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From apathy to nationalist mobilisation: politics makes a comeback in Armenia

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In the military dimension, the Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh (2–5 April 2016) changed little in the conflict zone. It has, however, had a significant impact on the situation in Armenia. The country was shocked out of the political malaise that had been the dominant mood in the last few years, and the Karabakh question, which used to animate political life in the late 1980s and early 1990s, once again became a driving force behind developments. In the internal dimension, the renewed fighting galvanised the political scene, triggered a rise in nationalist sentiments, mobilised the public and consolidated it around the Karabakh question, overshadowing the frustrations caused by the country's difficult economic situation. In the external dimension, the war, which was viewed as Moscow-endorsed Azerbaijani aggression, undermined people's trust in Russia and the Armenian-Russian alliance. It also made it clear for Armenians how uncertain the Russian security guarantees were and exacerbated their feelings of vulnerability and isolation on the international stage.

One of the main consequences the events of recent weeks has had is that Armenia has adopted a more rigid position on the Karabakh conflict; it is now a much more distant prospect that a compromise resolution will be reached and the military scenario is more likely to come to pass than it was in previous years. The new dynamics of political life in Armenia may be seen as a kind of comeback of politics and may, in turn, give new momentum to the country's internal political processes and Armenia's activities on the international level—in both cases this will be in a nationalist spirit. As a result, developments in Armenia in the coming months may be unpredictable and may trigger certain geopolitical processes in the Caucasus region and the entire post-Soviet area.

Armenia's malaise

Only a few months ago, Armenia's political and social situation was dominated by an apathy into which the country had slipped as a consequence of domestic developments since the late 1990s. In 1998 the camp of Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan was side-lined and the so-called Karabakh clan, a conglomerate of several to several dozen oligarchs from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (including many former military commanders) came to power and seized control of the political scene and key sectors of the economy.

In 2008, after the end of Robert Kocharyan's second term as president (1998–2008), Armenia undertook a failed attempt at challenging the oligarchic order. In the wake of the presidential election in which Serzh Sargsyan, the ruling camp nominee, competed with Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the leader of the Armenian National Congress, the opposition staged mass demonstrations with hundreds of thousands of protesters accusing the government of rigging the election. On 1 March the demonstrations were violently put down (leaving ten dead and hundreds detained). Even though those events did not lead to the formation of an authori-

tarian regime, they cemented the oligarchic system. Due to Sargsyan's skilful political manoeuvring (which included granting some 'licensed' opposition access to the parliament¹), the Republican Party of Armenia, representing the oligarchic and bureaucratic establishment,

Until recently, Armenia's political and social situation was dominated by apathy caused by what had been happening in the country since the late 1990s.

strengthened its grip on power and control of the political processes in the country (especially the elections, due to its control of so-called administrative resources); this led to political stagnation in Armenia². The numerous opposition parties (Armenian National Congress, Heritage and others) have been weak, lacking charismatic leaders and unable to put forward an alternative programme and take advantage of the people's discontent, as evidenced by the developments surrounding the protests against electricity price increases in the summer of 2015 (these protests came to be known as Electromaidan)³. The real power struggles have not been taking place between the government and the opposition, but between the individual oligarchic coteries, and have usually been limited to competition for resources⁴. The conse-

quences of the oligarchic rule included systemic corruption and the absence of any internal reforms, as the governing elites have been mainly interested in maintaining their holdings, to which potential reforms could pose risks.

A majority of the people have found themselves in a difficult economic situation involving high unemployment, poverty, huge income inequalities, etc. Due to this, the level of social frustration in Armenia has been very high. However, as people did not believe that change was possible and had no confidence in the entire political class (meaning both the government and the opposition), that frustration did not translate into political activity but instead caused general apathy and created increased migration pressure⁵. In the external dimension, the situation has been equally bad. Held hostage to the unresolved Karabakh conflict, Armenia has been in a geopolitical deadlock: it is in a state of war with Azerbaijan, has no relations with Turkey and, most importantly, is politically and economically dependent on Russia. The latter has been the cornerstone of Armenia's security policy: the country is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and hosts Russian military bases. It has no independent foreign policy, as Moscow controls the key sectors of Armenia's economy and has been forcing it to participate in the Russian integration projects in the post-Soviet area (e.g. in the Eurasian Union, which Armenia joined on 1 January 2015), and has simultaneously blocked Armenia's co-operation with the West (e.g. in 2013 the Kremlin forced Yerevan to scrap the plans to sign an association agreement with the European Union). At the same time, despite many critical voices coming mainly from the groups advocating rapprochement with the West, a majority of Armenians, including the governing elite, have

¹ In the 2012 general election, the following parties entered parliament: Republican Party of Armenia (69 seats), Prosperous Armenia (12), Dashnaktsutyun (10), Armenian National Congress (7), Rule of Law (3) and Heritage (2). The international community responded positively to this manual-controlled pluralism (however, independent observers reported large-scale electoral fraud).

² <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-12-09/constitutional-referendum-armenia-institutionalisation-oligarchy>

³ The opposition tried to take advantage of the protests, but it was not welcomed by the demonstrators; <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-07-01/protests-armenia-a-manifestation-states-systemic-crisis>

⁴ For instance, the conflict between Armenia's richest oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan and Serzh Sargsyan; <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-03-11/end-politics-armenia>

⁵ According to official figures, Armenia currently has a population of 3 million (compared to 3.4 million in 1989), however, these figures are probably an over-estimation. 2.5-2.8 million is probably a more realistic estimate; see for instance. <https://ditord.com/2012/02/10/armenias-de-facto-population-drops-below-3-million/>.

not until recently perceived their country's international situation as dramatic. The military alliance with Russia and the common belief in Armenia's strength and the 'organic' weakness of the Azerbaijani army, based on psychological factors (the victory in the 1992-1994 Karabakh war) created a sense of security.

The consequences of the four-day war for Armenia

The Four-Day War, which broke out overnight between 1 and 2 April 2016, came as a shock for the Armenians. While exchanges of fire and even acts of sabotage on the front line (both in Karabakh and in the Armenian province of Tavush bordering Azerbaijan) had been a regular occurrence⁶, a massive attack from the Azerbaijani side was absolutely not expected. Despite calming communiqués from the Armenian side, several days after the Moscow-mediated ceasefire (signed on 5 April) Yerevan and Stepanakert both admitted to having lost more than a dozen battle positions and that they had had to retreat several hundred metres⁷. The subsequent unprecedented dismissals of high-ranking military officers at the Armenian Ministry of Defence⁸ and the large numbers of casualties

(a total of 92 people, including 34 recruits and 4 civilians⁹; in a country struggling with a demographic crisis this loss of life was felt particularly painfully), provide a further indication that the Armenians were unprepared and taken by surprise. It is symptomatic that the prevailing mood in Armenia after the Four-Day War was the exact opposite of the all-national triumphalism that reigned in Azerbaijan¹⁰.

The Armenians were even more unsettled by the stance of Russia, whose behaviour was seen as at best merely biased in favour of Baku – a perception shared even by those who had hitherto advocated a firmly pro-Russian foreign policy.

Russia's stance has been cause for concern – even those who had hitherto advocated a firmly pro-Russian foreign policy determined that its relations with Baku were at least friendly.

Moscow, Armenia's ally and the guarantor of its security, was reproached for not condemning Azerbaijan's aggression and for limiting itself to calling on both sides to refrain from violence. There was also an outcry in Armenia about statements by Russian politicians, including by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev who spoke about a strategic partnership between Russia and Azerbaijan, as well as the ostensibly friendly atmosphere during the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov's talks in Baku on 7 April, the silence of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the cancellation of a Eurasian Union prime ministers meeting in connection with the escalation of the conflict (it had been scheduled to take place on 8 April in Yerevan). The Armenians also protested against the Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin's pledge that Russia would

⁶ According to unconfirmed reports, 27 Armenian soldiers and 6 civilians were killed in fighting in 2014, as well as 37 Azerbaijani soldiers and 2 civilians (<http://armenianweekly.com/2015/02/04/karabagh/>); in 2015 the casualty numbers were: 42 Armenian soldiers and 5 civilians, and at least 35 Azerbaijani soldiers (<http://armenianweekly.com/2016/01/14/attrition-war-escalates/>).

⁷ According to reports by the ANI Analytic Centre, which have not been denied by the Ministry of Defence of Armenia, the Armenian side lost seven battle positions in southern Karabakh (in the Hadrut Region) and fourteen in the north (near Martakert); <http://rus.azatutyun.am/content/article/27734368.html>. The Armenian side has also admitted to having to retreat some 200 to 300 metres; http://newsarmenia.am/news/nagorno_karabakh/azerbaydzhan-ne-osvobodhdal-nikakikh-territoriy-prezident-armenii/

⁸ The officials dismissed included: General Arshak Karapetyan, chief of the Military Intelligence Department of the General Staff of Armenia, Alik Mirzabekyan, deputy defence minister and head of the Material and Technical Supplies Department of the Ministry of Defence, and General Komitas Muradyan, commander of the Communication Troops; <http://www.armenianreport.com/pubs/129161/>

⁹ <http://news.am/rus/news/322142.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-04-06/four-day-war-nagorno-karabakh>

continue selling offensive weapons to Azerbaijan¹¹. Finally, the Armenian side decried the so-called Lavrov Plan, purportedly a proposed concept to partly solve the Karabakh conflict. Armenia argued it amounted to betrayal by Russia. The plan reportedly provided for a withdrawal of Armenian troops from some of the occupied territory in Azerbaijan, deployment of (presumably Russian) peacekeepers there and the granting of a temporary status to Nagorno-Karabakh. While it had never been made public, the Russian side has refrained from unambiguously denying the leaks about this plan which have appeared in the media, and the reaction by Yerevan suggested that such proposals may indeed have been made¹².

The most important effect of the escalation in April has been for Armenia to adopt a tougher position on the Karabakh question.

The Four-Day War has not resulted in any significant change in the two sides' positions along the front line or a change in the circumstances defining Armenia's geopolitical and internal situation. However, the escalation and the subsequent unfavourable diplomatic developments regarding Armenia made the country's people and elites realise how difficult their international situation was and triggered processes which might engender such change in the future.

The main consequence of the escalation in April has been for Armenia to adopt a tougher stance

on the Karabakh question. It has declared any further negotiations to be pointless unless there are guarantees to prevent Azerbaijan from resuming fighting again. It has furthermore stated that a compromise would only be possible if it envisaged a full resolution of the conflict instead of the phased approach under the so-called Madrid rules formulated by the OSCE Minsk Group. This change in Armenia's position was also visible in the radical reactions of civil society organisations, including even the pro-Western NGOs and analysts, who used to believe that concessions were necessary but are now ruling them out.

As another significant consequence of the Four-Day War, the Armenian-Russian alliance has been undermined, trust in Moscow eroded and the previously widely-held illusions about Russia dispelled. Russia has ceased to be commonly perceived as the 'eternal ally', and started to be seen as country guided by an imperialist logic to which its interests, alliances and international activities are subordinated. The change of attitude towards Russia has not been a sudden shift caused solely by the Four-Day War; it is rather the culmination of a process that had been underway in Armenia for several years, fuelled by such developments as Russia's decision to prevent Armenia from signing the association agreement with the EU in September 2013¹³, the case of Valery Permyakov (a Russian soldier from the Gyumri base, who murdered an Armenian family of five in January 2015; Russia's refusal to hand him over to face justice in Armenia led to massive demonstrations in the city¹⁴) and the protests against energy price increases in June and July 2015 where anti-Russian sentiments, initially absent, surfaced after the Russian media represented the demonstrations as a Western-inspired 'Armenian Maidan').

¹¹ <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-will-continue-selling-weapons-to-azerbaijan-and-armenia---rogozin/565479.html>. It has been estimated that Azerbaijan purchased around US\$ 4 billion worth of weapons from Russia in recent years, including tanks, cannons and infantry fighting vehicles. In February 2016, a Russian-Armenian agreement was signed under which Russia granted Armenia a loan of US\$ 200 million for the purchase of weapons; http://rbth.com/defence/2016/02/19/russia-grants-200-million-loan-to-armenia-for-purchasing-weapons_569219

¹² <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2972354>

¹³ <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-09-04/armenia-turns-away-eu>

¹⁴ For more information, see: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-01-21/anti-russian-and-anti-government-protests-armenia>

The change of attitudes towards Moscow was also visible in official reactions from Armenia: the hostile statements concerning Russia made by President Sargsyan (who said for instance that “there was no place for Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh”¹⁵; the ostensibly chilly reception given to Sergei Lavrov in Yerevan (21–22 April); and the fact that the government tabled a draft parliamentary resolution formulated by the opposition Heritage party on

In the weeks that followed the April conflict, Armenia experienced a national consolidation resembling the mobilisation over the Karabakh question in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

recognising the independence of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (parliament did not ultimately discuss the draft)¹⁶. The Armenian side also deliberately delayed the ratification of the agreement on the establishment of a Russian-Armenian air defence system, signed in December 2015. On 14 April several hundred people staged a demonstration in front of the Russian embassy in Yerevan in protest against Russia selling weapons to Azerbaijan and to demand Armenia’s withdrawal from the Eurasian Union. Social media and on-line portals in Armenia also witnessed a wave of anti-Russian articles and comments.

As a result of the Four-Day War, the Armenians also came to realise how illusory the guarantees of security and solidarity offered by the Russian-sponsored organisations were (this refers in particular to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Eurasian Union, of which Armenia is a member). The members of these organisations either failed to react to the escalation or adopted pro-Azerbaijani positions (for

instance the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev pushed for the Eurasian Union prime ministers meeting in Yerevan to be cancelled)¹⁷. The West showed little commitment to de-escalating the conflict (this includes Germany, which holds the OSCE presidency) and this had a similar effect. The Armenians suddenly felt threatened and isolated on the international stage.

The events of early April and the changed perceptions about Armenia’s international situation had an impact on internal political processes. In the weeks that followed the escalation in April, a general political and social consolidation took place which resembled the fight for the Karabakh cause in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The opposition scaled down its criticism of the government, putting aside political conflicts, and the public re-focused its attention away from economic problems to the struggle over Karabakh. In a move of symbolic significance for this national consolidation, an unprecedented meeting was held between president Sargsyan and Levon Ter-Petrosyan on 9 April at Ter-Petrosyan’s initiative. After the meeting Ter-Petrosyan called on the Armenians to refrain from criticising the government in the face of the mounting external threat¹⁸. He also met with the Karabakh president Bako Sahakyan. The leaders of the two branches of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicos Karekin II and the Lebanon-based Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia, who is highly revered by the Armenian diaspora) normally maintain rather frigid relations. In spite of this, they paid a joint visit to Stepanakert¹⁹. These developments unfolded amid a huge rise

¹⁵ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-24/caucasus-war-may-resume-at-any-moment-armenian-president-says>

¹⁶ <http://www.iragir.am/index/eng/0/country/view/35741>

¹⁷ Kazakhstan’s *de facto* pro-Azerbaijani policy had previously been a source of serious concern in Armenia. Other examples of similar actions included the pressure from Nursultan Nazarbayev, who insisted that the treaty on Armenia’s accession to the Customs Union and the Eurasian Union should include a provision explicitly excluding Nagorno-Karabakh from both operations. Astana, which made no secret of the fact that it was acting on a request from Azerbaijan, also called for customs posts to be introduced between Armenia and Karabakh.

¹⁸ <https://www.armenianow.com/en/karabakh/2016/04/12/armenia-levon-ter-petrosyan-sargsyan-meeting-karabakh/659/>

¹⁹ <http://artsakhpress.am/eng/news/42501/amenayn-hayoc-ev-metsi-tann-kilikio-katoxikosnery-zhamanel-en-arcakh-lusankarner.html>

in nationalism and radicalism among Armenians, a mobilisation of the veteran communities and an inflow of hundreds of volunteers from throughout Armenia to Karabakh. The Armenian diaspora also mobilised, including the new emigration which usually shows little activity (e.g. demonstrations were held in front of Azerbaijani and Russian diplomatic missions in the United States and Europe, including Poland)²⁰.

A surge in nationalist and radical sentiments could be observed in Armenia in recent weeks.

Armenia has also seen renewed activity by certain politicians and communities; this has not always been convenient for the government. For instance, the camp of the former president Robert Kocharyan became active again: the former foreign minister Vardan Oskanian announced the formation of a new political party named Consolidation; and Samvel Babayan the former Karabakh defence minister, popular among veterans, who had been in political exile in Moscow since 2004, returned to Armenia²¹. In an interview given to a local paper he fiercely criticised the current government (lambasting the Ministry of Defence for allowing the loss of territory to happen), and his supporters organised a demonstration in Stepanakert, calling for a meeting between Babayan and the Karabakh president Bako Sahakyan and for Babayan to be restored to the position of defence minister.

²⁰ <http://news.am/eng/news/321188.html>

²¹ Considered to have close links to Kocharyan, Samvel Babayan was the commander of the co-called Karabakh army in the years 1993-1999 and the minister of defence of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in the years 1995-1999. In 2000 he was arrested and sentenced to 14 years in prison for organising a (failed) assassination attempt of the then president of Karabakh Arkadi Ghukasyan. In 2004 he was pardoned and emigrated to Moscow.

Politics makes a (dangerous) comeback

The geopolitical deadlock in which Armenia had found itself and the internal apathy that reigned in the country until recently made it seem unlikely that the country and its people could become a driving force behind developments in the South Caucasus. The Four-Day War, however, has triggered a number of internal processes that could change this situation, undermining the paradigm of Armenians' lack of agency and the 'end of politics' in that country. The sense of being in danger, alone, and betrayed by Russia, the rise of nationalist sentiments and the widely held conviction that the entire nation needs to consolidate around the struggle for Karabakh mean that in the immediate future Armenia may become the stage of dynamic developments and the consequences for the entire region will be difficult to predict.

What the changes in Armenia mean is first and foremost that the prospects of a peaceful compromise solution to the Karabakh conflict are now minimal. On the contrary, the risk of a renewed, protracted regular warfare has increased considerably. Given the public sentiments currently prevailing in Armenia, if the government were to accept a compromise on Karabakh (which would inevitably involve a withdrawal of Armenian forces from at least some of the occupied territories), it would be tantamount to inviting internal political turmoil. A scenario of this kind might involve not only fierce political disputes and thousands of people demonstrating in the streets, but also attempts at a coup d'état or the nationalist communities resorting to terror methods. As recently as autumn 2015 Armenia witnessed events indicating that such developments could indeed be possible – the secret services arrested a militant group numbering in the dozens of the Nork Marash district of Yerevan; it had been planning attacks on high-ranking officials

including the president in order to obstruct the potential deal on Nagorno-Karabakh. The group was led by Artur Vardanyan, who had gained his combat experience in the civil war in Syria where he was a member of a militia defending the Armenian-populated town of Kes-sab on the Turkish border against the jihadists.

The Four-Day War has triggered a number of internal processes that could undermine the paradigm of Armenians' lack of agency and the 'end of politics' in that country.

It also included the former deputy defence minister Vahan Shirkhanyan²². In June 2016, Jirair Sefilyan, a Lebanon-born Karabakh war veteran and noted nationalist activist, was arrested for planning armed attacks along with his supporters²³.

What makes the above scenario likely is the fact that, unlike many other post-Soviet states, Armenia has a very empowered civil society with strong traditions of civic activity, an extensive network of non-governmental organisations, and a relatively good level of freedom of speech and political freedoms. The long tradition of political violence is also important; the public often regards this as acceptable. To illustrate this one may mention: the ongoing respected tradition of the fedayi (guerrilla) movements in the 19th century in eastern Turkey and in the 20th century in Nagorno-Karabakh; the terror activities of the Dashnaktsutyun party members against the tsarist government (late 19th and early 20th century); the attacks on the Young Turks activists responsible for the Armenian genocide (1920s), the terror activities of the ASALA (Armenian Army of the Liberation of

Armenia) founded in Lebanon, which organised attacks on Turkish diplomats (1970s and 1980s); and the attacks in the Moscow metro carried out in 1977 by members of the underground Armenian nationalist organisation known as the National Unity Party²⁴. The newest history of Armenia also provides some examples, such as the attack on the Armenian parliament on 27 October 1999, when an armed group of several men commanded by Nairi Hunanyan shot dead the prime minister Vazgen Sargsyan, the parliamentary speaker Karen Demirchyan and several ministers and deputies.

Potential attempts by Moscow to impose a resolution of the Karabakh conflict on the Armenians or – even more likely – a new escalation of the conflict by the Azerbaijani side could also trigger an uncontrollable outbreak of violence in the Caucasus. Should that happen, the scenario of war will be highly probable. Feeling trapped and facing a national disaster (that is how the Armenians would perceive a withdrawal from the occupied territories without Nagorno-Karabakh obtaining a determined status), Yerevan might decide to recognise the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (which would be tantamount to breaking the peace process) and take the risk of starting a pre-emptive war not just in Nagorno-Karabakh, but also on other fronts (Tavush, Nakhichevan). It might also decide to carry out strikes against strategic infrastructure in Azerbaijan, such as pipelines, power plants, oil installations or the Mingachevir reservoir providing the supply of water to Baku, and authorise or organise sabotage or terror acts abroad.

While highly probable, this dramatic course of developments in Armenia in connection with the Karabakh conflict is not the only possible scenario. Currently three other scenarios seem possible:

²² <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27393505.html>; <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/830188/nss-arrested-vahan-shirkhanyan-over-armed-gang%E2%80%99s-case.html>

²³ <http://news.am/rus/news/333047.html>

²⁴ 7 people died and 37 were injured in three separate attacks. The KGB detained three members of the group: Stepan Zatikyan, Zaven Bagdasaryan and Hakob Stepanyan. They were executed after a secret trial.

- maintaining the *status quo*: Moscow will ineffectively try to impose a compromise solution on the Armenian side and Azerbaijan will refrain from escalating the conflict again; in this variant the situation will revert to the pre-war status, i.e. there will be only sporadic exchanges of fire on the front line, inconclusive negotiations under the aegis of the Minsk Group will continue, and Russia will continue to use the Karabakh conflict to consolidate its own influence in the region;
- chaos in the Caucasus: facing pressure from Russia or a new escalation of the conflict on the part of Azerbaijan, Armenia will start a pre-emptive war that will morph into an all-out armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It will have the same effects as internal destabilisation in Armenia in the event of Yerevan's hypothetical acceptance of an imposed peace plan, i.e. chaos in the entire Caucasus region, with consequences that would be difficult to predict;
- the 'Ossetianisation' of Armenia: the Armenian side will yield to Russian pressure and accept the imposed peace plan, Armenian troops will withdraw from the occupied territories and a peacekeeping force will be deployed in the conflict zone. Legally it will be under the aegis of the OSCE or another international organisation, but in reality it will be composed of Russian troops; internal protests in Armenia will be ineffective or will be quelled; in that variant

Armenia would *de facto* lose sovereignty, once again slipping into a political malaise, and emigration would reach catastrophic proportions, in which case the country would start to resemble South Ossetia, gradually depopulating and irrelevant even in regional power games.

Irrespective of which scenario eventually comes to pass, it seems that the recent events will have one lasting effect – they have undermined the paradigm of pro-Russian Armenians. Because of the objective geopolitical circumstances, Armenia will formally remain Russia's 'outpost' in the Caucasus, but it will be hard to regard it as Russia's ally. This may hinder Russia's plans to re-integrate the post-Soviet area under Moscow's banner and force Russia to pay more attention to the Armenian factor in its calculations.

The above scenarios do not take into consideration the difficult-to-predict broader external context, and especially the internal situation in Russia and developments in the Middle East. Geopolitical shocks around Armenia cannot be ruled out given the fact that global instability is generally rising (such as a serious internal crisis in Russia, a sudden destabilisation in Turkey, the Middle East conflict spilling over into the Caucasus or an internal collapse in Azerbaijan). Any one of these could change the current balance of power in the region, as a result of which possible scenarios of developments in the Caucasus would have to be drawn up from scratch.

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