

# How does the Stagnation of the Potential Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Deal Influence Russia's South Caucasus Policy?

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In the period following the Second Karabakh War, tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan has continued owing to the partial implementation of the 10 November Trilateral Statement, the inefficiency of Russian peacekeepers in maintaining stability in the Karabakh region, and disagreements on the demarcation and delimitation of the Armenia–Azerbaijan international border. This article seeks to identify the extent of the implications of the stagnation of normalization of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations for Russia's foreign policy in the South Caucasus. The paper finds that the failure to sign a potential peace treaty contributes to Russia's legal and military presence in the geopolitical conundrum of the region and extends Russia's leverage over both countries, whereas the delay of the reopening of transport and economic links in the South Caucasus due to security concerns deprives Russia from economic and political advantages. With respect to Armenia, the rise of tension ingrains Russia's security umbrella over the political and military paradigms of the Armenian government and enables the Kremlin to repair its damaged image in Armenian public opinion. With the retrogression of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations and the associated delay in Azerbaijan's restoration of its full authority in the Karabakh region, where Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed, and the stall in the return of internally displaced people, the Kremlin is seeking to induce Azerbaijan to integrate into Russian-led security and economic integration alliances.

**Keywords:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh, Russia, peacekeepers, South Caucasus



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### ***Introduction***

After the end of the Second Karabakh War, several incidents between military units of Armenia and Azerbaijan that have occurred, mainly because of different interpretations of the 10 November Trilateral Statement that was signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, while Armenia withdrew its troops from the districts surrounding the Karabakh region, Russia neither ensured nor did Armenia complete the disarmament and withdrawal of the remaining Armenian forces in the Karabakh region, referring to Paragraph 1 of the statement that instructed the parties to “stop in their current positions”.<sup>2</sup> In response, the Azerbaijani side noted that ‘stop’ did not mean ‘remain’ and should be understood in the context of the first part of the clause implementing “a complete ceasefire and a cessation of all hostilities”. Thereby, Azerbaijan, in accordance with Paragraph 4 of the statement, demanded the full withdrawal of Armenia’s armed forces in parallel with the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces.<sup>3</sup> The harsh consequences of the disagreement were revealed through the reconnaissance and sabotage attacks launched, in November and December 2020, by remnants of Armenia’s armed forces against Azerbaijani military positions. The hostilities resulted in the deaths of 6 Armenian military personnel and 5 Azerbaijani soldiers as well as the incarceration of 62 members of the Armenian sabotage groups.<sup>4</sup>

Another area of concern was the efficacy of the Russian peacekeeping mission in the region. Those peacekeepers being stationed alongside Armenian troops in the Karabakh region, reportedly permitted the transfer of additional Armenian forces to this area through the Lachin

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1 TASS, “Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation, November 10, 2020”, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384> (accessed: 15 August 2021).

2 TASS, “Armenian Foreign Ministry accused the Azerbaijani Armed Forces of undermining regional security” (translation from Russian), 11 August 2021, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12109995> (accessed: 15 August 2021).

3 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, No: 304/21,” Commentary of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the statement of the Armenian Foreign Ministry dated August 11, 2021” (EN/RU), 11 August 2021, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no30421> (accessed: 15 August 2021).

4 United Nations, “Letter dated 28 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, United Nations General Assembly Seventy-fifth Session”, 28 December 2020, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/385/51/PDF/N2038551.pdf?OpenElement> ; Ismayilova, V., “Azerbaijani soldier killed in Armenian sabotage attack”, Azernews, 28 December 2020, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/174418.html> (accessed: 30 August 2021).

Corridor in February 2021. In demanding that Armenia terminate such illegal troop deployments, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) also stressed the violation of the peacekeeping contingent's 'control mechanisms'.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, on 11 August, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence detected the establishment of new Armenian military posts in Mukhtarkend and Shushakend settlements in the Karabakh region, notably close to temporary duty stations of the Russian peacekeeping mission, that led to more criticism regarding the acquiescence of the peacekeeping mission.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, starting in May 2021, disagreements arose over the demarcation and delimitation of the Armenia–Azerbaijan international border. The state border between the two countries did not physically exist in the Soviet era and remained undefined owing to the emergence of the First Karabakh War during the collapse of the USSR and the 30-year occupation of these border territories by Armenia. Therefore, Azerbaijan's efforts to set up border points based on maps of the Armenian and Azerbaijani soviet socialist republics triggered the situation. On 13 May 2021, Armenia accused Azerbaijan of "infiltrating" its lands around Black (Sev) Lake in the Zangezur (*Syunik*) region.<sup>7</sup> On 27 May, however, Azerbaijan captured six Armenian military servicemen during their attempt to slip over the border and "mine roads" in Azerbaijan's Kalbajar district.<sup>8</sup> The Armenian MFA confirmed the detainment of the soldiers but stated that they were carrying out 'engineering work' in the border area of the Gegharkunik region of Armenia.<sup>9</sup> On 5 August, the

<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Azerbaijan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No:072/21, "Information of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the cases of sending Armenian armed forces to the territories of Azerbaijan", 28 February 2021, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no07221-information-of-the-press-service-department-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-on-the-cases-of-sending-armenian-armed-forces-to-the-territories-of-azerbaijan> (accessed: 15 August 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Press release of the Ministry of Defense", 11 August 2021, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/press-release-of-the-ministry-of-defense-37123.html> (accessed: 29 August 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Ostroukh, A. and Bagirova, N., "Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of violating its territorial integrity", *Reuters*, 13 May 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/armenia-accuses-azerbaijan-violating-its-territorial-integrity-2021-05-13/> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "The Ministry of Defense: Reconnaissance-sabotage groups of the Armenian armed forces crossed our state border and attempted to mine our territories", 27 May 2021, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/the-ministry-of-defense-reconnaissance-sabotage-groups-of-the-armenian-armed-forces-crossed-our-state-border-and-attempt-36060.html> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Azerbaijan arrests 6 Armenian soldiers at border", 27 May 2021, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/azerbaijan-arrests-6-armenian-soldiers-at-border/a-57679790> (accessed:

newly-appointed (now former) Defence Minister of Armenia, Arshak Karapetyan, gave an order to the army to liquidate any Azerbaijani soldier who “attempts to cross Armenia’s border”.<sup>10</sup> In total, from 1 June to 24 August, there were 55 reports from Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Defense (MoD) and 15 public statements by Armenia’s MoD about exchanges of fire, not only on the state border but also in the Karabakh region, between illegal Armenian armed formations and Azerbaijan’s military servicemen.<sup>11</sup> During this period of hostilities, three Armenian soldiers and one Azerbaijani serviceman lost their lives.<sup>12</sup>

Such weak – from the perspective of Baku – performance by Russia in maintaining stability, coupled with experience of Russia’s previous peacekeeping activities in the post-Soviet space, provides the main objective of this study: to ascertain the extent to which the stagnation of progress towards a potential peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan has implications for Russian foreign policy in the region. The constant rise of Armenia–Azerbaijan tension might be in Russia’s interest if it desires to maintain a peacekeeping presence in the Karabakh region through the possible extension of its temporary duty. However, instead of limiting the scope of our research to this possible rationale, a further focus is on the Kremlin’s potential alternative reasoning concerning its role in the ever-changing political configuration of the region, with a special emphasis on its bilateral agendas with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thus, to unveil any possible correlation between the inflammation of the situation in Karabakh and Russia’s foreign policy in the region, we pose the following question: *“How does the stagnation of the potential Armenia–Azerbaijan peace deal influence Russian foreign policy in the South Caucasus?”*

The rising tension, in conjunction with the Russian presence in the region, represents an independent variable of the study, whereas the Kremlin’s bilateral policies with Yerevan and Baku are dependent

30 September 2021).

10 Asbarez, “Armenian soldiers ordered to ‘shoot and destroy’ Azerbaijani forces crossing Armenia’s borders”, 5 August 2021, available at: <https://asbarez.com/armenian-soldiers-ordered-to-shoot-and-destroy-azerbaijani-forces-crossing-armenias-borders/> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

11 Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “News”, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news-791/>; MoD of Armenia, Twitter, available at: <https://twitter.com/armeniamodteam> (accessed: 24 August 2021).

12 Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “A serviceman of the Azerbaijan Army became Shehid (Martyr)”, 23 July 2021, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/a-serviceman-of-the-azerbaijan-army-became-shehid-martyr-36881.html>; Ibid. (accessed: 15 August 2021).

parameters. To that end, we aim to conduct a content analysis of data collected from the public statements of the three countries' official authorities, government-issued news, and opinion pieces and articles by independent researchers and journalists. The paper starts by examining extant views in academia concerning Russia's foreign policy, as seen in peacekeeping operations in its 'near abroad', then proceeds to findings and discussions in response to the main question raised above, and concludes with a few remarks.

### ***Literature Review on Russian Peacekeeping Activities Abroad***

Russia's explicit indication in all its military doctrines since 1993 of conducting peacekeeping missions in compliance with the country's interests has united many scholars on one standpoint: that the Kremlin incorporates these operations as one of its foreign policy tools by ensuring synchronization between the military and foreign policy decision-making processes. In this regard, to ensure a better understanding of Russia's possible benefits from the stagnation of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations, the review elaborates discussions on Russia's long-standing objectives in deploying and maintaining peacekeepers and 'freezing' conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The literature does cover the Kremlin's geopolitical purposes in the current peacekeeping mission in Karabakh region, but it mainly focuses on the impact of the prolongation of the severe level of tension for Russia's policy in the South Caucasus.

Among many observations on the matter of Russia's 'peacekeeping card' in the post-Soviet space, Roy Allison argues that Moscow's self-entitled interventions in conflicts in post-Soviet countries under the guise of peacekeeping derive from Russia's neo-imperialist policy.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, categorizing the strategic vision of Moscow in peacekeeping operations within state-centric and society-centric considerations, Neil Macfarlane and Albrecht Schnabel depict the Kremlin's peacekeeping policy as a symbol of Russia's intention to assert its position as the primary power in the Commonwealth of Independent States with the aim of neutralizing threats to its security from third parties such as Turkey in the Caucasus and as a legitimate way

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13 Allison, R., "Russian 'neo-imperialism' under the guise of peacekeeping", *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 1 November 1994, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07026.9> (accessed: 26 September 2021).

of consolidating Russia's leadership of regional security structures.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the geopolitical interests of Russia that lie behind the peacekeeping mission in the South Caucasus, Gerard J. Libaridian (ex-adviser to former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian) considers that the years of the West's 'wrong-policy' of enfeebling Russia in its periphery have motivated the current, more powerful Russian existence in the Karabakh region as a means of preventing the Westernization of the three countries of the South Caucasus and ensuring the extension of its own interests.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, George Barros discusses the use of the peacekeeping mission in Azerbaijan to legitimize the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a UN-recognized peacekeeping force among Russia's primary targets. He believes that Russia aims to address humanitarian issues among the local population of the Karabakh region and to involve the CSTO as a facilitator in this regard under a UN mandate.<sup>16</sup> The potential for CSTO involvement as a peacekeeper in the Karabakh region is less likely to be favoured by Azerbaijan owing to Armenia's representation in its military structure. Moreover, Russia's peacekeeping mission has itself not yet received an internationally recognized mandate.

With regard to Russia's possible gains from the retrogression of the potential peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, there is a wide range of opinions. Providing a pessimistic scenario regarding the involvement of peacekeepers, Anar Valiyev believes that the Kremlin would prevent the reintegration of the Armenian population of the Karabakh region into Azerbaijan under the pretext of security issues and would stipulate that Baku join the CSTO or Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in exchange for pushing Armenia to recognize Azerbaijan's borders.<sup>17</sup> This view is somewhat supported by Thomas de Waal, who asserts that, although increasing tension puts the safety

<sup>14</sup> Macfarlane, S. Neil and Schnabel, A., "Russia's approach to peacekeeping", *International Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 294–324, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25734054> (accessed: 23 September 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Libaridian, G.J., "Gerard J. Libaridian: Karabakh War: The aftermath", Düzdanişaq, 2 June 2021, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRvpwkdnIQU> (accessed: 26 September 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Barros, G., "Putin's 'peacekeepers' will support Russian wars", *Institute for the Study of War*, 16 November 2020, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29379> (accessed: 24 September 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Valiyev, A., "Karabakh after the 44-Day War: Russian peacekeepers and patterns", *Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia*, 23 August 2021, available at: <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/karabakh-after-the-44-day-war-russian-peacekeepers-and-patterns/> (accessed: 23 September 2021).

of the peacekeeping troops at risk and could delay the restoration of transport links connecting Russia with Armenia, Iran, and Turkey through Azerbaijan, the normalization of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations would likely end the need for the peacekeeping mission and take away from Russia’s influence over both countries.<sup>18</sup> A more prudent approach comes from Anton Troianovski and Carlotta Gall, who argue that Russia’s reinsertion into the South Caucasus in 2020 is a new test and opportunity for it to gain a sense of trust from both countries through a combination of soft and hard power.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Russia’s Mechanisms to Influence the Foreign Policies of Armenia and Azerbaijan***

Similar to Syria and Ukraine, a main challenge that Russia faces in the geopolitical conundrum of the South Caucasus is Turkey. Turkey’s growing political support to Azerbaijan before, during, and after the Second Karabakh War is not disregarded by Russia, as it strengthens Baku’s hand in moving away from Russia’s sphere of influence. It should be noted that, after the end of the Second Karabakh War, Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdoğan has visited Azerbaijan three times, notably in December 2020 and June and October 2021. The most recent journey was to inaugurate Fuzuli International Airport, the first airport built by Azerbaijan in the liberated territories,<sup>20</sup> whereas the June visit was to Shusha to sign a declaration on the relationship between the two countries as allies; this primarily envisions improvements in defence and economic cooperation.<sup>21</sup> The Shusha Declaration had its origins in the Agreement on the Development of Friendship and Comprehensive

<sup>18</sup> De Waal, T., “Unfinished business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict”, *Carnegie Europe*, 11 February 2021, available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/02/11/unfinished-business-in-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-pub-83844> (accessed: 28 September 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Troianovski, A. and Gall, C., “In Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal, Putin applied a deft new touch”, *New York Times*, 1 December 2020 (updated: 24 April 2021), available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/01/world/europe/nagorno-karabakh-putin-armenia-azerbaijan.html> (accessed: 24 September 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Daily Sabah, “Erdoğan, Aliyev inaugurate Fuzuli International Airport in Azerbaijan”, 26 October 2021, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-aliyev-inaugurate-fuzuli-international-airport-in-azerbaijan> (accessed: 12 November 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Trend, “Turkish president to visit Azerbaijan”, 1 October 2021, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3492549.html>; Zorlu, F., “Turkey and Azerbaijan ink Shusha Declaration to further boost ties”, *Anadolu Agency*, 16 June 2021, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/turkey-and-azerbaijan-ink-shusha-declaration-to-further-boost-ties/2276305> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

Cooperation and Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed in 1994, as well as the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support signed in 2010. Through it, both sides consent to pursuing joint efforts in the event of third-party aggression against the independence or sovereignty of either party. The timing was particularly remarkable as it accompanied the rise in border incidents in May 2021 and Armenia's appeal for the implementation of the collective defence clause of the CSTO.<sup>22</sup>

The interaction of the Azerbaijan–Turkey alliance and Azerbaijan–Russia recrimination can be described in terms of Newton's third law of motion, in that each tendency has an impact on the emergence of the other. For example, a day after the Shusha Declaration was signed, Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated, “cooperation in the South Caucasus should develop taking into account the principle of good neighbourliness and, of course, the interests of all countries in the region”.<sup>23</sup> Thereupon, in response to journalists' questions about whether the Shusha Declaration presages the creation of a Turkish military base in Azerbaijan or if there are grounds for the consideration of that issue within the scope of the agreement, President Erdogan confirmed the inclusion of such an aspect among the other points of the declaration and added, “there may be further development and expansion here.”<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted, “the deployment of military infrastructure by the (NATO) alliance countries near our borders is cause for our special attention, as well as a reason for us to take steps to ensure our security and interests.”<sup>25</sup>

A further indirect tussle was observed in the arena of military exercises. On 17–22 July 2021, following the border incidents between Armenia

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22 Kocharyan, S., “Pashinyan officially applies to CSTO Collective Security Council Chairman-in-Office to execute Article 2”, *Armenpress*, 14 May 2021, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1052329.html> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

23 APA, “Russian MFA comments on the Shusha Declaration signed between Azerbaijan and Turkey”, 17 June 2021, available at: <https://apa.az/en/xeber/social-news/russian-mfa-comments-on-the-shusha-declaration-signed-between-azerbaijan-and-turkey-351926> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

24 TRT Haber, “Erdogan to Biden: Do not expect us to take different steps on the S-400 and F-35” (translation from Turkish), 17 June 2021, available at: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/erdogandan-bidena-s-400-ve-f-35-konusunda-farkli-adim-atmamizi-beklemeyin-588995.html> (accessed: 12 November 2021).

25 Reuters, “Russia monitoring talk of Turkish military base in Azerbaijan, says Kremlin”, 18 June 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-monitoring-talk-turkish-military-base-azerbaijan-says-kremlin-2021-06-18/> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

and Azerbaijan, Russia organized large-scale snap combat readiness drills for its troops from the Southern and Western military districts; this was accompanied by two-week-long joint military exercises by Azerbaijan and Turkey in Baku, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Kurdamir, and Yevlakh beginning on 29 July.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, on 6–10 September, Azerbaijan's and Turkey's special forces conducted another exercise, the first in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan, that was particularly meaningful in terms of its timing and location:<sup>27</sup> the exercises took place after, on August 30, Russian drills for combating drones were held in the Karabakh region<sup>28</sup> within 300 meters of the Lachin Corridor, the route along which Russian peacekeepers, evoking criticism from Azerbaijan, had permitted the transfer of Armenian armed forces to the Karabakh region.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, France, as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, is dissatisfied with being excluded from Armenia–Azerbaijan negotiations after the Second Karabakh War and, hence, seems interested in reactivating the role of the Minsk Group. As France hosts the largest Armenian community in Europe,<sup>30</sup> the prioritization of friendly relations with Armenia exemplifies the issue's relevance for both the foreign and domestic policies of the French government. A geopolitical rivalry with Turkey over Libya, Syria, and Lebanon; recently discovered gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean; and confrontation with Russia in Ukraine and Africa (Mali and Chad) are motivating France to use the South Caucasus as a diplomatic front against both countries. The prolongation of Russian–Turkish involvement in the post-conflict

26 Huseynov, V., “Azerbaijan, Turkey hold large-scale military drills amidst escalation of tension with Armenia”, *The Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 17, Issue 121, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkey-hold-large-scale-military-drills-amidst-escalation-of-tensions-with-armenia/> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

27 Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Joint Azerbaijani-Turkish exercises started in the Lachin region”, 6 September 2021, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/joint-azerbaijani-turkish-exercises-started-in-the-lachin-region-37528.html> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

28 Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “Russian peacekeepers have practiced actions at an observation post upon detection of a ‘drone’ in Nagorno-Karabakh” (translation from Russian), 30 August 2021, available at: [https://mil.ru/russian\\_peacekeeping\\_forces/news/more.htm?id=12380991@egNews](https://mil.ru/russian_peacekeeping_forces/news/more.htm?id=12380991@egNews) (accessed: 6 October 2021).

29 Huseynov, V., “Azerbaijan increasingly critical of Russia’s peacekeeping mission in Karabakh”, *The Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 18, Issue 144, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-increasingly-critical-of-russias-peacekeeping-mission-in-karabakh/> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

30 Zenian, D., “The Armenians of France”, *Armenian General Benevolent Union*, available at: <https://agbu.org/news-item/the-armenians-of-france/> (accessed: 19 November 2021).

situation following the Astana Forum also paves the way for the EU to support alternative trade routes in the region that bypass Russia and Turkey, thereby reducing their economic incentives in the region.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, the operation of the North–South Transport Corridor along the Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Black Sea route is receiving the utmost consideration.

In accordance with abovementioned interests, France has taken necessary actions including reaffirming its support to Armenia. Shortly after the 10 November statement, France suggested ‘international supervision’, in which the Minsk Group could play a role, of the ceasefire established between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, speaking about peace and dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan at a meeting with Pashinyan in Paris on 1 June 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron confirmed that, as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, France would, along with Russia and the United States, implement efforts to achieve de-escalation and restoration of dialogue.<sup>33</sup> On 25 November 2020, the French Senate adopted a resolution “On the need to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh”.<sup>34</sup> Following the border dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan on 14 May, Macron voiced the solidarity of France with Armenia.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, during a meeting with Pashinyan in Paris, Richard Ferrand, Speaker of the French Parliament, said, “France is on the side of Armenia … you can rely on us now and in the future”.<sup>36</sup> With regard to boosting the connectivity role of Armenia along the North–South Transport Corridor, during a three-day visit to the South Caucasus in July 2021, President of the European Council

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31 Minassian, G., “What is France Looking for in the Nagorno-Karabakh Issue?”, *EVN Report*, 29 September 2021, available at: <https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/what-is-france-looking-for-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-issue> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

32 Irish, J., “Fearing Turkish role, France wants international supervision in Nagorno-Karabakh”, *Reuters*, 20 November 2020, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-armenia-azerbaijan-france-idINKBN27Z3AY> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

33 Ghazanchyan, S., “Macron urges withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Armenia”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, 1 June 2021, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2021/06/01/macron-urges-withdrawal-of-azerbaijani-troops-from-armenia/> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

34 Ozcan, Y., “French National Assembly approves decision on Karabakh”, *Anadolu Agency*, 4 December 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/french-national-assembly-approves-decision-on-karabakh/2065200> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

35 Macron, E., “Azerbaijani armed forces have crossed into Armenian territory. They must withdraw immediately. I say again to the Armenian people: France stands with you in solidarity and will continue to do so.”, *Twitter*, 14 May 2021, 2:11 a.m., available at: <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelMacron/status/1392965873187659778> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

36 Ibid.

Charles Michel announced the provision of €600 million as part of the EU's financial aid package of €2.6 billion to Armenia.<sup>37</sup> In comparison, the sum allocated to Georgia as part of the Economic and Investment plan was €2.3 billion,<sup>38</sup> whereas Azerbaijan was offered only €150 million, despite the economic consequences of the Second Karabakh War and the need for restoring the liberated territories.<sup>39</sup>

Although diplomatic negotiations over the conflict in eastern Ukraine have been witness to disagreements and heated discussions between Russia and France (as well as Germany), interestingly, talks on post-conflict issues concerning Armenia and Azerbaijan between Paris and Moscow have been informative in character. Since the end of the Second Karabakh War, Putin and Macron have discussed this issue seven times by telephone: on 16 November and 23 December 2020, and on 11 January, 27 April, 2 July, 19 August and 16 November 2021.<sup>40</sup> Although none of these talks led to publicly revealed dissatisfaction, in each conversation both sides reiterated their determination to cooperate on various aspects of the issue, primarily within the OSCE Minsk Group.

Regarding the impact of the retrogression of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations on Moscow's policy towards Yerevan, it is not easy to estimate any possible further degree of Armenian loyalty to Russia, given that it has joined all existing Russia-led security and economic integration alliances. However, Pashinyan's foreign policy orientation in the pre-war period still deserves attention, particularly to compare it with that of the post-war period. Specifically, back in 2017, before coming to power, Pashinyan was a supporter of accessing the EU and leaving the EAEU as a step towards eluding Russia's influence in its domestic and foreign policy decision-making process.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, when he was elected as

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, "Joint Staff Working Document: Recovery, resilience and reform: Post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities", 2 July 2021, available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf) (accessed: 20 November 2021).

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, "Eastern Partnership: A renewed agenda for recovery, resilience and reform underpinned by an Economic and Investment plan", press release, 2 July 2021, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_3367](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3367) (accessed: 20 November 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Business Media Georgia, "*'This is unfair' – Aliyev about EU's €2.6B funds for Armenia*", 23 July 2021, available at: <https://bm.ge/en/article/this-is-unfair--aliyev-about-eus-23b-funds-to-georgia-and-26b-for-armenia/87920/> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

<sup>40</sup> President of Russia, "Events", available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

<sup>41</sup> ArmWorld, "Nikol Pashinyan: The Association Agreement with the EU is a counterweight that protects Armenia's sovereignty" (translation from Russian), 3 October 2017, available at: <https://>

prime minister, he did not hide his interest in leading an independent foreign policy that included expanded economic cooperation with the EU.<sup>42</sup> Yet, what shone out more clearly in his early days in office was the launch of criminal investigations against Russia-backed former leaders such as former presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, as well as tax-evasion investigations against the Russian-owned Gazprom Armenia company and Armenian Railways; these were regarded as anti-Russian policies.<sup>43</sup>

With the end of the Second Karabakh War, and particularly through the deployment of Russian peacekeepers and the outbreak of periodic hostilities with Azerbaijan, Russia gained leverage to reconsolidate its position in Armenia's foreign policy decision-making process, as proven by a significant change in Pashinyan's policy. Specifically, since the end of the Second Karabakh War, Pashinyan has visited the Kremlin five times, becoming the most popular guest in this period.<sup>44</sup> In comparison, he visited only six times between November 2018 and September 2020. Furthermore, he takes many opportunities to thank Russia for its support during the entire course of the war and for maintaining its position in the post-war period.<sup>45</sup> The rationale behind such a change of diplomatic course is that Pashinyan understands the difficulty of escaping from Russia's sphere of influence and the reluctance of Western countries to help ensure its domestic stability while, at the same time, offering security and peace in the South Caucasus. Another reason, according to some scholars, is the lesson learnt from Russia's 'punishment' of keeping a low profile in the Second Karabakh War owing to the earlier anti-Russian position.<sup>46</sup>

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[arm-world.ru/news/armnews/17793-nikol-pashinyan-soglashenie-ob-associacii-s-es-protivoves-zaschischayuschiy-suverenitet-armenii.html](http://arm-world.ru/news/armnews/17793-nikol-pashinyan-soglashenie-ob-associacii-s-es-protivoves-zaschischayuschiy-suverenitet-armenii.html) (accessed: 6 October 2021).

42 Beketov, A., "Nikol Pashinyan: Armenia will not be authoritarian", *Euronews*, 3 March 2019, available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/08/nikol-pashinyan-armenia-will-not-be-authoritarian> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

43 Batashvili, D., "Security Review: Nikol Pashinyan's Russian problem", *Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies*, 2019, available at: <https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/pdf/English-2684.pdf> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

44 The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Foreign visits", available at: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/page/1/> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

45 TASS, "Armenia felt Russia's support during the war in Karabakh, Pashinyan says", 21 November 2020, available at: <https://tass.com/world/1226317> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

46 Demirdas, A., "Why is Putin punishing Armenia", *The USA Tribune*, 22 October 2020, available at: <https://theusatribune.com/2020/10/why-is-putin-punishing-armenia/>; Oruç, M.Ş., "How Vladimir Putin punished Nikol Pashinian", *Daily Sabah*, 23 November 2020, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/how-vladimir-putin-punished-nikol-pashinian> (accessed: 6 October 2021).

Concerning Russia's bilateral agenda regarding Azerbaijan, the rise of tension in the region, coupled with the fact of the presence of Russian peacekeepers, cuts Baku off from completely leaving Moscow's monitoring. This is because, first, Azerbaijan understands that, as long as tension remains high, the only arbiter that can legitimately participate in the termination of hostilities and communication with both sides in this theatre is Russia. Second, Baku is aware that the CSTO can allege a military confrontation along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border in order to activate the collective defence provision in support of Armenia. Third, Azerbaijan's vision of launching connectivity projects to Turkey and Europe passing through the Karabakh region and, later, Armenia necessitates that stability is ensured in the region. To some extent, this depends on the performance of Russian peacekeepers and, accordingly, the existence of pragmatic relations with Russia.

Meanwhile, Russia will continue to market its security and economic integration organizations such as the CSTO and EAEU to Azerbaijan despite official Baku's steadfast reservations. In particular, recent months have registered a number of welcoming approaches from Moscow's official circles with respect to Baku's possible conjugation with the CSTO. Specifically, when answering a question on possible expansion of the membership of the CSTO, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Andrei Rudenko stressed that the doors of the bloc should be open to everyone, including Azerbaijan.<sup>47</sup> To ease the registration process and potentially to attract more countries such as Azerbaijan to sessions, the CSTO started discussing the creation of a new format in addition to member and observer states. In this regard, Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly and Speaker of Russia's State Duma, confirmed the organization's plans to set up an institution of the bloc's partner states and signalled Azerbaijan's possible involvement in the new format.<sup>48</sup>

As for the EAEU, official communications depict Russia's interest in seeing Baku among the members of the organization after the Second Karabakh War. Recently, during the inter-governmental meeting of the

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<sup>47</sup> Postnikova, E., "Every month and a half or two NATO maneuvers take place in Ukraine", (translation from Russian), *Izvestiya*, 24 May 2021, available at: <https://iz.ru/1167113/ekaterina-postnikova/kazhdye-poltora-dva-mesiatca-na-ukraine-prokhodiat-manevry-nato> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Astafyev, A., "CSTO PA will establish an institute of partner states, Volodin said" (translation from Russian), *Ria Novosti*, 1 July 2021, available at: <https://ria.ru/20210701/volodin-1739376766.html> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

EAEU held in Kazan, Russia, in April 2021, a discussion was held on the possible inclusion of Azerbaijan.<sup>49</sup> However, the Armenian delegation voted against the participation of an Azerbaijani representative as a guest at the recent inter-governmental meeting of the EAEU.<sup>50</sup> Azerbaijan's participation in the community is viewed as of special importance for Russia's strategic interests and its 'great Eurasian partnership' vision.

However, given Azerbaijan's long-standing apathy regarding joining the organization owing to the political and economic disadvantages of full membership,<sup>51</sup> many scholars do not envisage a significant change in Azerbaijan's foreign policy with respect to the EAEU except for participation in some meetings as an observer or cooperation on an ad hoc basis in the agricultural and technological spheres. Furthermore, attributing the economic benefits of potential full membership only to the Azerbaijani government's policy of diversification of export products, Rovshan Ibrahimov doubts the existence of any political incentive for Baku in being part of the Russia-led organization.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Rising Tension is Detrimental to Russia's Interests in the Region***

The constant occurrence of military confrontations between Armenia and Azerbaijan along the state border and in the Karabakh region obstructs the implementation of Paragraph 9 of the 10 November statement. This particular point envisaged the reopening of transport and economic links in the region, thus restoring Azerbaijan's access to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenia. Towards this, on 15 February 2021, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev laid the foundation stone of the Horadiz–Agbend railway line.<sup>53</sup> The rising tension has not only

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49 Altynbayev, K., "‘Great Eurasian partnership’: A facade for Kremlin’s geopolitical strategy”, *Caravanserai*, 19 April 2021, available at: [https://central.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2021/04/19/feature-01](https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2021/04/19/feature-01) (accessed: 5 October 2021).

50 TASS, “Armenia did not consent to Azerbaijan’s participation in the meeting of the EAEU intergovernmental council” (translation from Russian), 1 May 2021, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11294095> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

51 Valiyev, A., “Azerbaijan and the Eurasian Union: Costs and Benefits”, *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, Issue 51–52, 17 June 2013, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/166585/CAD-51-52.pdf> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

52 Topchubashov Center, “Azerbaijan’s foreign policy towards the EU and the EAEU after the Second Karabakh War”, 2 July 2021, available at: <https://top-center.org/en/analytic/3168/azerbaijans-foreign-policy-towards-the-eu-and-the-eaeu-after-the-second-karabakh-war> (accessed: 5 October 2021).

53 APA, “Azerbaijani President laid foundation of Horadiz–Agband railway”, 15 February 2021,

caused security concerns over the proposed transport connection to resurface, but also led to the suspension of meetings of the working group created on 11 January 2021 in Moscow through a four-point agreement of the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.<sup>54</sup> Although five meetings of the tripartite committee consisting of the deputy prime ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia were held between 30 January and the end of May, since June the parties have only met twice, on 17 August<sup>55</sup> and 20 October,<sup>56</sup> to address necessary issues including the establishment of railway and automobile communication routes, and the restoration of existing and installation of new infrastructure facilities.

Such delays in the unblocking of transport and economic links in the region harm Russia's interests as the transport corridor is economically and politically attractive to Moscow. First, it offers a much more operable land connection with Armenia compared with the current routes: (1) one traversing Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran<sup>57</sup>, (2) another one passing along Georgia's Kazbegi–Upper Lars Road in North Ossetia as the latter, also known as the military highway, is mountainous and subject to heavy traffic and closures because of difficult weather conditions.<sup>58</sup> Correspondingly, this leads to the second motive, which is to reduce the Armenia–Russia trade network's dependence on Iranian and Georgian highways as well as to ensure the primacy of the Kazbegi–Upper Lars Road for Georgia–Russia connection.<sup>59</sup> Third, the transportation line between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan grants Russia

available at: <https://apa.az/en/xeber/infrastructure/Azerbaijani-President-laid-foundation-of-Horadiz-Agband-railway-342659> (accessed: 14 November 2021).

54 President of Russia, “Meeting with Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan”, 11 January 2021, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64877> (accessed: 19 November 2021).

55 Buniatian, H., “Trilateral talks on unblocking regional transport links resume in Moscow”, *Azatutyun*, 18 August 2021, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31416324.html> (accessed: 19 November 2021).

56 APA, “Media: Moscow to host meeting of trilateral Working Group on Karabakh”, 19 October 2021, available at: <https://apa.az/en/foreign-news/media-moscow-to-host-meeting-of-trilateral-working-group-on-karabakh-360190> (accessed: 19 November 2021)

57 Jalilov, O., “Iran Denies Facilitating Transfer of Russian Arms to Armenia”, *Caspian News*, 9 September 2020, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-denies-facilitating-transfer-of-russian-arms-to-armenia-2020-9-7-40/> (accessed: 12 December 2021)

58 De Waal, T., “In the South Caucasus, can new trade routes help overcome a history of conflict”, *Carnegie Europe*, 8 November 2021, available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/11/08/in-south-caucasus-can-new-trade-routes-help-overcome-history-of-conflict-pub-85729> (accessed: 20 November 2021)

59 Ibid.

an additional gateway to Iran<sup>60</sup> that includes Armenia and promises to expand the volumes passing through the North–South transit corridor. Fourth, the integration of the projected Kars–Nakhchivan railway with the Armenia–Azerbaijan–Russia line<sup>61</sup> will facilitate Moscow gaining momentum to increase its transportation links with Turkey and contribute to the East–West trade and transport corridor. Last but not least, given that it has been agreed that Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) border security guards will patrol the Zangezur Corridor traversing Armenia, Russia will obtain further political tools and influence in the South Caucasus.

### ***Russia’s Expanded Role following the Armenia–Azerbaijan Border Tension***

The failure of negotiations over the demarcation and delimitation of the state border has set the stage for Russia’s heavier involvement in the region. There are two directions in this regard: (1) Russia’s provision of additional security guards to Armenia, and (2) its recent diplomatic efforts to mediate the resolution of the demarcation process. With respect to the former issue, early steps were taken as early as 14 November 2020, when Russia established three posts along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border and two posts on Armenia’s border with Iran.<sup>62</sup> Until then, only Armenia’s borders with Iran (45 km) and Turkey (345 km) were protected by the border troops of Russia’s FSB on the basis of the interstate contract of 30 September 1992, which, in 2010, was extended until 2044.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, in March 2021, some Armenian sources claimed that

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60 Baghirov, O., “Analysis: the impact of the opening of Zangezur corridor on regional transportation and communication lines”, *AIR Center*, October 2021, available at: <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/Zangezur%20Corridor.pdf> (accessed: 19 November 2021).

61 Kanbolat, H., “A new railway line in South Caucasus: ‘Kars–Ighdir–Nakhchivan’” (translation from Turkish), *Hürriyet*, 22 July 2008, available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/guney-kafkasya-da-yeni-bir-demiryolu-hatti-kars-igdir-nahcivan-9492966> (accessed: 20 November 2021).

62 Koloyan, A., “Russian border guards expand presence in Armenia”, *Azatutyun*, 14 November 2020, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30949776.html> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

63 CIS Legislation, “The contract between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the status of the Border Troops of the Russian Federation which are in the territory of the Republic of Armenia and conditions of their functioning”, available at: <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=25477>; Zenkovich, T., “Russian border guards’ presence on border with Turkey important for Armenia – premier”, *TASS*, 26 July 2018, available at: <https://tass.com/world/1014872> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

Gafan Airport was being used as a second Russian military airfield, or used jointly with the Armenian Air Forces.<sup>64</sup> Heretofore, Erebuni aviation base, located near the Armenian capital, Yerevan, had performed the task of receiving and transferring armed personnel and equipment between Russia and its military base in the city of Gyumri, Armenia. In addition, speaking at the National Assembly on 2 May, Pashinyan confirmed the establishment of two new outposts of the Russian 102nd Military Base in the ‘*Syunik*’ region of Armenia on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border as an additional security guarantee for the province and the country.<sup>65</sup> On 27 May, plots of land in the *Gafan*, *Meghri*, *Goris* and *Tegh* (Azerbaijani: Qafan, Meghri, Gorus and Tekh) regions were also handed over to the authority of the border guards of the Russian FSB to improve the security of Armenia’s south-eastern borders.<sup>66</sup> Following that, on 29 July, Pashinyan made a request that went further; he asked Russia to deploy security guards along the entire length of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border.<sup>67</sup> However, on Thursday, 5 August, Alexander Bikantov, a Russian foreign ministry spokesman, noted that the lack of legally formulated, internationally recognized borders hindered the basing of Russian border guards in the designated area. Nevertheless, on the same day, Russia stationed troops on the north-eastern segment of Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan. Bikantov emphasized the necessity of an immediate start on the trilateral work of delimiting and demarcating the border.<sup>68</sup>

The diplomatic aspect of Russia’s involvement in the demarcation issue occurred following the rise of tension on 13 May 2021. Six days later, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, confirmed the Kremlin’s

<sup>64</sup> Novosti Armenia, “The situation in Syunik: Are there any security guarantees and how does the demarcation process go. Comments of heads of communities” (translation from Russian), March 2021, available at: <https://newsarmenia.am/news/analytics/situatsiya-v-syunike-est-li-garantii-bezopasnosti-i-kak-prokhodit-protsess-demarkatsii-kommentiruyut/> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

<sup>65</sup> Alarabiya News, “Russian military in Armenia reinforce areas near Azeri border: Reports”, 3 May 2021, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/05/03/Russian-military-in-Armenia-reinforce-areas-near-Azeri-border-Reports> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

<sup>66</sup> Kocharyan, S., “Armenia donates land area to Russian border guards in Kapan, Meghri and Tegh”, *Armenpress*, 27 May 2021, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1053616.html> (accessed: 4 October 2021).

<sup>67</sup> TASS, “Pashinyan proposed to deploy CSTO observers along the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan” (translation from Russian), 29 July 2021, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12013557> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

<sup>68</sup> Azatutyun, “Russia deploys more troops on Armenian-Azeri border”, 5 August 2021, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31395702.html> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

proposal to set up a joint commission for the demarcation of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan: Moscow would take part as a “consultant or mediator”.<sup>69</sup> On 5 August, Alexander Bikantov issued a reminder of the necessity for de-escalation of an immediate start of the trilateral work on delimiting and demarcating the border.<sup>70</sup> On 21 August, Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova reaffirmed Moscow’s readiness to mediate negotiations over the delimitation of the border and its subsequent demarcation.<sup>71</sup> This position was reiterated during Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s speech in his meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan in Moscow on 31 August.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, there is no doubt that the expansion of the area of operation of Russian border guards in Armenia will accelerate its reliance on Russia’s security umbrella. As Neil Macfarlane and Albrecht Schnabel describe, through this tendency, Armenia’s borders are becoming an outer, but effective, frontier of Russia.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, it is possible to say that the stronger military presence of Russia provides greater momentum for Russia to maintain the Armenian government within its periphery through responding to Yerevan’s security concerns as well as administering its trade opportunities with Iran. In this regard, the comments of David Lake and Patrick Morgan provide a clearer picture of the situation. They assert that the deployment of Russian border guards allows the Kremlin to symbolize its physical presence as well as to embody the region as within its sphere.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Azatutyun, “Moscow proposes to create a demarcation commission for the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, in which it can participate as a mediator” (translation from Russia), 19 May 2021, available at: <https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/31262836.html> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

<sup>70</sup> Akbarov, F., “Russian MFA comments on proposal to deploy Russian border guards to Armenia-Azerbaijan border”, *APA*, 5 August 2021, available at: <https://apa.az/en/xeber/foreign-news/russian-mfa-comments-on-proposal-to-deploy-russian-border-guards-to-armenia-azerbaijan-border-355235> (accessed: 30 September 2021).

<sup>71</sup> Azernews, “Russian MFA talks launching talks on border delimitation between Azerbaijan, Armenia”, 20 August 2021, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/182414.html> (accessed: 2 October 2021).

<sup>72</sup> Harutyunyan, A., “Long-term solution of Armenia-Azerbaijan border crisis possible only through demarcation and delimitation – Lavrov”, *Armenpress*, 31 August 2021, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1062034.html> (accessed: 2 October 2021)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Lake, D.A. and Morgan, P.M., *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, pp. 221–223 (accessed: 4 October 2021).

## ***The Next Chapter of the Arms Race***

The rise of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan is also likely to prolong arms imports from Russia. Armenia gives particular importance to this aspect of the relationship, acknowledging the distinct superiority of Azerbaijan's military<sup>75</sup> and the loss of US\$3.8 billion worth of its matériel in the Second Karabakh War.<sup>76</sup> In this regard, during the meeting of the defence ministers of Russia and Armenia in Moscow on 11 August 2021,<sup>77</sup> Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu reaffirmed Russia's assistance in modernizing Armenia's armed forces and announced the commencement of supplementary arms supplies to Armenia. Nearly two weeks later, newly appointed (now former) Armenian Defence Minister Arshak Karapetyan paid another visit to Moscow to attend the opening ceremony of a military exhibition and to meet with Russian military industry officials.<sup>78</sup> Further talks with representatives of the Russian Defence Ministry were reported as continuing in Yerevan on 2 September.<sup>79</sup>

Russia's reforms encompass upgrading the air control and defence system of Armenia.<sup>80</sup> It can be argued that this assistance aims at advancing the combat readiness of the Armenian army against drones, which were among Azerbaijan's main all-purpose weapons during the 44 Day War. Furthermore, former Armenian Defence Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan notes that Russia also plans to optimize the capabilities of its detachment at the Russian base in Armenia and introduce new weapons systems.<sup>81</sup>

75 Gressel, G., "Military lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh: Reason for Europe to worry", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 24 November 2020, available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/military-lessons-from-nagorno-karabakh-reason-for-europe-to-worry/> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

76 Azertac, "Military equipment losses of Armenia amount to 3.8 billion dollars – Analysis", 2 December 2020, available at: [https://azertag.az/en/xeker/Military\\_equipment\\_losses\\_of\\_Armenia\\_amount\\_to\\_38\\_billion\\_dollars\\_\\_Analysis-1656759](https://azertag.az/en/xeker/Military_equipment_losses_of_Armenia_amount_to_38_billion_dollars__Analysis-1656759) (accessed: 29 September 2021)

77 News.am, "Russia MOD gifts Armenian counterpart a dagger, says 'we can consider the process of supplying Armenia launched'", 11 August 2021, available at: <https://news.am/eng/news/657935.html> (accessed: 29 September 2021)

78 Azatutyun, "Armenian defense chief meets with Russian arms industry officials", 24 August 2021, available at: <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31425306.html> (accessed: 29 September 2021)

79 Mkrtchyan, M., "Military specialists of the Russian Defense Ministry are in Yerevan,", *ArmInfo*, 3 September 2021, available at: [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=64843&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=64843&lang=3) (accessed: 29 September 2021).

80 Sargsyan, A., "Russian armed forces to bring Armenian military to its level – analyst on reforms", *Armenpress*, 12 August 2021, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1060527/> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

81 Ria Novosti, "Armenia will reform the army after the Karabakh War" (translation from Russian),

It should be mentioned that Armenia–Russia cooperation in the military sector is not of recent vintage. Between 17 July and 10 November last year alone, Russia supplied Armenia with 400 tonnes of military equipment.<sup>82</sup> Having exported its weapons to Yerevan for the first time in 1993–1994, when the First Karabakh War was still ongoing, in 2015–2019 Russia accounted for 94% of Armenia’s arms imports.<sup>83</sup> In 2015, a treaty was signed that agreed US\$200 million of loans from Russia to Armenia, and, in 2017, another loan of US\$100 million was agreed to develop Armenia’s military arsenal with sophisticated arms.<sup>84</sup> In addition, following Armenia’s defeat in the ‘Four Day War’ in April 2016, in September of the same year, Russia supplied Yerevan with advanced versions of the Iskander-E ballistic rocket system.<sup>85</sup> However, during the Second Karabakh War, the M-version of this ballistic missile, which has a range of 500 kilometres and is manufactured only for the use of the Russian military, was launched against Azerbaijan, as admitted by a top Armenian military official.<sup>86</sup> Overall, the amount of money Yerevan spent in the acquisition of Russian arms surpassed US\$5 billion in the second half of the last decade.<sup>87</sup>

On the Azerbaijani side, we have not seen similar developments since the Second Karabakh War. In contrast, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that Russia should spare “no effort for the region’s

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22 February 2021, available at: <https://ria.ru/20210222/armeniya-1598538603.html> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

82 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, “Ilham Aliyev made a phone call to Russian President Vladimir Putin”, 13 August 2020, available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/40463> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

83 Nazaretyan, H., “Arms supplies to Armenia and Azerbaijan”, *Evn Report*, 17 February 2021, available at: <https://www.evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/arms-supplies-to-armenia-and-azerbaijan> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

84 Abrahamyan, E., “Russian loan allows Armenia to upgrade military capabilities”, *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 8 January 2018, available at: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13491-russian-loan-allows-armenia-to-upgrade-military-capabilities.html> (accessed: 29 September 2021)

85 Abrahamyan, E., “Armenia’s new ballistic missiles will shake up the neighborhood”, *National Interest*, 12 October 2016, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/armenias-new-ballistic-missiles-will-shake-the-neighborhood-18026> (accessed: 29 September 2021)

86 Khojoyan, S., “Armenia fired Iskander missiles in Azeri war, ex-army chief says”, *Bloomberg*, 19 November 2020, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-19/armenia-fired-iskander-missiles-in-azeri-war-ex-army-chief-says> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

87 Abay, E. G., “Russia provides 94% of Armenia’s weapons in 5 years”, *Anadolu Agency*, 29 October 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-provides-94-of-armenia-s-weapons-in-5-years/2023969> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

security”<sup>88</sup> but called on it to stop arming Armenia because, according to Baku, ‘the conflict is over’.<sup>89</sup> Yet, given the course of the ongoing Armenian–Russian military cooperation, coupled with the changing geopolitical conundrum of the region, there is no expectation that Baku will stop advancing its military arsenal. In that case, Russia is expected to be one of the suppliers, taking into account its 31% share of Azerbaijan’s arms imports in 2015–2019. However, the difference between Baku and Yerevan here arises from the former not being overwhelmingly dependent on Russian-manufactured arms, as, in the same period, the largest proportion (60%) of its weapons imports came from Israel, according to a report of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.<sup>90</sup> Along with Israel and Russia, Baku also pursues military-technical cooperation with, among others, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Pakistan, South Africa, and Turkey.<sup>91</sup>

### ***Armenian Perception of Russia: From ‘Betrayer’ to ‘Saviour’***

During the Second Karabakh War, despite the expectations of the government and people of Armenia regarding Russia’s military involvement in support of its main ally against Azerbaijan, Russia did not take part, but stood by and witnessed Azerbaijan’s advances in the war. On 31 October 2020, Pashinyan’s request to Russia to provide assistance to Armenia to ensure its security was rejected by Moscow with the argument that hostilities were not taking place on Armenian territory.<sup>92</sup> According to some reports, there were even calls from top

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88 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, “The CNN Turk TV channel has interviewed Ilham Aliyev”, 14 August 2021, available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/52736> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

89 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, “Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Azerbaijan Television”, 10 May 2021, available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/51454> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

90 Wezeman, P. D., Fleurant, A., Kuimova, A., Da Silva, D. L., Tian, N., and Wezeman, S. T., “Trends in international arms transfer 2019”, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, March 2020, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2019> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

91 Gurbanov, I., “Military procurements on Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s defense agendas”, *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 27 March 2019, available at: <https://caciyanalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13564-military-procurements-on-armenias-and-azerbaijans-defense-agendas.html> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

92 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Ministry statement in connection with Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan’s address to President of Russia Vladimir Putin”, 31 October 2020, available at: [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4411939](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4411939) (accessed: 21 September 2021).

officials of Armenia, on five occasions, for Russian military support under the pretext of fighting international terrorism – all unsuccessful.<sup>93</sup>

This led to many accusations aimed at Moscow in the mainstream and social media of Armenia, grousing about Russia's passive and pensive behaviour. According to Azat Arshakyan, a former Deputy of the Supreme Council, despite the years of successful Russia–Armenia alliance, proven by the latter's joining the EAEU and pursuing military cooperation, what became apparent through the Second Karabakh War was Russia's betrayal of Armenia for its own interests.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, an editor of the *russia-armenia.info* news site, Aram Khachatryan, stresses that Russia disdaining to bring troops to Armenia in early October was a clear signal of its betrayal not only of Armenia, but of the two million Armenians in Russia as well.<sup>95</sup> This view was shared by some experts in Russia, such as Konstantin Zatulin, a member of the Russian State Duma for Commonwealth of Independent States affairs, who stated that not supporting the Armenian people at such a moment [during the war] meant for Russia to betray itself, too.<sup>96</sup>

Now, with the end of the war, particularly after the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces, a change in the perception of Armenians regarding Russia has gained momentum. Because the high level of tension will likely keep Armenians in fear of the outbreak of, and defeat in, another war, that grants an opportunity for Russia to alter the narrative by militarily and politically backing Yerevan. In this regard, along with the advancement of military cooperation, as mentioned in previous chapters, Russia's recent official statements have also contributed to this process. For instance, immediately after Azerbaijan's 11 August call for

<sup>93</sup> Lenta, "How did the Karabakh War change Armenia–Russia relations" (translation from Russian), 25 December 2020, available at: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/12/25/allies/> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>94</sup> Ananyan, R., "Russia has betrayed us, but we are grateful. The executioner accuses us of a poor fight: Azat Arshakyan. Video" (translation from Armenian), *Factor*, 24 February 2021, available at: <https://factor.am/341548.html> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>95</sup> Papyan, S., "Most of 2 million Armenians in Russia are offended by this policy of Russia" (translation from Armenian), *Lragir*, 13 November 2020, available at: <https://www.lragir.am/2020/11/13/598996/> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>96</sup> Infoport, "Zatulin: Armenia goes through difficult times: not supporting the Armenian people at such a moment means for Russia betraying itself" (translation from Russian), 6 August 2021, available at: <https://infoport.am/ru/news/politics/hayastann-aprum-e-amenadzhvar-zhamanaknery-nman-pahin-hay-zhoghovrdin-chajakcely-rusastani-hamar-nshanakum-e-davatchanel-inqn-iren-zatulin> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

Russian peacekeepers to do their duty,<sup>97</sup> the Russian Defence Ministry released a statement blaming Azerbaijan for “violating the ceasefire”.<sup>98</sup> However, what grabbed more attention was the citation of the phrase “Nagorno-Karabakh armed formations” in reference to the remnants of the Armenian army in the Karabakh region. Such an enunciation, by reiterating the official position of Yerevan, represented an attitude of indifference to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan,<sup>99</sup> and also to Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev’s call for dismissing ‘Nagorno’ from the term following the establishment of the Karabakh Economic Zone in Azerbaijan.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, on 3 September, the Unified Information System of Russia portrayed the Karabakh region as the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh republic” in a tender,<sup>101</sup> this was later deleted at the Azerbaijani authorities’ demand.

Eventually, initial signs of the evolution of the view of Russia among Armenians emerged. During his meeting with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov on 7 May 2021, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan thanked Russia for its efforts in the resumption of the peace process in the post-war period, referring to the presence of the temporarily deployed Russian peacekeeping contingent in the Karabakh region.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, according to Armenian political analyst Richard Giragosian, the prestige of Russian peacekeepers among Armenians is

<sup>97</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Press release of the Ministry of Defense”, 11 August 2021, available at: <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/press-release-of-the-ministry-of-defense-37123.html> (accessed: 12 November 2021).

<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Russian Federation, “Information bulletin of the Ministry of Defense of Russian Federation on the activities of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” (translation from Russian), 12 August 2021, available at: [https://mil.ru/russian\\_peacekeeping\\_forces/bulletins/more.htm?id=12376882@egNews](https://mil.ru/russian_peacekeeping_forces/bulletins/more.htm?id=12376882@egNews) (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>99</sup> Ghazanchyan, S., “The scenario of withdrawing the Defense Army from Artsakh is a scenario of evicting Armenians from Artsakh – Armenia MFA”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, 11 August 2021, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2021/08/11/the-scenario-of-withdrawing-the-defense-army-from-artsakh-is-a-scenario-of-depopulating-artsakh-armenia-mfa/> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>100</sup> President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, “Ilham Aliyev viewed activities of Chovdar Integrated Regional Processing Area owned by AzerGold CJSC”, 22 July 2021, available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/52522> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>101</sup> Report, “Does Russian Defense Ministry consider that their peacekeepers serve in ‘Nagorno Karabakh Republic’?”, 3 September 2021, available at: <https://report.az/en/karabakh/does-russian-defense-ministry-consider-that-their-peacekeepers-serve-in-nagorno-karabakh-republic/> (accessed: 21 September 2021).

<sup>102</sup> Karabakhspace, “Pashinyan thanks Lavrov for Russia’s support; emphasizes, ‘there must be a final settlement to Karabakh’”, 7 May 2021, available at: <https://karabakhspace.commonspace.eu/news/pashinyan-thanks-lavrov-russias-support-emphasises-there-must-be-final-settlement-karabakh> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

about to evolve from ‘scapegoat’ to ‘saviour’ following the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the Karabakh region and in light of the strengthening tendency of Turkish–Azerbaijani cooperation.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, it should be noted that the stagnation of the potential peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to the noncompliance of Armenia with the 10 November Trilateral Statement, inefficacy of Russian peacekeepers in preventing violations of that statement and ensuring the ceasefire in the Karabakh region, along with disagreements on the demarcation and delimitation of the international state border have significant implications for Russia’s foreign policy in the region. Such interactions can be dominantly perceived as having a positive nature from the perspective of the Kremlin’s foreign policy agenda in the South Caucasus, with only the delay in the reopening of transport links representing a negative effect.

In a geopolitical context, the increasing occurrence of armed incidents paves the way for Russia to balance Turkey’s growing role in the region and, notably, indicates the diffusion of NATO’s shadow impact from Russia’s western borders (Ukraine) to its south-western frontier (Azerbaijan). In other words, it is understood that the need for defusing the tension is linked to the Russian peacekeepers’ performance and the Kremlin’s mediation role, which leads to respect for Moscow’s legal authority and military presence. That notwithstanding, to prevent any possible loss of power projection to a NATO member country and ensure the balance of power, Russia finds it necessary to bolster its support of Armenia.

Furthermore, the long-standing state of diplomatic confrontation between France and Russia, associated with the presence of a strong Armenian community and Turkey’s support for Azerbaijan, has sparked France’s interest in reassuming an active role in Armenia–Azerbaijan negotiations, thereby challenging Russia’s sole representation in the region as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. To reactivate its

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<sup>103</sup> Synovitz, R., “Armenians see Russia as ‘savior’ not ‘scapegoat’ in Nagorno-Karabakh war”, *RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty*, 24 November 2020, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenians-see-russia-as-savior-not-scapegoat-in-disdaining-nagorno-karabakh-war/30966988.html> (accessed: 29 September 2021).

former status, Paris holds frequent meetings and talks with Yerevan and Moscow and ensures its political and economic support to Armenia. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that, despite major disagreements and dissatisfaction over the Ukraine conflict as well as the situation in Africa, France and Russia seem, so far, to have a conventional policy relationship on the post-conflict situation as they confer by telephone to discuss the relevant issues.

With respect to Russia's foreign policy agenda towards Yerevan, the frequent occurrence of border incidents ingrains Russia's security umbrella over Armenia and, accordingly, draws its Western-oriented government into the Kremlin's periphery. To that end, Russia is expanding the size and composition of its military presence in Armenia in the form of border guards. That is not the limit of Russia's assistance to Armenia in the military sphere, as Moscow is becoming heavily involved in reforming Armenia's armed forces and modernizing them with sophisticated arms, especially countermeasures against drones, which were Azerbaijan's game-changer weapon in the Second Karabakh War. As a result, the upgraded military assistance, associated presence and humanitarian activities of Russian peacekeepers in the Karabakh region, and some statements emanating from the Kremlin in recent months present a solid background for the rehabilitation of the Armenian public view of Russia as a 'guarantor of security', a view that was clearly damaged during the Second Karabakh War.

The rising tension has caused a delay in the return of Azerbaijan's internally displaced persons to Karabakh and the reopening of transport and economic links in the region, as well as in the restoration of Baku's full jurisdiction over the region that is under the peacekeepers' temporary control. All of these elements offer Russia a bargaining chip to put pressure on Azerbaijan.