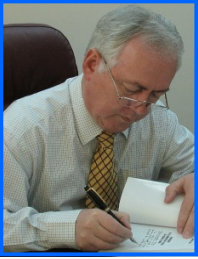


Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory"—I.L.Caragiale

EDITORIAL

Nagorno-Karabakh – a punctual issue with extended implications



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The current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh has its roots in the gradual incorporation of South Caucasus in the Russian Empire and later on in the policy of the former Soviet Union of creating contentious areas in different parts of the satellite states in order to better control them. So, Nagorno-Karabakh, alongside Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria, each one with its own peculiarities, represents a region where Russia but other powers, too, use it for achieving its strategic objectives, most of the times divergent not only among them, but also of Armenia's specific interests.

It is difficult to foresee how the situation in this area will evolve during the next years due to the variables which evolution cannot be precisely determined, yet some important changes will occur at least internally in Armenia that will influence this evolution. The first one is represented by the generational change as the ones who gained independence and then the 1992-1994 war will gradually leave the political stage (in 2013, Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, aged 71, announced he would not compete, due to health reasons, in the presidential elections). The second one will be determined by the 2015 referendum that amended the Constitution by turning the country into a parliamentary republic and the elections of April, 2017 marked already the beginning of this new stage even if the Republican Party of the president Serzh Sargsyan was the first with 49.17% of the vote (58 seats of the total of 131, 11 seats less than in the previous legislature). Yet the constitutional amendments will enter into force after the presidential elections scheduled in February 2018, and then a period of reforms in the governing system will likely follow with the establishment of new institutions and the decentralization of the government. Externally, Armenia will continue to successfully use the possibilities its strong diaspora in the USA, France and other European countries offer. Also the relations with Russia – its main ally, with Nagorno-Karabakh Republic - an indispensable security partner, with Iran, and its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan as well will witness new evolutions.

We stress that Azerbaijan's escalations and military actions in April 2016 followed by Erevan's unilateral denunciation of the agreements reached in Vienna and Saint Petersburg in May and, respectively, June 2016, prove the determination of the Armenian political class to reject any compromise in solving the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Mention should be made on this background of the recently (20th of February) held referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh, aimed mainly at changing of denomination in "Artsakh Republic" and granting more powers to the president - by abolishing the position of prime minister for making more rapidly some security related decisions – steps approved by more than 76% of the participants. The referendum was not recognized by several states (Germany, Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey, Azerbaijan indeed, etc.) the European Union included and we mention part of the latter's statement: "The EU does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework for such procedures that cannot modify the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh and cannot influence the negotiations process". We remind that, after the 1992-1994 war, apart from Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia occupied seven other adjacent regions (Lachin, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli and Zangilan), and during the negotiations processes in the OSCE format – Minsk Group (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, USA, France, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Belarus, Finland and Sweden, co-presidents Russia, USA and France – as of 1996) Armenia would have accepted the return to Azerbaijan of five of these regions in exchange of the recognition of the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh and securing a connection with Armenia (Lacin area), but no progresses at all were registered.

Mention should be made also of the important initiative of president Serzh Sargsyan of rapprochement to the European Union, marked by his visit to Brussels on 27-28th of February where he had meetings not only with the EU's leaders but also with NATO's General Secretary. On that occasion, the two sides agreed a "Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), for the development of the bilateral relations" in the new global context which signature is contemplated most probably in November 2017 during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels. An intelligent move of president Sargsyan, in line with his strategy, even if his joining the Euroasian Union in 2015 seemed to end the evolution towards an European integration. This movement brought most probably more votes to the Republican Party of president Sargsyan during the recent parliamentary elections.

Even if by cooperating with the EU the authorities in Erevan seek to generate a new balance in its political and economic dependency relationship with Moscow, it is unlikely that Armenia can renounce the latter in the foreign policy, defense and security issues.