

Современная наука и инновации.
2024. № 1 (45). С. 175-181.
Modern Science and Innovations.
2024; 1(45):175-181.

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ /
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Научная статья / Original article

УДК 327

<https://doi.org/10.37493/2307-910X.2024.1.20>

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**Армяно-Азербайджанские отношения в
контексте признания суверенитета
Азербайджана над Нагорным Карабахом**

**Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in the
Context of recognition of Azerbaijan's
sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh**

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Аннотация. Проблема принадлежности Нагорного Карабаха остается актуальной при рассмотрении армяно-азербайджанских взаимоотношений, несмотря на то, что Армения фактически признала суверенитет Азербайджана над ним. В этой связи в статье, на основе анализа документов и высказываний политических деятелей стран, заинтересованных в решении злободневных вопросов региональной безопасности на Южном Кавказе, исследуется современная политика России, Армении, Азербайджана, Турции и других геополитических игроков в регионе, в частности их позиция в отношении проблем Нагорного Карабаха в рамках армяно-азербайджанского противостояния, как важнейшей составляющей всей системы международных отношений на Южном Кавказе.

Ключевые слова: международные отношения, Южный Кавказ, Россия, Армения, Азербайджан, Турция, Нагорный Карабах, региональная нестабильность

Для цитирования: Койбаев Б. Г., Ревазов В. Ч. Армяно-Азербайджанские отношения в контексте признания суверенитета Азербайджана над Нагорным Карабахом // Современная наука и инновации. 2024. № 1 (45). С. 175-181. <https://doi.org/10.37493/2307-910X.2024.1.20>

Abstract. The problem of Nagorno-Karabakh's ownership remains relevant when considering Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, despite the fact that Armenia has actually recognized Azerbaijan's sovereignty over it. In this regard, the article, based on the analysis of documents and statements of political figures from countries interested in resolving pressing issues of regional security in the South Caucasus, examines the modern policies of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and other geopolitical players in the region, in particular their position regarding problems of Nagorno-Karabakh within the framework of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation, as the most important component of the entire system of international relations in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: international relations, South Caucasus, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Nagorno-Karabakh, regional instability

For citation: Koibaev BG, Revazov VCh. Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in the context of recognition of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. Modern Science and Innovations. 2024;1(45):175-181. <https://doi.org/10.37493/2307-910X.2024.1.20>

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Introduction. Within the framework of the modern Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation, a special place is occupied by the recognition of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh and the significance of this event for the further development of the entire system of international relations in the South Caucasus.

The aggravation of the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh has been going on since September 2020, when fighting began in the region between the armed forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a result, a tripartite statement was signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

Materials and research methods. The empirical basis of the work was formed by political and legal documents. In particular, documents and speeches by political and government figures from Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, France and other countries at the UN and other international meetings on regional security issues in the South Caucasus.

In this work, the following research methods were used: observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis and others.

Research results and their discussion. The situation around the region deteriorated again in 2022, when the State Border Service of Azerbaijan established a checkpoint in the Lachin corridor - on the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia [9].

The Azerbaijani authorities expected to conclude a peace treaty with Armenia by the end of the year and called on Yerevan to record recognition of the territorial integrity of the neighboring republic. Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev reported this to TASS [4].

Baku also called on Yerevan to undertake a commitment to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan, including attempts to bring issues of interaction with citizens of Armenian origin in Karabakh to international platforms "under the pretext of ensuring the rights and security of this population group."

Kh. Hajiyev emphasized that these are citizens of Azerbaijan and their rights and security will be ensured by the Constitution. He added that Baku highly appreciates the contribution of international mediators to the normalization of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations.

On May 25, 2023, N. Pashinyan and I. Aliyev, through the mediation of V. Putin, discussed relations between the two countries in the Kremlin, but did not adopt a joint statement at the end of the day. At the same time, as Aliyev noted, after Armenia's statements on recognizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the issue of agreeing on the points of the peace treaty will be "much easier."

Further events unfolded in Turkey, where on June 3, 2023, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was inaugurated as the country's president.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sensationally took part in the inauguration of Turkish President R. Erdogan, after which a direct dialogue took place with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

It should be emphasized here that, firstly, the informal negotiation round took place not on a conditionally neutral platform, as provided by Russia and Brussels, but in a country allied with Azerbaijan, which politically supported Baku during the Karabakh war. Secondly, the dialogue took place without any intermediaries; Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan spoke directly to each other.

The meeting in Ankara was practically not covered in the media, but photographs from the inauguration of the Turkish president can be used to judge the mood in which the head of the Armenian state spent his working visit to Turkey. Nikol Pashinyan shook hands with Erdogan and communicated with Ilham Aliyev as if there were diplomatic relations between the countries, and there had never been a Karabakh war, as well as political and territorial claims against Turkey.

The Turkish leadership, for its part, has repeatedly emphasized that relations with Yerevan will be normalized as soon as the Armenian authorities regulate contacts with Baku. Turkey does not have any significant interests in Armenia, with the exception of the launch of the Zangezur corridor, which will connect the infrastructure of Azerbaijan with Turkish infrastructure, and through Azerbaijan - the infrastructure of its neighbors, including Russia.

In this regard, Nikol Pashinyan's invitation to the inauguration of Recep Tayyip Erdogan was expected: Turkey shows that it is not in confrontation with Armenia and supports conciliatory rhetoric, which is still heard from time to time in Yerevan.

It should be noted that Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Ankara could well have been denied due to the fact that the Armenian authorities do not stop supporting extreme nationalism, which in the case of Armenia is expressed in hatred of everything Turkish and Azerbaijani. Not long ago, a monument to the Dashnaks, who killed Turkish and Azerbaijani diplomats about a hundred years ago, was unveiled in Yerevan - and immediately after the announcement of preparations for the opening of an Armenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the Turkish border.

Ankara naturally responded to this anti-Turkish provocation by closing the skies over the republic to Armenian flights. Since the monument still stands in the Armenian capital, one could expect that Erdogan would not want to see Pashinyan at the celebration of his victory.

However, the Turkish authorities preferred to give Armenia another chance. Ankara strives to be on good terms with all its neighbors, thus implementing the foreign policy strategy of a positive regional leader, and therefore is not opposed to the presence of the head of a problematic state for the region along with allies and partners at the inauguration of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It is noteworthy that Nikol Pashinyan was seated in the second row, immediately behind Ilham Aliyev, who was sitting on Erdogan's right hand: this is a political symbol that communicates that for Turkey, Armenia stands strictly after Azerbaijan and is perceived only as an addition to Azerbaijani-Turkish relations.

As for Ilham Aliyev, he held a meeting with Nikol Pashinyan in Ankara, despite the fact that two days earlier they had already met on the sidelines of the European Political Community summit in Bulboaca, Moldova. Here, the leaders of the two countries communicated in the presence of European Council President Charles Michel and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, as well as French President Emmanuel Macron.

Direct dialogue with Yerevan is what Baku strives for, preferring to build all its foreign policy relations on a bilateral basis. The leadership of Azerbaijan works on all platforms offered by other players, since it sees the benefit in every opportunity to constructively promote the Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement, however, it emphasizes that the final format of contacts with Armenia will be precisely a one-on-one format, without intermediaries, as any healthy people look like relations between two countries, especially neighbors.

The meeting in Ankara allows us to judge that the bilateral format really benefits the Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue. At meetings in Ankara, the Armenian prime minister was depicted as open, sociable and positive, as he can usually be seen only in contact with Western leaders. That is, in the absence of larger players with whom he could hide, Pashinyan does not find the strength for confrontation and goes for direct dialogue. It is clear that after negotiations in Brussels, Moscow and Bulboaca, the informal meeting in Ankara could not give new practical agreements, but the beginning of bilateral interaction between Baku and Yerevan at the highest level is valuable in itself.

In Ankara, Nikol Pashinyan did a lot that was previously difficult to even imagine performed by the head of a state built on nationalist ideology. For example, he stood listening to the Turkish anthem. For the leader of any other country, this is a completely natural part of diplomatic protocol, but for Armenia, which has not yet abandoned the cult of hatred towards Turks and Azerbaijanis, this is something sensational and even scandalous.

Thus, we see changes in Armenia's foreign policy approaches. The reason, in our opinion, is simple: Armenia no longer has the opportunity to pursue its previous foreign policy of aggression against Azerbaijan. The republic could not hold Nagorno-Karabakh on its own, the diaspora can only demand from Yerevan that its illusions about "Great Armenia" be realized, and all Armenian allies and partners are either both allies and partners of Azerbaijan, or do not want to conflict with Azerbaijan. Therefore, the new concept of Yerevan's foreign policy was the desire to protect Armenia through peaceful relations with Baku and Ankara. Hence the open recognition of the Karabakh economic region as the sovereign territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The visit to Ankara fully fits into the new concept: at least to show that you want peace and do not want war. If Yerevan regularly repeats that it wishes to normalize relations with Turkey as

soon as possible, then Nikol Pashinyan was obliged to attend the inauguration of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and behave there as if Armenia had already established diplomatic contacts with its western neighbor. Which is what he did. Likewise, since Turkey needs Armenia's peace with Azerbaijan, the Armenian prime minister spoke with Ilham Aliyev one-on-one, demonstrating a new normal in Yerevan's approach to relations with Baku. That is, in total, it was a political PR campaign by Pashinyan on a regional platform, showing Armenia's neighbors a human face instead of the usual nationalistic grin.

However, despite Nikol Pashinyan's friendly gestures, Armenia continued to impose its convenient border delimitation map and use Baku's disagreement with this approach to slow down the settlement. Armenia did not participate in any way in demining Karabakh; on the contrary, it continued to mine the border and Azerbaijani soil in the temporary deployment zone of Russian peacekeepers. Armenia also did not withdraw its armed citizens from the territory of Azerbaijan, and they continued to prepare for military operations against the Azerbaijani army, regularly launching attacks on Azerbaijan.

All this led to the fact that on September 19, 2023 the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense announced the start of local anti-terrorist measures in Nagorno-Karabakh. The next day it became known that the conflicting parties had agreed to a complete cessation of hostilities.

Against this background, on September 21, a meeting took place in Yevlakh between the Armenians of Karabakh and the delegates of Azerbaijan. Following their results, the representative of the Azerbaijani president for special assignments, Elchin Amirbekov, said that the meeting would help reach the conclusion of a peace treaty between Baku and Yerevan.

Later, on September 22, Hajiyev noted that residents of Nagorno-Karabakh who had laid down their arms could be amnestied by the country's authorities. However, he stressed that some members of the armed groups have made public statements that they will continue to resist.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly spoke about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and called on Azerbaijan to fulfill its obligations and ensure freedom of movement through the Lachin corridor, as well as to withdraw the military from Karabakh.

Speaking about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azerbaijan previously carried out "anti-terrorism measures," A. Mirzoyan accused the neighboring country of a large-scale attack against the indigenous population of Karabakh, a gross violation of the tripartite statement of November 9, 2020.

"During this inhumane attack, the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, other cities and towns was subjected to intense and large-scale bombing using heavy military equipment: missiles, artillery, combat drones, aircraft, including prohibited cluster munitions," he said [3].

According to him, more than 200 people died as a result, another 400 were injured, and the fate of "hundreds of people" is unknown. In addition, 30% of the population of Karabakh became internally displaced.

A. Mirzoyan also spoke about the consequences of the blockade of the Lachin corridor since December last year. Baku's actions, he said, led to an acute shortage of food, medicine, fuel and other essentials.

Armenia has repeatedly expressed to the international community the need for clear actions, including the deployment of an interagency UN mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, but over the past few months it has failed to help people. He emphasized that allegations that the UN is not on the scene and therefore cannot verify what is happening cannot be an excuse for inaction. A. Mirzoyan expressed hope that the organization will show "strong political will" to condemn the resumption of hostilities.

Yerevan also calls for a UN interagency mission to be sent to Nagorno-Karabakh to monitor and assess the human rights, humanitarian and security situation on the ground. Unhindered access of UN institutions and other international organizations to Nagorno-Karabakh in accordance with humanitarian principles is mandatory, A. Mirzoyan emphasized.

“We also believe that the international community should demand the withdrawal of any Azerbaijani military and law enforcement agencies from all civilian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh to prevent panic, provocation and escalation among the civilian population, and to enable UN-sanctioned peacekeeping forces to maintain stability and security in Nagorno-Karabakh,” said A. Mirzoyan [3].

The President of Turkey also proposed holding a quadrilateral meeting on the situation with Nagorno-Karabakh to the leaders of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated this during a briefing before flying to the United States for the UN General Assembly. However, Ankara has not yet received a response to its proposal.

September 16, 2023 Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev said that Baku expects to conclude a peace treaty with Armenia by the end of the year. At the same time, the Azerbaijani authorities call on Yerevan to record recognition of the territorial integrity of the republic.

The problem in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations was the search for conditions for opening traffic along the Lachin road.

The Lachin corridor, which is the only land road from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, was blocked on December 12, 2022 by a group of Azerbaijanis, and then Baku officially established a checkpoint on the border with Armenia near the Hakari Bridge.

The Azerbaijani authorities may allow the use of the Lachin road connecting Armenia with Karabakh after the opening of an alternative route Aghdam - Khankendi. This was stated by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during a telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, the press service of the Azerbaijani leader reported.

“On August 29, French President Emmanuel Macron called President Ilham Aliyev. The parties discussed the situation around the Lachin road and the Agdam - Khankendi road. President Aliyev emphasized that after the opening of the Agdam-Khankendi road, the Lachin-Khankendi road can be used subject to customs and border regulations,” the message notes [1].

Aliyev also informed Macron about the dispatch of a convoy from Baku with humanitarian aid for the Armenian population of the region.

In turn, the French President noted that Paris is ready to “contribute to stabilizing the situation and reducing tensions.”

At the end of August, Pashinyan said that the situation in the region remains tense. According to him, Yerevan submitted new proposals to Baku on the draft peace treaty.

On September 3, the Armenian Prime Minister, in an interview with the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, said that Russia was moving away from the South Caucasus, and Russian peacekeepers did not control the Lachin corridor. The Kremlin did not agree with the prime minister’s words, emphasizing that the Russian Federation is “an integral part of this region” and therefore cannot leave it.”

“There is an attempt to remove responsibility for failures in domestic and foreign policy by shifting the blame to Moscow,” the department noted.

The head of the Armenian government, in fact, admitted that all this time Yerevan was deliberately preparing for a turn away from Moscow. At the same time, the Armenian authorities justify this by alleged mistakes on the part of Russia and the CSTO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified.

On Smolensk Square they emphasized that, at the instigation of the authorities, an anti-Russian bacchanalia was launched in the Armenian media.

Commenting on the situation with protests in Armenia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied allegations that they were inspired by Moscow. The cause of dissatisfaction among part of the Armenian society was the irresponsible policy of N. Pashinyan’s team.

“Pashinyan, instead of observing the gentleman’s agreement between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia from November 2020 to leave the decision on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh to future generations, succumbed to the admonitions of the West,” the publication states [6].

Russia has always been faithful to its allied obligations, respected Armenian statehood and never confronted the republic with a choice: with us or against us, the department explained.

Yerevan is making a mistake by trying to destroy the centuries-old ties between Armenia and Russia and making the country a hostage to the geopolitical games of the West. The ministry noted that the vast majority of the Armenian population understands this.

Moscow also asked Yerevan for an explanation regarding the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) by the Armenian parliament.

The representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, said at a briefing that Russia will determine its further actions based on the response from the Armenian side. She added that a request for clarification of this issue had already been sent.

Armenia is ratifying the statute in the hope of arousing a favorable attitude from the United States, political scientist Alexander Asafov noted in this regard [8].

Earlier, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called Armenia's plans to join the Rome Statute of the ICC "absolutely unacceptable." Sources from TASS and RIA Novosti reported that Moscow warned Yerevan "of the extremely negative" consequences of such a decision.

The Kremlin also expressed caution in connection with US military exercises in Armenia. The upcoming joint military exercises between the United States and Armenia in the Kremlin are causing concern. Kremlin official representative Dmitry Peskov announced this on September 6. "This is cause for concern, especially in the current situation. Therefore, we will deeply analyze this news and monitor the situation," the press secretary of the head of state said at a briefing [5].

Earlier on September 6, the Armenian Ministry of Defense announced joint military exercises between Yerevan and Washington EAGLE PARTNER, which will be held in the country from September 11 to 20 at the Zar training center. They noted that the military of the two countries will train to increase interoperability within peacekeeping missions.

Prior to this, on September 4, the Chairman of the European Committee for NATO Enlargement, Günter Fehlinger, called on Armenia to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. In a social media post, he added the phrase "defend Armenia," while tagging the account of US President Joe Biden.

In April, Moscow asked Yerevan for clarification that the Armenian Armed Forces intend to take part in joint exercises together with NATO troops, reported Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. Then she pointed out that such actions by the alliance could lead to destabilization in the regions and also contribute to the growth of conflict potential.

As you know, Armenia nevertheless conducted joint exercises with the United States from September 11 to 20 in the territories of Zara and Armavir. "The opening ceremony of the Eagle Partner exercise took place. The exercise will help prepare Armenia's 12th Peacekeeping Brigade to meet NATO standards for assessment later this year," the material summarized [2].

However, speaking about Armenian-Russian relations, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan noted that in this matter he proceeds from the statements of the President of the Russian Federation. Earlier, at the plenary session of the EEF-2023, Vladimir Putin said that he was in contact with Pashinyan and "we have no problems with Armenia or with Prime Minister Pashinyan" [7].

In this regard, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan considers talk about changing the country's foreign policy vector inappropriate, saying that this vector has always been aimed at the state's own interests.

Conclusion. Thus, the leadership of Armenia actually recognized the sovereignty of Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. In this context, questions arise related to the humanitarian component and the mandate of Russian peacekeepers to stay in the region.

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Вклад авторов: все авторы внесли равный вклад в подготовку публикации.

Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Contribution of the authors: the authors contributed equally to this article.

Conflict of interest: the authors declare no conflicts of interests.

*Статья поступила в редакцию: 16.01.2024;
одобрена после рецензирования: 19.02.2024;
принята к публикации: 10.03.2024.*

*The article was submitted: 16.01.2024;
approved after reviewing: 19.02.2024;
accepted for publication: 10.03.2024.*