

Armenian Leadership (Political and Party Elite) Stance on State's Foreign Policy Orientation

Many scholars specialized in social sciences affirm that there are always several ways in which the phenomena under study may be sorted and arranged for purposes of systemic analysis. As Kurt Lewin observed, "*The first prerequisite of a successful observation in any science is a definite understanding about what size of unit one is going to observe at a given time*"¹

Analyzing state's foreign policy orientation impact is a more deep and extensive task than describing or analyzing ordinary foreign (regional, local, global) political processes. It concerns firstly the issue of identity and includes many more aspects than foreign orientation, socio-cultural, economic, political security and ties with international community.

In this case, we'll represent the segment of foreign policy orientation of supposed state, Armenia, the attitude and stance of Armenian political parties represented in the National Assembly regarding political elite's policy toward last integration processes in the region. For this and other purposes we conducted quantitative and qualitative research, case studies and in-depth interviews with Armenian internal and foreign policy makers². These interviews revealed the behavior of foreign policy

¹ "Field Theory in Social Science", New York, 1951, p. 157.

² The interviews also covers issues like the role of Armenian political elites in defining the nature and spheres of foreign policy, what they consider to be the national interest, how they characterize it and how national identity affects policy forming process and what is the relevance of both motives and ideological preferences in Armenian national behavior.

making actors, the feature of shaping that policy, its motives, incitements, volume, composition, the conduct of legal and legitimate political elite³ representatives, its preferences, political culture, values and behavioral characteristics, etc...⁴

At the heart of the field is an investigation into decision making, the individual decision makers, processes and conditions that affect foreign policy and the outcomes of these decisions. By virtue of this approach, as C. Alden mentions⁵, foreign policy analysis is necessarily concerned with the boundaries between the external environment outside of the nation state and the internal or domestic environment, with its variety of sub-national sources of influence.

The geopolitical situation and power-settings in South Caucasia obviously changed after the Moscow-Tbilisi tension in 2008⁶. After 4 years of hard negotiations with the EU⁷, Armenia's political elite decided to join Eurasian Economic Union⁸ (EEU) banding together with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in a Moscow-led project meant to counterbalance the European Union⁹.

³ G. Mosca, V. Pareto, R. Michels, J. Linz, J. Schumpeter, Higley and Burton, etc... many political scientists from Classical Elite theory to contemporary "Elite Schools" define this term in various forms. We adapted the latter definition within the framework of this article. It defines the elite "as a group of individuals holding strategic positions within a political system, which enables these individuals to influence political decision making directly and regularly", Higley, J., & Burton, M. G. (2006). *The Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

⁴ As David Singer noted in his well-known schema of International Relations, in grappling with world politics, one necessarily focuses on either the study of phenomena at the international system level, the state (or national) level or the individual level. Foreign policy analysis has traditionally emphasized the state and individual levels to be the key areas for understanding the nature of the international system. J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations", *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, the International System: Theoretical Essays. (Oct., 1961), pp. 77-92.

⁵ C. Alden, "Foreign policy analysis", IR2137, University of London, 2006., http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/sites/default/files/programme_resources/lse/lse_pdf/subject_guides/ir2137_ch1-3.pdf

⁶ We will not discuss here the developments regarding Armenia's and its neighbor's policy toward regional and global powers during last decade.

⁷ Negotiations for Armenia's associate membership in the EU started on July 19, 2010. An Associate membership agreement assumed close ties between Armenia and the EU in fields of improving democracy, human rights, institutional amendments, economy, energy issues, etc...

⁸ Armenia became a full member of the EEU on Jan 2, 2015. Its share in distributed customs duties from imports to the EEU is 1.13%. By preliminary data, Armenia will receive about \$250 million in 2015. EEU customs taxes on a range of goods, particularly, cars, drugs and essential goods, will be applied in Armenia in a year after the accession. The aggregate volume of economy of the EEU member states is more than \$2 trillion. The agreement implies freedom of movement of commodities, services, capital and workforce, implementation of coordinated or single policy in economic sectors stipulated by the given agreement and international agreements within the EEU.

⁹ On September 4, 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan abruptly announced the decision to join the Eurasian Customs Union (which has now morphed into the Eurasian Economic

Armenia's parliament voted almost unanimously to ratify the EEU treaty in December 2014. The National Assembly's voting results on ratification of the agreement on Armenia's joining in the EEU reflected the parliamentary majority and other minority Parties decision: only 7 deputies out of 131 voted against the accession.

The President of RA stated that prospects of Armenia's accession to the EEU are good. Otherwise Yerevan would not adopt such a decision. *"I am sure Armenia made the right choice. In any other circumstances, the difficulties we are facing today would be much heavier,"* Serzh Sargsyan said pointing to the interconnectedness of the EEU economies. The President assured that the most of the agricultural produce is exported to toe EEU countries, first of all, to the Russian market. *"The revaluation of the Russian ruble has led to problems for the commodity producers of Armenia. Many Armenians residing in the Russian Federation make transfers to Armenia to support their families and relatives"*¹⁰.

In spite of the statesman's repeated assurances¹¹, this decision gave rise to some fears within the Armenian society connected with their hopes and concerns for their country's future as part of this Union¹². The decision was met with skepticism in some circles, especially in political and parliamentary ones. "Why the EEU and not the European Union?" critics asked. Some suggested that Russia used Armenia's dependence on its energy and security to influence the decision. Others raised questions about potential customs checkpoints being implemented at the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) border.

A Yerevan based analyst, the Founding Director of the Regional Studies Center, points out that EEU membership may have several negative impacts on the Ar-

Union) following a visit to Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin. This, after almost four years of negotiations with the European Union to sign the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that was to have been initiated in Vilnius in November 2013. This decision completely derailed Armenia's foreign policy track, which many were hopeful would have elevated standards in the country and brought them into line with European norms and values.

¹⁰ The speech of the President of RA during the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly session in Yerevan, Armenia, 17.03.2015.<http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/03/17/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-National-Assembly-Euronest-Parliamentary-Assembly/>

¹¹ Statements and Interviews of RA President Serzh Sargsyan to the Media (various TV, radio channels and presidential press-releases) <http://www.panorama.am/am/politics/2015/04/06/serzh-sargsyan-3/>, <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Media-forum/> <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2014/12/05/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Convention-Industrialists-and-Entrepreneurs/> <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2014/12/23/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-of-the-Supreme-Eurasian-Economic-Council/>

¹² Richard Giragosian, Armenia and the Eurasian Economic Union: the view from Yerevan, European Council on Foreign Relations, 8th January 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_armenia_and_the_eurasian_economic_union_the_view_from_yerevan387, accessed 2nd March 2015

menian economy. *“Firstly, as a more open economy Armenia will have to adopt fresh protectionist policies, which could force up consumer prices. Secondly, Armenia will have to adjust away from its recent history of EU-focused trade in order to favour EEU counterparts”*¹³.

The Secretary of the opposition “Rule of Law” parliamentary faction noted that *“The Armenian accession to EEU has a political, economic and security importance. Our society has expectations from this process, but the majority of them have positive expectations. Therefore, Yerevan must use effectively the opportunities of this accession. I think that this is also a public demand”*¹⁴.

The leader of the oppositional “Heritage” party finds that *“the deplorable efforts of the republic’s regime to compel Armenia’s accession to the EEU, together with Serzh Sargsyan’s domestic and foreign policies that do not flow from Armenia’s national interests”*¹⁵. He claims that the President, who has usurped power through unjust elections, is not authorized to sign any agreement or undertake any obligation on behalf of the people of Armenia.

What are the circumstances of the process for making Armenian foreign policies? Geography is basically considered an obstacle for Armenian foreign policy. Though there are other small countries with strong foreign policy, Armenia has a more challenging geographical location than those countries. Many respondents mentioned the fact that being surrounded with two no-partners and being a land-locked country limits Armenia’s geostrategic potential. A MP¹⁶ from an opposition party stated, *“Armenia is land-locked country, which brings a global negative effect. It is not a gift from God to have such neighbours. Over the centuries we have suffered because of the neighbours. This region contains a great risk. Of course, nowadays it is not impossible to manoeuvre, but the opportunities are fewer. Moreover, every single opportunity has its negative effect.”*

Global developments also have their effects on Armenian foreign policy making. Today, countries are more connected to each other, so global developments cannot be ignored. According to a MP¹⁷ from the governing party, *“Armenian authorities should be able to react in time. One of the engines in making foreign policy is global development. If we cannot react in time, we’ll lose our chance to be in the right place. Modern global developments are the main guidelines of international relations and we should not ignore them”*.

In general, party leaders and policy analysts think that Armenia has had to change its foreign policy course rather frequently due to the geopolitical environ-

¹³ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁴ From the interview with Heghine Bisharyan hold on 10.09.2014.

¹⁵ From the interview with Raffi Hovhannisyan hold on 24.09.2014.

¹⁶ From the interview with Mikayel Melkumyan hold on 06.03.2015.

¹⁷ From the interview with Khosrov Harutyunyan hold on 10.04.2015.

ment around the region. In this regard, one¹⁸ of the respondents from an opposition party stated that *“I agree that it (changing of foreign policy orientation) was unexpected for our partners from Europe, but I believe that this new market will be beneficial for us, too. The region and the conditions surrounding us make change our foreign policy direction, but I suppose that our partners from the EU can understand us: the example of the Ukraine is in front of their eyes.”*

According to several current and former statesmen¹⁹, throughout history Armenian foreign policy targeted national rather than personal interests. Firstly, foreign policy has been determined by national security, secondly by economic interests, and thirdly by regional interests.

A representative of the party in power²⁰ mentioned that *“After the collapse of the Soviet Union the economic situation forced the authorities to start negotiations with Turkey. Several times I connected with the PM of Turkey and offered to start negotiations without preconditions. Today we are ready to restart negotiations with Turkey, but... There are no negotiations without two parts. The previous century is considered to have noticeable impact on our foreign policy thinking. Being a part of the former Soviet Union makes the Armenian society more inclined to cooperate with the Russian Federation. Economic, military, food and other forms of security as well.”* Contrary to this, an expert²¹ stated that *“Today young generation has no stereotypes about the important relationship between Armenia and the Russian Federation. They (young people) are more inclined to cooperate with the EU or the USA. This generation can break all stereotypes in the future”.*

One question referred to the most beneficial foreign policy course so far. A general opinion about this question is what one²² of the respondents mentioned, *“Over these years different parties and different leaders declared different courses of foreign policy, but actually all of them were based on multidimensional policy (political dialogue, respect for mutual interests, cooperation with all power centers, etc.) Such a policy provided an environment from which we benefited most. We can't give us the luxury to cooperate with only one pole, so we need more partners around the world.”*

As regards current trends in Armenian foreign policy, some respondents believe that membership in the newly-formed Eurasian Economic Union merely implies not only economic, but also political integration. One²³ of the respondents stated that *“Armenia has many ties to the Russian Federation, and the Armenian products and*

¹⁸ From the interview with Mikayel Melkumyan hold on 06.03.2015.

¹⁹ From the interviews with Arsen Avagyan and Arman Navasardyan hold on 10.03.2015 and 20.03.2015.

²⁰ From the interview with Khosrov Harutyunyan hold on 10.04.2015.

²¹ From the interview with Ashot Manucharyan hold on 04.05.2015.

²² From the interview with Vazgen Maukyan hold on 11.05.2015.

²³ From the interview with Mikayel Melkumyan hold on 06.03.2015.

goods are highly accepted in the Russian markets, so the EEU is a lesser evil for current regional situation and conditions.”

Though several respondents from oppositional parties did not support such policy, they mentioned that the authorities had no alternative. According to them, in this situation the society needs to find ways to make this new conditions serve our interests. A MP²⁴ from an oppositional party stated that *“Today’s elites have exhausted their limit, that’s why an alternative option was not available. The fact is that we have to find appropriate mechanisms to catch all possible and impossible benefits (I do not think that they are unlimited) from the worst forced decision in recent years.”*

Talking about the importance of relations between Armenia and world power centers, most of the party leaders stated that even though Armenian officials decided to continue their close relations with the EEU, not with the EU, there is no doubt that the country should continue to maintain good relations with European countries and especially with the EU. A MP²⁵ from the party of power stated that *“Armenia wants to have more partners from Europe. We are open to discuss with the EU any question what our partners want. I think that we still have a chance to stay in contact with the EU partners. The Ukrainian crisis has shown our European partners why we took such an orientation.”* Conversely, an MP²⁶ from an oppositional party noted that *“In my view, it is impossible to continue the development between the EU partners and Armenia. We have already made our decision. Actually, the authorities made that irreversible decision, not the public. Of course, the EEU has many supporters in Armenia, but we need European development, not the return of the Soviet times.”*

According to most of the respondents NATO and the USA are good partners for Armenia. One of the respondents²⁷ said *“USA officials want to see strong and prosperous Armenia. It is very important for us. Even though Armenian officials made a choice that the USA find unacceptable, the USA still wants to develop our country. Americans are a very important partner for us international area. We should not forget that in the USA we have a big Armenian community, either.”*

While MPs from the opposition and the party of power stated that the membership to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is just a formal process, policy experts argued that it is very important for the country. One²⁸ of them said *“Of course, the membership to the CSTO is very important for us. The CSTO is very important and strategic partner for us. That’s the secret of why we attach great importance to our membership in the CSTO.”*

²⁴ From the interview with Aleksandr Arzumanyan hold on 05.09.2014.

²⁵ From the interview with Khosrov Harutyunyan hold on 10.04.2015.

²⁶ From the interview with Armen Martirosyan hold on 20.03.2015.

²⁷ From the interview with Aleksandr Arzumanyan hold on 05.09.2014.

²⁸ From the interview with Arsen Avagyan hold on 10.03.2015.

Russia is obviously considered a reliable partner. However, respondents state that there is a need to balance relations with RF towards a real strategic partnership. But respondents of RA National Assembly see Armenia's membership in the EEU on the one hand and the continuing partnership with the EU on the other are a good opportunity for the country to manoeuvre between the two cooperation formats, pursuing balanced policies.

*"Being an EEU member state, Armenia has to by all means undertake steps towards building active relations with EU institutions, preventing a possible provocation (which we have already eye-witnessed). I do accept the policy of maneuvers, and understandably, quite serious work is now underway with respect to the other states in the region,"*²⁹ stated the leader of the opposition "Heritage" faction in National Assembly.

According to an opposition MP from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun (ARF-D), Armenia pursues the right approach by not ruling out the future development of cooperation with the EU family. *"There is an understanding between the leading countries, so we should not succumb to the provocative statements attempting to derail the cooperation. [Such an intention] is clearly seen from pro-Turkish and pro-Azerbaijani statements,"*³⁰ he said.

Another radical oppositional MP who heads the Armenian National Congress (ANC) fraction, also emphasized the importance of balanced of a balanced cooperation. He said that their political force has always sought for effective relations with both the EU and the United States, and Russia and Iran. *"Instead of harmonizing the interests between the West and Russia, they entered into a game which became confrontational, Armenia [the dilemma of] 'either... or' imposing upon. We have to understand that the real key is the harmonization of interests of the EU, Russia and the US,"*³¹ he added.

In conclusion, most of Armenian parties, represented in the National Assembly, except the pro-western "Heritage" ("Republican Party of Armenia", "Prosperous Armenia party", "Armenian Revolutionary Federation"- Dashnaksutyun, "Rule of Law party", "Armenian National Congress party") agree with state's leadership foreign course regarding relations with international and regional power centers. They understand that Armenia's leadership "securitized" the decision of integration and Armenia's membership in the EEU takes into account security guarantees for both Armenia and NKR, although no proof of this has been offered.

²⁹ From the interview with Rouben Hakobyan hold on 21.02.2015.

³⁰ From the interview with Artsvik Minasyan hold on 16.01.2015.

³¹ From the interview with Levon Zurabyan hold on 27.03.2015.

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Abstract

On September 3, 2013, after Armenia completed nearly three years of negotiations with the European Union on the Association Agreement which included years of European-funded legislative reforms, President Serzh Sargsyan declared in Moscow that Yerevan wants to join the pre-formed Eurasian Customs Union (later it became Eurasian Economic Union). The President's announcement a few hours later caught many by surprise - even those in his inner circle. Brussels had made it clear that it was the Association Agreement, and specifically its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) component which was incompatible with membership in the Customs Union. The author, with his team, conducted qualitative surveys to represent the public opinion on foreign policy orientation. At least 40 in-depth interviews have been conducted and all 40 transcripts are complete. Each group of respondents (decision making centers, political party leadership, experts, and NGO sector representatives) answered both general and specific questions. In case of policy experts and

party leaders questions were divided into several groups. The questionnaire consisted of six main parts regarding national security issues, national identity impact on foreign policy, the bi-lateral and international relations building process of post-Soviet (independent) Armenia with neighbors, regional and global powers, the influence of Armenian Genocide on Armenian state policy and political decisions of the leadership, etc. As concerns the essence of security from the standpoints of the elites, political party leadership and the public, answers are quite different.

Key words: Armenia, Foreign policy, EEU, EU, Political Elite

