

# EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Role and Significance  
in the Process  
of Transformation  
of the Countries  
of Eastern Europe  
and the South Caucasus

EDITED BY  
PIOTR BAJOR





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of Transformation of the Countries  
of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**

**edited by  
PIOTR BAJOR**




**Kraków**

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## Within the EAEU and with the EU

### The Evolution of the Attitude of Armenian Ruling Elites Towards the Eastern Partnership

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the evolution of the approaches of Armenian ruling elites towards the Eastern Partnership during 2009-2021. In particular, the fundamental principles of the positions of the Armenian ruling elites are identified, as well as the desired international statuses and national roles that the Armenian elites sought to fulfill within or through the Eastern Partnership. It also identifies the main external and internal factors that have changed the approaches of the Armenian authorities and transformed the designated international statuses and national roles. In conclusion, the author highlights the commonalities and differences in the positions of the administrations of Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan, as well as stable, transformed and new international statuses and national roles in relation to the Eastern Partnership. The article also provides a list of recommendations for decision-makers to improve the effectiveness of Armenia's European agenda and the EU's Armenian agenda.

**KEYWORDS:** Armenia, the Eastern Partnership, Value-Based Community, differentiated partnership, bridging, Eurasian integration, European integration



## Introduction

As a small state with a fragile economy and political system in a complex geopolitical region, the authorities of the Republic of Armenia (RA) have always stated the need for a multivector foreign policy to diversify foreign partners and develop balanced relations with them. Despite that generality, the ruling class of Armenia has differently perceived the implementation of such a policy, and that policy with its results differed from the official concept of the authorities in practice.

As an organic component of multi-vector policy, the Armenian authorities have always considered the European direction and, particularly, the relations with the European Union (EU) as a priority. Nevertheless, these relations have not developed in a straightforward manner, as they have been conditioned first of all by external/structural factors, and partly by internal factors.

The volume of Armenia's relations with the EU and deep sectoral involvement has increased since 2006, after the accession of the EU to the European Neighborhood Policy, and this has gained momentum since 2009, when Armenia was included in the Eastern Partnership program.

The analysis aims at revealing the evolution of the attitude of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia towards the EU, in particular the Eastern Partnership, in 2009–2021. To reach the goal, some issue-questions of analysis were defined:

Based on the analysis of official documents and statements:

1. to find out what kind of principles the approaches of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia to the EU, in particular, to the Eastern Partnership were built on in 2009–2021.

2. to highlight the similarities and differences between the approaches of the elites during the periods of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency (2009–2018) and Nikol Pashinyan's prime ministership (2018–2021).

3. to find out what impact Armenia's membership in the Customs Union / EEU and the coup d'état of the government had in 2018, mainly how the approaches of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia towards the EU, in particular the Eastern Partnership were effected.

4. to point out policy directions that are more appropriate to the current structural conditions, aimed at the improvement of EU-Armenia relations.

## Basic principles

In the very first years of the launch of Eastern Partnership, the basic principles of the approach of the ruling elites led by Serzh Sargsyan to the significance of the program were clearly outlined. These principles are reflected, in particular, in Sargsyan's speech at the second summit of the Eastern Partnership in 2011,<sup>1</sup> and they are as follows:

- Eastern Partnership is a means of wider cooperation with the EU and between the participating countries in the EU, as a result of which “the interconnectedness between the parties becomes more and more tangible.” Mr. Sargsyan reaffirmed his approach in 2015, stating that since the launch of the Eastern Partnership, official Yerevan had viewed it as a format of cooperation with the EU, the promotion of societal relations, and targeted cooperation with directions.<sup>2</sup>
- The EU shall adopt a differentiated approach to participant countries in the frames of the project in accordance with their needs.
- The EU shall adopt another differentiated approach, based on the principle of “more support for more reforms” to stimulate partner countries according to the progress made by each.
- The Eastern Partnership is “an additional impetus for Armenia to advance fundamental institutional and structural reforms.”
- By implementing the changes envisaged by the program, the RA reaffirms its commitment to common European values.
- The EU can greatly contribute to cooperation, continual peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus. To reach this goal, through the Eastern Partnership the EU can support the peaceful settlement of the Artsakh conflict, providing, in particular, favorable conditions and strengthening confidence-building measures. And “if we use this opportunity wisely, everyone will benefit, both partner and EU member states.” Furthermore, Mr. Sargsyan considers the EU's role a key factor in promoting such cooperation, expecting it to be consistent with its own principles and values.
- The involvement of the South Caucasus in significant pan-European programs is a laudable action. However, as a result of these projects, no country should be in a more favorable position, “especially if that capital is used to the detriment of

<sup>1</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the EU Eastern Partnership Second Summit”, September 30, 2011. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2011/09/30/news-111/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Fourth Eastern Partnership Summit”, May 22, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/22/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Eastern-Partnership-Latvia-speech/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

regional security.” In particular, “the Southern (gas) corridor should never become a reason for a new war.”

It is noteworthy that Avet Adonts, the former Armenian Ambassador to the EU and Belgium, is convinced that the EU, which made a lot of efforts before the signing of the Armenian-Turkish protocols, “can still use its leverages more effectively to have the procedure on the right way in the current situation.”<sup>3</sup> This should also be considered one of the basic principles of the ruling elite’s approach to the issue of the final result of the program as an expectation in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

## Eastern Partnership as a valuable association

The rhetoric of the political elites led by Serzh Sargsyan on relations with the EU was rich in valuable emphases. Back in 2007, “the adoption of the European path of development” in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia during the presidency of Robert Kocharyan was considered as one of the components of Armenia’s complementary foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, Tigran Sargsyan, the Prime Minister of the RA, stated in one of his speeches that “Armenia has consciously chosen the European path of development” due to the Christian heritage of the Armenian people and “the decision to get rid of the tracks of the previous dictatorial regimes (Ottoman Empire and Soviet Union).”<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that Prime Minister Sargsyan placed importance on the choice of European values not only in the context of Armenia’s internal life, but also in the context of regional developments. In particular, according to him, the reforms of the European development path of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia would contribute to regional security and cooperation. “The only right option for the countries of our region is to rely upon values such as mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity, which are the cornerstones of modern Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

The valuable emphases in the rhetoric of the elites led by Serzh Sargsyan were numerous, especially in 2013–2017, from the period of the accession of the RA to

<sup>3</sup> “Avet Adonts: ‘We Need to Realize Substantial Reforms to Start Negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU’”, *Mediamax*, August 29, 2011. At: <https://mediamax.am/en/news/interviews/2177/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia”, January 26, 2007. At: <https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf>, last accessed September 18, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, “Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia Has Consciously Chosen the European Path of Development”, June 4, 2012. At: <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/6248/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

the Russian-led Customs Union (CU) to the signing of the CEPA with the EU. According to RA President Serzh Sargsyan, the membership in the CU did not cancel the agenda of Armenia-EU relations, as their cooperative relations were based on common values – legal state, rule of law, and respect for human rights.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in his view, the core uniting the partner states that have adopted different directions in the development of relations with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is their commitment to common values, democracy, human rights, rule of law, regional stability and peace.<sup>8</sup> Relying upon these common values, Armenia is developing its relations with the EU in the areas of democratic institutions, such as improving the judiciary, effective governance, human rights, promoting the rule of law, strengthening civil society, improving the business environment, combating corruption, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned valuable emphases are visible in the rhetoric of the ruling elite led by Nikol Pashinyan, as well. Thus, according to Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Armenia is an inseparable part of European civilization and its value system. And the latter are the basis of democratic public administration reforms and sectoral cooperation with the EU in Armenia.<sup>10</sup> According to Pashinyan, the RA-EU CEPA is equal to a truly independent judiciary, an institutional mechanism for preventing and combating corruption.<sup>11</sup> According to

<sup>7</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Interview of President Serzh Sargsyan to the Czech *Lidové Noviny*” (National News), January 30, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/Interview-of-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-durin-state-visit-to-Czech-Republic/>, last accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Meeting of the European People’s Party Eastern Partnership Leaders”, May 21, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/21/Statement-of-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-EPP-Latvia/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Address by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Opening Meeting of the Fourth Ordinary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly”, March 17, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/03/17/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-National-Assembly-Euronest-Parliamentary-Assembly-speech/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan at the Annual Conference of the MFA Apparatus and Heads of Diplomatic Service Abroad”, August 27, 2019. At: [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm\\_opening\\_remarks/9782](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm_opening_remarks/9782), last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> “Nikol Pashinyan: Armenia Will Not Be Authoritarian”, *Euronews*, March 8, 2019. At: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/08/nikol-pashinyan-armenia-will-not-be-authoritarian>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

him, the CEPA is a document that gives rise to reforms, the implementation of which presupposes qualitative changes in many spheres of public life.<sup>12</sup>

## Differentiated partnership

During the period under review, all of Armenia's ruling elites highlighted the need for the EU to apply a differentiated approach to partner countries within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. In Serzh Sargsyan's words, it is not known why the EU has included states that are so different in their approaches, aspirations, and capabilities in one program. And this, in his opinion, had a negative impact, for example, on the component of regional cooperation of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, he praised the introduction of the "more for more" principle of an individualized approach to partners within the revised European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>14</sup> According to Edward Nalbandyan, the former Armenian Foreign Minister, the principles of the differentiation and promoting approach create the possibility of multi-sectoral or multi-level cooperation, thus preserving the integrity of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>15</sup> According to former Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Pashinyan's government is another way of maintaining the integrity of the Eastern Partnership and responding appropriately to the individual needs of partners, which should not be perceived as a fragmentation within the program.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "It Is Impossible to Settle the Nagorno-Karabakh Issue Without Hard and Consistent Work, without Compromise, Mutual Respect, and Balance" – PM Addresses the Italian Institute for International Political Studies in Milan", November 20, 2019. At: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/11/20/Nikol-Pashinyan-ISPI/>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level Meeting on the 5th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership", April 25, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/04/25/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Eastern-Partnership-Prague/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia at the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament", February 21, 2018. At: <https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2018/02/21/fm-afet-speech/7958>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan Participated in the EaP Ministerial Video-Conference", July 1, 2020. At: [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/07/01/fm\\_eap/10342](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/07/01/fm_eap/10342), last accessed September 22, 2021.

## Combining European and Eurasian

In 2011, Armenia also joined the CIS Free Trade Agreement, which replaced and regulated bilateral free trade with Armenia's main trading partners within the Association, and negotiations regarding the free trade agreement with the EU began in 2012. From that moment on, heated discussions on the compatibility of the "European" and "Eurasian" components of Armenia's foreign policy began in Armenian socio-political and analytical circles. The position of the representatives of the ruling elite of the Republic of Armenia on that issue was clear. As Tigran Sargsyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia (and the future Chairman of the Eurasian Economic Commission) regularly stated,<sup>17</sup>

- As a small state, Armenia can not "play" with diplomacy. The Russian Federation, a strategic partner of Armenia, is well aware of official Yerevan's relations with the EU, the US, NATO, Iran, China, and Georgia. The European partners of Armenia, in their turn, understand the actions of official Yerevan due to the geopolitical situation and problems with its neighbors.
- The cooperation of Armenia with the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is not directed against the Russian Federation, and the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership is not directed against the European Union. The relations between Armenia and the EU, Russia and the United States are complementary, and not mutually contradictory.
- The cooperation with the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is not aimed at Armenia's membership in the organization, and the deepening of economic cooperation within the CIS is not aimed at Armenia's membership in the Customs Union.
- Armenia is interested in deepening economic cooperation both within the CIS and with the EU. Official Yerevan wants to parallelly create a free trade regime with both the Customs Union and the European Union, gaining the right of free access to the markets of the two economic unions.

<sup>17</sup> "Таможенный союз не имеет для нас смысла" ("Tamožennyj soúz ne imeet dlâ nas smysla"), *Коммерсантъ (Kommersant)*, April 4, 2012. At: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1908052>, last accessed September 16, 2021; N. Il'ina, "«Для интеграции нужно создать экономические стимулы»" ("Dlâ integracii nužno sozdat' èkonomičeskie stimuly") Prem'èr-ministr Armenii Tigran Sarkisân", *Gazeta.Ru (Gazete.Ru)*, April 7, 2012. At: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2012/04/06/4309137.shtml>, last accessed September 16, 2021; The Government of the Republic of Armenia, "Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia Has..."; The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of The Republic...*

On September 3, 2013, Serzh Sargsyan, the President of the Republic of Armenia, announced the wish of Armenia to join the Belarus-Kazakhstan-Russia Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). He explained that the decision was based on the fact that Armenia initially built its military security system on the basis of partnership with Russia within the CSTO, so “being in the same system of military security, it is impossible and inefficient to keep aloof from the relevant geo-economic space.”<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, in his opinion, this decision does not mean breaking off the dialogue with European structures; Armenia intends to continue the reforms in the spheres of strengthening democratic institutions and civil society, and in the sphere of protection of human rights with the support of European partners.<sup>19</sup>

According to the ruling elites led by Sargsyan, “the expansion and deepening of relations with one partner shall not create new divisions, and Armenia shall continue its policy of combining and harmonizing the interests.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, no partner state shall pay for its decision to join one integration process or another. “We do not want to choose between our friends, but we want to have as many friends as it is possible... When we announced the «both...and» approach, we meant to have an alternative, and not to choose this or that instrument of cooperation.”<sup>21</sup> According to Sargsyan, by joining the EEU, Armenia continues to maintain its readiness to deepen and expand relations with the EU. Moreover, having a balanced policy, Armenia did not create additional hotbeds of tension in Europe and, on the contrary, was able to build its policy on the principles of compatible, balancing and multi-vector cooperation of different integration systems.<sup>22</sup> Together with the EU partners, Armenia will develop such new legal regulations of relations, which, on the one hand, will reflect the content of the previous negotiations with the EU and, on the other hand, will be compatible with the undertaken commitments of Armenia within the EEU.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “The RA President Serzh Sargsyan’s Remarks at the Press Conference on the Results of the Negotiations with the RF President Vladimir Putin”, September 3, 2013. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-working-visit-to-Russian-Federation/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Interview of President...*

<sup>20</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan Took Part in the Plenary Session of the EPP in Dublin”, March 6, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2014/03/06/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Dublin-EPP/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level Meeting...*

<sup>22</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Meeting...*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



It should be noted that The European Union and Armenia had already started negotiations on Association and Free Trade Agreements in 2011. According to Ambassador Avet Adonts, the end of the negotiations on the Association Agreement was already visible at that time, which was to be followed by further extensive work – the implementation of the agreement. And after the settlement of a number of issues, Armenia would be able to start negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. At the same time, according to the ambassador, negotiations on visa facilitation were expected to start, as a result of which contact between people would be improved. And “without it, the signing of the Association Agreement and the application of the free trade regime could simply become an end in itself, without the results on which documents are based.”<sup>24</sup> The end point of this process should have been the mutual abolition of the visa regime.

In 2017, President Sargsyan assessed the new agreement with the EU as a political document, which confirms the viability of the “both... and” policy of combining different interests.<sup>25</sup> In his words, “Armenia has shown through its experience that it is possible to combine diverse integration processes, taking from each of them and giving to each the positive and useful thing that unites the states, and not divides them.”<sup>26</sup> According to the representatives of the ruling elite, the EU-Armenia CEPA may be a positive precedent for other programs and even for various integration processes.<sup>27</sup>

In 2017, the ideas of the ruling elites of Armenia about the possible practical manifestations of joining the EEU and cooperating with the EU were made public. For example, according to RA President Sargsyan, the EU and the CU have huge markets, and the goal of Armenia should be the promotion of exports to those markets. “We have to produce much more, and it’s up to us how much our economy will grow, how many goods we will export, and those goods can be adequately exported

<sup>24</sup> “Avet Adonts: ‘We Need to Realize’...”

<sup>25</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Spoke at the Carnegie Center”, February 28, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/02/28/President-Srezh-Sargsyan-visited-Carnegie-Center/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan Participated at the Congress of the European People’s Party”, March 29, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/03/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participated-at-EPP-Congress-in-Malta/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Eastern Partnership Summit”, November 24, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/11/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyans-speech-at-EaP-Summit/>, last accessed September 20, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of...*



to both the EEU and EU markets.”<sup>28</sup> Armenia can also be a supplier of high quality agricultural products and an attractive platform for the development of information technologies for the EU.<sup>29</sup>

According to Karen Karapetyan, the Prime Minister of the RA, from the point of view of business development a large and perceptible market is attractive for Armenia. The EU is one of the largest donors and investors in Armenia, and, deepening the relations with the EEU, official Yerevan continues to cooperate with the EU. “We see ourselves as bringing these two markets closer together, not separating them.”<sup>30</sup>

In another speech of President Sargsyan another approach of compatibility is visible, that is, the clear realization of the membership in the EEU would best serve the economic development of Armenia, which, however, would not hinder cooperation with the EU, especially in the field of institutional reforms and modernization.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of disproportionate combination was preserved during Nikol Pashinyan’s prime ministership, as well. In particular, in Pashinyan’s words, the official CEPA with the EU intends to use official Yerevan with maximum efficiency in the design and implementation of the reforms planned by the government he headed. And the cooperation with the EU does not contradict Armenia’s membership in the EEU at all, and, what is more, it complements and enriches the country’s capabilities with new relative advantages.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is no problem for Armenia of choosing between East and West. “We are a member of the EEU, we have a CEPA with the

<sup>28</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan’s Interview with Armenia TV Channel”, December 14, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2017/12/14/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-gave-an-interview-to-ArmeniaTV-channel/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> “EU, Armenia Edge towards Cooperation Deal”, *Euronews*, March 2, 2017. At: <https://www.euronews.com/2017/03/02/eu-armenia-edge-towards-cooperation-deal>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> A. Zabrodin, “Армения стремится стать мостом между ЕАЭС и Евросоюзом” (“Armeniâ stremitsâ stat’ mostom meždu EAËS i Evrosoûzom”), *Известия (Izvestiâ)*, April 3, 2017. At: <https://iz.ru/news/675354>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Remarks by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Munich Security Conference”, February 17, 2018. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/02/17/President-Serzh-Sargsyans-speech-at-Munich-Security-Conference/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, “Nikol Pashinyan Attends Plenary Session at St. Petersburg International Economic Forum”, June 6–7, 2019. At: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2019/06/06/visit-to-Saint-Petersburg/>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

EU. Russia is not against our cooperation with the EU, and the EU is not against our membership in the EEU.”<sup>33</sup>

It is very remarkable that initially Pashinyan was dissatisfied with the scale and depth of EU support for institutional reforms. Thus, in July 2018, he stated that Yerevan would not be the questioner in relations with the EU, and European partners should clarify their position and actions, “as the high-profile statements of European capitals have not been fixed in Armenia since the Velvet Revolution.”<sup>34</sup> According to him, since the democratic revolution the EU policy and the volume of support to Armenia have not changed. Therefore, it is necessary to either temper the enthusiastic tone of those announcements or radically reconsider the policy. In his words, “democratic Armenia expects a more serious attitude.”<sup>35</sup> However, in the following period, similar complaints have not been voiced by Pashinyan’s team, and Pashinyan’s government is already fully satisfied with the level and depth of cooperation with the EU, including the framework of the Eastern Partnership in 2021.<sup>36</sup>

## Bridge

Along with the idea of combining cooperation with the EU with EEU membership, the ruling elites led by both Sargsyan and Pashinyan spread the idea of connecting the two, the idea of bridging them. This idea appeared in 2014–2015, immediately after Armenia’s membership in the EEU, and then it was conceptualized in 2017–2018. So, in 2014, RA President Sargsyan stated that Armenia joined the Eastern Partnership, being convinced that it was not directed against any third state. Moreover, that initiative should not be a dividing wall in the South Caucasus, but a connecting bridge. “It

<sup>33</sup> V. Solov’ev, “Россия пришла в наш регион как европейская сила” (“Rossiâ prišla v naš region kak evropejskaâ sila”), *Коммерсантъ* (*Kommersant*), October 29, 2019. At: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4140669>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> “Pashinyan: EU Should Pipe Down Big-Hearted Tone of its Statements in Relations with Armenia, or Change Policy”, *ARKA*, July 13, 2018. At: [http://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan\\_eu\\_should\\_pipe\\_down\\_big\\_hearted\\_tone\\_of\\_its\\_statements\\_in\\_relations\\_with\\_armenia\\_or\\_change/](http://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan_eu_should_pipe_down_big_hearted_tone_of_its_statements_in_relations_with_armenia_or_change/), last accessed September 24, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> “European Union to Provide Armenia with 1.6 Billion Euros Worth Grants”, *ARKA*, July 9, 2021. At: [http://arka.am/en/news/economy/european\\_union\\_to\\_provide\\_armenia\\_with\\_1\\_6\\_billion\\_euros\\_worth\\_grants/](http://arka.am/en/news/economy/european_union_to_provide_armenia_with_1_6_billion_euros_worth_grants/), last accessed September 23, 2021.

is necessary to find solutions by the help of a dialogue, and the solutions will take into account the interests of all stakeholders in the region.”<sup>37</sup>

Armenia even tried to position itself as a possible bridge for a mutually beneficial approach between the EEU and the EU. The favorable economic, political and cultural relations with Iran were presented as a favorable precondition in that context, which, in Sargsyan’s opinion, could be used by European companies to enter Iran, as well as connect seaports of the Black Sea with the Persian Gulf. In particular, the North-South highway is aimed at the same idea. According to Sargsyan, the mutually beneficial relations between Armenia as an EEU member and Georgia as an EU associate partner can become a model of cooperation. In 2018, Serzh Sargsyan even spoke about the negotiations with the beneficiaries of the EEU-EU member states over the Black Sea-Persian Gulf transit corridor.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of a bridge was circulated with much less caution by the ruling elites led by Pashinyan, considering it realistic and inevitable, but a matter of future perspective.<sup>39</sup> Pashinyan underlined the EU’s participation in the infrastructure projects of Armenia as well, in particular, the construction of the North-South highway.<sup>40</sup>

## Eastern Partnership as a means of regional peace and cooperation

As Serzh Sargsyan once noted, Armenia initially supported the Eastern Partnership in the belief that this format of cooperation was aimed at promoting sustainable regional development, and as a uniting factor, being based on fundamental rights of people, it would erase all dividing lines.<sup>41</sup> And the solution of the last problem was one of the main expectations of the elites led by Serzh Sargsyan. Probably it is with this very logic that Mr. Sargsyan regularly called to the EU to promote the unblocking of the Armenian-Turkish border should be probably observed in the same. In his words, one

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<sup>37</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level...*

<sup>38</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Remarks by the President of the Republic of Armenia...*

<sup>39</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, *Nikol Pashinyan...*

<sup>40</sup> “Azerbaijan’s Xenophobic Policy Should be Condemned by Civilized World – PM Receives EU Official”, *Armenpress*, April 15, 2021. At: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1049190/>, last accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Eastern...*

of the problems hindering the mutual benefit of cooperation with the EU is the “illegal blockade of Armenia by Turkey, a member of the EU Customs Union”<sup>42</sup> and for the Eastern Partnership to be in the vital interests of all member states, “for Armenia it is, first of all, the unblocking of the closed border with Turkey.”<sup>43</sup>

The same logic probably applies to Sargsyan’s attitude towards peaceful settlement of the Artsakh issue. And it is noteworthy that he positively assessed the RA-EU CEPA from this point of view; more specifically, “the document reaffirms the EU’s commitment to support the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, it clearly states the three principles proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group.”<sup>44</sup>

It is noteworthy that Pashinyan’s government (despite the autumn war in 2020) does not (for the time being) emphasize the advance of the approaches of the previous elite to the involvement of the EU in the establishment of regional peace and development of cooperation, but it also never opposed it.

## Summary and recommendations

Summing up the results of the analysis, we conclude that:

- Since the accession of Armenia to the Eastern Partnership program in 2009, all Armenia’s ruling elites have been guided by the almost unchanging principles of that program and its position on the EU in general: 1) The Eastern Partnership is the most effective mechanism for multidisciplinary cooperation with the EU; 2) In order to maintain the integrity of the program and to make it more effective, the EU should have a differentiated and individualized approach to its partners, responding to their individual priorities and encouraging their progress; 3) Adherence to common values is essential for both maintaining the integrity of the program and achieving its underlying goals; 4) For Armenia, cooperation with the EU in general and with the Eastern Partnership in particular is an influential stimulus for structural change; 5) The program should necessarily contribute to the elimination of dividing lines in the South Caucasus, the establishment of regional peace and the strengthening of cooperation; 6) The program should not limit the participation of partner countries in other integration formats, but complement it.

<sup>42</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *President Serzh Sargsyan Took Part...*

<sup>43</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by President...*

<sup>44</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *President Serzh Sargsyan’s Interview with Armenia TV...*

- Accession to the CU in 2013 and then to the EEU in 2015, have radically influenced the content and logic of Armenia's cooperation with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. If official Yerevan had previously sought to combine free trade zones and free movement mechanisms within the CIS with the EU, then since 2013, the rhetoric of Armenia's ruling elite has discussed the idea of disproportionate compatibility, economic integration, CU / EEU membership and institutional reforms in the framework of cooperation with the EU, free movement of people and manpower, CU / EEU membership and visa regime liberalization and gradual abolition in the framework of cooperation with the EU.
- Later, in the rhetoric of the ruling elites of Armenia, the idea of bridging the EU-EEU appeared, positioning Armenia as a possible transit link for EU countries to the EEU and Middle East markets, in the opposite direction.
- The changes brought about by the coup d'état of 2018 did not lead to a radical change in the "European" agenda of the ruling elite in Armenia, neither in terms of rhetoric nor actions. Pashinyan's government probably did not receive the expected increased support from the EU for "democratic Armenia" and, the accents known from the previous period were shortly after restored to the agenda of official Yerevan's foreign policy under the influence of regional structural factors.
- All in all, during the years of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency, 2009–2018, the "European" rhetoric of the ruling elite and the practical steps in that direction were much more intense, more conceptualized and richer in ideas, than after 2018. The decrease in the intensity of "European" rhetoric and practical steps during Pashinyan's rule were due to internal (interpolitical realignments following the coup d'état, coronavirus disease in 2020, the 44-day war, and their consequences on governance and socio-economic situation) and external factors (the "waiting" position of the EU during the realignment of the political elite in Armenia in 2018–2019, the global pandemic situation in 2020, the structural dependence of Armenia on Russia in the war and post-war situations, and the deepening of integration into the EEU and CSTO).
- The foreign policy agenda of Armenia has always been highly sensitive to changes in the international system (primarily the regional subsystem). Due to their influence, the ruling elites of Armenia had to and in the nearest future will have to make adjustments and changes in their foreign policy agenda, striving, on the one hand, to quickly adapt to the new situation and, on the other hand, to create certain opportunities for independence and maneuvering.

- The situation resulting from the 44-day war in 2020 and the new geopolitical realities arising around Armenia hinder and in the coming years will further hinder the foreign policy actions of the elites led by Nikol Pashinyan (and his successors).
- The sharp increase of Russia's role in the sphere of the external security of Armenia and the deepening of economic integration within the EEU will objectively make the "Russian" and "Eurasian" agendas superior to other directions of foreign policy of official Yerevan. This, in its turn, will significantly reduce official Yerevan's opportunities to combine cooperation with the EEU and the EU.
- The increased role of Turkey and Azerbaijan in matters of strategic importance to Armenia (primarily regional transport infrastructure) will increase both the influence of these countries in working out Armenia's political agendas and the weight of these two countries in the relations with regional actors, including the EU. All this will affect the EU relations with Armenia.

At the moment, the EU is targeting its technical and financial assistance to Armenia in resolving post-war humanitarian issues, mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic, carrying out institutional and structural reforms in governance, and promoting small and medium-sized businesses.

However, there is a risk that due to the influence of external-structural factors and the weakness of internal stimuli, the "European" agenda of the Armenian authorities may be significantly narrowed. To prevent this, instead of making it viable, developing and expanding, the EU must address the following issues through bilateral and multilateral cooperation:

1. support the strengthening of Armenia's internal economic and institutional capacity in order to make it more resilient to external and internal challenges;
2. in order to promote stability and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus, to link the individual progress of each of the three countries of the South Caucasus in the field of domestic and foreign policy, and to connect the three countries within regional programs.

The measures taken to address these issues may include:

- **The EU should coordinate its work with Armenia on foreign and domestic policy issues.** Cooperation regarding only national institutional and structural reforms is not enough. It is necessary to carefully and gradually but actively penetrate the sphere of drawing up Armenia's foreign policy agenda. In particular, the most accessible areas at the moment are the issues of repatriation of war prisoners held in Baku, regional energy and transport infrastructure, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Armenia-Turkey dialogue, especially Armenia-Georgia dialogue, Armenia's for-

eign trade and, in particular, export promotion and export diversification. Most of these issues have been present in the frames of the Eastern Partnership, but have never received adequate attention from either the EU or partner countries. It is necessary to change the attitudes towards the regional format of the Eastern Partnership and intensify the actions at that level.

- **The EU must be not only a “supporter” but also a “participant.”** In other words, it is necessary to not only provide technical and financial assistance to Armenia, but also directly penetrate into the socio-economic life of Armenia through the volume of investments, European capital and an increase in the number of joint partnerships. To this end, it is expedient to create a “Group of European Friends of Armenia” with the participation of the EU, individual European countries and organizations, which will reveal the target areas by means of scanning, making logistical calculations and mobilizing financial and technical resources, and directing them to the target areas.
- **The EU should increase its engagement and its intensity in the areas of Armenia’s “disproportionate compatibility” with the EEU and the EU,** focusing in particular on current priorities, especially for official Yerevan. Such spheres can include the development of energy capacities (renewable and alternative), internal transport infrastructures (automobile-railway), smart agriculture (introduction of new resource-saving technologies, organic methods), special branches of tourism (first of all, agricultural, healthcare, cultural) and balanced territorial development. Special attention and support should be paid to the development of Armenia’s production capacities in the spheres, the end result of which may be exported to other EU markets, in addition to Armenia’s privileges already within the CIS and GSP + system in the EU. Consistent and coordinated efforts in these areas can significantly contribute to the development of Armenia’s own capabilities, thus to some extent developing its capacity for independence and maneuvering. One of the results may be the creation of the edges of cooperation between the EU and the EEU through Armenia.
- **The EU should increase the financial and technical assistance and its participation in the areas of “soft impact”** such as school and university education, science and research, and facilitate and intensify human-to-human contacts (primarily through abolition of the visa regime). It is desirable for the EU to support and participate in these areas of “disproportionate compatibility” through the “Group of European Friends of Armenia.”



- **The EU should reconsider its policy concept in the South Caucasus**, increasing the significance of normative principles in the logic of its principle-based pragmatism. In particular, to link the EU energy and communication realpolitik with normative-value requirements in relations with the countries of the region, at the level of both high-level statements and practical policies. It will stimulate democratic transformations in those countries, and it will contribute to the strengthening of mutual trust and stability in the region.
- By the same token, **the EU should expand the spheres of application of flexible principles of interconnection and mutual agreement** in relations with the South Caucasus partner countries within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. They have proven their viability and effectiveness over the years. At present, they need to be disseminated both for cooperation in the foreign and national policy of each of the partner states and for the creation of structural interdependencies between those states. In particular, it is necessary to interconnect and mutually agree on (for example, with additional financial support) the support of the internal reforms of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with their regional cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, to establish a similar interconnection within the framework of EU cooperation with Turkey.
- **The EU should promote the deepening of the interconnectedness of Armenia and Georgia**, taking into account the similarities and common interests of foreign policy issues of these two countries, as well as the more positive relations and the existing opportunities for cooperation in economic and humanitarian issues. This support can be directed, for example, to cross-border cooperation between the two countries, joint productions, joint research, and joint educational programs.

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