

## INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### COMPLEX ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN – ARMENIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (PART 1)

Armenia is known as one of the oldest countries. Throughout its centuries-long history, it has been geopolitically maneuvering between various powerful conquering states (Russia, Ottoman Empire, Persia, etc.). Its territory was a victim of constant invasion that led the country to the territorial disintegration. Despite its difficult historical past, the nation still preserved its indigency and identity. One of the main reasons for the collapse of the USSR was its economic collapse. Consequently, the economic situation of independent states emerging from its ruins was also difficult. In this regard, the situation in Armenia was especially deplorable. Countries that do not have direct access to the sea are facing serious economic and geopolitical problems. In the case of Armenia, this problem is even more acute. In addition, regional instability and conflict with neighboring countries exacerbate the situation. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict led to a complete blockade of Armenia both in the west and in the east by Azerbaijan and its ally, Turkey.

**Keywords:** Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Russia, USA, geopolitics, security.

In the international arena, in parallel to the shift in the balance of power caused by the collapse of the USSR, the newly emerging independent states have been actively engaged in global and regional integration processes aimed at achieving high standards of security and economic development. This process is still going on along with constant instability. These republics have become independent subjects of international relations and began to form their own foreign policy doctrine more or less intensively, which was quite logical.

In analyzing the foreign policy strategy of the Armenian republic, scientists and political scientists focus on two important factors that are historical and geographical<sup>1</sup>.

Armenia is known as one of the oldest countries. Throughout its centuries-long history, it has been geopolitically maneuvering between various powerful conquering states (Russia, Ottoman Empire, Persia, etc.). Its territory was a victim of constant invasion that led the country to the territorial disintegration. Despite its difficult historical past, the nation still remained its indigency and identity.

The hardest line in the modern history of the Armenian people goes back to the genocide perpetrated on them in the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. It was the brutal severity carried out by the Kemalist government in Turkey that destroyed the lives of about million and a half of Armenians and hundreds of thousands who survived genocide started to seek shelter in various countries. The fact of the Armenian Genocide is substantiated, acknowledged and confirmed by witness testimonies, laws, resolutions and decisions of various countries and international organizations. However, none of the Turkish authorities have acknowledged this fact till today, which has led that recognition of the genocide nowadays remains the cornerstone of Armenia's foreign policy.

One of the main reasons for the collapse of the USSR was its economic failure. Consequently, the economic situation of the independent states emerging from its ruins would not be favorable as well. In this regard, the situation in Armenia has been particularly deplorable, especially when the country has not yet fully recovered from the colossal damage caused by the 1988 Spitak earthquake. In the 1990s, the Armenian economy had the hardest times: economic potential fell by almost 90%, the GDP indicator reduced 10 times, and industrial production fell by 80%.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gary, K. B. (2000). *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*. NY: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Гаджиев, К.С. (2003). *Геополитика Кавказа*. Москва: Международные отношения.

As a result, the country suffered from a severe financial and economic crisis that could not be overcome even by trade and economic ties with Russia and Iran.

Access to the sea has vital importance for economic activity and trade routes. Countries that do not have direct access to the sea face significant economic and geopolitical problems. In the case of Armenia, these problems are even more acute. In addition, regional instability and the conflict situation with neighboring countries make these circumstances worse. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict keeps Armenia in a full-fledged transport and communication blockade to the West-East by Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey. In early days, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline were constructed bypassed the Armenian territory on the territory of Georgia because of this conflict.

In this regard, Armenia doesn't have a desirable situation in the north, either. The 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia and its results literally cut off the country from its strategic ally, Russia. (Most of the Armenian freight turnover came to the Abkhazian railway).

Both in terms of territory and population, Armenia lags behind the other two South Caucasian states. Its population is up to 3 million as of 2016. Neither does geography provide an impressive dividend in both economic and foreign policy maneuvering. Thus, the Republic of Armenia is significantly behind from its major geopolitical opponent in the region – Azerbaijan, in terms of population, geographical area and diversity of natural resources. Therefore, its economic development largely depends on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the opening of the border with Turkey and the resolution of the Abkhazia conflict as well.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is fundamentally important to the Armenian state. Its stated foreign policy goal is to peacefully and legally resolve this conflict. The Armenian view of a legal settlement of the conflict is based on the following principles:

a) The basis for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be the right of the self-determination of the Nagorno-Karabakh population. b) Nagorno-Karabakh must have a reliable land border controlled by the Armenian side with the Republic of Armenia<sup>1</sup>.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh has an important place in the current edition of the Armenian military doctrine (2007). The doctrine directly obliges its armed forces to protect the security of Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>2</sup>. This means that the armed forces of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh will act as a united force in case the renewal of the conflict.

Modern Armenian statehood was restored by the collapse of the USSR. On August 23, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR adopted a Declaration on the Independence of Armenia. And according to the results of the referendum held on September 23, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic affirmed the country's independence<sup>3</sup>. The following year, the country became a UN member.

According to Levon Ter-Petrosian, the first Armenian president, the collapse of the USSR was based on a systemic crisis that led to the collapse of economic integrity as a single body and the disruption of social, economic, and political systems<sup>4</sup>. Based on these circumstances, Armenia refused to sign a new Kremlin-initiated inter-ally treaty, but at the same time supported the "Belavezha Agreement" and entered the CIS.

The process of the formation of post-Soviet Armenian statehood was running under difficult political and economic conditions. In the context of not so calm Russian – Armenian relations and the conflict with Azerbaijan, President Ter – Petrosyan decided to try to normalize relations with Turkey. The distrust towards the Kremlin was huge. He, as the leader of the National Movement, blamed Moscow for promoting the anti-Armenian movement in Azerbaijan, which began on February 27-29, 1988 in Sumgait and covered the whole country. These and other accompanying processes led to the actual disruption of state relations with Moscow in 1990-91. Neither was the Turkish government opposed to normalizing relations with Armenia, which would help strengthen its position in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Armenia (2019). *Foreign police* <<https://www.mfa.am/en/foreign-policy>> (2019, September, 20).

<sup>2</sup> Geroicheskiy.Narod.Ru (2007). *Военная доктрина республики Армения* <<http://geroicheskiy.narod.ru/doktrina.html>> (2019, September, 20).

<sup>3</sup> National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia (2019). *Legislation* <<http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=2602&lang=arm&enc=utf8>> (2019, September, 20).

<sup>4</sup> El sol de Mexico (1994). *Интервью президента Армении Л. Тер-Петросяна главному редактору*, 12. 03.05.94

It should be noted that Ter-Petrosyan was ready to make significant compromises in exchange for normalizing relations with Turkey. He was in favor of a revisionist vision of the development of Armenian foreign relations, according to which the foreign policy of the government was based on the principle that "there are no eternal friends or enemies, but there are eternal interests." Ter-Petrosyan believed that the Armenian issue should not have been political since it was purely historical. Therefore, in his view, modern Armenia should face reality and not use the tragic historical past as a political tool.

The Armenian authorities have committed themselves loyal to the principles of territorial integrity and respect for existing borders. It also decided that the difficult historical experience between Turkey and Armenia should not hinder the development of pragmatic relations between the two countries<sup>1</sup>.

There were two motives for this assumption: 1) Turkey is a big state and Armenia needs to reach an agreement with it; 2) Modern Turkey differs from the Ottoman Empire, rejects the ideas of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism and adopts a distinctly European orientation. In addition, because of the existent of the Karabakh conflict, the Armenian administration realized that if Armenia could launch economic and trade relations with Turkey, it could use the country as a transit bridge with Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Ter-Petrosyan realized that this goal could not be achieved in parallel with the demand for recognition of the genocide, so he went against the requirement of putting genocide recognition into the constitution<sup>3</sup>. However, most representatives of the legislature, as well as parties associated with the diaspora, opposed such an initiative. Finally, Ter-Petrosyan sacrificed his revisionist foreign policy and relatively reluctant stance towards the Karabakh conflict. In February 1998, he was forced to resign.

It should be noted that Turkey's activation in the post-Soviet space was parallel to the collapse of the USSR. The idea of creating a "Turan" by some Turkish political scientists and historians is also related to that time<sup>4</sup>.

But Ter-Petrosyan's expectations have not been acquitted. In exchange for establishing diplomatic relations, Turkey set its conditions: in particular, it demanded that Armenia first renounce its territorial claims, as well as the charge of the genocide of 1915 and its international recognition. But that was not all: Turkey closed border with Armenia in the condition of escalating Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and joined the economic blockade declared by Azerbaijan.

In such a situation, the Armenian authorities, which were in fact isolated, were forced to reconsider their foreign policy priorities. On the one hand, it stopped the process of normalizing relations with Turkey, and on the other hand, used the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance as a political tool to sort out relations with Russia. Azerbaijan shares Panturkish ideas. The Presidency of Elchibey in Azerbaijan has led Turkish-Azerbaijani relations to a dangerous point for Russia, which has naturally contributed to the rapprochement of Russia and Armenia.

One interesting question naturally arises here: after the failed alliance with Turkey, why the development of the Western vector has not become a priority of Armenia's foreign policy, as it happened in case of Georgia. Especially when Armenia had such a powerful political and social tool to overcome this vector, such as the Armenian Diaspora in the West.

The answer to this question lies first in its geopolitical plane. The geographical isolation of Armenia and the uniqueness of the Turkish factor emerges from this plane. Ter-Petrosyan's revisionist foreign policy served to break this geopolitical agenda, and Turkey was seen as an appropriate instrument. Of course, Ter-Petrosyan did not trust Russia, and Iran could not become a strategic orientation as it had its own problems. Only Turkey remained, which was also a member of NATO at the same time, so by normalizing relations and establishing diplomatic ties, he was trying to break this enchanted arc to the west and connect Europe. However, this plan by Ter-Petrosyan failed, which eventually led Armenia's foreign policy vector to shift in the north – towards Russia.

Cooperation between the US and Armenia has also developed in a different political context. During this period, Armenia was one of the largest recipients of US humanitarian aid, largely due to the "Armenian

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<sup>1</sup> Shireen, T. H. (2000). *The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of the Transcaucasian States*. In: Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Gary Bertsch, Cassidy Craft, Scott A. Jones and Michael Beck (Eds), Routledge 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph, R. M., Robert, O. (1999). *Krikorian, Armenia's Foreign Policy*. Armenia: At the Crossroads. OPA.

<sup>3</sup> Kamer, K. (2002). Armenia's Foreign Policy: Basic Parameters of Ter-Petrosian and Kocharian Era. *Review of Armenian Studies*, 1, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Гаджиев, К.С. (2001). *Геополитика Кавказа*. Москва: Международные отношения.

lobby". The "Armenian Lobby" was also active in adopting Amendment N907 to the US Congress Freedom Support Act. However, despite these and other positive shifts, bilateral relations still did not come close to the strategic benchmark, which was largely driven by different views on fundamental issues.

Commenting on the US Government's position on Armenia, Deputy Secretary of State S. Talbot claimed in May 1995 that American policy towards Armenia was based on two principles. First, the US administration was ready to defend Armenia's independence, and on the other hand, it was committed to promoting Armenia's integration processes in the international arena. However, in the same interview, S. Talbot also emphasized the differing visions in bilateral relations. He pointed out that the successful development of US foreign policy in Armenia largely depended on the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict. He also hinted at the unacceptability of official Yerevan-Tehran political and economic rapprochement for US interests in the region, calling it a negative factor accompanying bilateral relations.

The Russian Federation also recognized Armenia's independence in December 1991. The first official treaty, which became the basis for diplomatic relations between the two countries, was signed on December 29, 1991 – the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance". This agreement set out the main directions of bilateral cooperation.

But the main challenge for Armenia was its national security. The country decided to solve this problem within the framework of a "collective security system" initiated by Russia. On May 15, 1992, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was formed with the participation of representatives of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia in Tashkent.

In the conditions of the full-scale war confrontation with Azerbaijan, Turkey's involvement with the Azerbaijani side was not excluded, which was periodically hinted by both official and various political circles in Turkey. Of course, the development of such a scenario would have led to the overthrow of the Armenian statehood, the intensification of Turkey's influence and the establishment of its status as a regional leader, which was unacceptable to Russia's geopolitical interests in the region.

In this situation, Armenia was forced to turn its foreign policy vector to the north – towards Russia. Especially when there was an intersection of geopolitical interests between the two countries in the region. The Armenian state was faced with the issue of physical survival, and for Russia, the establishment of NATO member Turkey and implementation of its far-reaching pan-Turkic plans in the region was inadmissible.

According to Thomas de Waal, the personal ties between the leaders of the two countries also played a role in the post-Soviet Russia-Armenia rapprochement: Ter-Petrosyan wrote a letter to President B. Yeltsin and asked for the supply of weapons, Yeltsin responded positively. As Ter-Petrosian later recalls, since Azerbaijan got a strong armament from the Transcaucasian military arsenal, Yeltsin decided to restore the balance of power in Karabakh and provided Armenia with an adequate amount of weapons<sup>1</sup>.

The agreement signed between Armenia and Russia on August 1994 on the joint protection of the Armenian-Turkish border should be considered as a logical continuation of this process<sup>2</sup>. Also, the agreement reached between the two countries on March 16, 1995, on the prolongation of the Russian military base deployed in Armenia.

In the context of close cooperation between the Russia-Armenia military-political field, the following important detail should be emphasized: in order to deepen military-political cooperation between member states of "Collective Security Treaty Organization", the Russian government made a decision, to supply organization member states with military armaments at reasonable prices. If we take into consideration the geopolitical situation in the region, this decision by the Russian authorities is vital for Armenia. Of course, we have in mind the factor of the Karabakh conflict. However, there is one very important nuance: the legal rights and obligations of the Collective Security Treaty Organization do not extend geographically to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Bilateral and multilateral commitments in the field of security and mutual assistance within this organization apply only to internationally recognized member states. And Karabakh, as a self-proclaimed republic, has so far not been recognized by any subject, including Armenia, so it represents the territory of Azerbaijan under international law.

<sup>1</sup> Том Де Ваал (2014). Чёрный сад: Армения и Азербайджан между миром и войной. *Российская политическая энциклопедия*. Москва: РОССПЭН.

<sup>2</sup> Шакарянц, С. (2002). *Вопросы коллективной безопасности СНГ и Армения. Ориентиры внешней политики Армении*. Ереван: Антарес.

Of course, this nuance is an important problem for Armenia, for which the security of Karabakh or "Artsakh" has fundamental importance. At this time, we are spontaneously reminded of the events of April 2015, when the Azerbaijani army launched a large-scale attack on the Armenian positions fortified on the Karabakh line. At that time, neither Russia nor the other allies within the organization would have thought of providing military assistance to Armenia.

On August 29, 1997, the "Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" was signed between the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation providing for military-technical assistance to Armenia in case of military aggression by a third country.

On July 14, 2011, the State Duma of the Russian Federation (Protocol No. 5) ratified an amendment to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Operation of the 102nd Russian Military Base on the Armenian Territory. According to the protocol, the area of dislocation of the 102nd base has been expanded and its operational life has increased from 25 to 49 years. The protocol also includes the provision of joint protection of the Armenian state border in the area of responsibility of the "Collective Security Treaty Organization".

However, in addition to providing regional security to Armenia in the regional format and equipping the Armenian Army with modern Russian military equipment, Russia is also expanding military-political cooperation with Azerbaijan and explains it as the need to maintain a military-political balance in the region. Of course, this circumstance is not acceptable for the Armenian side, which causes dissatisfaction.

The development of Russian-Armenian military-political cooperation did not slow down in the following years: On November 30, 2016, the two countries' defense ministers signed an agreement on the creation of a "United Military Group"<sup>1</sup>.

According to the agreement, the 102nd Russian military base and the Armenian Armed Forces were united in the group. The main task of the group is to receive timely information on the possible attack on Armenia and Russia and to take preventive measures. Also the protection of land borders and airspace of the Armenian and Russian Federation. The Agreement is valid for 5 years. However, the parties may extend the term by another five years.

According to the abovementioned, we can conclude that after Russia undertook the obligation to withdraw a Russian military base from Georgia's territory in accordance with the decision of the 1999 Istanbul Summit, Armenia became the only real military and political ally in the region for Russia. These circumstances have certainly contributed to the increase of Armenia's importance in the South Caucasus in defining Russia's foreign policy strategy.

The new stage in the development of Armenian-Russian relations is linked to the September 2000 Declaration of Alliance, signed by the parties, as 21st-century bilateral relations focus on cooperation between the two countries at the height of strategic partnership<sup>2</sup>. Following the signing of the Declaration, the term "strategic partnership" has become the main content in the evaluation of Armenian-Russian relations. Overall, "strategic partnership" can be seen as a long-term, stable and mutually beneficial interaction that identifies the interests of partner countries and promotes bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Including coordination of foreign policy field.

A detailed analysis of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership requires consideration of the dynamics and principles of interstate cooperation in military-political, economic, scientific, technical, humanitarian and cultural spheres.

The first official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Armenia in September 2001 was important for the development of Armenian-Russian economic cooperation. By this time, Armenian-Russian relations had a positive dynamics in military-technical cooperation, and the economic sphere and trade turnover was clearly lagging behind. An agreement on trade and economic cooperation was signed on September 15 as part of this visit<sup>3</sup>.

At a meeting in Moscow on September 3, 2013, the Presidents of Russia and Armenia discussed problems and perspectives related to Armenia's accession to the Customs Union initiated by Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> ТАСС, информационное агентство (2016). *РФ и Армения подписали соглашение об объединенной группировке войск двух стран* <<https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/3825861>> (2019, September, 10).

<sup>2</sup> Дипломатический вестник (2000). *Декларация о союзническом взаимодействии между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения, ориентированной на XXI век, 10.*

<sup>3</sup> Внешняя политика и безопасность современной России. 1991-2002 (2002). *Декларация о союзническом взаимодействии между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения, ориентированной на XXI век, 360.*

Serge Sargsyan positively assessed the activities of the union and said that the republic would join the customs union and would continue to participate in the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Russian President V. Putin supported the Armenian President's statement and expressed his readiness to promote Armenia's integration into the structures. On November 6 of that year, Armenia signed a Memorandum that led to the process of republic joining the Customs Union. And on October 10, 2014, an agreement was signed by which Armenia would join the Eurasian Union on January 1, 2015<sup>1</sup>.

However, this decision by the Armenian president hasn't been passed without scandal: before September 2013, the country was preparing to sign the Association and Free Trade Agreement with the EU, and on November 28 Armenia refused to sign it. Sargsyan's move came as a surprise to a lot of people. The effect of the surprise was increased because of an interview with Russian "Kommersant" on April 2012, in which Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian actually ruled out joining of the country in customs union: "In world practice, there is no example of a country becoming a customs union member without a common border. This is complete nonsense. The essence of a customs union is to exchange goods without a customs inspection. In our case, this is not possible, as we will have to cross the territory of the neighboring state and accordingly double customs clearance will be needed for us"<sup>2</sup>. However, Sarkisian soon changed his seemingly firm position and became one of the country's main lobbyists for joining the Customs Union.

The process of joining the Customs Union has also had its logical continuation: since January 2, 2015, Armenia has officially become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. This fact has caused mixed reactions within Armenia. According to Opposition and experts, refusal to Association agreement with the European Union and membership in the Eurasian Union was a decision taken because of pressure coming from Moscow.

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<sup>1</sup> Президент России (2013). Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-армянских переговоров. <<http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/19142>> (2019, September, 10).

<sup>2</sup> Черненко, Е. (2012). Таможенный союз не имеет для нас смысла. *Коммерсантъ-Online*. <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc-y/1908052>> (2019, September, 10).

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