



INTERVIEW War over Nagorno-Karabakh
"No one tries to stop them"

Stand: 07.11.2020 13:57 Uhr

The war over Nagorno-Karabakh has been raging for almost five weeks. Armenia's Prime Minister Pashinyan sees his country left alone in the fight against two neighbors. He calls Russian peacekeeping troops a viable solution.

tagesschau.de: Mr. Pashinyan, thank you very much for taking the time to do the interview. When you with the democratic protest movement brought about the peaceful transfer of power in 2018, did you think it possible that two years later a war would break out?

Nikol Pashinyan: When I was a member of parliament perhaps back in 2016 or 17 I predicted at the time that war is inevitable. Why? Because war is Azerbaijan's, it has always been Azerbaijan's objective. Why has war been Azerbaijan objective? Because it has not been ready for mutual concessions for solving the Karabakh issue. Because mutual concessions mean that you need to step back somewhat from your maximum bar.

And the fact that Azerbaijan is and was not ready for a mutual concession is best illustrated by the Kasan process. The Kasan process of 2011 when documents was on the table, according to which the Armenian side agreed to give five Azerbaijani districts in return for Nagorno Karabakh receiving

interim status, which would later be made more specific by a referendum or plebiscite. And that was a significant concession by the Armenian side. It would be because, it contained a lot of uncertainty for the security of the Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh. But the Armenian side was opting for it. The document was negotiated and ready at the last minute. Azerbaijan refused to sign the documents.

This is not just an episode. It has been a methodology, something that would become acceptable to Armenia and Karabakh as a result of an effort to make a mutual concession immediately at that time it starts to become unacceptable for Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan continues to become more hardline in its position. This has always been the Azerbaijani formula. Azerbaijan has always prepared for a military solution of the Karabakh issue.

But in July 2020 on the Armenia Azerbaijan border there was a provocation. As a result of that provocation Azerbaijan understood that its armed forces are not capable of solving the Karabakh issue. That's why it was forced to request the help of mercenaries and terrorists. What happened next was that from August, what they called supposedly a military exercise, in fact, was a process of bringing mercenaries and terrorists from Syrian territories under Turkey's control. These people were transported to Azerbaijan. Much Turkish military equipment was deployed in Azerbaijan. And Turkish military experts were also deployed to Azerbaijan. They undertook jointly the attack on Nagorno Karabakh.

tagesschau.de: Unlike the former Presidents Kocharian and Sargsyan, you are not from Nagorno-Karabakh. Is that why you expressed strong support with statements such as "Karabakh is Armenia", which was seen as a provocation in Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan: That is connected with the history of the Karabakh question. The international community, after some point in time, unfortunately lost the information on the essence of the Karabakh issue. Back in the day when the Karabakh issue came up in Europe and the world, it was viewed as one manifestation of democratization of the Soviet Union, which led to the falling of the Berlin Wall. And the Karabakh issue emerged in 1988 when the Soviet Union was having Gorbachev's process of perestroika and democratization. And the Karabakh Armenians, who always were more than 80 percent of the population of the autonomous district of Nagorno Karabakh, decided to use the opportunities made available by democratization to reinstate their violated rights in an absolutely peaceful process.

What right was it in the 1920s when the Soviet Union was being formed? Nagorno Karabakh, with over 80 percent Armenian population, was placed within Soviet Azerbaijan and not Soviet Armenia. So in 1988, the Supreme Council of the Autonomous District of Nagorno Karabakh adopted a decision on reunification with Soviet Armenia, which was its legitimate right, as the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia also adopted a similar decision in response to these very peaceful decisions, unarmed process's Soviet Union and Soviet Azerbaijan responded with violence, firstly in some guide, and in Baku they organized pogroms of Armenians.

Is Nagorno Karabakh Armenia? Hayastan means a land where Armenians live - Hay people, the Armenian people, land of the Armenians. Those who have been in Nagorno Karabakh would have seen the fifth century and later centuries Armenian churches. The first Armenian school was established in Nagorno Karabakh and the population of Nagorno Karabakh has always been 80 plus percent Armenian. If this is a provocation, that is the whole problem. That fact, the fact that Armenians live in Nagorno Karabakh Azerbaijan has always considered that a provocation, a provocation for them to engage in aggression and now using rockets to shell several town civilian towns and villages, they are fighting this so-called provocation.

And really broadly, let me tell you something more generally. It may be that the existence of Armenians in itself is seen as a provocation to some countries or by some countries, in fact, including Turkey, where in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, the genocide of Armenians took place. Huge Armenian territories were cleansed of Armenians via the genocide. And my assessment is that a hundred years later, Turkey has returned to the South Caucasus to continue that operation.

But this is not just anti-armenian emotional operation in my belief. It is my belief that this is a manifestation of Turkey's expansionist, imperialistic policies, because Armenians in the South Caucasus are the last obstacle on the path of Turkey's expansion to the north, to the east, to the southeast. And I view this in the context of the policies Turkey is implementing in the Mediterranean Sea, in Syria, Iraq, in the relations with Greece and Cyprus. And in light of the fact that we see Turkey encourage certain actions in Europe.

tagesschau.de: When you were in opposition, you spoke out against Armenia's membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Union. Already during the protests in 2018 you sought contact with Moscow. How would you describe your position as, as pro-European or pro-Russian?

Pashinyan: First of all, in my parliamentary activity, there was an episode where I voted against Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union. But there was an episode where I also voted against Armenia leaving the Eurasian Economic Union.

And during the revolution with our people, we decided that after the revolution there will be no geopolitical U-turns, and this is essentially a result of our collective decision. And it's very important to note that U-turns in foreign policy can be very dangerous.

Yes. Today, we are a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. Last year Armenia held the presidency in the Eurasian Economic Union. And our presidency in the Eurasian Economic Union turned out to be quite productive. We concluded a number of new treaties, but we also cooperate with the European Union and our Democratic agenda has not changed at all.

tagesschau.de: You are regularly in contact with President Putin. What kind of concrete support do you expect from Russia?

Pashinyan: The support that we expect from Russia, we receive it. We do not have any reservations concerning the quality of Russia's honoring of the partnership commitments towards Armenia. On the other hand, though, we understand that Russia is, first of all, a co-chair country in the OSCE Minsk Group, which has a certain neutrality obligation in the Nagorno Karabakh issue. And also, Russia has a good relationship with Azerbaijan. Now, this is not really a very straightforward situation, but I want to say that we are pleased with how Russia is honoring its commitments towards Armenia, the quality of honoring of those commitments towards Armenia.

tagesschau.de: How about Russian peacekeepers?

Pashinyan: That's one of the important questions, as I said, deployment of Russian peacekeepers is acceptable to us. The question is not so much and not only political as also it is practical. Russia is present in the region. Peacekeepers means a swift response and Russia is present in the region. Russia knows this region to the point where I can say linguistically in terms of linguistic communication. There are ideas of possibly having peacekeepers from different countries in this region, starting with language and communication, linguistic communication lines, knowing the region, knowing the mindset and these subtleties. We continue to think that the activity of Russian peacekeepers could be the most effective in that sense.

tagesschau.de: But then Azerbaijan is proposing to bring in peacekeepers from Turkey. Would you accept that?

But, you know, Turkey is essentially already a country that brings mercenaries and terrorists to this region. It's hard to imagine a country with that role contributing to any peace process, especially a peacekeeping or peacemaking process.

tagesschau.de: How do you explain the shelling of cities in Azerbaijan like Gandja and the use of cluster munitions in Barda?

Pashinyan: Well, let me start off by describing some facts. When there are some explosions in Azerbaijani towns, the Azerbaijani government takes the ambassadors accredited to Azerbaijan and journalists and escorts them to the scene and shows them things, but any diplomatic representative has never been to Stepanakert, Martuni, Martakert, or Askeran. These are towns in Karabakh, let alone the villages in Nagorno Karabakh and no diplomatic representative has seen what is going on. Journalists have a very hard time visiting, meaning international journalists.

But today those towns are half destroyed. Continuous shelling of towns in Nagorno Karabakh has not triggered any international response. No one has even tried to stop it. But Nagorno Karabakh Defense Army having also legitimate military targets in some towns or near some towns has responded with strikes.

tagesschau.de: But why was the town of Barda bombarded with cluster munitions? Human Rights Watch has found evidence.

Pashinyan: Did people not get killed in Stepanerkert?

tagesschau.de: Now I am asking about Gandja and Barda.

Pashinyan: No, I'm trying to understand. I mean, why are you not asking me what's the point, I guess, than the civilians that get killed? So we need to just provide explanations for why civilians are dying. If that explanation for Stepanakert, and the civilians in Stepanerkert and Martakert and Martuni, if you are happy with that explanation for those towns, then the explanation is the same. It makes no difference, where the civilians are dying. If the explanation for Stepanakert is satisfactory to you, then that formula should work in any town in the world in respect of the dying of civilians. If you're satisfied, for me, I'm not satisfied with that explanation, for instance.

tagesschau.de: Civilians on both sides dy. Shouldn't that be stopped?

Pashinyan: Nobody is arguing against that who is who is. Who is arguing against it? Nobody's arguing against that. At least in Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia nobody is. But let's look at the statistics and let's look at the chronology.

tagesschau.de: The last time you met Azerbaijan's President Aliyev, was at the Security Conference in Munich. What are your conditions for serious negotiations with Azerbaijan?

Pashinyan: In the conditions of war, to speak about negotiations is normal, but it's not realistic. The conditions for negotiations were discussed and agreed upon in the Moscow statement dated October 10, which was reiterated subsequently. The Moscow statement was adopted with mediation of the Russian president. It was followed by the reiterations with mediation of the presidents of France and the United States. And there is a clear plan there and it's essentially agreed upon. So if there is an agreed upon set of points, what's the point? What's the meaning of proposing conditions to one another? Bottom line that was jointly enacted, jointly adopted. So there is no need for proposing any extra conditions. The conditions are worded in that text and we thought those conditions were acceptable.

tagesschau.de: Do you see the OSCE Minsk Group still as the right format to find a solution?

Pashinyan: Yes, of course. We think that it is the only format where this question can be discussed and solved and decided. But it doesn't mean that the international community should not support the Minsk Group co-chairs. Of course, the international community must support. However, in fact that is the format of the discussions.

tagesschau.de: What do you think the EU should do? Should the EU send peacekeepers?

Pashinyan: I already answered the question about peacekeepers. We need to take into consideration also the position of other states in the region. And we need to make sure that the peacekeepers really bring stability and not instability or reasons for concern. And I think that the Russian peacekeepers are the most suitable and right actors in this process.

And as to the EU, I have said a number of times, in many interviews I have expressed my opinion the EU, yes, could support the process by clearly acknowledging who initiated this war, by clearly acknowledging the fact of transporting mercenaries to the region. In fact, we already have two mercenaries captured by the Karabakh Defense Army as prisoners of war, and they are clearly testifying as to what exactly happened. This is a very important, substantive matter.

One of these mercenaries only had four years of school. The other mercenary does not know how to read or write. Those people were brought here from Syrian territories that are under Turkey's control. This phenomenon where people really with no education, who don't know the letters of the alphabet. Those people are brought here, injected certain so-called values inciting them to the people who live here are enemies.

By the way, there is something very interesting here. I want to draw a parallel. I want us all to draw a parallel in territories of Syria under its control Turkey recruits these people, transports them into Turkish territory, then from Turkey transports them to Azerbaijan, then from Azerbaijan transports them to the hostilities zone in Nagorno Karabakh. They promised to them a salary of two thousand dollars a month. Very importantly, rewards to those who would cut the heads of the infidels. For every head the reward is established at one hundred dollars. Do you see any similarities with what is happening somewhere these days?

And that's the reason why I think that in my assessment that's a Third World War, which is a hybrid war, has now started. It is unfolding in all directions. The war is aimed equally against Christians, Muslims, Jews, I want to clarify why I consider that also aimed against Muslims, because it is creating the wrong image of Muslims around the world. And secondly, people who don't have education cannot read or write. And I'm sorry for saying this, people with a very narrow world view with those people's illiteracy is being used for narrow political objectives. And we know who organizes it. We know who the organizer is. We see that same phenomenon take place in Nagorno Karabakh. We see that same phenomenon take place, manifest itself in Vienna. We see that same phenomenon manifest itself in Canada. We see that same phenomenon manifest itself in France. And I continue to state the same phenomenon.

We see also continue and take place and manifest in slightly different ways in Russia in the last month. We saw a number of statements, reports of the activities of terrorist groups in the North Caucasus, which the Russian law enforcement effectively have eliminated, eradicated. Then there is my

statement. My statement is, oh, by the way, it's also very important that there's something else which further proves that this war is equally aimed against Muslims.

We are seeing a number of Arab countries very rightfully responding to what is happening. We see the valuable response of those countries. We see the valuable response of the Islamic Republic of Iran to what is happening because the presence of those people in our region is viewed by the Islamic Republic of Iran also as a threat to its security, in the same way it is viewed as a threat to themselves by many Arab countries.

tagesschau.de: Should Iran play a bigger role in the process?

Pashinyan: Iran is our neighbor country and the neighbor country to Azerbaijan and naturally Iran is interested in the process and it has concerns about the process. Our position is that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs are the right format for discussing the Nagorno Karabakh issue. But I said it doesn't mean that the international community should not support the voice Minsk Group co-chairs.

tagesschau.de: My last question. Your government took office with the promise of reforms and fighting corruption. Is that still possible?

Pashinyan: The demand for it now is more acute. Am I pleased with the results we have achieved in the fight against corruption? No, I'm not pleased. Why? Well, but I also know why we have not had sufficient progress, because for 20 plus years, systems and mechanisms that were developing in a corrupt reality, they were built to protect.

To safeguard corruption and the existing institutions and the existing architecture, as we have seen, is getting in the way of our efforts to fight corruption effectively and to return the stolen money at a sufficient pace. But we have decided that we will not transgress or we will not choose the illegal path. We will follow the path of improving this system and this legislation and reforming the system. And that is making the process longer.

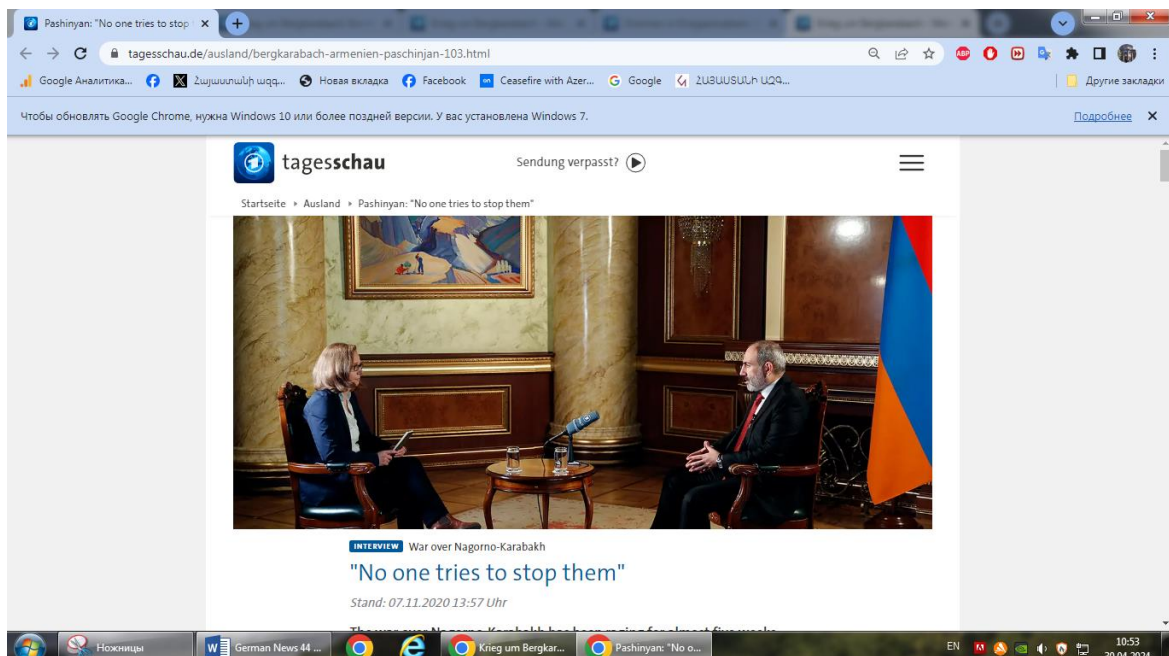
Understandably. And now I think in the public, there is a greater understanding of the fight against corruption in this time people are seeing issues which for many years were not addressed. And the public perception now is that these issues were not addressed because of corruption. Armenia has no alternative. We indeed need to fight corruption. We need to build democracy.

But issue number one in our agenda today is the aggression against Nagorno Karabakh. Of course, it has a component of national security. But I am sure, as I said, that there is also here component of international security because, look, in this process, Russia sees a threat. The Islamic Republic of Iran sees a threat, the Arab countries see a threat. The EU sees it a threat. The United States see it as a threat. All these countries have a lot of disagreements in their relationships otherwise, but at least in the current situation with the engagement of terrorists and mercenaries, the author of which is Turkey, is being evaluated in the same manner. So this is also an issue for the international security agenda.

Of course, we are doing everything we will to everything to not undermine democracy, but I think a martial law is not the best environment for democracy. So we will do everything to overcome that environment of martial law as soon as possible and get life back to normal. But unfortunately, it will depend not only on us, but we will to the maximum. That depends on us.

tagesschau.de: Thank you, Mr. Pashinyan.

The interview was conducted by Silvia Stöber, tagesschau.de



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a video player from tagesschau.de. The browser's address bar shows the URL: tagesschau.de/ausland/bergkarabach-armenien-paschinjan-103.html. The video player shows a man in a suit (Nikol Pashinyan) sitting in a chair, talking to a woman in a blue suit (Silvia Stöber). The video title is "No one tries to stop them" and the subtitle is "War over Nagorno-Karabakh". The date and time of the recording are "Stand: 07.11.2020 13:57 Uhr". The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows several open windows, including "German News 44...", "Krieg um Bergkar...", and "Pashinyan: 'No o...". The system tray shows the date and time as "10:53 30.04.2024".