

Dear All,

For your information, please see a letter that has been sent to the Delegation Heads of representations to the UN of the states that have recognized the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire of 1915, as well as to the members of the UN Human Rights Council which recently adopted an anti-genocide resolution. The genocidal war has to be stopped as soon as possible, to save the populations of Armenia, Artsakh, and Azerbaijan.

14 October 2020, 16:00

Your Excellencies,

I was planning to write this letter to notify you about our gratefulness to the United Nations for granting Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) a consultative status with ECOSOC; and to thank the UN Human Rights Council for voting for the anti-genocide resolution.

However, as you know, starting from September 27 a war ensued in my region. Azerbaijan attacked the non-recognized Nagorny Karabakh (Artsakh) whose sole security defender is the Republic of Armenia. As I write, the situation changes minute by minute, but at this stage it is clear now that the war has brought a humanitarian catastrophe to the region. I am not going to present you with the well-known facts about the conflict and the peace plan which had been developed over the years (and currently most likely ruined forever) under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs: I am sure you know about that and there are plenty analyses and publications on that available freely. However, as Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) is an organization which has worked for peace in the region and beyond for many years, I feel it is my duty to bring some of the less obvious aspects of the situation to your attention.

In this war, Azerbaijan is supported by Turkey. There are numerous reports confirmed by independent observers and media sources of the presence of Turkish F-16, as well as jihadists and Syrian mercenaries from terrorist organizations on the battlefield. We can send media reports to you upon request. The cease-fire seemingly agreed by the sides, negotiated with the mediation of Russia and welcomed by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs (USA, France, Russia), did not hold. The war started with an offensive on Nagorny Karabakh and surrounding territories (the so-called 'buffer zone'), but the logic of escalation makes the territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia gradually being engulfed in the war as well – with all the dire consequences.

One of the biggest issues is the humanitarian catastrophe which develops in the region that is under direct attack – inside and outside Nagorny Karabakh (Artsakh) proper. Particularly in Artsakh, there has been a significant displacement of the population (several tens of thousands), many settlements are destroyed, including significant damage to the residential areas of main towns; many people are wounded; Amnesty International reported cluster munitions planted indiscriminately, which present an imminent threat to the civilians for the months to come, even if and when the war stops. It should be underlined that because Nagorny Karabakh (Artsakh) is a non-recognized entity, Azerbaijan prohibits entry of the internationals and international organizations there (because Artsakh can be entered only from the side of Armenia). The international community therefore, since the times of the main cease-fire (1994), has left Artsakh

with no attention whatsoever, apart from very rare humanitarian presences, such as of ICRC and some others.

Since 1994, neither side entertained implementing seriously what they declared from times to times: preparing populations for peace. For that, they needed large-scale exchanges between media and civil society; and Artsakh had to be open to the international community. This, as well as actions to address the consequences of war, including the atrocities, would remove the feeling of siege among the population there, address the hatred that the sides inherited after the war of the 1990s, and to some extent restore trust. Such work could bring about a situation where Armenians of Artsakh would seriously consider reconciliation and co-habitation with Azerbaijanis. But particularly the Azerbaijani government, since around 2000s, alongside with its clampdown on the freedoms inside its own society, also gradually made it more and more difficult for any reconciliation work to be done with Armenians. Moreover, the sides built a historical and conflict narrative where ‘the other side’ is the main historical foe. In parallel, all attempts to establish diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia failed. Still in 2008, during the process of the so-called ‘football diplomacy’, when Turkey and Armenia came close to a point of signing protocols and establishing relations, I mentioned several times publicly and internationally that this would allow Armenians to build trust with Turks, and Turkey to be more welcome in the South Caucasus region. That would also give Turkey a legitimate chance of having a say in the conflict around Nagorny Karabakh. But Turkey, already under the leadership of Erdogan, ruined the chance of normalization. Now, with a hindsight, this may be construed as Turkey’s predisposition of intervening in the region militarily rather than using its soft power.

After this chance was ruined, an unprecedented campaign developed globally, towards the centenary of the Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, on the recognition of the Armenian genocide and other tragic events which took place in Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) during the First World War. Armenians all over the world became grateful to those of their governments which, at least at the level of the legislative power, recognized the 1915 Genocide. Apparently, Turkey (as well as Azerbaijan) perceived this chain-recognition, which was a mere non-consequential symbolic gesture of justice vis-a-vis the Armenian nation and culture, as an anti-Turkish action in their war with Armenia: a non-stop war, which had its hot stages, at that point in time it was subdued, but they were waiting for the new opportunity to rekindle. Thus the countries that recognized the Genocide, without simultaneously taking precautionary steps to assure the security in the region, particularly in NK (for instance, not sanctioning for or outright disallowing Azerbaijan purchasing huge amounts of armaments, or conditioning relations with the sides from concrete actions of reconciliation), inadvertently contributed to the build-up towards the current war. The war where Azerbaijan and Turkey together fight Armenians in Artsakh, and the Republic of Armenia is the only one which supports the small (150,000-strong) community of Armenians there.

The fierceness of the war; the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance; the prohibition of the international community to intervene inside Artsakh, at least for humanitarian purposes; the huge upheaval which results in the destruction of an entire, very significant and unique, cultural and national community; the lack of desire by Azerbaijan and Turkey to listen to the calls for cease-fire and negotiations; these are the factors because of which the Armenians all over the world consider this a clear continuation of the century-long genocidal policies against themselves. There is always a justification for genocide, it can sound very plausible. In the case of Azerbaijan it is ‘these are our lands’.

It is clear, at the same time, that the expansion of the war region, including towards Georgia, Russia, Iran, the appearance of jihadists and mercenaries, etc., is going to affect the entire international community very seriously. The Armenian side is not planning to succumb: it is ready to cease fire and go for negotiations, but the Azerbaijani side wants Artsakh ethnically cleansed and fully flat, and the Armenian presence and culture scorched from there.

It is not the time now to look for who is guiltier and who is less in this situation. Nobody in their right mind can claim that over the last 26 years since 1994 Armenia had done everything needed to establish peace. For 20 years, until 2018, a kleptocratic regime was being gradually rooted in Armenia. That regime had a vested interest in the continuation of the status quo, i.e. no peace-no war situation. That regime was removed via the April 2018 people's peaceful revolution. And now Armenia is a nascent democracy, which, because of the failures of its previous regime, the issues inherited from that regime, and its incapacity to build up, in such a short time, proper response policies towards the incursions and demands of the autocratic adversaries – Azerbaijan and Turkey, is engaged in the fiercest war of attrition, a war comparable to which has not taken place in South Caucasus since the times of the First World War.

Currently, since the Turkish-Azerbaijani side does not stop the war, the Armenian side has only two options: to fight to the end or to accept Artsakh becoming an empty ruin, devoid of any Armenian presence. It is the first option that the Armenian side has chosen. The international community understands this quite well. Peace is not only declarations for peace. Peace is also action. And the best action in this situation is working for the restoration of the balance of power. This means stopping arms deliveries to Azerbaijan, as well as other actions which will make peace more likely and coming sooner, and prevent more young people's and civilians' casualties from both sides.

There is one thing currently that the international community can do: intervene in Artsakh. There exists a maximum level of interference: the remedial recognition. It will provide the Armenian side with legitimacy to insist on negotiations with Azerbaijan. It will also prevent the war from entering deeper into the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan and of the larger region. There are also other levels of intervention: entry to Artsakh, from the Armenian side, for humanitarian reasons; for the reasons of monitoring; and any other ways of opening-up Artsakh to the world. Make the situation fully transparent. There are also other actions that states can take: diplomatic notes to Turkey and Azerbaijan to hold hostile activities, with concrete scenarios on the response actions, i.e. in the form of severing economic and other ties, which will follow if this is not done.

Those countries who understand what is genocide also understand that it does not have to result in the deaths of several hundreds of thousands of human beings to be called what it is. At this stage, it can still be prevented. They also understand that if it is not prevented, it may seem far away but will affect things globally. They also know well that now it is time to act for their words to equal their deeds.

Thank you for your attention,

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan,

CEO