

Q2: SITUATION IN ARMENIA

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, Research Fellow and Director of IFRI's Russia/Eurasia Centre

If I can continue with you, Mr. Kostanyan, the situation in South Caucasus has changed dramatically in September. Nagorno-Karabakh came under the control of Azerbaijan as a result of a military operation, and the recognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic declared itself dissolved by the end of the year.

You said that 100,000 Armenians were pushed to leave their homeland in dramatic conditions and move to Armenia. Some people from the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh were arrested. Russian peacekeepers were deployed in Karabakh and the Armenia/Azerbaijan border remained helpless as international community. What is the situation today in Nagorno-Karabakh? What is the future scenario? What are the prospects for a settlement? Is a peace agreement possible? Because Nikol Pashinyan said many times that he hoped to have a peace settlement before the end of the year, but unfortunately it was not possible in Granada because their counterpart did not come to this meeting.

There is another scenario of a further escalation, further aggression, this time of the sovereign territory of Armenia, especially around the so-called Zangezur corridor that passes by the Syunik province.

Which, for you, is the most probably future scenario?

Vahan Kostanyan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia

Thank you for the question. Armenia was, and remains, interested in establishing good neighborly relations with our neighbors, not only with Azerbaijan, but also with Turkey, with both we do not have diplomatic relations, we have closed borders. For a landlocked country like Armenia, it is very difficult economically as well in the situation we currently have.

Moreover, taking into account the fact that the global security architecture and, in particular, European security architecture, has deteriorated, we understand the very necessity to normalize relations with our neighbors. We are not going to move anywhere from this region and we are going to have the same neighbors.

The political will of the government of the Armenian Prime Minister remains to normalize relations with Azerbaijan, and we do believe in the principles which were indicated in the Granada Statement, which are the following:

- the full respect to sovereignty and territorial integrity of both states, meaning Armenia and Azerbaijan;



- the clear understanding of a border line that we have, taking into account the Almaty Declaration, which was signed back in 1991 and according to which the administrative borders of former Soviet Republic have become interstate borders;
- to organize the opening of all communications in our region, based on the respect of sovereignty and jurisdiction of the states which we are passing through, on the principles of equality and reciprocity.

In this regard, to somehow shape this idea on opening communications, the Prime Minister, just a few days ago, presented a vision that we have, which is called 'The Crossroads for Peace'. The so-called Zangezur corridor that you mentioned, first, I would kindly ask not to use that term because, in its sense, it contains extraterritorial claims towards the Republic of Armenia. If our neighbors are really sincere when they say that they do not have any extraterritorial claims when it comes to opening of communications, when we see that 'The Crossroads for Peace' is a doable and realistic project which can bring benefits to all the states in our region on the one hand; on the other hand, the economic ties, the logistical ties can secure lasting peace in our region.

Coming to the issue of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, as I already mentioned, we had the forced displacement of these people from their very homeland, where they were indigenous people living, and unfortunately, regardless, because Armenia was raising and alarming the international community since December, when the Lachin corridor closed. This is a planned action of ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The international community, and especially the UN Security Council, where four sessions were organized, did not adequately react to the situation. We have the fact of ethnic cleansing and probably everyone, each of us, has our share of guilt when it comes to the fortune of these people, but I do believe that there is still a chance that all the rights of these people, including the right to return, can be addressed.

This means and this requires a bit more effort from the international community because, without a joint effort, in general, the protection of rights and the protection of the UN Charter is not possible.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you very much. Of course, it was a question for Armenia, but maybe you can explain the official position of Kazakhstan on this conflict?

Roman Vassilenko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan

We naturally hope that Armenia and Azerbaijan can advance in their peace negotiations, and that they can conclude the peace agreement in good faith.

I would pick up on something that my colleague just said about the unlocking of communications in the region. This will not only benefit Armenia, this will benefit a much wider region, meaning Central Asia and Europe, because we are now working on the development of the so-called Middle corridor and the stability of South Caucasus. The unlocking of



communication lines in South Caucasus will benefit so many players and it has so many repercussions, way beyond South Caucasus.

That is why we are praying, hoping for the two parties to achieve a peace treaty settlement, of course respecting the territorial integrity of both states.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you very much.

Vahan Kostanyan

I guess that it is very important to touch on the issues of opening of communications and, here, Armenia wants to be understood by our colleagues that we are not an obstacle for connecting Europe and Central Asia, and Far Asia, and connecting north to south, connecting to GCC countries, for example.

We are the ones who are interested in it, but to have lasting, pragmatic and realistic solutions, we should adhere to these four principles: sovereignty, jurisdiction, equality, and reciprocity. To say all of this, we clearly understand that, in order to be competitive on logistic change, we need to do simplifications. We are ready to simplify the processes in order to attract more cargo, more vehicles, more people-flow through the sovereignty territory of Armenia.

I do believe that all our partners, including Central Asian partners, should have their role in convincing or bringing the idea that these are the principles which can make the project really attractive and lasting.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you very much.

Roman Vassilenko

I was not, in any way, implying that Armenia stands in the way. I was saying that the peace agreement, peace treaty and generally the establishment of the atmosphere of peace and cooperation will benefit not just yourselves, but us and Europe.

Vahan Kostanyan

We believe that the opening of communications should be an important part of a possible peace treaty with Azerbaijan, on the one hand; on the other hand, we are interested to open the land border with Turkey and to re-establish also railway communication that we had during the Soviet period.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Yes, but all in respect of your sovereignty and your territory integrity, of course.