

100 Days: The Foreign Policy Dimension

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Abstract

Despite the fact that Serzh Sargsyan's foreign policy priorities haven't changed much during the second term of his rule, the foreign context and inner processes create a certain intrigue: if Sargsyan's government keeps the traditional line of balancing (sometimes referred to as political complementarity) between Russia and the West, will it be able to get close to the EU and, at the same time, maintain good relations with Putin's Russia, which seems to strengthen the pressure? Perhaps Armenia will (or will be forced to) make a choice that can have a greater influence on the "futures" balance of forces in the region.

The Government's Independent, or Permanent, Foreign Policy Priorities

It is commonly considered that Armenia's foreign policy is expressed in a triad formula: Armenia, Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorny Karabakh) and Diaspora¹. Obviously, the adherents of this point of view think that these three concepts determine not only the subject of Armenia's foreign policy, but also its problems.

This quite simple approach may at first seem precise and correct; however, it doesn't provide a possibility of a deeper analysis. Such division into three zones of responsibility demands a separate analysis of concepts, structures and measures relevant for each zone. But that is wrong; actually the three zones are inseparable and have an active influence over each other, which brings about changes in the whole system. In other words, these or any other responsibilities of the Republic of Armenia foreign policy should not be separated, to the contrary, they should be examined together with all their interrelations and principles.

In this way, we will be able to understand how the Armenia presidential elections, being almost entirely approved by geopolitically different authoritative international organizations (e.g. OSCE and CIS), will affect the whole system of the Armenia foreign policy, which is implemented by different structures, including those of Artsakh and Armenian communities abroad.

Post-Elections Priorities

The February 2013 presidential elections put an end to the very long period of elections. This period activated different foreign and local political forces. The society was tense during the past two years. The 2013 elections marked the end of a certain time-out. Now Armenia will concentrate more on the negotiations concerning Nagorny Karabakh, on relations with Turkey, as well as on its participation in the vaguer programs connected, e.g., with the formation of the Eurasian Community initiated

by Russia. Generally, the country will now deal with the matters that were put aside during the elections, such as Turkey etc., because the public opinion concerning them had been especially sensitive.

In the coming four years no elections are planned. This allows us to expect a serious activation of negotiations on the following matters:

1. Nagorny Karabakh
2. Normalization of relations with Turkey
3. Armenia's participation in different Eurasian structures, such as the Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Council, etc.
4. Measures for strengthening of regional security and stability, which is especially pertinent considering the present processes in the Arab countries, where many Armenians live.
5. Search of opportunities for Armenia's economic strengthening (including negotiations with different international and financial organizations)
6. Bilateral and multilateral relations with Europe.

Serious attention will be paid to such matters as the strengthening and institutionalization of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) activity, intensification of cooperation with NATO, and efforts towards different aspects of European integration.

The International Context

The present tense geopolitical and military-political situation in the region (the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian seas with their attached transportation links) has a great impact on the above-mentioned problems and processes. The processes brought forward by the so-called "Arab spring" have led to a serious destabilization not only in the Middle East but also in the whole region. Almost all the great empires and regional countries have been involved in the events going on in Syria. The following countries have been especially active: the USA, Russia, China, Iran, Great Britain, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and several other countries.

The influence of the continuous tension around Iran's nuclear program, that results in the escalation of the ten-

¹ An example of such a formulation was given by Zhuravlev in his article "Republic of Armenia Foreign Policy and the Problems of Security in Northern Caucasus", published in www.ia-centr.ru

sion on the Israel–Iran–USA level, is also great. It is quite natural that the events in Syria have a logical connection in both the geopolitical and military-political aspects with the possible scenarios of the events development in this area.

Being stuck in the Middle East swamp, Turkey is in a quite complicated situation now, which is one of the reasons for the massive demonstrations against Prime Minister Erdogan's policy. The destabilization of Turkey's internal situation is a serious obstacle for the implementation of different international programs, aimed at the strengthening of security and stability in the region.

The situation in another neighboring country, Georgia, is also far from being stable or relatively favorable. On one hand, there is a reduction of tension with Russia after the failure of Saakashvili's party at the latest elections. On the other hand, the recognition of both Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence on Russia's part is the main obstacle that prevents the normalization of bilateral relations between the two countries. This obstacle now seems insurmountable. Meanwhile, the regulation of Russia–Georgia relations could activate all the transportation opportunities of the region. Separate positive actions, such as the gradual restoration of the diplomatic relations and trade, would also contribute to the reduction of the tension in the region.

Sargsyan's Foreign Policy Program

The 100 days of Sargsyan's first presidential term (2008–2013) were marked by several notable foreign policy initiatives. The bravest step was the initiation of the so-called "football diplomacy", aimed at a breakthrough in the sphere of Armenia–Turkey relations.

Sargsyan was forced to spend the first months of his second presidential term dealing with the domestic problems accumulated and manifested during the elections, the results of which again raised doubts among the Armenian society.

The main principles underlying Sargsyan's foreign policy of the past four years are likely to remain unchanged.

(a) In the sphere of military security, Armenia will maintain its reliance on Russia and the CSTO, the membership of which is considered one of the most important parts of the Republic of Armenia's (RA) national security concept. The cooperation in this sphere is considered mutually beneficial, complete and multidimensional (despite several problems in recent years) due the following factors: the presence of a Russian military base on the territory of RA; border security maintenance together with Russian frontier troops; trainings and staff games carried out together with Russian armed forces or inside of the CSTO; cooperation of secret services; the possibility to obtain military technique on the basis of bilateral agreements or internal rules for the CSTO member countries, etc.

We should take into consideration that the Armenian society's perception of Turkey, one of Armenia's neighbor countries, is closely connected with the memory of the 20th century Armenian genocide. The policy carried out by Turkey towards Armenia is perceived as a continuous threat that the past century's tragic events can repeat. That is why close relations with Russia are supposed to guarantee the safety of the country. Besides, the society considers these relations to be the continuation of age-old traditions. This political line was confirmed at the meetings held during the 100 days (Sargsyan's working visit to Moscow, meetings with the Russian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff S. Ivanov and with the Secretary General of the CSTO N. Bordyuzha). We can affirm that this political line will be followed in the future as well.

(b) One of the core aims of the RA security is the ensuring of border inviolability. This includes measures for maintaining maximal stability throughout the whole Armenia–Azerbaijan border as well as throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh–Azerbaijan border.

Obviously, besides military, intelligence and other components, foreign policy also plays a vital role in this matter. Despite the manifold critical attitudes towards the OSCE Minsk Group, RA official authorities constantly claim that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem can be solved only in a peaceful way through negotiations under the auspices of this structure.

According to the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group (USA, France, Russia), the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be based on the six elements through which the two parts have come to a certain (or relative) agreement: a temporary, then a referendum-based, final status for Nagorno-Karabakh; return of the occupied territories; the existence of a corridor uniting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh; return of refugees; peace maintenance.

However, the announcements made by the two parties show that each party has its own interpretation of these six elements, which gives the negotiations an obviously chaotic character.

In different announcements about the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, made by the presidents of the USA, France and Russia, the following principles have been noted: territorial integrity, the right of nations for self-determination and the lack of a military solution to the problem.

It is interesting to note that from time to time different countries express a wish to become negotiators between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This mostly refers to Iran and Turkey; each of these authoritative regional states has its own interests and reasons.

We should mention the initiative of the present OSCE co-chairman in Ukraine, whose plan of activities in this office includes an initiative of organizing the

meeting of Armenia and Azerbaijan presidents in Kiev. The media and the information placed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs official sites of the three countries indicate that Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs L. Kozhara's planned visits to Azerbaijan and Armenia have been postponed. This means there are serious problems in the negotiations in relation to the initiative by Ukraine.

It should be noted that the Armenia Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Nalbandyan and Azerbaijan Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Mammadyarov made official visits to the USA and met the US Secretary of State J. Kerry². During these visits the problems concerning the negotiations were discussed. Kerry pointed to the necessity of strengthening the trust between the two parties. Some attempts were made in order to come to an agreement concerning the matter. However, the absence of any serious actions proved the negotiations to be useless.

We can also suppose that during these bilateral meetings the parties discussed the possible drafts of the announcement by the USA, France and Russia presidents, adopted at the G8 meeting in Lough Erne.

Anyway, the reliance on the strategic alliance with Russia and the CSTO membership plays a decisive role in determining the possible actions of Armenian diplomacy, including the negotiations over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

(c) At the same time, an active cooperation with NATO in the sphere of military security will be carried on and intensified. Armenia will take an active part in all the programs included in the plan of cooperation with this organization. In our opinion, such a policy pursues the following goals:

1. An attempt to keep the balance in the relations with Russia on one hand, and with the countries of the North Atlantic Bloc, particularly the USA, on the other hand. Evidently, despite the presence of a Russian military base in Armenia and a quite different level of military-political and military-technical cooperation with Russia and the CSTO, Sargsyan's policy, unlike that of Kocharyan, is more oriented to the acceptance of NATO's military-political concept in the matters of interest for Armenia.
2. In such a complicated geopolitical situation for Armenia³, this form of policy is based on the tendency to

2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmCj2hkVZ1w&feature=youtu.be>; <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/06/210256.htm>

3 RA borders with four countries (Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia). There is a cease-fire agreement signed in May 1994 with Azerbaijan, i.e. the countries are in fact at war. Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Turkey and being blockaded by the latter. The Islamic Republic of Iran is under UN sanctions because of its nuclear program. This limits the possibility of cooperation with this country. Georgia has no diplomatic relations with Armenia's strategic ally, Russia. Because of the conflict with Abkhazia, the land transportation routes between Armenia

demonstrate the diverse nature of Armenian initiatives in the sphere of security. Such a policy also tries to reduce the risk of situational developments unfavorable for Armenia if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict enters a "hot" phase. This is determined by the fact that the strategic ally of Azerbaijan, Turkey, is a member of NATO and its main striking force in the East.

3. It is also evident that the participation of Armenian peacemaking forces in different operations under the auspices of NATO, as well as various joint maneuvers are quite useful for the Armenian armed forces. This gives them a chance to examine the tactics and structure of NATO armed forces, and to master the armament and technique.
4. We should also take into account some of Sargsyan's actions oriented towards a certain diversification of the Armenian foreign policy and diplomatic initiatives. The Armenia foreign policy constantly prods the limits of its possible actions. It focuses on the directions where Armenia has the chance of an active participation without disrupting its balanced relations with the whole group of partners. For example, this kind of policy is carried out towards the Armenian refugees from Syria who are given favorable conditions for getting Armenian citizenship.
- (d) The orientation towards European integration, which is traditionally considered the most widely declared priority of RA foreign policy, received a new impulse during Sargsyan's rule. Besides other benefits (economic, value systems, etc.), this, in our opinion, is related to the fact that RA's active behavioral line directed to the fulfillment of obligations vis-à-vis European dimension is a peculiar component of the national security concept. Armenia is now on its way to sign the Association Agreement, therefore its foreign policy aims at making the country the member of a club of several countries towards whom Europe applies a higher standard of security criteria.

At present, the European component of RA foreign policy is of great significance, despite the often imitational character of obligations' fulfillment. This conclusion is based on the fact that Armenia has serious economic problems because of the monopolistic-oligarchic character of its economy, and on the questions this situation arouses. These questions relate to the effectiveness of judicial and executive powers, a high level of corruption, human rights violations, etc. The European component of RA foreign policy will contribute to the changes in the president's internal policy, as the conditions of signing the Association Agreement demand serious changes in both social and economic spheres of the society's life.

and Russia cannot be operated, which complicates the interaction of the two ally countries.

(e) Another important principle of RA foreign policy is the tendency to strengthen the good relations with two neighbor countries, Georgia and Iran. During the 100 days of his second presidential term, Sargsyan was quite active in this respect. He received the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, M. Pandjigidze, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), Ali Akbar Saheli, and the IRI Attorney-General, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i. Almost all the negotiations were based on the questions related to the achievement of greater effectiveness in economic relations and to the problems of communications diversification. Further strengthening of the bilateral relations with both neighbor countries was also discussed. In private talks Georgian experts expressed the viewpoint that Prime Minister B. Ivanishvili's government will try to use Armenia–Russia high level relations for the purpose of regulating Georgia's relations with Russia. However, no serious mention of the matter has been in the media so far.

Foreign Policy Moves

Sargsyan didn't start his new presidential term only with the usual post-elections matters, i.e. formation of the new government, appointment of regional governors, etc. Sargsyan's above mentioned absorption into the country's domestic problems was connected not only with his active involvement in the Mayor of Yerevan elections campaign and process in May 2013, but also with the constantly growing economic problems.

This does not mean that Sargasyan did not pay enough attention to foreign policy. From April 1 to June 14, 2013 he held 32 meetings with representatives of different countries, including:

- EU and EU member countries: 15 meetings
- CIS and CIS member countries (except Russia): four meetings
- Russia: three meetings
- Regional meetings: three (Iran, Georgia)
- Meetings with the representatives of international organizations: four (UN, NATO, OBSEC, IMF)
- others (South America, Arab countries, etc.): three meetings

The range of discussion topics was large, comprising: strengthening of bilateral relations; attraction of investments into Armenia's economy; financing of different social and economic programs; and technical help. The subjects ranged from social-economic and financial problems to

the participation in peacekeeping missions, from the problems of Karabakh conflict regulation to the situation with human rights and changes in the legislature of the country.

However, one of the cancelled meetings was very important, too. As announced by Tigran Balayan, the press secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "RA president Serzh Sargsyan will not participate in the non-official summit of the CSTO leaders in Bishkek because of the First Republic Day celebration on May 28. In this relation several activities with the president's participation have been planned."⁴

Russia's Gazprom increased its tariffs for Armenia by 67%, raising them to USD 270 per 1000 cubic meters. The situation provoked a reaction from society. The increase of gas prices in the country is expected to begin July 2013. The public opinion relates this to the forthcoming signing of the Association Agreement with EU, which will practically exclude Armenia's participation in Russia's Customs Union. Despite all the efforts of the Armenia government, the Prime Minister's negotiations in Moscow and other measures, Gazprom didn't change its decision.

Sargsyan's decision not to take part in the CSTO summit is probably connected with this. Certainly, this move does not indicate the existence of insolvable problems in Armenia's relations with Russia. The president probably wanted to show that there are problems which urgently demand solution.

This is how the first 100 days of Sargsyan's second presidential term looked from the point of the foreign policy. The processes that had started during the previous years were continued. However, there were also some new subjects, namely, the problems connected with Armenia's choice between the EU and EAU. Russia thinks this choice has no alternative. Sargsyan thinks these two ways can be combined. For this very purpose, the Armenian government signed a memorandum of understanding between Armenia and the Eurasian Economic Council on April 11. At the same time, the government seriously prepares for association with the EU. This intrigue develops against the background of a quite complicated social-economic situation in the country.

The main question, that still remains unanswerable, is: will the president's activity towards different foreign policy matters result in the necessary changes and systemic reforms in the domestic life of the country?

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4 <http://ria.ru/world/20130528/939951792.html#ixzz2Uu10Y2ER>