In anticipation of the North Atlantic Drift

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Lately, the notion of Armenian accession to the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) has been circulated in the Armenian political discourse. Those who launched it – mostly government-fed pseudo-analysts – are well aware that in the current geopolitical and security environment, it is at least unrealistic, if not out of the realm of fiction. Yet the purpose of this discourse is quite divergent – it is to breathe false hopes into the Armenian public that, against the background of the continuing deterioration of relations with Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the intensifying security crisis, Armenia has a viable alternative to the CSTO and Russia in terms of defence and security policy, while at the same time diverting attention from the actual disaster – the full-fledged and complete Turkish colonisation of Armenia. Meanwhile, the authorities circles have been very cautious: although they do keep the flame and occasionally fuel it basing on political expediency, at their meetings with high-ranking NATO representatives they limit themselves to talks about the importance of relations

with NATO and readiness to deepen them, having declared at the first-person level that NATO accession is off the agenda of the Armenian authorities. It's a good thing to be cautious, as it's preferable not to run into icy currents from Moscow, as long as the warm North Atlantic currents are not quite coming our way.

Let us put aside the geopolitical aspect of the issue and only discuss in this analytical essay why such 'hopes' are absolutely groundless and why Armenia cannot aspire to NATO membership. At first sight, everything is simple and easy: NATO has an 'open door' policy, which means that any European country adopting the provisions of the founding act – the Washington Treaty – and contributing to the security of the North Atlantic region can apply for NATO membership. But there are several important 'buts'. **First**, NATO is all about security, so the Alliance must be assured that new members can actually contribute to collective security, not just pay lip service to it, which means that a country expressing a willingness to join NATO must fulfil the political, economic, and military criteria for membership: share a set of common values with Alliance members, not be involved in an ethnic or territorial conflict or have the capability to resolve it peacefully, and most importantly, be politically and militarily capable of much more than mere protection of its own sovereignty and territorial integrity. Furthermore, the defence system of that country must be interoperable with that of other NATO member states. In essence, the country's membership should be attractive to NATO, which has absolutely no need of security 'consumers', since NATO is not in the business of supporting the weak. For example, Finland and Sweden, the last countries to join NATO, are global technology leaders, with Sweden possessing a sophisticated and innovative military industry, both of them having strong military capabilities and a high degree of interoperability with NATO since they have operated for years in partnership with NATO forces. Finally, their geographic location enhances NATO's security and further shifts its centre of gravity to the north and east of Europe, while also strengthening NATO's standing in the Baltic region.

Let us be frank with ourselves: what can be offered to NATO by Armenia, for which it is pointless to even talk about such things as the ability to maintain territorial integrity and sovereignty, military might, and whose authorities are ready to turn their own country into a geopolitical brothel, and their people into its servants, just to avoid fighting and secure their entitlement to a warm and well-fed life, while presenting all this under the guise of an 'epochal' 'Crossroads of the Peace' project? Probably representation in the region? It is there anyway, all the more so since Armenia is steadily moving towards becoming a colony of

Turkey, a NATO member (and by the way, colonies cannot join alliances, those are envisaged for independent and sovereign states). Then maybe Armenia can offer involvement in peacekeeping missions? Trust me, NATO will easily find a replacement for an Armenian unit of fewer than 200 personnel.

And the 'Crossroads of Peace' project, which Pashinyan once again did not miss the chance to present to the Secretary General, can only invite ridicule in Brussels. NATO as a political and military alliance is the embodiment of the tenets of political realism, and no clearer statement of those principles can be found other than in the 5th Article of NATO's founding treaty. The primary objective of NATO is deterrence and defence, which entails an unconditional preparedness and capability to protect every inch of the territory of its member states and to suppress any intention or potential for aggression against the Alliance or its member states. NATO appreciates peace, but not in a philosophical or pathetic sense, but in its proper meaning, realising that in order to establish peace one must be prepared to fight, as it is weakness that inspires aggression.

Second, decisions on the admission of new NATO members are reached by consensus, and in a scenario where a member country exercises its veto power, the application is rejected. In this regard, it would suffice to recall the impediments that Turkey and Hungary put on Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. It takes a child-like naivety to assume that Turkey, a reliable and tried-and-tested NATO member with the second largest army in NATO, will let Armenia cherish hopes of joining NATO. The decisions on Armenia's membership in one or another organisation are not made in Yerevan anymore.

Now, let's briefly talk about the Armenia-NATO relationship and their results. This relationship was established after the declaration of independence, notably through the Partnership for Peace programme, launched in 1994 as part of NATO's enlargement policy. The aim of this programme was originally to equip former Warsaw Pact states and post-Soviet countries for Alliance membership by promoting cooperation and interoperability. It was subsequently populated with a different content and toolkit. As early as 2002, Armenia, like the other two countries in the region, engaged in the Planning and Review Process (PARP), which became part of that programme, and has participated in peacekeeping missions in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (until the end of the mission in 2014) since 2004. However, while in the early 2000s Armenia sought to engage in all NATO programmes for partner countries and contribute

to military exercises and peacekeeping missions organised by the Alliance as vigorously as possible, later on, as relations between Russia and the West began to cool down, Armenia strove to keep a low profile and gradually reduced its involvement in NATO to a mere formal presence in various platforms and to the deployment of very small units to peacekeeping missions. NATO was also sympathetic to Armenia's attempts to foot in both camps and had little expectations from it.

Over more than 30 years, NATO-Armenia co-operation has not developed into a strategic partnership and has led neither to deep and meaningful reforms in the Armenian Armed Forces, nor to their closer compliance with NATO standards or increased interoperability, nor to the introduction of Western scientific and technological advances in military education. All this time, the Armenian Armed Forces were not only not coming closer to NATO standards, but were increasingly departing from interoperability with it: the Armenian Armed Forces officers mainly retrained in Russian military educational institutions, the decisions in the General Staff were being made by generals educated on Russian military concepts and philosophy, and Armenia was purchasing the lion's share of its armaments from Russia. In parallel, against the background of statements about deepening relations with NATO at official meetings, Yerevan continuously refrained from participating in NATO exercises and downplayed the importance of proper representation in the Alliance's key command areas, limiting itself to the unavoidable activities; failed to implement the NATO-Armenia Trust Fund programmes and offered no credible explanations for doing so; the rare press reports concerning the operation of the Armenian representation in NATO are limited to participation in fairs and official receptions. Peacekeeping missions and military education reforms remained the sole fields of co-operation, but only to a very limited extent.

Meanwhile, in the 'parallel' reality, two neighbouring countries – Georgia and Azerbaijan – were skimming the cream from cooperation with NATO. The former was deepening direct ties with NATO, while the latter was maximising the capabilities and leverage of its ally as well as NATO member Turkey. Officers and soldiers of the armed forces of Azerbaijan have been trained and retrained for years in Turkey, a NATO member. With its help, Azerbaijan has modernised its armed forces and equipment to approximate them to NATO standards. Azerbaijan has utilised and continues to take every possible opportunity to expand and deepen cooperation with NATO, not only by participating in the Alliance's peacekeeping missions, but also by facilitating the unimpeded transportation of military cargoes for the NATO mission in Afghanistan through

its territory. At the dawn of 2020 Azerbaijan already was a key NATO partner with its armed forces nearing NATO standards, which became instrumental in the second Artsakh war.

Notably, NATO has been undertaking a thorough revision of its approaches to building partnerships in recent years, introducing the ‘Individually Tailored Partnership Programme’ (ITPP) as part of the ‘one partner, one programme’ vision. NATO acknowledges that the ongoing Ukrainian operations have pushed the Alliance’s partnership policy to transition from a need-based approach to a value-based approach, i.e., to concentrate not on those partners who need NATO, but rather on those needed by the Alliance itself. It is all natural, for NATO is not a charitable organisation, but a political and military alliance.

Now let’s guess who holds the most ambitious ITPP in the region, and who should not even have the right to hope for NATO membership.
