

**THE EVOLUTION OF ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY  
IDENTITY: THE CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY DRIVEN  
PATHS. FRIENDS AND FOES IN ARMENIAN FOREIGN  
POLICY DISCOURSE**

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of Armenia's foreign policy identity. Drawing chiefly on presidents' speeches and policies, it delves into the evolution of Armenia's foreign policy identity, identifying the core characteristics of friends and foes. The starting point of this analysis is the rise of the un-Sovietized and nationalistic foreign policy identity that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union. The second critical phase involves the shift in the discussion about European identity, which started during Robert Kocharyan's presidency. This was followed by a disconnect between identity-based European aspirations and security driven Russian/Eurasian constraints.

The restoration of Armenia's independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union has faced many challenges. The country's foreign policy identity has been inextricably linked to the pan-Armenian movement for Nagorno Karabakh's self-determination and its reunification with independent Armenia.

During perestroika, Armenians sought to address the long-standing issue of Nagorno - Karabakh's status. This ultimately led to a pan-Armenian movement for independence.

The newly formed political elite in Soviet Armenia, known as the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM), positioned itself as a flag carrier of a movement pursuing self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh and the restoration of Armenia's independence. To this end PANM developed nationalistic policies that shaped the fundamental transformations that were taking place across the country. They put a special emphasis on modernizing Soviet Armenian identity and redefining national interests. In its search for a new national and foreign policy identity, PANM's anti-Soviet positions also extended to a rejection of Russia.

Russia's historic role as Armenia's "savior" in Armenian strategic thinking was profoundly challenged in the wake of the

breakup of the Soviet Union. Russia, Armenia's "big brother," suddenly became a "chauvinistic empire" widely regarded as a formidable challenge to the independent, free and democratic development of Armenian statehood. This change in public thought occurred gradually, gathering speed in the later stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement. One of the prominent leaders of PANM and the first president of independent Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, declared: "Armenians have pinned their political hopes on Russia for over 300 years and, regardless of constant disillusionment, they have continued to adore the Russian people, making a clear distinction between Russians and the imperial, chauvinistic policy carried out by the authorities... We sincerely seek to strengthen friendly ties with the Russians and other Soviet nations, yet fiercely oppose any encroachment on our national interests, along with any sort of imperial chauvinistic policies of Russification," (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 34).

Armenia's traditional pro-Russian orientation was also condemned by other prominent Armenian public figures and politicians, who urged the nation to give up its reliance on Russia and embrace Armenia's national identity (Mirzoyan 2010, p. 28). In the early stages of the movement, the leaders of the national movement targeted "imperial" Russia as a fundamental obstacle to Armenia's development in order to encourage nationalistic sentiments across the country.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the first Armenian minister of foreign affairs, Raffi Hovhannisyan, was forced to resign because of considerable frictions with Ter-Petrosyan, focusing on national issues, namely the question of sidelining the issue of Genocide in Armenia's foreign policy agenda. *America From Abroad : Distant Relations : Armenians living abroad are generous with money--and advice--for their homeland. And that's creating some resentment.*

## **New strategic approach toward Turkey**

Once Armenia became an independent country and the movement became the ruling party of the new state, the new political elite toned down nationalistic rhetoric. It started to shape a new neutral and civic identity that was believed to be conducive to the challenges threatening the country. At the core of this policy was the transformation of Armenian-Turkish relations.

Given the Ottoman past and, in particular, the strong mark that the Genocide has left on Armenian collective memory and identity, "Turkey" appeared to represent everything that opposed the essence of "Armenia." Armenia's political elite, however, viewed anti-Turkish sentiments as a threat to Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, which was viewed as indispensable for Armenia's steady development and regional stability. The political elite worked hard to overcome Armenian society's deep-seated anger toward Turkey. "We always remember historical conflicts but, guided by our country's realistic interests, we must overcome our pain and establish normal interstate relations... The psychological barriers appear to be overcome, which is the greatest achievement of our movement" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 300).

Ter-Petrosyan's administration did not put the issue of the Genocide recognition on the foreign policy agenda, viewing it as prejudicial to Armenian-Turkish relations. "Armenia regards the events that occurred in 1915 as a genocide against the Armenian people. Nevertheless, Armenia does not view that issue as a prerequisite for normalizing Armenian - Turkish relations... Mutual understanding between two societies is contingent upon rapid settlement of bilateral relations" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 480). Ter - Petrosyan avoided placing Armenia in either a Western or Eastern context. Rather, he stressed that Armenia should be a bridge between the East and the West. In the president's view, independence offered Armenia the opportunity to become the center of an international crossroads – a political, economic and cultural link between East and West (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 265) .

The Armenian political elite preferred to portray Armenia as a part of Europe according to its religion and core values; but it politically associated Armenia with the Middle East, while still

emphasizing the significance of the Caucasian region. "We see ourselves in the Middle East alliance and security system in the future... I hope that upon the settlement of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict our relations with Turkey will be resolved. We see possibilities for large-scale cooperation in the South Caucasus" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 301).

Ter-Petrosyan's administration placed a great deal of faith in European integration, driven by the belief that integration into European institutions was essential to achieve sustainable development and enhance regional stability in the South Caucasus. (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 557) Anti-Russian propaganda started to decline shortly after Armenia reclaimed its independence.\*

### **Friends and foes**

After the restoration of independence Ter-Petrosyan started to advocate strengthening Armenian-Russian ties, drawing on the two countries' backgrounds: "The break-up of the Soviet Union does not blunt the unity, which has emerged as means of coexistence over centuries... it is no secret that for a long time, Russian culture was the only way of interacting with world civilizations for all the nations in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 401). The discourse concerning the identity of Armenia's foreign policy under Ter-Petrosyan's presidency can be summarized as culturally Western (European), and politically Eastern (Middle East). Armenia sought to be a bridge between East and West with a foreign policy based on universal values and pragmatic calculations.

An analysis of Ter-Petrosyan's foreign policy speeches lead to the conclusion that he attached negligible importance to identity, norms and beliefs in foreign policy, and prioritized pragmatic political and economic considerations. He was constantly striving to redefine "foes" and "friends" in Armenian collective memory. In his view, the challenges facing the country pushed historical conflicts to the background, and moved the economic and political benefits of cooperation with both Azerbaijan and Turkey to the forefront. Turkey's portrayal as a "foe" was challenged by Ter-Petrosyan, who regarded Azerbaijan and Turkey as Armenia's most natural allies.

Ter-Petrosyan saw identity and collective memory as detrimental to the country's development, and he sought to introduce rationalism and pragmatism to Armenia's foreign policy. He avoided characterizing Armenia as overly European, Caucasian or Asian, preferring to identify the country as a bridge between the East and West. There is evidence that Ter-Petrosyan's controversial positions on national and identity-related issues, especially his willingness to prioritize relationship building with neighbors over national values, led to the opposition against him and his 1998 resignation.

### **Robert Kocharyan: A shift in the European Identity narrative**

Given the unpopularity of Levon Ter-Petrosyan's vision of Armenia's foreign policy priorities and its identity, it was unlikely the country's second president, Robert Kocharyan, would adopt similar positions. Kocharyan's presidency heralded a new era of Armenian foreign policy, largely hailed as "well-balanced" He embarked on the construction of a new foreign policy identity that revolved around three core dimensions: Genocide recognition; a complementary foreign policy; and, most importantly, full-scale European integration. Kocharyan made a clear distinction between himself and his predecessor, particularly regarding national identity-related issues. He questioned the viability a foreign policy agenda that pursued "material" interests at the cost of national identity and collective memory.

In his view, Armenia should not give up on Genocide recognition for the sake of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement: "We are neighbors, and we must find a common ground, but not at the expense of our historical memory" (Esiweb.org, 2015). Putting his words into action, Kocharyan introduced the issue of the Genocide recognition as a priority of Armenia's foreign policy agenda during the UN General Assembly in September 1998, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention.

## **No preconditions**

Kocharyan stressed that Genocide recognition was not a precondition for normalizing relations with Turkey, underscoring that it was a moral issue, which would not include legal consequences. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian called on Turkey to establish relations with Armenia without any preconditions, stressing that "we must talk to each other, deal with each other, visit each other, trade with each other, and do so within the framework of our own equal, sovereign identities" (MFA.am, 2002).

Kocharyan introduced an ambitious foreign policy agenda, reflected in the "complementarity" doctrine. This envisaged multivector foreign policy making, aimed at skillfully balancing core dimensions and avoiding problems in relations with major powers. Kocharyan explained: "Complementarity is based on the concept of seeking advantages by softening the contradictions of the global and regional powers, and not by deepening the differences. We are responsible for regional stability and our actions shall help solve problems, instead of creating new ones (MFA.am, 2004). It is worth noting that, from the outset, Kocharyan adopted a pro -Western (European) policy, putting a strong emphasis on Armenia's integration into European institutions.

## **A move toward the West**

In contrast to his predecessor, Kocharyan favored a broader foreign policy agenda that included both political and military rapprochement with the West. In April 1999 Kocharyan attended the celebration of NATO's fiftieth anniversary in Washington, which was branded by the leader of Armenia's Communist Party, Sergey Badalyan, as betrayal of Russia (Nt.am, 2015). In the early stages of his presidency, Kocharyan was largely perceived as a pro-European politician, who strived for European integration to increase room for maneuvering in relations with Russia.

The ruling elite tended to view the shift in the Western/European dimension of Armenia's foreign policy as its civilizational choice. Foreign Minister Oskanian declared: "There

were many questions about which path to take. ... The choice was clear. Armenians believe in the values of European enlightenment, of European civilization..." (Panarmenian.net, 2005). There was a resolve to rectify the shortcomings caused by Armenia's long isolation from Europe, and to achieve substantial progress, in terms of democracy promotion, and economic and social development. Kocharyan announced: "Armenian society, which has deep European roots, was isolated from European political, economic and legal realm because of the ideological confrontation of the 20th century... Today our goal is to comply with EU standards," (Kocharyan 2011, p. 253).

The will to move toward Europe was furthered by Armenia's membership in the Council of Europe in 2001, which Armenian society and political elites hailed as a historic advancement toward the "European civilizational realm." Oskanian expressed confidence that the European values promoted by the Council could be instrumental in tackling the mounting challenges facing the country, and the region overall, with a specific reference to the Nagorno - Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Turkish relations (MFA.am, 2000). In his speech on Armenia's joining the Council of Europe, Kocharyan also stressed the organization's perceived role in further integration into Europe: "The priorities and objectives of Armenia are in full conformity with the values and practices of Europe and its institutions. It was with this vision in mind that we tabled our application to join the Council of Europe and engaged ourselves in the long accession process. We view our membership as a crucial juncture on the road to Armenia's comprehensive integration within Europe... At last, Europe has institutionally extended its borders to where they belong. We are here to mark our own effort in enriching the sense and meaning of being European" (MFA.am, 2001).

The Kocharyan-led elite placed their faith in the European path of development, which was deemed essential for fostering large-scale political, economic, legal reforms across the country in compliance with European fundamental values of democracy and human rights. This optimism was encouraged by Armenia's inclusion in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy initiative. The EU's 2004 enlargement, which was a substantial shift in its policy towards the South Caucasus, created high hopes. It encouraged

Armenia's efforts to integrate further into European structures, which were associated with a peaceful and democratic path of development.

Armenia's inclusion in the European Neighborhood was welcomed by Kocharyan's administration, which regarded the program as essential for Armenia's homecoming to the European family. "Armenia perceives its future in its full-scale integration with the European family... the "new neighborhood" initiative will further advance our resolve to satisfy Europe's criteria, to be able to contribute and fully benefit from the cooperation between our states and nations. We walk this road with deep belief and confidence, and we appreciate your efforts to help us in that uneasy but crucial effort" (Address by Robert Kocharyan 2004).

Armenia's foreign policy principles, enshrined in the 2007 National Security Strategy, reflected the ruling elite's dialogue about identity. The development and consolidation of Armenia's relations with European structures (Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and with the European Union (EU), was considered a foreign policy priority (MFA.am, 2007). Hayk Kotanjian, a current advisor to the defense minister and one of the author's of the strategy, said: "The choice of the European direction of development is not an accidental one. It conforms to the Armenian people's deep European roots (common values of ancient Christianity, uninterrupted centuries-old historic cultural ties, an Indo-European language, widely spread Diaspora etc) and a European world outlook...Armenian-Russian relations have never been an obstacle to developing other vectors in Armenia's foreign relations, for instance-to Euro-Atlantic integration. On the contrary, Russia has also chosen the European road of development" (Kotanjian 2008, p. 500).

The Armenian political elite chose the identity-based European path of development due to the following factors. First, Armenia's firm commitment to the European value system and the resolve to create a modern European state characterized by a full-fledged democracy and free market economy. Second, the Armenian political leadership's deep conviction that European integration holds the potential to radically improve Armenia's geopolitical position by producing a breakthrough on peace and cooperation promotion in the region. The EU's commitment to reforms and development in the

region resonated deeply with Armenian society and its policy - makers. Third, there is a belief in the EU's "soft power" and its capacity to challenge hard power politics in the region by applying its rich toolbox and patterns of sustainable development and peaceful coexistence. Finally, Armenia was committed to a complementary foreign policy, by maintaining well-balanced partnerships with core regional actors. This would enable Armenia to expand its ability to maneuver and preclude it from moving deeper into the orbit of Russian influence.

### **Russia as a strategic partner**

Kocharyan never questioned the significance of Armenian-Russian relations and viewed Russia as Armenia's indispensable and strategic partner, despite his overtures to the West. In the eyes of foreign policy makers, Armenia's integration into European institutions was not at odds with the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership. This position was based on the assumption that Russia had also chosen the European path. "Russia is the most powerful state across the post-Soviet space in economic and military terms. Russia is our pivotal partner which does not preclude us from establishing new relationships with the European Union, the United States of America and Iran" (Kocharyan 2011, p. 272).

The National Security Strategy of Armenia (2007) notes, "The importance of Russia's role for the security of Armenia, the traditional friendly links between the two nations, the level of trade and economic relations, Russia's role in the Nagorno Karabakh mediation effort, as well as the presence of a significant Armenian community in Russia, all contribute to a strategic partnership" (MFA.am, 2007). The concept of strategic partnership in Kocharyan's discourse was not characterized by identity-related or cultural references, and focused chiefly on shared economic, political and military interests. The pivotal role of Armenian-Russian relations has never been questioned by the president, government, parliament and major political parties. In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, security-related references unequivocally fall in the realm of a "Russia-first" approach. All other European and Euroatlantic security

actors, whether the European Union or NATO, take a back seat to Russia and Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

There is no mention in the National Security Concept of Armenia's Caucasian identity or a reference to a common regional identity. Kocharyan tended to view ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious divisions as a potential cause for emerging political conflicts. He questioned the feasibility of the peaceful co-existence of Armenian and Azerbaijani populations because of their "ethnic incompatibility. "The Caucasus is an extremely complicated and explosive region, taking into consideration its ethnic diversity, religious mosaic, heavy historical heritage and mixture of multiple interests..." (Kocharyan 2011, p. 47).

Nevertheless, Kocharyan noted the indispensable importance of regional cooperation as a recipe for peace and stability promotion in the region. In Kocharyan's view, the key to addressing the acute hardships facing the region lies in complementary economic cooperation rather than the artificial construction of common regional identity. "Today our common challenge is to transform the Caucasus into an area of economic routes—an area of peace and stability" (Kocharyan 2011, p. 47). Kocharyan believed that regional economic cooperation in the spheres of energy and transport, was instrumental to confidence building and resolving conflicts. He saw this vision as inextricably linked to the European Union's experience of conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence: "There is confidence in Armenia that, through formulating and pursuing common interests for all the three states of the region, we will be able to surmount the present difficulties.... Europe's history and present achievements provide encouragement for this objective" (MFA.am, 2001). Foreign Minister Oskanian also pinned high hopes on the European Neighborhood policy as a viable tool for finding a way to break the deadlock obstructing dialogue and cooperation (MFA.am, 2004).

The identity of Armenia's foreign policy under Kocharyan's presidency was pro-European, notwithstanding large discrepancies between the rhetoric and the real policy, which was dominated by

pro-Russian constraints\*. The prevailing feeling of insecurity deriving from the formidable security challenges facing Armenia can explain the uneasy coexistence of the country's pro-European political choice and its strategic alliance with Russia. Nevertheless, unlike his predecessor, Kocharyan attached more importance to identity, norms and beliefs in foreign policy making. The path to European integration was viewed as a civilizational choice, given Armenia's European identity and commitment to the European value system.

### **Armenia's Foreign Policy Narrative under S. Sargsyan's Presidency (2008-present)**

President Serzh Sargsyan came into office in 2008 with the aim of radically improving Armenia's geopolitical position. The search for a development strategy led Sargsyan to place a special emphasis on identity-related issues, particularly Armenian identity. "We should formulate and define a new Armenian identity. An identity, which should become our beacon in the new century. The new Armenian identity should be person-centered, freedom-centered, and rights-centered. An identity based on freedom and rights is the most appealing and empowering... Diversity is the key to continuity, while isolated species become extinct. The Armenian identity is an umbrella for diversity. Tolerance fortifies Armenian diversity. Are we tolerant? We should be! We have to be!" (President.am, 2008).

### **Seeking a Russian-European balance**

The underlying objective of the president's call to redefine Armenian identity was to bring it in line with the wider European identity and the prerequisites for full-scale European integration. Sargsyan stressed: "The people of Armenia have made their historic and irreversible choice. Our road to becoming closer to Europe has

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\* During Kocharyan's presidency the strategic assets of Armenia's economy, especially in the energy sector were taken over by Russia.

been unique in an organic way. ... (President.am, 2011).

He unequivocally stated that Armenia's heritage, values, culture and identity make the Armenian nation an indivisible part of Europe, constituting the cornerstone of Armenia's Euro-integration policy (President.am, 2012).

Under Sargsyan's presidency, the following events determined the constraints under which foreign policy discourse evolved. First, the shift in the EU's policy towards the South Caucasus that led to the Eastern Partnership program; second, the Russian-Georgian war, which further deepened lines of conflict in the region; lastly, the intensification of the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. The Eastern Partnership, which opened up an EU Association perspective for the EU's Eastern partners, was welcomed by the Armenian political leadership, which regarded it as a crucial milestone on the path to European integration. Sargsyan hailed it as a new impetus to Armenia's European integration; it was largely regarded as a recipe for peaceful, sustainable and democratic development: "Today Europe has become a synonym of tolerance, a constructive approach, and peaceful resolution. We aspire to the Eastern Partnership to enforce that perception of Europe. We want the initiative to be successful and to prove that policies based on such a system of values are able to bring exceptional and unexpected results" (President.am, 2009).

Most Armenian political parties, the government and parliament shared Sargsyan's position on Armenia's European foreign policy identity and the necessity of adhering to the path of European integration. Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, who also served under the former president, has consistently supported the European path of development as Armenia's civilizational choice. "The European direction of Armenia's foreign policy is a result of a reasonable choice, which is rooted in a common value system, a rich cultural and Christian heritage, and derives from our domestic agenda... Armenia is part of European civilization with its past and present, with its commitment to establish democracy, ensure the rule of law, protect human rights and fundamental freedoms," he said (Armradio.am, 2013). Sargsyan's staunch opponent – Ter-Petrosyan, who was Armenia's former president and current leader of the opposition Armenian National Congress (ANC) - did not question

the path to European integration. He agreed it provided the best chance at free and democratic development (Ter-Petrosyan appeals 2008).<sup>21</sup>

The Armenian president, along with other leading officials, repeatedly reiterated Armenia's commitment to the European path of development, despite close ties with Russia. "Today, the issue of becoming a full member of the European Union is not yet on our foreign policy agenda. However I would like to repeat that the European rules of the game and European standards must take root in our country because these are high and time-tested standards... There is no discrepancy between this reality and Armenia's being a CIS and CSTO member, and Russia's strategic partner. Our close and multifaceted, I would say in many instances exemplary, cooperation with the Russian Federation does not contradict these values, which are proclaimed by Russia itself. Furthermore, I am confident that our friends – Russia, the West, and all others, will be only happy for our success" (President.am, 2010).

Relations with Russia have created obstacles for Armenia's EU Association aspirations, however. Russia viewed Armenia's closer relations with the EU as hostile to its own interests, and moved to block Yerevan from intensifying ties with Brussels by maneuvering the country to join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union, instead of signing the EU Association Agreement. (Emerson and Kostanyan, 2013). The notion of complementarity commits Armenia to a policy that seeks to simultaneously develop relations with all states in the region and with states with interests in the region. The notion of "engagement" commits Armenia to active involvement in both regional and international integration as an equal partner. "Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia; its adoption of a European model of development; its mutually beneficial cooperation with Iran and the United States; membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); and the intensification of its cooperation with the NATO alliance all contribute to the consolidation of the potential of

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<sup>21</sup> Ter-Petrosyan did condemn Sargsyan for Armenia's abrupt move away from the EU Association Agreement to Russian-led Customs Union, however, even if he said this choice was inevitable (Azatutyun.am, 2013).

Armenia's policy of complementarity," (MFA.am, 2007).

To what extent is Armenia capable of remaining committed to its identity-driven European path of development, while deepening strategic security partnership with Russia. Consistent with his predecessor, Sargsyan has never questioned the vital importance of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership, which is viewed as fundamental to improving national security. Even though no identity-related reference has been attributed to the Armenian-Russian partnership, it is viewed as the most important and indispensable factor for the maintenance of stability and security in the South Caucasus: "The Armenian-Russian strategic partnership will remain the pivot of Armenia's security, which through the twenty years of independence has proved its viability. Within this context, we attach the utmost importance to our membership to the Collective Security Treaty Organization" (President.am, 2013).

Armenia's European identity and pursuit of European integration, with a focus on Armenia-EU and Armenia-NATO rapprochement, are outweighed by the "Russia-first" approach. Armenian society, government and most Armenian political parties broadly share this attitude. Political parties have not opposed Armenia's membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union; rather they defend the decision by saying that the acute regional challenges facing the country lead to the bolstering of Armenia's strategic partnership with its 'best friend' and security provider, Russia, in all possible spheres (Armenianow.com, 2013). Sargsyan, along with other high-ranking officials, justifies Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union chiefly in terms of its security concerns.

This is particularly important, given several core facts. First, there is an Armenia-Russia comprehensive security partnership, and Armenia's membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Shortly before Armenia unexpectedly opted for the Eurasian Union rather than signing the EU Association Agreement 2013, Russia intensified military cooperation with Azerbaijan by supplying it with \$4 billion worth of military equipment (Eurasianet.org, 2013). This sent ripples of apprehension through Armenia and significantly influenced its choice of the EEU. Prior to Armenia's move towards the EEU, Russia increased gas prices for

Armenia by 50 percent in April 2013. The gas price was subsequently reduced once Armenia decided to join the EEU. Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisyan stated outright that the country's Eurasian choice shields it from gas price hikes (Asbarez.com, 2013).

Russia is the main external trade partner of Armenia, buying 20 per cent of Armenian exports and is the source of 70 per cent of remittances (Worldbank.org, 2015). Russia also maintains a lead in the realm of foreign investments in Armenia. Finally, Russia is home to more than 2.5 million Armenian migrants, who could be subjected to severe hardships in case of Armenia's 'non-Russian' foreign policy options (Emerson and Kostanyan, 2013, p. 2).

### **The South Caucasus: a "broken region?"**

In Sargsyan's administration, regional identity is not given any particular emphasis in the foreign policy discourse. Much like their predecessors, Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian tended to regard the South Caucasus as a political and-economic, rather than cultural, space with a common regional identity. The South Caucasus has been broadly viewed as a complex and volatile region, which is prone to acute interethnic, political and economic conflicts. "If we look back at our history, it becomes obvious that superpowers and empires historically had the ambition to establish their hegemony over this part of the world. It is also true today. The contemporary South Caucasus is a model of the multi-polarity of the world. It is one of the regions where there are seemingly unyielding dividing lines, where the internationally recognized political map is very different from the real one, where stability is extremely vulnerable, and the re-establishment of peace requires joint and concentrated titanic efforts" (President.am, 2009).

The core characteristics of the South Caucasus in Armenia's foreign policy discourse are linked to the notions of a "broken region," "transportation corridor," and a "route for energy export and transit." However, the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of the region is also associated with the possibilities of interethnic dialogue and meaningful cultural interactions, rather than challenges and identity-related conflicts. "Certainly, there are not too

many places in the world where one can find such a diversity of nations, ethnic groups, cultures, religions and civilizations. All of it combined constitutes our real wealth. We should be able to rise and move forward, working not against this diversity or rejecting each other but rather complementing and mutually enriching each other – just like other European states have done and continue to do so" (President.am, 2010).

In Sargsyan's view, the countries of the South Caucasus have to come up with the common values that are essential to peaceful co-existence and lasting peace: "I am confident that we can have a secure and developing region exclusively through a common system of values. Our region really needs to sow the seeds of understanding common values, developing the security agenda, and creating an integrated economy, particularly considering the peculiarities of our region and multiplicity of the existing challenges" (President.am, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the president pinned high hopes on the EU's involvement in the South Caucasus, which was perceived as a force capable of promoting fundamental European values, applying European patterns of peaceful co-existence in the region. "We attach importance to EU's involvement in Armenia and South Caucasus not only because the EU is a global player, but first of all because it is the best model of nations' peaceful, secure and sustainable development. Our vision of the full-fledged development of the South Caucasus is anchored in the values and understanding that made Europe's success possible" (President.am, 2012).

There is no marked reference to regional identity, but Georgia occupies a privileged position among Armenia's "special" friends in its foreign policy discourse. Armenia is under a double blockade, which makes Georgia the main gateway for its communication with the world. Georgia is also home to a large Armenian community, mostly living in the southern Georgian region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Sargsyan called the bilateral relationship with Georgia "brotherly," based on the long-standing experience of peaceful coexistence and deep ties between the two countries. (President.am, 2015). Sargsyan declared: "The consistent reinforcement of the Armenian-Georgian partnership is one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy. The fragile stability and peace in the South Caucasus region greatly depend on the effectiveness and firmness of

Armenian-Georgian cooperation." (President.am, 2014) The National Security Strategy attaches great importance to Georgia's stable and secure development, considering it essential for Armenia because of the vital transit links across Georgia (MFA.am, 2007). In the hostile environment prevalent in the South Caucasus, Armenia is bound to regard Georgia as indispensable friend and to downplay issues that could impair bilateral relations.

### **Iran as partner**

In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, Iran is perceived as a reliable partner, which has gained the status of friend. The National Security Strategy attaches critical importance to the consistent reinforcement of traditional neighborly relations with Iran due to shared borders, historic and cultural ties, and mutual economic interests. President Sargsyan has repeatedly expressed his appreciation to Iran for its balanced position towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as its friendly policy towards the Armenian community in Iran and its mindfulness of the Armenian cultural heritage in its territory. He has underlined the fact that Iran willingly supported Armenia and the Armenians in times of trouble, given that some Genocide survivors found refuge in Iran (President.am, 2009). Iran is viewed as a crucial economic and trade partner.

European identity is at the core of Armenia's narrative foreign policy identity. European integration heralds Armenia's homecoming to European civilization and cultural space. Europe is associated with peace, freedom, tolerance, full-fledged democracy and rule of law. In contrast to the first Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who believed Armenia was part of Middle Eastern civilization, his successors regarded Armenia as a European country due to its identity, beliefs and culture. Both Kocharyan and Sargsyan prioritized identity, norms and beliefs in foreign policy making. Yet, the security challenges facing the country have overshadowed Armenia's European identity, and a "Russia first" approach in foreign and security policy has dominated the discourse.

Armenia is limited in its ability to choose "friends" and select

its own strategic partnerships, due to its size and regional conflicts. There are substantial differences between the country's European foreign policy identity and Russian-led security policy constraints. Russia is viewed as Armenia's 'best friend', while the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership is seen as the main provider of Armenia's national security. Armenia's foreign policy is extremely vulnerable to Russian pressure.

Even though the term "friend" is ubiquitous in official discourse. The country's "best friend" is Russia, and the EU is the most "desired" partner. Georgia and Iran are regarded as essential partners and brotherly nations. They are critically important in the face of the double blockade imposed on Armenia by neighboring Azerbaijan and Turkey. A scrutiny of Armenia's foreign policy discourse supports the theory that acute regional constraints, rather than identity-related drivers, have led Armenia to view Georgia and Iran as 'friends'. There is also evidence suggesting that, in addition to their geographical vicinity and security relations, several other factors have caused Armenia to view these countries as friends in its foreign policy. These include the need for a balanced approach to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement; the presence of an Armenian Diaspora, the importance of bilateral relations; and the intensity of economic and trade relations.

### **The Conception of "The Other" in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse**

Conventional wisdom presumes that the evocation of "the other" in a state's foreign policy discourse is indicative of the core characteristics of its foreign policy identity. "The other" is largely deemed a symbol in the definition of who "we" are. A discourse analysis of the conceptions of "the other" in the policies and speeches of Armenian presidents is indicative of the major ups and downs in the country's relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey over the past two decades. This section scrutinizes the core characteristics attributed to "the other," examining their identity-related and situational contexts.

The path to Armenia's independence was inherently linked to the national movement and Nagorno-Karabakh's self-determination.

The devastating war with Azerbaijan, coupled with the double blockade imposed on Armenia, created formidable challenges to the newly independent state. Essentially, the Nagorno-Karabakh movement was instrumental in distinguishing foes and friends in Armenian political thinking and public consciousness. Given both historical conflicts and new hostilities, both Turkey and Azerbaijan were unequivocally identified as "the other" in the presidents' speeches and in foreign policy documents – anti-Armenian, hostile, "antagonistic" and belligerent.

Clearly, independence catalyzed a substantial transformation across the country, extending to national identity-related issues, reframing ideas of traditional "foes" and "friends." Russia's traditional role as Armenia's "savior" in Armenian strategic thinking was challenged in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union. The country's anti-Russian political and social sentiments started to wane shortly after the restoration of independent statehood, replaced by deep-rooted anti-Turkish and anti-Azerbaijani ideas. In Armenian public consciousness, Turkey and Azerbaijan are largely perceived as the two parts of an indivisible whole, rather than two independent entities.

Turkey's perception as a historical foe in Armenian collective memory was reinforced following the Turkish blockade of the country, a gesture of solidarity with Azerbaijan. In an attempt to alleviate the severe suffering caused by the economic blockade and transition, the ruling elite was consistently striving to prepare ground for an Armenian-Turkish rapprochement.

The discourse analysis of Armenia's foreign policy from 1991-1998 indicates that despite the challenges facing Armenia due to the blockade by Turkey, there was no outright anti-Turkish rhetoric. To this end, it attempted to transform Turkey from a historical foe to an indispensable neighbor. Furthermore, Turkey's core characteristics in Ter-Petrosyan's discourse are intimately linked to the notion of "friend" rather than that of "foe." Ter-Petrosyan refrained from bringing up issues concerning Genocide recognition or its consequences, seeing them as detrimental to Armenian-Turkish rapprochement.

The most frequently used terms in his speeches on Turkey were: "natural ally," "economic partner," "vital bridge," "indispensable

neighbor." (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, pp. 553-554). In Ter-Petrosyan's view, Turkey's historical depiction as a hostile enemy in Armenian collective memory had to be overcome in order to prepare society for dialogue and mutual understanding. He declared: "As neighboring states, Armenia and Turkey have to forge mutually beneficial economic ties and gradually overcome historical conflicts, rebuild confidence between Armenian and Turkish societies via the establishment of friendly relations... this obliges each party to display political will and moral attitude" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 48):

The Armenian president tended to attribute the lack of progress in Armenian-Turkish relations to Azerbaijan's aggressive stance against any sort of normalization: "We stand ready to establish relations without any preconditions right away... Turkey does not reportedly oppose this but seems to have been fallen into a trap which it set by linking the improvement of its relations with Armenia to Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and in particular to the resolution of Nagorno - Karabakh conflict" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 595):

Ter-Petrosyan avoided taking a harsh position on Azerbaijan since he believed that the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno - Karabakh conflict was essential for Armenia's national interests and regional cooperation. Ter-Petrosyan tended to interpret the conflict as a Kremlin-led conspiracy against two nations, rather than a manifestation of ethno-political antagonism stemming from racial, cultural and religious divisions: "There is no ethnic, racial, national or religious factor behind the conflict...the conflict itself has been artificially incited and retained by colonial nation [Russia]. Without the Kremlin's interference, Armenia and Azerbaijan would find a common language... If there was a democratic government in Azerbaijan that was open to dialogue, any sort of mediation would be rendered obsolete" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 197).

President Ter-Petrosyan was adhering to the "democratic peace" theory, which believes democracy promotion is essential to breaking the impasse in the "frozen" conflict. "I am confident that, once we have a fair settlement for the Karabakh conflict, our societies will quickly rediscover the devices necessary to retain the traditions of peaceful co-existence" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 196). Notwithstanding the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Armenia's foreign policy discourse was free of rhetoric that propagated

contempt against Azerbaijan. Ter-Petrosyan made a clear distinction between the Azerbaijani state and society, contending that the core hindrance to Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute resolution was the deficit of democracy in Azerbaijan and its unwillingness to remain committed to a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, Ter-Petrosyan's discourse tended to be more negative than positive about Azerbaijan; there was a blurred line between the notions of "friend" and "foe."

Ter-Petrosyan criticized Baku's policy, which in his view, used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to deflect attention from domestic economic, political and social shortcomings (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 194). The core conceptions of Azerbaijan in Armenia's foreign policy discourse under Ter-Petrosyan's presidency were reflected in the following terms: "destructive," "belligerent," "non-democratic," "natural ally," "neighboring partner," etc.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was seen as the major obstacle to the rapprochement with "natural allies," Azerbaijan and Turkey. The ruling elite stressed the potential economic significance of Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, claiming that historical conflict and identity-related constraints must come second to economic interests. In Ter-Petrosyan's view "Karabakh's foe is the international community rather than Azerbaijan" (Ter-Petrosyan 2006, p. 630). Nevertheless, his efforts at redefining Azerbaijan and Turkey in Armenian strategic thinking beyond the notion of "the other" and reconciling collective memory with economic considerations proved futile. His "pro-Turkish" and "pro-Azerbaijani" views, especially the emphasis on concessions in the NKR conflict resolution in exchange for lifting the blockade, were at odds with widely held views among the public. This ultimately resulted in his resignation in 1998.

Table 1: The portrayal of "the other" under Levon Ter-Petrosyan's presidency (1991-1998).

The other	Discourse
Soviet Union (Russia)	Chauvinistic; Imperial
Azerbaijan	Non-democratic; Destructive; Natural ally
Turkey	Traditional foe (given the Armenian Genocide); Indispensable neighbor; Vital bridge

### **The "Other" Under Robert Kocharyan's Presidency (1998-2008)**

The Armenian government's positions toward Azerbaijan and Turkey in foreign policy discourse hardened throughout Robert Kocharyan's presidency. He declared in 2015: "After 10 years of a re-evaluation of our approach, now I think that it was politically wrong [to make concessions]. It gave no results. And what happened in 1998-2000 regarding the toughening of the position towards Turkey was logical as we got nothing from our concessions..." (Robert Kocharyan 2015).

In speeches by Kocharyan, Turkey is fiercely condemned for subjecting Armenia to an unlawful blockade, which hindered Armenia's advancement toward European integration and steady development. Yet, despite the historical conflict and the Turkish blockade, there was a tendency to regard Turkey as an important neighbor that could play a crucial role in regional stability if it reversed its policy toward Armenia. "History and geography have thrown us together, we are neighbors... some distance between our two countries might have allowed us to put distance between our past and our future. But we have no such luxury. There is no space, no cushion, between us" (MFA.am, 2002). The National Security Strategy states: "The absence of normalized relations adversely affects the stability of the region... The normalization of Armenian-

Turkish relations would lower the possibility of new dividing lines emerging in the region and would help to create a more conducive environment for the final settlement of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict" (MFA.am, 2007).

Throughout Kocharyan's presidency, Yerevan repeatedly expressed its readiness to bypass the issue of Genocide recognition in order break the impasse in the Armenian-Turkish relationship. The National Security Strategy of Armenia states:"Armenia has long advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations without any precondition and will continue its efforts to surmount the obstacles and improve the bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey" (MFA.am, 2007). The lack of any tangible progress in normalization was attributed to Ankara's aggressive policy. When asked about the main obstacles to the normalization of bilateral relations, Foreign Minister Oskanian was quick to cite Turkey's stance on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict: "The establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey or the complete re-opening of the border before the conflict's final settlement is not probable... the Karabakh issue has become a precondition for normalizing relations" (MFA.am, 2002). The core characteristics of Turkey in foreign policy discourse under Kocharyan are linked to contrary notions of "important neighbor" and "historical foe," characterized by "non-European policy" and "belligerent rhetoric."

Regarding Azerbaijan, Armenia's foreign policy makers started out on a positive note, placing strong faith in peaceful negotiations. Initially, Kocharyan abstained from adopting a harsh position toward Azerbaijan, calling on the latter to tone down its ambitions and resume negotiations over a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorno - Karabakh conflict without preconditions. (Kocharyan 2011, p. 19). In the president's view, a breakthrough in the conflict settlement could be achieved only via intensified and persistent efforts at moving beyond the deep-rooted hostilities. Like his predecessor, Kocharyan invariably stressed that, despite Azerbaijan's efforts at presenting the conflict in religious and cultural realm in order to win the Muslim world's support, there is no religious or cultural reason behind the conflict (Kocharyan 2011, p. 141). Nevertheless, over time he started to respond to Azerbaijan's propaganda and threats to resume war against Armenia. A new line

in Yerevan's foreign policy discourse regarded Azerbaijan as an "aggressor" "The war of 1992-1994 was precipitated by the aggression unleashed by Azerbaijani authorities seeking to conquer the territory of Nagorno - Karabakh through ethnic cleansing...the conflict settlement should build upon its essence rather than Azerbaijan's build-up stemming from oil dollars. That is a recipe for confrontation rather than compromise," (Kocharyan 2011, p. 247).

Guided by European patterns of conflict settlement, Armenian foreign policy makers believed intensified interaction between Armenia and Azerbaijan would be instrumental in breaking the impasse: "The history of EU formation indicates the advantages of regional cooperation as a path to prosperity and stability...Lack of regional cooperation is one of the core impediments to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement. Armenia believes in the possibility of conflict settlement through regional cooperation, whereas Azerbaijan rules out the possibility of cooperation unless the conflict is settled," (Kocharyan 2011, p. 255). Kocharyan began to question the ethnic compatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis: "The anti-Armenian pogroms (in 1988 in Sumgait and in 1990 in Baku) have shown that Armenians and Azerbaijanis are ethnically incompatible. People who have lived through a genocide cannot allow it to repeat itself," (reliefweb.int, 2003).

The parties have drifted further apart during President Aliyev's presidency. The nadir came when Azerbaijani Army lieutenant, Ramil Safarov, killed 26-year-old Armenian officer, Lieutenant Gurgen Margaryan in his sleep, during a special NATO-backed course in Budapest on February 19, 2004. Safarov was subsequently hailed as a hero in Azerbaijan, gaining Aliyev's explicit support (Washingtonpost.com, 2004). In statements following the incident, Kocharyan emphasized that Azerbaijan's hostility left little room for optimism in regards to peaceful conflict resolution. The murder widened the conflict, and consolidated anti-Azerbaijani sentiments across Armenian society. The portrayal of "the other" became increasingly savage. President Kocharyan said "Armenian society would never glorify an axe-murderer decapitating a human being who is asleep. I am confident that in such a psychological condition a society cannot succeed..." (Kocharyan 2011, p. 297).

The National Security Strategy of Armenia stresses the need for conflict transformation, referring to Azerbaijan's policy as detrimental to conflict settlement and regional cooperation: "Azerbaijan has adopted a policy aimed at the exclusion of Armenia from all projects of regional cooperation. Azerbaijan continuously refuses to open its communication routes with Armenia and denies all Armenian and international initiatives to engage in bilateral cooperation in an attempt to exert pressure on Armenia regarding the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Armenia believes that bilateral and regional cooperation could build confidence and have a serious positive impact on the overall situation. Armenia will continue its confidence building efforts and to this end will encourage cooperation, contacts and visits on every level," (MFA.am, 2007).

To sum up, unlike his predecessor, Kocharyan adopted a harsher position *vis-à-vis* Turkey invariably stressing that Armenia was not going to ignore the history. Yet Kocharyan abstained from putting preconditions on the establishment of bilateral relations, which he believed were essential for Armenia's eventual European integration. In Kocharyan and Oskanian's view, the normalization of bilateral relations was prevented by Azerbaijan's belligerent position *vis-à-vis* Armenia, which tied all regional cooperation initiatives to the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The accumulated evidence prompted Kocharyan to state that peaceful co-existence was unfeasible. The core characteristics of Azerbaijan and Turkey in Armenia's foreign policy under Kocharyan's presidency revolved around the notions "belligerent," "bellicose," "destructive," "ethnically incompatible," and "aggressive."

Table 2: The portrayal of "the other" under Robert Kocharyan's presidency (1998-2008).

The other	Discourse
Azerbaijan	Aggressive; ethnically incompatible; destructive; (uncommitted to a negotiated outcome to the conflict); bellicose; impediment to regional cooperation

Turkey	Traditional foe unwilling to encounter the past; Impediment to Armenia's sustainable development; Obstacle to Armenia's European integration;
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### **The “Other” Under Serzh Sargsyan’s Presidency (2008-present)**

The outset of Serzh Sargsyan’s presidency coincided with large-scale geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus, including the Five Day War fought between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. The unfreezing of "frozen" conflicts sent ripples of apprehension through Armenia at the possibility of a "spill-over" of instability into the country. To mitigate possible risks, Sargsyan expressed the political will to move beyond deep-rooted hostilities and identify the means for peaceful co-existence with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Sargsyan placed special emphasis on redefining Armenia’s general and foreign policy identities, a process seen as essential to achieving a breakthrough in regional cooperation: "We should formulate and define a new Armenian identity, an identity that should become our beacon in the new century." (President.am, 2008) The call implicitly stressed the necessity to resolve the Armenian-Turkish conflict and turn the page on the long-stalled relations between the two countries. The Turkish notions of "zero-problems with neighbors" and "rhythmic diplomacy" seemed to reflect Ankara’s new position, particularly concerning the normalization of Armenian - Turkish relations, which were previously perceived as a "red line" issue. This warming received a further impetus from Ankara’s 2008 proposal to establish the "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform." The new developments were expressed in Sargsyan’s foreign policy discourse, characterized by a strong emphasis on the notions of a united Caucasus and Armenian-Turkish rapprochement.

Sargsyan declared: “I believe that the August (2008) events have made it clear for everyone how tense the situation in the

Caucasus actually is, and how serious the challenges and threats are (President.am, 2009). He attached critical importance to regional cooperation as a recipe for addressing these new challenges (President.am, 2008). Armenian-Turkish rapprochement was placed at the heart of the renewed regional policy: "I truly believe that the time has come to solve problems in Armenian-Turkish relations" (President.am, 2008). To bring these visions to fruition, Sargsyan invited the Turkish president to visit Armenia on September 6 2008 to watch the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey. Abdullah Gül's historical visit to Yerevan, coupled with Sargsyan's commitment to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without setting pre-conditions, profoundly challenged the status-quo.

All subsequent developments and statements appeared to support the establishment of diplomatic relations within a very short time. The "roadmap" for normalizing relations was finalized in April 2009 and on October 10, the two countries' foreign ministers signed the "Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey" and a "Protocol on the development of relations between of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey." The ratification of the protocols seemed to be just a matter of time, given the parties strong rhetoric supporting the end to the deadlock. Regrettably, the reality shaped up differently and, shortly after signing them, Turkey backtracked on its commitment to establishing relations with Armenia without setting preconditions (Kardas, 2011).

The conciliatory policy spotlighted many identity-related obstacles to the establishment of bilateral relations. From the outset, Armenian-Turkish rapprochement sparked political and public debates in Armenia. The nationalist party Dashnaktsutyun pulled out of the ruling coalition in protest over the talks. The party harshly criticized Sargsyan's conciliatory policy towards Turkey, in particular, the normalization "roadmap", which it believed did not reciprocate Armenia's concessions. Dashnaktsutyun expressed deep concerns over the possible preconditions imposed on Armenia by Ankara, referring to the fact that Turkey had not lifted the economic blockade (Azatutyun.am, 2009). Armenians in the Diaspora –the descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors –viewed Sargsyan's

conciliatory policy towards Turkey as a "betrayal". To reduce widespread anxieties and clarify the process, the president went on a pan-Armenian tour to major Armenian communities. He repeatedly emphasized that the process would not jeopardize the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and was not dependent upon the settlement of the Nagorno - Karabakh conflict through unacceptable concessions (President.am, 2009).

Notwithstanding this intensified effort to break the deadlock, over time other obstacles came to the light. Specifically, Turkey proved incapable of resisting Azerbaijan's staunch opposition to Armenian-Turkish conciliation. Sargsyan suspended the procedure of ratifying the Protocols (President.am, 2010). Following the failed process, Sargsyan toughened his position on Turkey: "The policy of "zero problems" with neighbors yielded zero results. That occurred because Turkey is trying to solve all problems with neighbors at the expense of those very neighbors" (President.am, 2013).

The failed outreach had deep repercussions with Armenian society, reinforcing fears that Turkey's imperial nature was unchanged. Sargsyan's discourse expressed this idea clearly, when he branded Turkey's regional policy as a vivid manifestation of a "New Ottomanism.": "What did the Ottoman Empire bring to the peoples under its yoke other than massacres, oppression, and tyranny? Does anyone miss Ottomanism, or support a reason to deliver a "New Ottomanism" (President.am, 2013)? Foreign Minister Nalbandian questioned Turkey's adherence to "zero problem with neighbors", stressing the disconnect between its rhetoric and policy: "Turkey pretends that all problems in the region must have a "comprehensive solution" once and for all. This is a beautiful phrase, but how realistic is it? It is mere rhetoric, all words and no performance... It seems we speak in different languages. On the one hand, the Turkish leaders pretend that they always respect the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept), but on the other hand, they refrain from ratifying and implementing the agreements signed by themselves in Zurich" (Wsj.com, 2010).

Turkey's withdrawal from the protocols eroded Armenian confidence in Turkey and further hardened the view of Turkey as an unreliable and unpredictable neighbor which pursued anti-Armenian policies. "To hell with you, ratification," (President.am, 2014). This

crude phrase, which Sargsyan delivered to Ankara at the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2014, is indicative of the difficulties that his position towards Turkey has undergone throughout his tenure. On February 16, 2015 the president sent an official letter to the Chairman of the National Assembly Galust Sahakyan to recall the Armenian-Turkey protocols from parliament (Civilnet.am, 2015). In essence, Sargsyan's initial attempts at redefining Armenia's foreign policy identity to bring it in line with Armenian-Turkish rapprochement proved futile. Subsequently, the terms "Ottoman," "destructive," "belligerent" and "unreliable" became the core characteristics of Turkey in Armenia's foreign policy discourse.

### **Azerbaijan in Armenia's Foreign Policy Discourse (2008-present)**

From the very outset of his presidency, Sargsyan stressed the necessity of political will in achieving a breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijan relations. Armenian foreign policy makers have consistently stressed that Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian propaganda, coupled with the full-blown arms race between the two countries, doomed initiatives for regional cooperation and conflict settlement to failure. This disappointment particularly applies to the EU's peace-oriented Eastern Partnership. Sargsyan questioned the viability of its regional cooperation component, noting that Azerbaijan's resolve to extort unilateral concessions from Armenia render it meaningless. In his view, there is no common ground between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to Baku's aggressive and uncompromising policy. "The Eastern Partnership had some problems in its formation period yet... I still do not understand the criterion of grouping Armenia and Azerbaijan into one partnership – different opportunities, different approaches, different goals – and this is the reason that this component did not work" (President.am, 2014).

Nevertheless, unlike his predecessor, Sargsyan has utterly rejected the identity-based notions of ethnic incompatibility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. He has made a clear distinction between Azerbaijani state and society, expressing a hope that the

people of Azerbaijan or a significant percentage of them do not endorse state-run Armenia-phobic propaganda: "I am confident that our peoples will have a better future than the one contemplated by some leaders who preach hatred and war... I do not consider the people of Azerbaijan to be the enemy of the Armenian people. We are capable of respectfully resolving our disagreements and peacefully co-existing as neighbors" (President.am, 2013).

Armenian foreign policy makers - President Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian - have fiercely criticized speculations about the religious nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, asserting that any attempt to package the dispute in a religious context is not constructive. Nalbandian has repeatedly condemned Baku for propagating ethnic contempt against Armenians. In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, Azerbaijan is largely characterized as Armenia-phobic and uncompromising. Despite the commitment by both Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a compromise settlement for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, ample evidence indicates there are misconceptions about the very term of "compromise." President Sargsyan's statement at the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly on September 29, 2015, in addition to his address at the 31st Ministerial Conference of the Francophonie on October 10, 2015, is indicative. "I shall note that aggressive policy pursued by Azerbaijan resulted in the absence of any meaningful progress of negotiations for the conflict settlement, and the situation drifts toward increasing tensions. The dictatorial regime of the country made disgraceful repression an instrument to strangle the people's anger ... It is obvious to us that the Azerbaijani leadership has irreversibly lost both the sense of reality and all norms of human conduct (President.am, 2015).

The President expressed his frustration: "Unfortunately, there is currently a huge gap between the perceptions of the Azerbaijani authorities and the norms accepted by the civilized world. While the civilized world is creating the necessary conditions for a people's exercise of their right to self-determination, Azerbaijan, blinded by its oil revenues, is trying in all possible ways to impose its views on not only Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, but also on the mediator countries..." (President.am, 2015).

In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, Azerbaijan is largely

associated with the terms "non democratic," "uncompromising," "belligerent," "bellicose," "destructive," and "Armeneophobic": "Coercion, violence, terror, war; these are our opponent's notions of reality. They are trying to impose upon us the same notions they force on their own people. We have rejected these terms, and will never accept them. We are creating a different reality: economic growth, the rule of law, strengthening of democracy. The word "Armenia" must first of all entail these notions" (Statement by President 2013).

Armenia's foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis "the other" has undergone considerable changes throughout Sargsyan's presidency. Unrealized expectations for reconciliation with Turkey led Yerevan to toughen its positions, which shifted from optimistic to critical. The latter was precipitated by Azerbaijan's rhetoric and aggressive policy toward Armenia, as well as the failure to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without setting preconditions.

Table 3: The portrayal of "the other" under Serzh Sargsyan's presidency (2008-present).

The other	Discourse
Azerbaijan (elite)	Armenia-phobic; Bellicose; Aggressive; Dictatorial; Destructive, (uncommitted to a negotiated outcome to the conflict), Non-European (misperceived the essence of European integration)
Turkey (elite)	Unreliable; Imperial (referring to New Ottomanism); Obstacle to Armenia's European integration; Belligerent and destructive

An analysis of Armenia's foreign policy discourse shows that although all three presidents attached varying degrees of importance to identity, norms and beliefs in foreign policy making, each of them advocated foreign policy decisions that are not negatively influenced by identity-related conceptions. This is supported by Armenian foreign policy makers' attitudes to Genocide recognition. Even though Kocharyan touched on the issue of recognition, he - like his

predecessor and his successor - did not view it as a precondition for the establishment Armenian-Turkish relations. In contrast to Ter-Petrosyan, who rejected the idea of Azerbaijan and Turkey as "the other", and considered them Armenia's natural allies, both Kocharyan and Sargsyan regarded Azerbaijan as Armenia's fiercest foe, which is entirely responsible for suffering in Nagorno Karabakh. In their view, Turkey should be condemned for subjecting Armenia to a blockade and refusing to recognize the Armenian Genocide. Consequently, Turkey has been regarded as a formidable obstacle to Armenia's European integration and its sustainable development. The failure to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations hardened Sargsyan's position on Turkey. He likened Turkey's destructive policy to its Ottoman traditions, contending that Ottoman Turkey had in fact remained unchanged.

In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, "the other" - Azerbaijan and Turkey - are not characterized by ethnic, religious and cultural notions. Rather they are regarded as belligerent, destructive, non-democratic, bellicose, and aggressive. Kocharyan once went so far as to assert that Armenians and Azerbaijanis are ethnically incompatible.

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