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Armenia 2015: Foreign Policy Review

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There were four main foreign policy priorities for Armenia for 2015: recognition of the Armenian Genocide, the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a more balanced policy between the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and European Union (EU), and closer cooperation with neighboring countries, such as Iran and Georgia, for some notable examples.

Armenia sought to address each of the above mentioned directions. It attained success in some of them, although failures and missed opportunities were inevitable.

The Armenian Genocide: “The Past in the Future”

In 2015, Armenians around the world took part in the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, in both Armenia and beyond. The commemoration events were significant for several reasons.

First, the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide was a symbolic deadline for Turkey to recognize the genocide. Despite the fact that it is not the case so far, the reciprocal visits of civic activists, representatives of arts and culture and other public figures shows that the ice between the two countries is melting and that “track-two” diplomacy has achieved small, but tangible outcomes.

Second, there was a significant involvement of the international community in not only the commemoration events, but also in the process of recognition. Several states, such as Austria, Brazil and Luxemburg, for example, have recognized the

Armenian Genocide in 2015 (with some 23 states having recognized it since 1965), and more than 400 events were organized in 35 countries around the world, including in Turkey itself.¹ This shows that the centennial commemoration forged a new level of global awareness of the Armenian Genocide, which is important in the sense that the awareness of the past can prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Third, the 100th anniversary does not mean that the issue is now outdated. However, it will take more effort to bring this issue on the current Turkish policy agenda, especially taking into account the current foreign and internal policy priorities of Turkey. The clashes with the Kurds in the Eastern Turkey, the Syrian crisis, the threat of ISIS, the recent terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Ankara have tended to lower the Armenian Genocide issue on Turkey’s list of priorities.

All in all, the past year has demonstrated that the Genocide still serves as an issue to be raised by interested parties against Turkey. More specifically, after the Turkish authorities shot down a Russian military jet in November 2015 and Russia retaliated by imposing sanctions against Turkey, many people in Armenia saw this as a beneficial situation for Armenia. This misperception takes Armenia-Turkey relations one step back, when the Genocide issue is being directly connected to the opening of the border and establishing diplomatic relations with

¹ <<Ցեղասպանության 100-րդ տարելիցին 35 երկրում մշակութային 400 միջոցառում է անցկացվել>>, *Արմենպրես*, 26 դեկտեմբեր 2015: <http://armenpress.am/arm/news/830972/cexaspanutyan-tarelicin-35-erkrum-mshakutayin-400-mijocarum.html>

Turkey. Those issues should be discussed separately, as the common discussion turns into a never ending discussion of which comes first and, therefore, deadlocks the process.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: “No War, No Peace”

The latest meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan took place on 19 December 2015 in Bern, Switzerland. This meeting was yet another in a now routine series of nonproductive meetings since a ceasefire agreement was first signed in 1994. There was no tangible outcome of the meeting. However, these meetings are important in a sense that they keep the peace process alive. The OSCE Minsk group proved once again that the only tangible outcome of their endeavors are the failed meetings of the presidents and it should come up with other means, platforms or formats to have any result in the peace process.

The peace process was not peaceful on the borders of Armenia-Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh-Azerbaijan. In 2015, as a result of ceasefire violations, there were 41 military deaths on the Armenian side. The deaths from the ceasefire violation increased drastically compared to the past few years, and the geography has changed. If in 2012-2013, for example, there were more soldiers killed along the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, during the last two years it has changed and as a result, there were more military personnel killed on the border between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

The numbers and geography of killings on Armenian side as a result of ceasefire violations²

Year	Place		Killings as a result of ceasefire violations	Total number of killings
	Nagorno Karabakh	Armenia		
2011	11	0	11	39
2012	2	10	12	50
2013	1	4	5	31
2014	23	3	26	45
2015	34	7	41	76
Total	71	24	95	241

² <<2015թ. ՀՀ զինված ուժերում և ԼՂ պաշտպանության բանակում մահացության դեպքերի մասին>>, *Հելսինկյան քաղաքացիական ասամբլեայի Վանսաձորի գրասենյակ*, 2016: <http://hcav.am/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Տեղեկանք-2015-ԶՈՒ-Մահվան-դեպքեր-pdf>

The issue of the ceasefire violations was raised by the president of Armenia during the latest meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Moscow on 20 December 2015. More specifically, Armenia condemned the members of the CSTO for not supporting Armenia in defense of Azerbaijani aggression and demanded more support, including military assistance as is stipulated in the founding documents of CSTO.³

However, there was no response from any of the CSTO members on this issue. Moreover, taking into account this issue and also the latest developments in Turkey-Russia relations, Armenia did not get a chance to assume the chairmanship of CSTO for the coming year.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU): “Opportunity or Challenge”

Since January 1, 2015, Armenia has been an official member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). First, the EEU promised Armenia new opportunities for economic growth and prosperity. However, it has not happened so far.

Moreover, the economic growth of the country became highly dependent not only on internal, but also on a series of external factors. The biggest external factor this year was the devaluation of the Russian ruble. As a result, the transfers, or remittances, from Russia decreased by \$470 million from January-October 2015.⁴

Second, as Armenia does not have strong economic ties with any of the EEU countries other than Russia, the EEU made Armenia three times more dependent on trade with Russia. Armenian exports to Russia decreased by 47 percent during the first half of 2015.⁵ The devaluation of the ruble made the Armenian goods more expensive and less competitive in the Russian market.

³ <<Հայաստանի ներկայացուցիչն այդպես էլ չստանձնեց ՀԱԳԿ գլխավոր քարտուղարի պաշտոնը>>, *Ազատություն ռադիոկայան*, 22 դեկտեմբեր 2015: <http://azatutyun.am/content/article/27442764.html>

⁴ <<Կառավարությունն ունի տնտեսության զարգացման իր տեսլականն իրականություն դարձնելու քաղաքական կամք. ՀՀ վարչապետ>>, *Արմենպրես*, 9 դեկտեմբեր 2015: <http://armenpress.am/arm/news/828969/karavarutyunn-uni-tntesutyun-zargacman-ir-teslakann.html>

⁵ Karapetyan, Armen. “Eurasian Union Fails to Deliver for Armenia: Troubled regional environment plus domestic weakness leave trade in the doldrums”. *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*. 24 September 2015. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/eurasian-union-fails-deliver-armenia>

In the past three quarters of 2015, trade with Kazakhstan decreased by 21.2 percent and with Belarus by 17.3 percent. Exports to Belarus decreased by 36.7 percent and to Kazakhstan by 20 percent.⁶

Third, the sanctions against Russia also played a negative role on Armenian economy. The common market and common customs regime make the economies of Armenia and other EEU states interdependent and interconnected. Thus, it mainly affected the imports from EEU countries to Armenia.

EU-Armenia

Armenia's strategic decision of joining the Eurasian Economic Union instead of signing an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) seemed to be a serious deadlock for the future of Armenia-EU relations. However, the partners kept the willingness of continuing cooperation in the areas that were compatible with Armenia's obligations to the EEU. On 7 December 2015, for example, the EU and Armenia officially launched negotiations for a new legally binding and overarching agreement. The latter will replace the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). On January 18, 2016, Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandyan took part in the next round of negotiations with the EU on this new cooperation agreement. The meeting reaffirmed the commitment of both parties to continue working on the new legal framework.

The course of EU-Armenia cooperation was quite fruitful in the spheres of visa facilitation and economics. The EU is still Armenia's main trading partner, accounting for around 30 percent of Armenia's total trade,⁷ although trade decreased by some 25.8 percent during the first nine months of 2015.⁸

As for visa facilitation, the process is on track. Some of the EU member states, such as France,

have unilaterally facilitated the visa process for Armenian citizens. The EU officially declared that it is working in cooperation with Armenia on visa liberalization.

Conclusion

The results of 2015 demonstrate that joining the Eurasian Economic Union actually made Armenia more vulnerable and more dependent on the developments in Russia. However, the decision to be a part of this Union did not completely limit Armenia's options in foreign policy. And the newly suggested cooperation agreement with the EU proves this.

As for the course of Armenia-Turkey, relations are stagnated and Turkey is busy with other issues and the recognition of the Genocide or the "normalization" of relations is not yet on the agenda.

This year the developments in Nagorno Karabakh were also in a negative direction. The killings on the border set the ground for a further escalation of the conflict and brought the parties too far apart.

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⁶ "Armenia Is Pushed out of Eurasian Economic Union". *Lragir.am online newspaper*. 31 October 2015. www.lragir.am/index/eng/0/country/view/34848#sthash.QDj8YSFo.dpuf

⁷ "EU-Armenia Political and Economic Relations". *EU Delegation in Armenia*. http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/eu_armenia/political_relations/index_en.htm

⁸ "Armenia Is Pushed out of Eurasian Economic Union". *Lragir.am online newspaper*. 31 October 2015. www.lragir.am/index/eng/0/country/view/34848#sthash.QDj8YSFo.dpuf