

# Armenia's neighbors use war in Karabakh toward their own ends

by an Armenian patriot

Armenia, the native land of the Armenian people, is part of the Middle East, one of the cradles of human civilization. Situated between Europe and the South, Armenia has often unwillingly become a target for those states and political forces that strive to gain regional as well as worldwide control. The result of this was the genocide of the Armenian people in 1915-21, and the final conquest of Armenia in 1920-22, which was able to take place largely due to world indifference. Armenia was annexed and divided among Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. At the present moment, the international forces behind those spheres of influence are rearranging themselves, vitally affecting the realities in the Middle and Near East.

Now, again, the strategic location of Armenia and the aspirations of the Armenian people are being used by outside forces to gain influence in the Transcaucasus. Karabakh and neighboring countries have become levers for outside forces to realize their attempts at governing in the region. Possibly, this is because the region's countries have not developed a fully independent policy. Nagorno-Karabakh, de jure and de facto, is an indivisible part of Armenia. But, not being recognized by the international community as such, Nagorno-Karabakh has become one of the main levers for promoting instability. Beyond that, attempts are being made to reestablish autocratic rule in Armenia, thus threatening not only the security of Armenia, but also the development of democracy. Only in the absence of external aggression and interference, can Armenians achieve democracy and political stability.

For example, currently the countries of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) are treating the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh as a self-determination issue for a national minority living within the borders of Azerbaijan, thus concealing the real nature of the conflict, which represents the struggle of Armenia, and of Nagorno-Karabakh, to rid themselves of all colonial rule by becoming one independent state.

The countries neighboring Armenia have great influence on Armenia, and are very important for understanding the processes which operate there.

## Georgia's influence

First among these neighbors is Georgia. If we accept that, in time, the importance of Georgia will decrease as a reliable link between Armenia and the external world, it is still true that cultural and religious unity will always bind us together. Furthermore, we are situated in the same geographical location, in an area where religious unity has always been decisive.

The present political and economic situation of Georgia can be characterized as critical. If the economic crisis there is typical for all the former U.S.S.R. republics, then the political crisis is much deeper, and near-term stabilization is difficult to predict. The roots of the Georgian crisis are intertwined with the minority and national problems there, including the nationality conflicts in the regions of Ossetia and Abkhazia. Similar to them, are hidden national conflicts in the region of Adjara. We must also take into consideration the situation in the seacoast areas inhabited by Mengrels, and the tendencies in the central region, where certain forces, in the wake of the ouster of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, are considering breaking away from the central Georgian state and forming new republics. Even if the Tbilisi government succeeds now in stopping such plans, the longer-term problems are by no means solved.

The processes taking place in Georgia cause great interest, first of all because they are so paradigmatic. The dictatorial way in which problems were dealt with in the past gave Georgia a particularly negative reputation internationally. The lack of international recognition marked the beginning of the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia. Overthrow can be considered the simplest mechanism for controlling newly formed states. Gamsakhurdia was an unpredictable political figure, and it was necessary to replace him with someone more flexible. Once such a personality was found, namely Eduard Shevardnadze, then the problems of international recognition and other issues were solved at once.

It is important to mention that the one country which did not protest against the Gamsakhurdia government was Turkey. The logical expression of this was the large amount of credit Turkey granted to Georgia. Added to this were the

friendly relations between Gamsakhurdia's Georgia and the Chechens, and, under clear Turkish influence, the relatively passive position taken by the Muslims of Abkhazia, in contrast to the bloody war being fought against Ossetia, Russia's outpost in the Caucasus. Now, with Gamsakhurdia gone, it is quite possible that in the very near future we will have stable relations with Ossetia.

The Georgian map is not complete without looking at the Armenian community. It is one of the biggest ethnic communities, but hasn't any essential influence on political life, and is acting rather passively. All in all, the political situation in Georgia is still in flux, and it would be premature to say that the new government will last.

### **Iran and Turkey jockey for influence**

Iran is Armenia's most important neighbor—at least in respect to potentialities. Unfortunately, the Armenian government hasn't tried to improve relations with Iran, although the necessity for doing this is obvious. I think there are some political forces that are preventing any improvement of relations with Iran, even if this is harmful to the interests of the Armenian people. In general I should say that Iran has demonstrated good-neighborly relations to Armenia, although Iran might have been expected to defend Azerbaijan as a neighboring and Muslim country. But the Iranian government chose a neutral position and has, as a peace mediator, attempted to settle the conflict. This role is quite understandable, if we analyze recent events.

For centuries, Iran has always fought against Turkey over territorial spheres of influence. The development of the Russian Empire and then the formation of the U.S.S.R. neutralized Turkey and Iran's influence in this region. But since the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the struggle has resumed, with Iran playing the "Islamic card," while Turkey is relying on economic penetration, and the advantage of the common Turkish language, presenting itself as a civilized and modern-progressive Muslim country.

The development of events shows that Turkey is the winner in this struggle. The ruling circles of the Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan have more than once announced their preference for the Turkish model. To counter these forces, ways must be found to reduce Turkey's influence in this region. Armenia, with its anti-Turkish history, can be part of this. This could have the effect of preventing Turkey from taking any decisive measures in the Karabakh War, and thus make it possible for Azeris and other Muslims to turn to Iran for help. For centuries, the common people have been against the European secular-progressive model. Beyond that, Iran's neutral role in the Karabakh War will give Iran the chance to rehabilitate itself in international circles.

Since Turkey was separated for 70 years from the eastern Turkic nations, the world began to think that the Pan-Turkic ideology was dead. To be sure, the Iron Curtain had the effect of containing Turkey. However, after the destruction of the

U.S.S.R., the foreign policy of the world powers changed, toward devising a new division of the world. Two years ago, when such plans began to be discussed, an agreement was reached consigning the Transcaucasus to the Turkish sphere of influence, in the context of Turkey's role as the executor of U.S. plans. The last two years show that these plans are now reality.

What forces came up with this plan, and what do they want to do with the U.S.S.R.'s heritage?

Before the destruction of the U.S.S.R., Turkey was used as a force against it. In this role, Turkey could demand and receive very considerable help from West, enabling it to maintain one of the greatest armies of the world, and also to solve domestic economic problems. It would appear that after the demise of the U.S.S.R., Turkey would have lost her profitable role. However, Turkey's political leaders found a new role for Turkey, not less profitable. They introduced themselves to the West as the alternative to Iran's Muslim fundamentalism. This solution was really a stroke of genius from their standpoint, because it opened the doors to Central Asia. Why not, with some effort, dominate the region of the former Russian Empire where the Turkic nations live? Given these realities, one can only speak about a revival of Pan-Turkic ideology.

Turkey's new role, besides its benefits, has dangerous elements as well. However, under overall favorable conditions, the situation can be changed to have a beneficial effect upon Armenia. The potentially beneficial side is the deep cleavage in identity within Turkish society, between a pro-European component and the Islamic-centered identity of the Anatolian Turk.

According to the policy of Turkish sociologist Sheref Mardi, "Turkey is divided into two parts: Rumelian Turks are really Europeans, whereas Anatolian Turks, connected with Islam, have never understood and could never stand European influence. These are two different races." They are really two different races, because these Rumelians are Romanians, Armenians, Greeks, and Bulgarians, who were forced to accept the Turkish religion. This conflict certainly will lead to some contradictions within Turkish society itself.

One cannot say that all this is being ignored by the West. The London *Economist*, while writing about the positive role of Turkey in the Central Asian region, also warns that Turkey's new role will cause a new Turkish orientation to the East, and otherwise to the absolutist idea of the victory of Pan-Turkism. It is impossible for the West not to be concerned over such an outcome. With its present 56 million population, Turkey is more or less realizing the plans of the West for the region, but this will not be the case once, under the Pan-Turkic doctrine, Turkey has expanded into a "Greater Turkey," or "Turan," with a population exceeding 100 million. Turkey's tendency to become a superpower in the Middle East and western Asia will have to be opposed by the superpowers of this world.