

# ARMENIA: Nagorno-Karabakh War: Putin destabilising Pashinyan's regime

By Willy Fautre (*Human Rights Without Frontiers*)

The European Times (17.11.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2H7PrdQ> – On 9 November 2020, an armistice agreement was signed between Baku and Yerevan under the aegis of Moscow after over six weeks of fighting.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Armenia suffered a crushing defeat and lost territories that have been under its control for about 30 years. President Ilham Alijev's Azerbaijan regained about one half of the territories seized by Armenian forces in the early 1990's that Azerbaijan had been trying to reclaim for decades on the basis of several UN resolutions. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey asserted its ambitions to be recognised as a regional power in the Caucasus and President Vladimir Putin's Russia imposed a unilateral peacekeeping operation under its sole authority.

By stopping the war, Putin is freezing – again – the conflict between the two former Soviet republics and increasing his military presence on the ground. The deployment of peace troops in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor strengthens Russia's dominant position in the Caucasus, side-lining and making obsolete the OSCE Minsk Group co-chaired by France, Russia, and the US since its inception in 1992.

Another important opportunity for Putin to expand Russia's reach in the region might still be to come: the toppling of Pashinyan by the same people who elected him two years ago. In the aftermath of the armistice, thousands of Armenians have expressed feeling humiliated and betrayed by their Prime Minister. They said Pashinyan did not have the right to sign such an agreement without consulting the people. They took to the streets to protest the secured territorial advances for Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, storming the parliament building and demanding Pashinyan's resignation. However, he refuses to step down.

Pashinyan was the leader of the 2018 Armenian revolution that overthrew the corrupt and dictatorial regime of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. On 8 May 2018, Pashinyan managed to obtain enough votes from the Parliament to become the Prime Minister himself.

For years, Putin has sold arms to both Azerbaijan and Armenia. He had good relations with former PM Sargsyan and so he was greatly concerned at the emergence of a people's revolution calling for a democratic regime. Rebellions and quests for democracy and human rights in Russia's neighbourhood are always perceived as an existential threat to Putin's own rule because revolutions can be contagious.

The question is if Putin could have intervened more energetically at an earlier stage of the conflict to put an end to it or if he waited on purpose until the inevitable capitulation of Armenia to successfully push his pawns forward. Now that Pashinyan's rule is contested, a regime change that side-lines the influence of the West in Yerevan and aligns more with Moscow might be the next episode in the

post-conflict period.

The successful political and diplomatic operation led by Putin provides him with significant leverage to manipulate and pressure all parties in the region for a long time to come, pending a definitive solution which seems unlikely.

*Photo: The European Times.*