." (*Նալբանդյան. Միջազգային հանրությունը պետք է քայլեր կատարի Ադրբեջանի նկատմամբ*). June 13. Accessed August 17, 2017. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28546062.html>.

- Stepanyan, Ruzanna. 2017. "Azerbaijan Creates Ground for Large-Scale Military Action. Rustamyan (Ադրբեջանը հիմքեր է ստեղծում լայնամասշտաբ ռազմական գործողությունների համար. Ռուստամյան)." *Azatutyun.am*. July 6. Accessed August 12, 2017. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28599482.html>.
- Sukiasyan, Luiza. 2017. "'Some say – let us give Karabakh and live normally, without acknowledging 'Nation-Army' issue underlies not here'." *Aravot.am*. April 21. Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://en.aravot.am/2017/04/21/193525/>.
- Ter-Petrosyan, Levon. 2017. *Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Preliminary Reaction (Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյան. Նախնական արձագանք)*. April 3. Accessed August 17, 2017. <http://www.ilur.am/news/view/59135.html>.
2017. "The Electoral Program of the Republican Party of Armenia." *Lovearmenia.am*. Accessed August 12, 2017. https://www.lovearmenia.am/file_manager/HHK%20Program.pdf.
2017. "The Program of the "Tsarukyan" Bloc. Free the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises from Taxes for 3 Years, Remove the Speedometers and the Red Lines." («Ծառուկյան» դաշինքի ծրագիրը. ՓՄՁ-ն 3 տարով ազատել հարկերից, արագաչափերը և կարմիր գծերը վերացնել). February 17. Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/view/148147>.
2017. "Vardan Oskanyan Prefers the Reunification of Armenia and Artsakh." (Վարդան Օսկանյանը նախընտրում է Հայաստանի ու Արցախի վերամիավորումը). February 17. Accessed August 12, 2017. <http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/view/148141>.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

NKAO – Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast

Author

David Galstyan is a Political Journalist at the agency Sputnik Armenia in Yerevan, Armenia. David holds an MA degree in Politics and International Relations from the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University in Yerevan. His journalistic work mainly concerns international relations, geopolitics, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.