



The 2012 Armenian Parliamentary Elections: Implications for Armenian Foreign Policy

Marilisa Lorusso

Abstract

Armenian parliamentary elections were held on 6 May 2012. Five parties and a coalition won seats in Parliament. Three of them are opposition parties, two in the previous legislature were allies of the presidency party, the Republican Party. The latter comfortably won the elections. With 45% votes through the proportional system and 29 seats through the majoritarian one, the Republican Party has the absolute majority of seats, 69 out of 131. So the two main issues in Armenian foreign policy - the protracted conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and relations with Turkey - will be addressed in continuity with the policy expressed so far by President Serzh Sargsyan, unless the regional counterparts change their strategies. With the party he chairs being confirmed as the leading political force of the country, Sargsyan will run for his second term in the upcoming presidential elections.

Keywords: *Armenia, Parliamentary elections, Armenian foreign policy, Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian-Turkish protocols, Ceasefire violations*

The 2012 Armenian Parliamentary Elections: Implications for Armenian Foreign Policy

by Marilisa Lorusso*

1. The 2012 Armenian parliamentary elections: an overview

May 6th was election day in Armenia. Five years have passed since the 2007 parliamentary elections, which paved the way for then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan to run for the Presidency in 2008. This year the same process could be repeated, whereby after the election, incumbent President Sargsyan may announce officially his candidature for the 2013 presidential elections.

In 2007 a coalition between the Republican Party (RP), Prosperous Armenia (PA), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) won an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly.¹ The only other parties which entered parliament were the Country of Law (8 seats) and the Heritage Party (7 seats). After the elections, Country of Law joined the government, leaving Heritage as the only opposition party. The winning coalition, however, did not survive the entire legislature: the ARF withdrew from the government on 27 April 2009, to protest against the Turkish-Armenian Protocols. ARF Chairman Hrant Markarian blamed President Sargsyan for surrendering to Ankara's claims, thus undermining Armenia's national interests.²

The electoral framework has not changed since the last elections. Armenia has a unicameral parliament with 131 seats. The electoral system is mixed; 90 members are elected through a proportional party-list system, while the remaining 41 members are elected through a majority system in single-member constituencies. On 22 March the Armenian Central Electoral Commission closed the procedures for nominations.³ All the parties sitting in parliament ran for elections, although not all of them presented candidacies for all constituencies. Politically, however, a novelty was the emergence of a new political actor which challenged other contesters in all constituencies: the Armenian National Congress (ANC) led by former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan.⁴ For the 90 party-list seats, nine political forces presented their candidates: 8 parties plus

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¹ Hereinafter the parliament.

² David L. Phillips, *Diplomatic History: the Turkey-Armenia Protocols*, New York, Columbia University Institute for the Study of Human Rights, March 2012, p. 60, http://hrcolumbia.org/peacebuilding/diplomatic_history.pdf.

³ "Политическая 'девятка' вступает в борьбу за армянский парламент", in *Новости-Армения*, 22 March 2012, <http://www.newsarmenia.ru/politics/20120322/42631152.html>.

⁴ "За 41 место в парламенте Армении по одномандатным округам будут бороться человек 180", in *Новости-Армения*, 22 March 2012, <http://www.newsarmenia.ru/politics/20120322/42631146.html>.

one alliance - the ANC.⁵ The ANC is a new political force, although its leadership is far from new to the political life of the country. Levon Ter-Petrosyan was the first Armenian President who served for almost two mandates until 1998, when he resigned under pressure from his Cabinet, which refused to accept a peace plan for Nagorno-Karabakh put forward by the international mediation forum: the Minsk Group. Then President Ter-Petrosyan advocated the plan as a viable compromise, but failed to convince his Prime Minister, Robert Kocharyan, a Karabakhi, who won early presidential elections and replaced him as a President, between 1998 and 2008.

Levon Ter-Petrosyan made a come-back in 2008, as a candidate in the presidential elections, which he lost against another Karabakhi, the current incumbent President Serzh Sargsyan. At today's political juncture, Ter-Petrosyan managed to rally around his leadership some opposition parties, including the People Party of Armenia led by Stepan Demirchyan, the Armenian Republic Party led by Aram Sargsyan, the Social Democrat Party, and other minor parties.

Apart from the ANC, all Armenian parties made the strategic choice to run alone, albeit the Heritage Party joined its list with the Free Democrats for the proportional system, aiming to retain and possibly to increase its current seats, so as to play a more punchy role. Raffi Hovannisyan, leader of the party, was aware that it was highly unlikely that the parliamentary balance would drastically change with the elections, but he hoped - and most analysts shared this opinion - that the next legislature would see more room for opposition.⁶ The 2012-2017 Parliament is indeed more inclusive. Six parties received more than 5% vote, thus passing the electoral threshold: the Heritage Party, the Armenian National Congress, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Prosperous Armenia, Country of Law and, with an absolute majority of votes, the presidential party: the Republican Party. While the first three represent the opposition, relations between two former allies, Prosperous Armenia and the Republican Party, are quite tense.⁷ This leaves Country of Law as the only clear supporter of the Republican Party.

The election campaign started on 8 April. Well before its start, it was already clear that the most prominent national political forces would be confirmed. During the campaign some topics were hotly debated, especially at the domestic level: the role of powerful oligarchs in parliament and the legitimacy of the elections. At the regional level the big

⁵ Full list, from the official webpage of the Armenian Central Election Commission: Prosperous Armenia, Heritage Party, Armenian National Congress, Armenian Revolution Federation, Democratic Party of Armenia, Communist Party of Armenia, Republican Party of Armenia, United Armenians Party, Country of Law. Proportional lists available at <http://www.elections.am/kus2012> (this website is bilingual, Armenian and English).

⁶ Author's interview with Raffi Hovannisyan, Yerevan, July 2011. Hovannisyan was the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian Republic. He descends from the American Armenian diaspora and moved to Armenia after independence. Although he is linked to the US, he has gained some respect among the Russian Armenian diaspora as well. In 2011 Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigorij Karazin held a meeting with him in Yerevan. See Author's blog, *Wisdom or mourning*, 27 March 2011, <http://marilialorusso.blogspot.it/2011/03/week-21-27-march-wisdom-or-mourning.html>.

⁷ For the new political dynamics within the former ruling coalition, see the video of the interview to Civilitas Foundation Director Salpi Ghazarian and Regional Studies Center Director Richard Giragosian, *Election analysis - old and new alliances*, 6 May 2012, <http://civilnet.am/2012/05/06/election-analysis-old-and-new-alliances>.

questions were, are and will be, relations with Turkey and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The aim of this paper is that of mapping the Armenian political debate in light of the 2012 elections, highlighting the possible trajectories that post-election Armenia might take in regard to the latter two issues.

1.1. *Corruption, conflict of interests and legitimacy: a ruling élite in search of stability*

At the annual congress of the Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, President Sargsyan stressed that business must be consistently separated from the state,⁸ touching on a sore point in the domestic political economy of the country: the “dollarization” of Armenian politics. In fact, a clique of oligarchs retains considerable economic and political power and common wisdom is that parliament has been turned into an arena where their interests are negotiated. According to the Corruption Perception Index 2011 of Transparency International, Armenia is ranked 129th out of 182 considered states, where New Zealand is at the top and Somalia at the bottom.⁹ The corruption of public officials was again addressed by the President in January 2012, when he established a Committee of Ethics¹⁰ headed by the Deputy Minister of Justice¹¹ to monitor possible conflict of interests, and whether deputies are engaged in entrepreneurial activities, which is forbidden by the Constitution.¹²

In the three months leading to the elections, political parties echoed the same transparency rhetoric, in the bid to recapture public support. Since January 2012 all the main political forces have tried to exclude or replace oligarchs.¹³

A lack of public confidence indeed risks undermining the electoral process itself. In 2008 the electoral results were refuted by the opposition forces. Sargsyan’s presidency started with the burden of the repression of a long and peaceful demonstration, which

⁸ “Chronicle from 25 October to 14 November 2011”, in *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 31 (21 November 2011), p. 19, <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/cad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=134593>.

⁹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2011*, http://archive.transparency.org/publications/publications/other/corruption_perceptions_index_2011.

¹⁰ Report presented by Armenia at the OECD 11th Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan Meeting held in Paris on 22-24 February 2012: *Second Round of Monitoring: Armenia Progress Report*, 20 February 2012, p. 2, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/52/49910824.pdf>.

¹¹ “Armenian Deputy Justice Minister to head State Committee on Ethics”, in *News.am*, 10 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/88592.html>.

¹² Article 65, Armenian Constitution: “A Deputy may not be engaged in entrepreneurial activities, hold an office in state and local self-government bodies or in commercial organizations, as well as engage in any other paid occupation, except for scientific, educational and creative work. A Deputy shall discharge his/her responsibilities on a permanent basis.” Non official translation available on the website of Armenian National Assembly, <http://www.parliament.am/parliament.php?id=constitution&lang=eng#4>.

¹³ Among the numerous articles about this issue see “Armenian parliamentary opposition pessimistic on Armenian new parliament to have fewer oligarchs”, in *News.am*, 5 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/86846.html>; “Electoral districts are restructured so that ‘goodfellas’ may enter parliament - Armenian opposition member”, in *News.am*, 11 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/88679.html>; “One Armenian MP - A businessman to be replaced with another”, in *News.am*, 29 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/91063.html>; “Decrease in number of oligarchs and criminal elements expected in future parliament - Armine Ohanyan”, in *Panorama.am*, 9 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/09/a-ohanyan>; “A total of 113 businessmen run for parliament”, in *Panorama.am*, 29 March 2012, <http://panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/29/azg>.

resulted in 10 casualties and 131 injured. For sure, the ruling élite is determined not to repeat such a scenario. Still, the last administrative elections in February 2012 were allegedly marred and possible frauds were denounced. The most common allegations are vote buying or the use of administrative resources or positions to exert pressure on voters.¹⁴ International monitors were invited to assess whether elections were free and fair, as Republican Party members claimed¹⁵ and as is mandatory to ensure domestic and international legitimacy.

The 1982 polling stations of the 41 Armenian constituencies opened at 8:00 am and closed at 8:00 pm. Out of 2.484.003 registered voters 62% cast their ballot for the eight parties and one coalition by the party list system, and for the 138 candidates by majority system.

The vote was monitored by 31,451 observers from local organizations and 647 representatives from international organizations. Among the latter, were the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) mission, which monitored the whole campaign with a long term team plus a short term one.¹⁶ Allegations of electoral fraud were frequent. Still, the unified preliminary statement by the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE

¹⁴ From January onwards, an increase of allegations and a heated of the debate surrounding the issue of legitimacy was recorded: "Armenia's parliamentary elections to be serious trial for state's democratization process - MP", in *News.am*, 6 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/86314.html>; "Free and fair elections the only task of Prosperous Armenia Party", in *News.am*, 9 January 2012, <http://news.am/eng/news/88411.html>. See also - all in in *Panorama.am* - "US Congressmen signify Parliament elections to be in accord with international standards", 20 February 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/02/20/congressmen>; "R. Giragosian: May elections test for Armenia", 12 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/12/kirakosyan>; "Ashot Bleyan: Voters themselves allow fraud", 12 March 2012, <http://panorama.am/en/popular/2012/03/12/bleyan>; "Manvel Badeyan: RPA to use political methods only, sure of winning parliamentary elections", 13 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/13/m-badeyan>; "Collection of voters' personal data in Petak trade center", 16 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/press/2012/03/16/yerkir1>; "Artak Sargsyan collecting personal data from citizens", 21 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/21/hraparak3>; "Letter to Vova Gasparyan", 22 March 2012, <http://panorama.am/en/press/2012/03/22/hraparak>; "PM: Political authorities have sufficient willpower to hold free elections", 23 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/23/prime-minister>; "Bad advice to voters", 24 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/short-news/2012/03/24/hayacq/short>; "100 Javakhk Armenians registered in one apartment", 31 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/31/chi>; "Nine persons registered in apartment of Sadoyan's father-in-law", 3 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/04/03/hzh1>; "Passports collected and pawned at petrol stations", 4 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/04/04/hraparak>; "Electoral bribes in Abovyan reach AMD 25000", 4 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/04/04/hzh1>; "Extra persons registered in lonely old women's apartments", 4 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/press/2012/04/04/yerkir>; "Unequal race in favor of Prosperous Armenia Party", 4 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/04/04/aravot>; "Laminated flooring board given as electoral bribe", 6 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/press/2012/04/06/hayacq>; "Rates hit USD 100 per vote", 6 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/press/2012/04/06/jamanak>; "Achemyan: Vote-buying rumors unfounded", 7 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/comments/2012/04/07/woman>; "Samvel Alexanyan invites everyone to Parvana", 7 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/society/2012/04/07/joghovurd>; "Republicanization continues", 10 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/04/10/yerkir>.

¹⁵ "Gagik Melikyan: Parliament speaker has already come up with initiative to control electoral process", in *Panorama.am*, 5 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/comments/2012/04/05/g-meliqyan>.

¹⁶ For all info and reports, OSCE/ODIHR web page dedicated to the 6 May 2012 parliamentary elections: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/88247>.

Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament - declared the elections as quite legitimate: "The 6 May 2012 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia were characterized by a competitive, vibrant and largely peaceful campaign. At the same time, an unequal playing field due to violations of campaign provisions and cases of pressure on voters, as well as deficiencies in the complaints and appeals process were causes for concern. The elections were held under an improved legal framework and administered in an overall professional and transparent manner prior to election day. Election day was generally calm and peaceful, but marked by organizational problems and undue interference in the process, mostly by party representatives. The freedoms of assembly, expression, and movement were generally respected and candidates were, for the most part, able to campaign freely. The general lack of confidence among political parties and the general public in the integrity of the electoral process is an issue of great concern, despite all stakeholders underscoring their commitment to hold elections in accordance with international standards."¹⁷

This assessment is taken in high consideration, both domestically and internationally.

2. Regional issues

The abovementioned cases of Levon Ter-Petrosyan in 1998 and of the ruling coalition crisis in 2009 show how two international issues affect the political debate to the point that they can mine the stability of the presidency or of the government: the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh and relations with Turkey. The unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and the international recognition of the massacres perpetrated in 1915 by Ottoman Turks as genocide are provisions of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic.¹⁸ Political parties cannot dispute these national pillars without being viewed as traitors, nor can they ignore the high expectations of public opinion on these matters.

2.1. Nagorno-Karabakh

According to a 2007 survey,¹⁹ the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) issue is perceived by public opinion among the three main problems Armenia faces.²⁰ It is also ranked third, after war and unemployment, as the greatest concern.²¹ The majority of interviewees thinks that the Azerbaijani breakaway region - which declared independence after the bloody conflict of 1989-1994 - should become part of Armenia. Some think it should be

¹⁷ International Election Observation, *Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions*, Yerevan, 7 May 2012, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/90332>.

¹⁸ The Supreme Council of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, *Declaration of Independence*, Yerevan, 23 August 1990, <http://www.gov.am/en/independence>. The Declaration of Independence is recalled in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Armenian Republic, thus being part of the legal framework of the country.

¹⁹ See the *Survey of Armenian Public Opinion, October 27-November 3, 2007* conducted by International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys/Gallup and Armenian Sociological Association, <http://www.iri.org/explore-our-resources/public-opinion-research/public-opinion-polls#three>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

independent and internationally recognized. Nobody accepts that NK should ever be returned to Azerbaijan.²²

Recently the cease-fire agreement signed in 1994 is proving to be ineffective. The Azerbaijani Defence Ministry claims an alarming number of violations on a daily basis, up to over 100 per month, with over 1000 exchanges of fire. The proximity of the two armies makes an involuntary escalation of violence hardly avoidable. Incidents are recorded not only in the disputed territories, but also along the Armenian-Azerbaijani state-borders, highlighting the risk of another possible front in case of war. Should the conflict erupt and should it be not a secessionist war but an inter-state one, it could have grave implications, such as a reaction of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).²³

In this context, the 2012-2017 parliament may face the difficult task of ratifying a new agreement or approving specific measures for conflict prevention, such as mechanisms to investigate ceasefire violations.²⁴ Depending on who will occupy relevant positions, in the Ministry of Defence, the Council of National Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, different policies might be pursued regarding confidence building measures, people-to-people contacts, NGO cooperation. Different pressure groups might have their say. These key posts were previously held by men close to the President who supported his policies and the efforts of both the OSCE Minsk Group and the Russian Presidency. And the word of the President is the ultimate one. Indeed, Armenia is a presidential republic and according to article 55 of Armenian Constitution he or she shall “execute the general guidance of the foreign policy, conclude international agreements, forward the international agreements to the National Assembly [...]”.

The government, however, is formed after parliamentary elections, not after presidential ones like in most presidential republics, and it has to submit its programme to parliamentary approval.²⁵ Moreover, article 81 foresees that “Upon the recommendation of the President of Republic the National Assembly shall: [...] 2) ratify, suspend or denounce the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia. The National Assembly shall ratify those international treaties: a) which are of political or military nature or stipulate changes of the state borders, b) which relate to human rights, freedoms and obligations [...]”. So, the orientation of the parties sitting in Parliament would make negotiations harder or smoother in case of any policy change regarding NK. In what follows I shall review the positions of the main parties on the NK issue.

Beginning with pro-government parties, the *Country of Law* party (5,58% of the votes and 1 seat by majoritarian system) and the Republican Party (44,78% and 29 seats) claim they oppose a military solution to the NK conflict and support the Madrid

²² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²³ Armenia is a CSTO member, together with Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In September 2012 Armenia will host CSTO drills. The country was visited in March by Colonel General Nikolaj Bordjuzha, the CSTO Secretary General.

²⁴ OSCE, *Statement of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs*, Baku, 6 March 2012, <http://www.osce.org/mg/88686>.

²⁵ Article 89.1 Constitution of the Armenian Republic.

Principles²⁶ (i.e. the non use of force; territorial integrity; the right to self determination). They uphold the independence of NK with a common land border with Armenia. The international community should guarantee NK's security. The leader of the Republican Party, current president Sargsyan is himself a Karabakhi. He was Defence Army Commander of NK before becoming Defence Minister and then Prime Minister of Armenia. The party's founder, Ashot Navasardyan, in 1989 established the Liberation Army of Armenia and many party members were fighters at that time. The RP has direct links with veteran organizations, as well as with the *de facto* government of NK. The party supports the mediation efforts of Russia,²⁷ and recognizes the precious contribution of the Minsk Group and the positive role played by Iran. By contrast, it is cautious about the activities of NGOs, fearing that unreliable NGOs could harm the peace process.²⁸

Prosperous Armenia (30,70% and 8 seats) was a member of the previous government coalition. It upholds the independence of NK and professes to be actively engaged with Russian think tanks on conflict settlement non-governmental activities. Some of its members joined the Volunteer Defence Force and liaise with the Veterans Union. It advocates a positive involvement of the European Union in the peace process, while upholding the centrality of the Minsk Group and of Russia.²⁹

Moving to the opposition, the *Armenian Revolutionary Federation* (5,82% and 1 seat) includes members who fought actively against the Ottoman Empire, during the First World War and in the NK war. It has a strong anti-Turk (meaning both Turkish and Azerbaijani) approach. It questions the legitimacy of the Armenian-Turkish borders and the validity of the Soviet-time treaties. Being a party with a federative structure, it has an affiliate in NK. It stands for NK independence and it considers the Madrid principle as harmful to Armenian interests and security. It does not believe that civil society can play a role in the peace process because it deems Azerbaijani NGOs to be under government control.³⁰

The *Heritage Party* (5,89%) also presses the Armenian government to recognize NK.³¹ Its party members were not directly involved in hostilities and the party does not have direct links with veterans' organizations. But it supports the interests of refugees, focusing in particular on the issue of compensation for those Armenians who fled

²⁶ The main documents brokered by the OSCE/CSCE Minsk Group are the 1994 Bishkek Protocol, which put an end to open war and the 2007 Madrid Principles, which envisage a step-by-step settlement for NK. Beyond these two main documents, the Minsk Group Co-Chairs have issued some declarations and recommendations.

²⁷ Since 2008, the Russian Presidency has pressed more intensely Armenians and Azerbaijanis to reach an agreement. In 2008, close to Moscow, the Nagorno-Karabakh Declaration was signed, followed by the Astrakhan Declaration (2010). In 2011 the sides, hosted again by President Medvedev, met in Kazan but failed to agree on basic principles. The same occurred in Sochi in January 2012.

²⁸ LINKS, *Karabakh: the big debate. The views of Armenian and Azerbaijani Political Parties on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and conflict resolution process*, May 2011, http://www.commonspace.eu/user_upload/karabakh/KARABAKH_BD_consolidated_5.May.pdf, p. 74-76. The only interview from party members is available on <http://links-dar.org/2011/12/02/karabakh-the-big-debate>.

²⁹ LINKS, *Karabakh: the big debate*, cit., p. 70-72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21-23.

³¹ So far NK has not been recognized by any country, including Armenia.

Azerbaijan. The Heritage party recognizes the Minsk group as the proper mediator but does not accept the Madrid Principles. It suggests that Russia is not an uninterested mediator and that the EU and the US would probably be more in favour of a change in the *status quo*. It actively backs civil society and calls openly for a direct communication bridge between Azerbaijani and Armenian parliamentarians.³²

The *Armenian National Congress* (7,22%) was created after the mass demonstration that followed the 2008 presidential elections. Its leader took part in the war. Many coalition members are also members of “*Yerkrapah*” (partisans), an influential veterans’ pressure group. The ANC, however, does not have any relationship with government or non-government structures in NK. Ter-Petrosyan regrets the presence of a “Karabakhi clan” in Yerevan’s government who, by the way, ousted him in the past. The ANC views the Minsk Group as useful. It has a branch in the US.³³ Some observers consider the ANC as a well-wisher of a colour revolution in Armenia.³⁴

2.2. Relations with Turkey

“While committed to the normalization of relations with Turkey, the Party considers unacceptable for Armenia to recognize in any way - in deed or document - the notorious Turkish-Bolshevik agreements of 1921, to assume any responsibilities emerging from them, or to accept such preconditions as were present in the Armenian-Turkish Protocols. The international reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide and Great National Dispossession of 1915, an undertaking of measures toward the guarantee of the right of repatriation to ancestral lands, and an enduring partnership with the Diaspora must be the foundations of this commitment.”

In such terms the Heritage party in its “Resolution for a New Armenia” defines its policy towards Turkey.³⁵ It questions inter-state borders, highlighting how amongst the lawmakers rather radical positions on this issue can be found beyond the ARF, the party with the longest anti-Turkish tradition. In March 2012 the Heritage party urged Parliament to withdraw its signature from the Armenian-Turkish protocols. Parliament Speaker Samvel Nikoyan’s reply deserves to be quoted in full: “It’s almost a traditional question having one answer: it’s the president’s constitutional right which he has exercised. If the protocols are on [the] NA [Parliament’s] agenda, it doesn’t necessarily mean we believe in them. It’s a kind of commitment towards [the] international community and we think it is right to leave them [on] the agenda”,³⁶ words that do not need an explanation to be understood. The Protocols seem doomed.

³² LINKS, *Karabakh: the big debate*, cit., p. 44-46.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

³⁴ After the so-called Arab Spring, Levon Ter-Petrosyan evoked a “Mubarakization” of Sargsyan. See “Armenian Opposition Leader Insists On Early Polls, Warns Of ‘Egypt-Like’ Unrest”, in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 19 February 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia_opposition_warns_of_unrest/2314680.html. The coalition mobilized for long periods its supporters through a series of rallies, from 2008 on, but no breakthrough has occurred. See Liz Fuller, “Is Levon Ter-Petrosian A Spent Force?”, in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 14 April 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/is_levon_ter_petrosian_a_spent_force/3557480.html.

³⁵ Heritage Party, *Resolution for a New Armenia*, adopted on 2 March 2012, <http://www.heritage.am/en/about/resolution>.

³⁶ “Traditional question - when will Armenia withdraw signature from Armenian-Turkish protocols?”, in *Panorama.am*, 19 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/03/19/parliament>.

The two protocols were signed at the University of Zurich on 10 October 2009, at 08.00 in the evening, after a hectic day of last minute negotiations.³⁷ They were signed by the Armenian and Turkish Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Eduard Nalbadyan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, in the presence of the OSCE Minsk Group representatives, Hillary Clinton, Sergej Lavrov, Bernard Kouchner, plus EU High Representative Javier Solana, and Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs Micheline Calmy-Rey. Although the protocols are about Armenian-Turkish bilateral relations, the border between the two countries was closed because of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. At the same time, the most thorny issue in the negotiation of the protocols was not NK, but how to commonly investigate Ottoman history in the years 1915-1923. So, the two protocols address both the NK-related Armenia-Azerbaijan-Turkish problems, as well as bilateral Armenian-Turkish issues, mixing two levels of confrontation. *The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey* confirms the respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of frontiers,³⁸ while the *Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia* stipulates the prospective opening of the common border between the two countries and the launching of “a dialogue on the historical dimension with the aim to restore mutual confidence, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives”.³⁹ As well known, the two Protocols have not been ratified yet. They gained momentum, which the sides failed to seize, and eventually fell in disgrace in both countries.

But while no political party in Armenia right now claims to be a promoter of the ratifications, all casually fail to underline that just the *land* border is still closed, not *all* borders. There are, indeed, direct flights between Istanbul and Yerevan, something which is unthinkable between Yerevan and Baku. Many Armenians visit and move to Turkey and some Turks go to Yerevan, for business, tourism, study, and curiosity. So, although relations are formally equally locked with both Turkey and Azerbaijan, there are differences. Two examples highlight these differences: in March 2012, while Turkish-Armenian filmmakers met in Istanbul,⁴⁰ the Azerbaijani Film Festival in the Armenian city of Gyumri had to be cancelled due to public uproar⁴¹ and Armenia is not sending its artists to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku in May 2012.⁴²

There is a thin sector of society that may demand a new step in the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, but so far its voice has faded away amidst harsh public discourse.⁴³

³⁷ David L. Phillips, *Diplomatic History*, cit., p. 55-56.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ “Five Armenian film makers leave for Istanbul”, in *Panorama.am*, 10 March 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/culture/2012/04/10/golden-apricot>.

⁴¹ “Azerbaijani Film Festival Canceled In Armenia After Protests”, in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 13 April 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan_armenia_film_festival_canceled_protests/24547207.html.

⁴² “Armenian singers refusing to take part in Eurovision 2012 in Baku”, in *Panorama.am*, 23 February 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/02/23/eurovision-armenian-singers>. Official list of participants available on the website of the event: <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/baku-2012>.

⁴³ A special thanks to Ph.D. candidate Turgut Tuncel for the interesting exchange on this topic.

Conclusions

With the Republican Party having a clear lead position in Parliament, the distribution of ministries will not be as challenging as the opposition may have hoped before elections. In view of the confirmation of the Republican Party's primacy, Sargsyan's candidature to a second presidential term is certain. The mandate for the presidential party may be clear, but how the new parliament and government will handle the NK and Turkish issue is still not. The President's position on these two issues has to be taken into consideration by future ministers.

During the election campaign, President Sargsyan made more radical statements against Azerbaijan. Due to the high number of violations of the ceasefire, the President ordered to fortify military duty on the Armenian-Azerbaijani contact line and to undertake continuous measures to increase military capability.⁴⁴ In one of his election campaign speeches he also claimed that Armenia has "a strong army and we will resort to relevant steps."⁴⁵

Now the election campaign is over. Like after the 2008 Presidential elections,⁴⁶ this could - hopefully will - be accompanied by a decreasing number of incidents on the line of contact. And being no longer in need of winning voters' consent, the President and the government may deem more reasonable to try to defuse tension.

In the next seven months, until presidential elections are held in February 2013, and in absence of an Azerbaijani military action, it is predictable that no major steps will be taken to change the status quo.

The same assumption can be made concerning relations with Turkey. The Armenian government and presidency will most probably wait and see how EU-Turkish relations evolve in 2013, which is going to be a decisive year for the future of Turkish candidacy to the European Union. Pragmatically, the Armenian ruling class will adapt its stance according to the evolution of EU-Turkey ties.

One thing can be safely concluded however: in both cases, a strong mandate is needed. So Sargsyan will exert his influence to shape a government which has to be as popular as possible and at the same time fully consistent with the strategies of the presidency. Over the next few weeks, with the appointment of the new government, the first knots will be untied. One knot was untied before the elections, and not by Armenian political forces, but by Russia. Arthur Baghdasaryan, Country of Law leader, and known for his pro-European attitudes was to quit his present position as Secretary of the National Security Council, to be promoted as State Prosecutor. But most

⁴⁴ "Serzh Sargsyan orders fortified military duty on Armenian-Azerbaijani contact line", in *Panorama.am*, 4 May 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2012/05/04/serzh-sargsyan>.

⁴⁵ Naira Bulghadarian, "Armenian President Promises Action Over Border Killings", in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 27 April 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/armenian_president_vows_retribution_over_border_killings/24562682.html.

⁴⁶ In 2008 violence on the line of contact spiralled during the repression of the opposition's protest in Opera Square, Yerevan, to return to average standards in the following weeks. Nowadays, Armenian officials blame Azerbaijan for trying to take advantage of temporary internal instability connected to the electoral process (*Ibid.*).

probably he will not, although his party won six seats. On 14 April 2012, Russian President Dmitrij Medvedev issued a decree to bestow the Order of Honor to Armenia's Prosecutor General Aghvan Hovsepyan. Russian Prosecutor General Yuriy Chajka came in person to Armenia to give the award to his counterpart.⁴⁷ The message is clear: Arthur Baghdasaryan and his perceived pro-European attitudes are not to be encouraged by the new government.

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⁴⁷ "Moscow opposes replacement of Armenia's Prosecutor General, paper says", in *Panorama.am*, 25 April 2012, <http://www.panorama.am/en/society/2012/04/25/joghovurd3>.



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