

# Lessons (To Be) Drawn in 2025: On Pragmatics and Values in the South Caucasus

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This article tries to contextualize Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's 'Aragats/Ararat' turnabout with the current situation in the South Caucasus region, with the aim of gauging the relationship between value-guided politics and realpolitik. As of March 2025, this situation is marked by the prospect of an imminent peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The discussion in this article illustrates some of the dangers that menace both N. Pashinyan's turnabout and the peace process, choosing as an example the cooperation between some Swiss MPs and former Armenian separatists. It argues that deeply rooted romantic ideas about the Armenian past and identity might resurge in combination with ideas about Christian "fraternity", which are politically instrumentalized, and other political interests in Europe. In discussing these issues, the contribution tries to make a general point about the relationship between values and principles on the one side, and realpolitik on the other, at the beginning of the 21st century. The text concludes that, while values seem to have failed as a guiding force in South Caucasus politics, the lingering presence of values as a force that shapes the political landscape of societies remains an important political determinant.

**Keywords:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh, Switzerland, realpolitik, value systems



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### ***Introduction***

Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War in 2020 and the anti-terror operations in September 2023 marked the breakdown of the three-decade-long process of sterile negotiations. This can be interpreted as the collapse of a system of values and principles. Simultaneously, the new situation created by Azerbaijan's victory has inspired an initiative to change Armenia's internal value system away from traditional references to romantic ideas toward a more pragmatic approach based on international law. Such a turnabout was recently proposed by Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan.

The contemporaneity of the collapse of one system of values and the renewed references to another, as mentioned in the above paragraph, with the dramatic turnabout in the political situation, changed by

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military tools in 2020 and 2023, leads to the question of how the relationship between political pragmatism (*realpolitik*) and so-called value-based politics should be assessed in the South Caucasus region in general.

In order to address this theoretical issue, the present paper starts with a short synopsis of the current political situation, which is followed by a summary of the outcomes of Azerbaijan's military victories in 2020 and 2023. After these two parts come another two sections that discuss examples of value-based political approaches, one being Nikol Pashinyan's abovementioned turnabout and the other a political initiative taken by revisionist networks centred in German-speaking Switzerland. In the conclusion section, the pragmatic and principle-based approaches are balanced against each other to answer the above question.

### ***Current Political Situation***

After having lingered in a "frozen" state for about three decades, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan around the latter's Karabakh region seems on the point of becoming history at last. In a statement published on March 13, 2025, Azerbaijan's foreign ministry expressed its "satisfaction" about the negotiations on a draft peace agreement

with Armenia having been concluded.<sup>1</sup> Similar announcements were made from the Armenian side. The optimism that accompanied these declarations gives reason to hope that a peace treaty will actually be signed by the two sides soon. However, some significant obstacles seem to remain. The most important of them appears to be the claims to Azerbaijani territory staked out by Armenia in its constitution.

That both sides would eventually be able to reach this level of diplomatic consensus had seemed hugely improbable before November 9, 2020. On this day, the Trilateral Statement was signed that ended the 44-Day War between the two countries. This war can be described as the first phase of Azerbaijan's successful military campaign to liberate its territory from foreign occupation. The liberation was finally completed by Azerbaijan's one-day anti-terror operation (September 19 to 20, 2023), when Azerbaijan was finally able to restore full control over its own territory.

Although Azerbaijan's right to control its sovereign territory had been enshrined in international law (and endorsed by, among others, UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 of 1993), all the lengthy negotiations that had been entered into since the start of the occupation in the early 1990s had proven utterly futile. In particular, this concerns the so-called Minsk group of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). On numerous occasions, these organisations "expressed their concern" and "regretted" their inability to redress the violation of international law constituted by Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory, as well as the non-implementation of the above UNSC Resolutions, while at the same time pouring enormous amounts of self-praise on themselves for their 'tireless' efforts.<sup>2</sup> Their basic effort was to avoid making any real effort. All their diplomatic activities that had been undertaken between the May 1994 armistice and the November 2020 Trilateral Statement brought almost

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1 Mfa.gov.az, *No:105/25, Statement on conclusion of the negotiations on the text of the draft Agreement on Peace and the Establishment of Interstate Relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia*, March 13, 2025, Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no10525> (Accessed: March 16, 2025).

2 PACE, *Resolution 1416. The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference*, January 25, 2005, Available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17289&lang=en> (Accessed: February 11, 2016).

no tangible result. Worse, they contributed to perpetuating the illegal *status quo* created by Armenia's actions.

It was only when Azerbaijan decided to take things into its own hands with utmost seriousness, i.e., using military force, that change finally appeared.

### *Consequences of Azerbaijan's Victory*

From an Azerbaijani point of view, the outcome of the two operations in 2020 and 2023, with their over three thousand casualties, was bitter, but ultimately successful. It proved that the country could only rely on its own strength and allies to assert its rights, but not on the selectively applied principles of international law or the recklessness of the international community and demonstrated the inability of international diplomacy alone. Azerbaijan came out on top in the conflict in every respect, legally as well as militarily.

In contrast, from the viewpoint of the OSCE, PACE, and other international actors, who had repeated the mantra that Armenia's occupation of the Azerbaijani territories was illegal and regrettable but then failed to come up with the willingness or means to act accordingly, the outcome of the 2020 and 2023 operations amounted to a declaration of bankruptcy for their diplomacy. Incidentally, this failure parallels similar failures of toothless and appeasing 'talkathon diplomacy' elsewhere, with the most notorious example coming to mind being Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The lesson that the Armenian occupiers had taken home from the Minsk Group and other discussion rounds before September 2020 was structurally the same as that Vladimir Putin took home from the 2016 Minsk Agreement – namely, you can attack other sovereign countries and get away with the aggression, as the 'international community' will only talk, but not act. The lesson to be drawn for the international community from all this is a reminder that diplomacy without the willingness to act may prove fatally inconsequential.

As for Armenia, its political and military position has been desperate since it lost the 44-Day War against Azerbaijan in 2020. Armenia's situation was particularly aggravated because its traditional patron, Russia, refused to come to Armenia's aid militarily either in 2020 or

2023. Ever since, Armenia has been no match for the economic and military strength that Azerbaijan and its most important ally Türkiye are able to muster. As a matter of fact, in spite of some recent success in reforming its juridical, administrative, and economic system, Armenia is far from being autarkic and is still largely dependent on Russia to this day. For instance, Russia controls Armenia's energy infrastructure, provides it with natural gas, and receives more than 50 per cent of Armenia's exports, to quote only a few significant indicators.<sup>3</sup>

The realisation of its precarious situation in the aftermath of the 2020 war and Russia's refusal to come to its aid militarily has led Armenia to look for political as well as military alternatives. For instance, it improved its military ties with the U.S. and France as an alternative to Russia. As early as September 2023, a small contingent of U.S. soldiers carried out a joint exercise with Armenian forces in Armenia.<sup>4</sup> Ever since, efforts to secure Armenia a future outside Moscow's political tutelage have intensified. However, the outcome of these germs of international political reorientation was already quite uncertain before the second Trump administration began to shake up the political world in January 2025. Armenia's huge economic dependence on and tight ties with Russia limit Pashinyan's leeway in trying to get away from its mighty former protecting power. In addition, some Western countries seem to be hesitating to improve their relations with Armenia due to its assumed role in helping to circumvent Western sanctions imposed on Russia in the aftermath of its invasion of Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> These factors

3 Musmar, F., "The Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict will reshape the European gas corridor", *Republic Underground*, 21 November 2020, Available at: <https://republic-underground.com/the-azerbaijan-armenia-conflict-will-reshape-the-european-gas-corridor/#content> (Accessed: 22 November, 2020); Della Faille, P., "Armenien: Verbesserung des mittel- bis langfristigen politischen Risikos durch niedrigere Konfliktgefahr mit Aserbaidschan und Rückgang des Finanzrisikos" [Armenia: Improvement of the middle-term and long-term political risk as a result of lower danger of conflict with Azerbaijan and reduction of the financial risk], *Credendo.com*, January 23, 2025, Available at: <https://credendo.com/de/knowledge-hub/armenien-verbesserung-des-mittel-bis-langfristigen-politischen-risikos-durch> (Accessed: January 23, 2025).

4 Dw.com/german, *Berg-Karabach Konflikt: Wendet sich Armenien von Russland ab?* [Conflict around Mountainous Karabakh: Will Armenia turn its back on Russia?], Undated [ca. September 14 or 15, 2023], Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MPFhGTtoyA> (Accessed September 15, 2023), 7'20'' ff.

5 On the sanctions question, see Della Faille 2025, op. cit.; Kersting, C., "Armenien und der Streit um Bergkarabach" [Armenia and the dispute on Mountainous Karabakh], *Swr.de*, January 30, 2025, Available at: <https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/wissen/armenien-und-der-streit-um-bergkarabach-das-wissen-2025-01-31-102.html> (Accessed: January 31, 2025), 17'49'' ff.

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compel Armenia’s political leadership to tread very carefully in their project to replace the country’s traditional, almost exclusive reliance on Russia with a more differentiated network of international relations. At this article’s time of writing, Armenia’s future seems as uncertain as that of the rest of the world due to the erratic politics of the Trump administration.

### ***Pashinyan’s Ideological Turnabout***

However, amidst the return to *realpolitik* that seems to have dominated the international political agenda – both globally and in the South Caucasus – since approximately 2020, Nikol Pashinyan has also put forward a remarkable initiative that goes beyond the day-to-day political business and aims at fundamental change in the ideological setup of his country and its society. As the starting point of his initiative, Pashinyan used the ‘Ararat’ and ‘Aragats’ mountains. In order to understand the ambition of his project, it is worthwhile to read one of his relevant statements verbatim. On one occasion, Pashinyan framed his re-evaluation strategy in the following terms:

*When I am talking about Mount Aragats and Mount Ararat, I am talking about the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia and about a territory that is not on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. Mount Aragats is in the Republic of Armenia, but Mount Ararat is not. This is a fact.<sup>6</sup>*

Mt Aragats (4090 m above sea level) is the highest natural elevation within the territory of the Republic of Armenia, whereas Mt Ararat (5137 m) is situated in Türkiye. However, the symbolic value of Mt.

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<sup>6</sup> This is English translation of the German version (*Wenn ich über die Berge Aragats und Ararat spreche, dann spreche ich über das Hoheitsgebiet der Republik Armenien und über ein Gebiet, das nicht im Hoheitsgebiet der Republik Armenien liegt. Der Berg Aragats befindet sich in der Republik Armenien, der Berg Ararat hingegen nicht. Das ist eine Tatsache*) of Pashinyan’s original Armenian words (which are audible in the background) in Stallmach, H., “Ringend um eine politische Zukunft zwischen Ost und West” [Wrestling for a political future between East and West], *Deutschlandfunk.de*, January 7, 2025, Available at: <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/armenien-realpolitik-und-die-last-der-geschichte-dlf-9d770ee6-100.html> (Accessed: January 8, 2025), ca. 13’-08’’-13’39’’. The same or similar utterings by Pashinyan are given elsewhere, too. See, for instance, Kersting, *op. cit.*, 22’13’’ff.

Ararat for constructs of Armenian identity and history has always been incomparably higher than that of Mt. Aragats. For instance, the first Armenian modern state in the region, which was established in 1918, is also referred to as the ‘Ararat Republic’ by Armenians and others.<sup>7</sup> Also, the romantic image of Mt. Ararat as a symbol of Armenian identity was widely used by Armenian chauvinists in the heated buildup to the First Karabakh War (ca. 1991–1994). For instance, the famous Armenian writer and poet Silva Kaputikyan (1919-2006), who played a significant role in instigating Armenian national mass fervour in that era, called one of her romantic and nationalist poems *Ararat*, paradoxically using the traditional Muslim, i.e., originally non-Armenian, form of the *ghazal* for it.<sup>8</sup>

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From its inception, Armenian nationalism has strongly drawn on romantic concepts (as a matter of fact, nationalism may also be described as a romantic idea). This is due in part to the fact that, chronologically, the development of the Armenian nationalist movement partly coincided with the epoch of romanticism. As a consequence, romantic ideas often mingled with political claims. This can be seen, for example, in the life of the romantic author Hakop Melik’-Hakopyan, aka Raffi (1835–1888).

What Pashinyan argues for in the above quote involving Mt Aragats and Mt Ararat essentially amounts to the abandonment of the romantic principle that, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, also influenced the revolutionary or terrorist (*Dashnak*) strand of the Armenian national movement, and its replacement by a completely non-romantic abstract notion of a modern society and state. According to this notion, the essence of the Republic of Armenia is to be defined not by references to

7 See, for instance, Soljan, S., “Entstehungsgeschichte und aktuelle Probleme des Karabach-Konflikts“ [Genesis and actual problems of the Karabakh conflict], In: Halbach, Uwe/ Kappeler, Andreas (eds.): *Krisenherd Kaukasus* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995), pp. 129-160; here p. 136. The relevant quotation is in German (“Ararat-Republik”).

8 See the Armenian and English texts in D. Sakayan, *Eastern Armenian For the English-speaking World* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University Press, 2007), p. 436. The ghazal structure is evident from the rhyme structure (aa ba ca...) in connection with the use of a *redif*, which is the word *Ararat* itself. The fact that Kaputikyan uses only incomplete rhyming (i.e., - as, - as, - as, - az, - aź, - az, - as) does not seem to amount to a violation of the poetic structure of the ghazal.

a glorious past or romantic ideas (as represented by Mt Ararat), but by international law (represented by the respect of state borders, which is symbolised by Pashinyan's reference to Mt Aragats).

While Pashinyan's turn away from the 'romantic' fantasies that traditionally dominated Armenian collective self-perception to a more sober and rational approach based on practical modern administrative categories might appear as an impressive ideological, or even philosophical, achievement, the grandeur of this re-evaluation is toned down by the circumstances in which it is articulated. If Armenia continued to be dominated by the same kind of stereotypes that came to predominance in the late 1980s, and which resumed much older, in part pre-Soviet, leanings, this would inevitably lead to new problems with its neighbour Azerbaijan. However, without the backing of Russia or any other outside power, and without its own resources that could balance Azerbaijan's strength, Armenia simply cannot afford another confrontation under any circumstances. Also, any serious attempt at a rapprochement with Western countries would require, as a precondition, the abandonment of romantic myths about Armenia's past and future as a central element of actual Armenian politics.

### ***Challenges to Renewal: An Example from German-speaking Europe***

It is obvious that the replacement of romantic ideas about the Armenian past by *realpolitik* and the respect of international law as basic principles could, in the long run, obliterate much of what Armenians have been dreaming about for the past 150 to 200 years. It is therefore likely that multiple Armenian voices, both from Armenia itself and especially from the diaspora, large parts of which are known to have a penchant for jingoistic ideas, will oppose the new approach introduced into the discussion by Pashinyan. It is also possible that such opposition could play a role in Pashinyan's political project to formalise the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan by means of the recently concluded Peace Agreement, especially if foreign powers like Russia start using it as leverage.

To give a sense of the power such opposition might draw on, one may look at the activities of some actors who advocate romantic visions of Armenia's path in the German-speaking world.

Possibly the most prominent attempt at thwarting the Azerbaijan–Armenia rapprochement and the future Peace Agreement in the post-2023 era came from Switzerland. On October 15, 2024, the Commission on Foreign Affairs (*Aussenpolitische Kommission*, abbreviated as *APK-N*) tabled a motion (i.e., a written proposal) in Switzerland’s Parliament, the *Nationalrat*. The purpose of the motion was to induce the *Nationalrat* to organise “an international peace forum on the conflict around Mountainous Karabakh” with the aim of “facilitating an open dialogue between Azerbaijan and people’s representatives of the Mountainous Karabakh Armenians” within the space of one year.<sup>9</sup> If adopted by the Swiss Parliament, the “international peace forum” resulting from this motion would establish itself independently of the ongoing bilateral talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia and, *en passant*, accord to representatives of the separatists a kind of official status. In a rare case of diplomatic indiscretion that sheds light on the machinations behind the initiative, a Swiss tabloid, using inflammatory rhetoric, made public that an Azerbaijani Member of Parliament, Dr. Rizvan Nabiyeu, had protested against this motion by writing a letter to *APK-N* members.<sup>10</sup> This was followed by a period of toing and froing in the Swiss parliament, the final outcome of which is, as of now, uncertain.<sup>11</sup>

9 *Ein internationales Friedensforum zum Bergkarabach-Konflikt zu organisieren, einen offenen Dialog zwischen Aserbaidschan und Volksvertretern der Bergkarabach-Armenier zu ermöglichen*. The quote is from [Parlament.ch](https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259), *Motion 24.4259. Friedensforum für Bergkarabach: Rückkehr der Armenier ermöglichen* [“Motion 24.4259. Peace forum for Mountainous Karabakh: Facilitating the return of the Armenians”], October 15, 2024, Available at: <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259> (Accessed: October 17, 2024).

10 Schwarzenbach, K., “Unterste Schublade»: Aserbaidschan-Brief an Schweizer Parlamentarier sorgt für Ärger” [“At the very bottom” – Azerbaijan letter to Swiss MPs stirs up discontent”], *20min.ch*, November 9, 2024, Available at: <https://www.20min.ch/story/unterste-schublade-aserbaidschan-brief-an-schweizer-parlamentarier-sorgt-fuer-aerger-103217571> (Accessed: 9. November 2024).

11 For details, cf. [Parlament.ch](https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259), *Stellungnahme des Bundesrates vom 27. 11. 2024* [Statement of the Swiss government, dated November 27, 2024], November 27, 2024, Available at: <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259> (Accessed: December 2, 2024); [Parlament.ch](https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259), *Antrag des Bundesrates vom 27. 11. 2024* [Proposal of the Swiss government, dated November 27 2024], November 27, 2024, Available at: <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259> (Accessed: December 2, 2024); [Parlament.ch](https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20244259), *Conseil national. Session d’hiver 2024. Dixième séance. 17. 12. 2024. 07h45. 24.4259. Texte provisoire. Motion APK-N. Friedensforum für Bergkarabach. Rückkehr der Armenier ermöglichen. Motion CPE-N. Forum sur la paix dans le Haut-Karabakh. Permettre le retour de la population arménienne* [National Council. Winter session 2024. December 17, 2024. 07 h 45. Provisional text. Motion of the Commission on Foreign

As for the background to the motion, a combination of at least two factors seems to have contributed to its creation. One of these is a journey by Swiss MP Erich Vontobel (from the *Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union, EDU*, party) – who most ardently supported the motion – to Armenia in 2024. There, Vontobel apparently met with some Armenians from the Karabakh region who had left Azerbaijan after the elimination of the separatist insurgency in 2023.<sup>12</sup>

The second factor is that a number of the actors who were involved in putting forward the motion are known to follow an explicitly Christian and conservative agenda. For instance, Vontobel's EDU describes itself as “adhering to the timeless biblical and Christian values and to our liberal, democratic, constitutional and independent Switzerland”,<sup>13</sup> which seems to suggest that ‘biblical’ and ‘Christian’ values are tantamount to ‘democratic’ and ‘constitutional’ principles under all circumstances. Vontobel himself expressed his conviction that to become active in support of the motion was “a commandment of solidarity with a Christian fraternal people” (*Gebot der Solidarität mit einem christlichen Brudervolk*);<sup>14</sup> here, besides the overtly religious motivation, a reference to the romantic idea of ‘fraternal peoples’ is visible. In a press article, the Swiss deputy Roland Rino Büchel (from the conservative *Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP*) stated that among those who had given support to the motion were “some strongly believing Christians from other parties” (by “other parties”, he referred to the Swiss Greens and Social Democrats).<sup>15</sup> In particular, he singled out Viola Amherd, who was *Bundespräsidentin*

Affairs of the National Council. Peace forum for Mountainous Karabakh. Facilitating the return of the Armenians], December 17, 2024, Available at: <https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=66643> (Accessed: December 19, 2024).

12 Vontobel, E., *Bergkarabach-Konflikt am WEF: Die Probleme sollen dort gelöst werden, wo sie verursacht werden* [The Mountainous Karabakh conflict at the World Economic Forum: Let the problems be solved where they are caused], *Weltwoche.ch*, January 22, 2025, Available at: <https://weltwoche.ch/daily/bergkarabach-konflikt-am-wef-die-probleme-sollen-dort-geloest-werden-wo-sie-verursacht-werden/> (Accessed January 23, 2025).

13 *Bekannt sich zu den zeitlosen biblisch-christlichen Werten und zu unserer freiheitlichen, demokratischen, rechtsstaatlichen und unabhängigen Schweiz* (Edu-schweiz.ch, *Positionen: Die EDU Schweiz und ihr Profil* [Positions. Switzerland's EDU and its profile], Undated, Available at: <https://www.edu-schweiz.ch/positionen/> (Accessed: March 18, 2025).

14 Vontobel, *Bergkarabach-Konflikt am WEF, op.cit.*

15 *Einige fest gläubige Christen aus anderen Parteien* (Büchel 2024).

(a leading member of the government) in 2024. According to Büchel, Amherd had written a letter to the Christian lobbyist organisation CSI (Christian Solidarity International) in which she strongly expressed her support for the motion.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to establishing direct contact with Karabakh Armenians and giving predominance to a Christian agenda over a neutral approach, the initiators of the motion obviously acted partially, i.e., in favour of the Karabakh separatists. The wording of the motion immediately betrays this one-sidedness by using the obsolete terms “Mountainous Karabakh” (*Bergkarabach*) and “Armenians of Mountainous Karabakh” (*Bergkarabach-Armenier*) and by crediting the latter with having “people’s representatives” (*Volksvertreter*), which aims at equalising members of a defunct illegal separatist structure with a democratically constituted body.<sup>17</sup> Vontobel’s use of the term “forcibly displaced persons” (*Vertriebene*) in reference to those Armenians who left Karabakh after Azerbaijan’s victory,<sup>18</sup> the application of the term “forced exodus” (in French, *exode forcé*) by Nicolas Walder (Green Party),<sup>19</sup> who was another supporter of the motion, and Vontobel’s false claim that what happened in Karabakh region amounted to a “well-documented example of ethnic cleansing” (“*ein klar dokumentiertes Beispiel für ethnische Säuberungen ethnische Säuberungen*”)<sup>20</sup> point in the same direction.

The Swiss motion proves that there is cooperation between Armenians from Azerbaijan’s former occupied territories and some right-wing individuals and groups with a markedly Christian agenda in the German-speaking part of Europe. The interest of some Armenians who have links to the former separatist entity is to communicate their false narrative without relying on Armenia’s government. Moreover, the interest of at least some of the Swiss actors is obviously to promote themselves as “defenders of the Christian faith or culture”, probably with the intent

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16 Büchel, R.R., “Viola Amherd: Im Namen von Jesus gegen die Neutralität und das Kollegialitätsprinzip?” [Viola Amherd: In the name of Jesus against neutrality and the principle of collegiality?] *Weltwoche.ch*, December 21, 2024, Available at: <https://weltwoche.ch/daily/viola-amherd-im-namen-von-jesus-gegen-die-neutralitaet-und-das-kollegialitaetsprinzip/> (Accessed December 26, 2024).

17 Parlament.ch, *Motion 24.4259. Friedensforum für Bergkarabach*.

18 See footnote 12.

19 Walder in Parlament.ch, *Conseil national. Session d’hiver 2024*.

20 Vontobel in L Parlament.ch, *Conseil national. Session d’hiver 2024*.

to gain voters. Some other Swiss actors, notably MPs from the Green and Social Democrat parties, probably do not have a marked Christian agenda. Their reasons for voting in favour of the motion could include traditional 'left' motives, such as presenting themselves as 'defenders of the rights of minorities', presumedly with the same goal, i.e., to gain voters.

### *Conclusion*

Has politics in the South Caucasus region over the past decade been shaped more by values and principles or by political pragmatism? The material examined in the present article seems to suggest that, while significant new developments have been created by pragmatic action and certain values and principles have been obliterated, the role of principles and values as such continues to be felt.

Although Armenia's current government fortunately seems to be bound and determined to conclude a peace agreement with Azerbaijan, a sudden reversal in the political process is always possible. This is particularly true in the rather confusing global political landscape brought about by the actions of the second Trump administration in its first months in power. In a negative scenario for the South Caucasus, the forces that have been highlighted in the present article – i.e., romantic revisionism on the part of certain Armenians from the Karabakh region who live in Armenia and its political instrumentalization in Europe – could play a role in a resurgence of revisionism and, speaking more generally, chauvinism in the Armenian community (Armenia and the diaspora) as a whole.

In the overwhelming part of German-speaking Europe, emphasizing Azerbaijan's legitimate rights or, in fact, articulating anything positive about Azerbaijan unfortunately, by default, creates odium. This tendency, which is particularly strong in, but not limited to, conservative Christian circles, offers an ideal basis for operations by forces who want to keep Armenia in a state of conflict with Azerbaijan. The present contribution has demonstrated that the cooperation between revisionist Armenian actors and certain strata of the political and societal landscape in Europe is a reality.

As one section of the anti-Azerbaijani mood in Europe is linked to

traditional romantic ideas about Christianity and the past, one way to contribute to diminishing them could be to support the rather secular and pragmatic narrative relating to the everyday business of politics, which Nikol Pashinyan has placed at the centre of his ideological reorientation and linked to the two mountains Aragats and Ararat. There is a real danger that, with a change in Armenia's internal or external political situation, this new orientation might become obsolete and that a resurgence of the dominance of long-established patterns of imagining romantic pasts for the Armenian people may occur. It is therefore necessary to strengthen Mr. Pashinyan's new approach to revising the Armenian self-image.

Apart from discussing some concrete aspects of the political situation in the South Caucasus, mainly concerning the past five years, the present article has also been concerned with the underlying question of the role of values and principles in politics. Up to 2020, there was a set of values and principles that had obviously failed to resolve the then conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a result of Azerbaijan's counteroffensives in 2020 and 2023, these values were obliterated and pushed to the second tier. In a different scenario, specifically in the form of Pashinyan's statements about the two mountains, the possibility of a new value orientation appeared on the horizon. However, this renewal also seems to be dictated by the force of political and military events and not by pure reflection.

On one hand, the stretch of South Caucasus history that has been touched upon here would seem to render one rather pessimistic about the possibility of human beings solving serious political problems according to pre-established, rational, and reflected values or principles. This is because only under the impress of outward necessity and force has change finally appeared on the stage.

On the other hand, Nikol Pashinyan's Aragats/Ararat intervention directly proves the relevance of values and principles to the centre of political activity. The romanticism embodied in Pashinyan's reference to Mt Ararat is the production of cultural processes that have stretched over centuries, i.e., of *longue durée*. Pashinyan's direct reference to it shows that such long-standing developments can be strikingly relevant to a context dominated by *realpolitik* because of the power they have gained traction in people's minds, through habit or a lack of rational

alternatives. Seen in this way, the rather ghastly conclusion arrived at in the previous paragraph seems to be counterbalanced by a demonstration that values, albeit *ex negativo*, still play a role in 21<sup>st</sup>-century politics.