

Will Peace in the South Caucasus Be Next Victim of Western Geopolitics?

by Lt. Col. Ralph Bosshard (ret.)

Swiss Lt. Col. (ret.) Bosshard served in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) peacekeeping mission in Ukraine (2014-2017), including in Kiev, Mariupol and Dnepropetrovsk. Until 2017 he was Special Military Advisor to the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE and to the Swiss Ambassador to Ukraine. From 2017 to 2020 Colonel Bosshard was Operations Officer in the OSCE High-Level Planning Group for a military peacekeeping mission in the South Caucasus.

Nov. 1—News has been [circulating](#) in the past few days that a peace deal could be on the horizon in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, that would put an end not only to the decades-old conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, but also to the old conflict between these two states in the South Caucasus. However, this agreement is not yet wrapped up: The war in Ukraine and geopolitical concepts could still bring the project to failure.

On November 9, 2020, mediated by Russia, a ceasefire agreement came into force, putting a temporary end to a six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The bone of contention in the peace negotiations was the so-called Zangezur Corridor, which is supposed to connect the Azerbaijani motherland with the exclave of Nakhichevan, which lies to the west of Armenia. The Azerbaijani leadership has always known how to use military means to exert political pressure. To this end, in recent months, Baku has not shied away from shelling Armenian territory and occupying parts of the terrain that without doubt belong to Armenia. So far, however, the West has had little to offer the Armenians apart from words.

A History Full of Changes

In the eventful history of Armenia, the region of Zangezur was part of the Syunik region, which was considerably larger than the current province of the same name in southern Armenia. After the October Revolution of 1917, disputes arose between the independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan over

ownership of some mixed-population areas, including Zangezur. After fierce Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes, most of the region was annexed to the Armenian SSR in 1924, which had become part of the Soviet Union. As a result, the ethnic Azerbaijanis migrated from this area. The discussions about [Zangezur](#) are now raising fears that Azerbaijan could also lay claim to these areas.

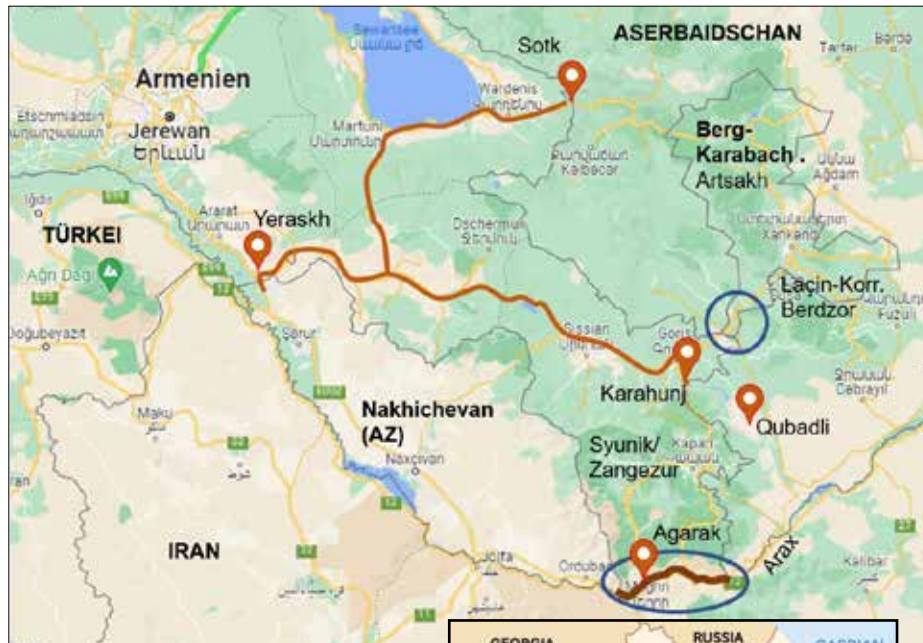
The [ceasefire agreement](#) of Nov. 9, 2020 included not only military-oriented provisions but also provisions aimed at settling political disputes, including in particular the lifting of all traffic blockades in the region. This would be a big step forward, since the borders between Armenia on the one hand, and Turkey and Azerbaijan on the other, had been hermetically sealed since the end of the war in 1994 and not even permeable to OSCE diplomats and ceasefire monitors. An agreement to end the blockade between Turkey and Armenia had been negotiated in Zurich on October 10, 2009, but was never implemented.

However, opinions differ on exactly what the provision for the lifting of all blockades in the ceasefire agreement means: Armenia has proposed the reopening of border crossings to the Azerbaijani motherland in Karahunj and Sotk, as well as one to the Azerbaijani province of Nakhichevan in Yeraskh (see **Figure 1**). The one in Karahunj in particular would be significant in several respects, as it would not only open the road from Goris in Armenia to Qubadli in Azerbaijan, but would also facilitate travel by road to Syunik in Armenia, which runs for long distances along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. There were disputes about the use of this road already last year when the Azerbaijani authorities suddenly demanded tariffs from Iranian transport companies.

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, insists on opening the road and rail link along the Arax River, which forms the border between Iran and Armenia. But Baku wants still more than that: It wants to carry out transports on this route without Armenian controls. In the ceasefire agreement of Nov. 2020, it was agreed that the traffic routes between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan should be

FIGURE 1

Armenia and Its Neighbors



The blue circle indicates the Lachin corridor (Laçin Korr.) connecting Armenia to the exclave of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh—designated on this map (labeled for German speakers) as Berg-Karabach. The proposed Zangezur corridor is shown in a blue oval.



under the control of Russian border troops.

Armenia’s Concerns

The very term “Zangezur Corridor” arouses suspicion in Armenia, because of a comparison to the corridor which connects Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. That represents a piece of originally Azerbaijani territory which, with the November 2020 ceasefire, remained under the control of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Yerevan fears that the Azerbaijani side may envisage a similar solution for the Arax River region, whereby Armenia would lose control of the border region. But that would put the most important border crossing between Armenia at Agarak and Iran at Nurduz, under Azerbaijani control.

And that, in turn, reawakens the old mistrust, that Azerbaijan and Turkey are ultimately not concerned with opening up transport routes in the region, but with the total isolation of Armenia. A cession of Armenian territory to Azerbaijan was never mentioned in the

ceasefire agreement, and such a cession on the Armenian-Iranian border would be exactly the opposite of what was actually intended. From the Armenian point of view, this concerns the existence or non-existence of the Armenian state and its people, including those of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Recent reports of NATO courses in Azerbaijan and joint exercises by the Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Georgian armies increase Armenians’ fears of being wedged between arch-enemy and NATO state Turkey, an increasingly hostile Georgia, and Azerbaijan, favored thanks to its importance as a natural gas [supplier](#) for Europe. At the same time, Armenia faces isolation from Iran, with which it has had good relations, and its ally Russia.

Role of Pan-Turkism

But this struggle is about much more than the South Caucasus region. In recent years, Turkish President Recep Erdoğan in particular has pushed ahead with his vision of the Turkic-speaking world, which finds its political and diplomatic expression in the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). In this previously rather loose group of states—which, in addition to Azerbaijan, also includes the Central Asian countries of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan—Turkey, as the most populous country, claims leadership. The supporters of Pan-Turkism are only too happy to take up such efforts and recall that Turkic-speaking minorities also live in Greece, Bulgaria, Crimea, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, China, Moldova and Russia. With the Zangezur Corridor, Azerbaijan would create a land connection between the Turks on the Mediterranean and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. Azerbaijan would then play a key role within the group of states.

With the gas supply agreement that Azerbaijan signed July 18 with the EU, the country has already realized the economic aspect of this claim, namely that

of being a hub for trading in oil and gas from the Caspian Sea region. Of course, the Central Asian member countries do not want to snub Turkey, but they have different historical experiences, socio-cultural norms and political systems. Although these countries have had ambivalent experiences with Russia and the Soviet Union, they do not maintain the arch-enmity that separated the Russian Tsarist Empire and the Ottoman Empire from one another. On the contrary, the Soviet Union and especially Russia played a major role in the development of the Central Asian region in the 20th Century. Turkey's claim to leadership is met with a certain skepticism there. The self-confidence of these nations with their rich cultural and historical heritage is too developed for that.

Armenia's Allies and Neighbors

However, several Central Asian states are also members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) [an intergovernmental military alliance comprising six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan] and are therefore military allies of Armenia. Naturally,

given its size and military strength, Russia has a leading role in the CSTO, while the armed forces of the Central Asian republic—with the exception of Kazakhstan—are probably not as strong as open sources suggest. The fact that Russia is currently militarily tied down in Ukraine may have encouraged [Azerbaijan's] President Ilham Aliyev to take a more outspoken stance on Armenia. Ukraine and the West could try to motivate him to demand even more far-reaching concessions. It would be sufficient for the Central Asian states to signal to Baku that its desired connections to Central Asia would not come to anything if Azerbaijan were to continue to lend a military hand to its allies.

The behavior of Georgia, whose history shows significant parallels with that of Armenia, may be particularly disappointing for many Armenians. As a small, predominantly Christian country on the border between two great empires and surrounded by predominantly Muslim areas, Georgia would actually be considered a natural ally of Armenia. In Yerevan, on the other hand, nothing good is expected from the flirtations of the Georgian leadership with the EU, NATO and Turkey.

Western Geopolitics

In the last few days, Russian diplomacy has apparently brought the counterparties in the South Caucasus to the [negotiating table](#) again. But Western geopoliticians already see their chance here in the fight against Iran and, more broadly, in the struggle for dominance in the Middle East, and could try to thwart peace efforts. The last thing people in the region need is interference from geopoliticians from Washington and Brussels, who believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will get them back into the region. Turkey and, in recent months, Saudi Arabia have increasingly refused Western influence.

Russia traditionally sees itself as the protector of Christians in the Orient. It is still unclear who will assume this role in the future if Russia is no longer able to do so as a result of the West's systematic weakening strategy. In several wars in the Middle East, the West weakened Iran's opponents and thereby *de facto* strengthened the position of the very country it had chosen as the global rogue state. And it is exactly those wars that exclude the United States and the West in general as a new protective power for the oriental Christians.

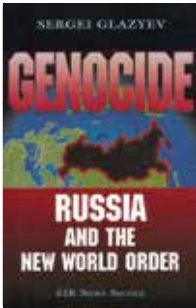
The West's fanatical Russophobia could soon claim new victims in unexpected places.

GENOCIDE


RUSSIA AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Russia in the 1990s: "The rate of annual population loss has been more than double the rate of loss during the period of Stalinist repression and mass famine in the first half of the 1930s . . . There has been nothing like this in the thousand-year history of Russia."

—Sergei Glazyev



Paperback, with a preface by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.



Economist Dr. Sergei Glazyev was Minister of Foreign Economic Relations in Boris Yeltsin's first cabinet, and was the only member of the government to resign in protest of the abolition of Parliament in 1993. He is now an advisor to President Putin.

\$20

Now available in PDF format from the LaRouche Publications Store.

Order online:
<https://store.larouchepub.com/product-p/eirbk-1999-002-00-000.htm>