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The Limits of Armenia's Complementarian Foreign Policy: An Analysis in the Context of the South Caucasus' Shifting Geopolitical Realities

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

I have always been profoundly fascinated by the history and the political dynamics of the former Soviet Union and the states that emerged, or reemerged, in the international arena after its fall. More specifically, I was captivated by the complex endeavour of newly elaborating foreign policy doctrines and finding international affirmation, given the lack of a deeply entrenched tradition, vis-à-vis the still troubled political legacy of the USSR. To the extent that I chose to dedicate my Bachelor's thesis to the evolving relationship between the Russian Federation and Central Asia, focusing on Kazakhstan's ambitious "multi-vectorial" foreign policy. Building on that reasoning, I aim to further explore the often-overlooked academic field of the multi-vectorial foreign policies of former USSR states, from a perspective that highlights their agency role, rather than viewing them as pawns in the hegemonic designs of great powers, as part of the current literature on their international standing.[1]

While, as also covered by this dissertation, Kazakhstan represents the quintessential example of multivectorialism, other countries, such as Armenia, aspired to embark on similar paths with more ambivalent results, as exemplified by the 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh War and other regional dynamics. The unfolding of the Armenian multivectorial strategy, known as Complementarism[2], not only constitutes an exceptionally interesting case in light of its prominence and peculiarity within the multivectorial *genus,* but it also intersects with fundamental theoretical questions on the nature of foreign policy at the basis of International Relations. In particular, whether foreign policy, especially for those considered "small states", is an inherent byproduct of systemic power relations or whether it stems from multifaceted causes.[3] In this regard, numerous commentators, especially Neo-realists, considered Complementarism as a mere velleity programme, given the systemic constraints for a nation encapsulated between the Russian orbit and hostile neighbours, dismissing it as a topic of scarce academic relevance. Conversely, this thesis understands Armenia's agency as the core pillar of its international posture, whose limitations denote the nuanced character of Complementarism and its evolving, rather than entirely receptive, nature. More precisely, the purpose of this dissertation is to fill the gaps in the literature on Multivectorialism, while contributing to highlighting Armenia's

[1] Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Pawn of Great Powers: The East-West Competition for Caucasia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010).
[2] "Complementarism" is the most employed term in academia, Complementarianism and Complementarian foreign policy are equally accepted.
[3] Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard", *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (1995).

agency and its multifaceted foreign-policy making process. To this aim, it aspires to answer the following research question:

What are the causes behind Armenia's difficulty in implementing and developing its Complementarian Foreign Policy, particularly in relations to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

Indeed, it will argue that Armenia oscillated several times between diversified engagement with many actors, including the so-called West, and full alignment with Russia, ultimately drifting towards the latter. This dissertation hypothesises that it was not the by-product of alleged objective characteristics of the regional international system, but rather the resulting outcome of a complex process involving deep-rooted historical trajectories and the interaction between endogenous and exogenous factors, comprising the independent variables of this study.

Firstly, it illustrates the historical roots of Armenian foreign policy, shedding light on its autonomous origins from modern systemic contingencies and tracing back the limitations of Complementarism to the strongly embedded Special Relationship with Russia and the identitarian issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, which consistently remains the main prism through which Armenian foreign policy is read. The notion of a spiritual and political Special Relationship with Russia, outlined in the first chapter, represents a *fil rouge* highlighting the importance of domestic cultural characteristics in the elaboration and conduct of foreign policy.

Subsequently, it analyses the evolution of Complementarism from its original conception, highlighting, through the theoretical lenses of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), its domestic and external foreign policy determinants and reviewing the existing literature on Multivectorialism and foreign policy development in Eurasia. Reconciling the influence of international *stimuli* on the internal political environment, this dissertation suggests that the combination of presidential agencies, domestic institutions and historical memory derailed Complementarism, hindering its implementation and initial aspirations, albeit in a remarkably different way from system-centred reductionist views. From a theoretical perspective, it aims to bridge the fields of Comparative Politics and International Relations, filling the gaps in the literature on Multivectorialism and integrating them with the analysis of Armenian foreign policy formulation.

Lastly, it assesses the impact of an exogenous intervening variable, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on the evolutionary trajectory of Armenian foreign policy, analysing recent political developments in conjunction with it and employing the case of Kazakhstan as a point of reference on multivectorialism. Paraphrasing Professor Elman, international pressures alone cannot fully explain

state behaviour as domestic politics shape the options and constraints of foreign policy.[4] In the case of Armenia, this entails understanding the historically entrenched dynamics that laid the foundations of its foreign policy and still affect its development.

[4] Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States".

Chapter 1: The Origins of Armenia's Foreign Policy, a History-Embedded Trajectory

1.1 The Roots of the Special Relationship: from invitation to alignment

Armenia's national statehood traces its origins in the ancestral mists of history of the kingdom of Urartu (9th-7th century BC), an ancient polity almost unknown to historiography until the beginning of the last century, encompassing the Armenian Highlands.[5] Despite the contested nature of its unitary character and connection to modern Armenia, subject to heated academic and political controversy akin to the case of the Kyivan Rus', it represents an identitarian pillar for current policy-makers and public opinion.[6]

The first attestation of the exonym Armenia (from Old Persian "*Armina"*) appeared in the Behistun inscription, in modern Iran, as a synonym for Urartu, at the time recently incorporated into the Achaemenid Empire as the satrapy of Armenia.[7] Such remote origins still represent the foundation for the widespread so-called "primordialism" among Armenian élites, a nation-building movement that emerged in the 1990s, emphasising continuity from ancient kingdoms (like Urartu) to modern Armenia, portraying the nation as a timeless, cohesive entity and justifying its territorial claims on this ancestral basis [8]

The province subsequently became independent, forming the first fully-fledged Armenian state known as the Kingdom of Armenia or Greater Armenia (331 BC-428 AD), ruling large portions of present-day Türkiye, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Armenia. In a fundamental turning point in Armenian history, King Tidridades III adopted Christianity as a state religion in 301 AD, prompting the foundation myth in the Armenian national ethos of Armenia as the "first Christian nation". However, caught between the rivalling Roman and Parthian Empires, the Kingdom progressively lost influence and autonomy, before being partitioned. In the subsequent four centuries, its lands were contested by foreign invaders such as the Byzantines, Sassanids, and Arabs. Armenia's statehood was only briefly

[5] Armen Y. Petrosyan, *The Problem of Armenian Origins: Myth, History, Hypotheses*, (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man, 2018).
[6] Ibid.
[7] Mack Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia: A History* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).
[8] Richard G. Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations", The Journal of Modern History 73, no. 4 (December 2001).

restored in the late 9th century with the establishment of the so-called Bagratid Armenia, as its demise in 1045 at the hands of the Byzantines marked the end of an independent Armenian state until the disintegration of the USSR, with the only exception of the kingdom of Cilician Armenia (1080-1375).[9] Scattered across the Near East, Armenians remained divided from the 16th century along the Ottoman-Safavid border and subject to Muslim rule. Thus, at the dawn of the Russian Empire's expansion in the South Caucasus in the early 19th century, Armenia had long been deprived of its longstanding statehood, political autonomy and core religious identity, two fundamental complementary elements in its national ethos.[10] Indeed, their reaffirmation represents a driving *fil rouge* of Armenian political considerations.

Initially, Russian-Armenian relations prospered during the rule of Peter the Great (1682-1725) and Catherine the Great (1762-1796) on primarily economic terms, as imperial authorities initiated granting patents and privileges to Armenian merchants from Persia, in exchange for diverting the passage of their silk trade towards Europe through Russia.[11] While these engagement attempts reflected the substantial economic dynamism of the Armenian communities, considered a cornerstone of transnational trade and the bulk of the entrepreneurial class in Persia and the Ottoman Empire, they also epitomised the growing Russian will to seek local alliances in the Southern Caucasus and find intermediaries beyond the frontier with rival Persia.[12]

However, this should not be understood in a reductionist unilateral Russian-centred discourse downplaying the agency of Caucasian people in driving the region's political dynamics. Conversely, Armenian and Georgian emissaries incessantly brought their pleas to European crowns and Peter's and Catherine II's court to stir political support for their cause, sparking increasing attention for the region.[13] For instance, Israel Ori, a renowned ethnic Armenian nobleman and diplomat, delivered in 1702 an appeal from Armenian *meliks* (lords) of Karabakh to Peter the Great requesting military assistance to establish a newly independent Armenian polity.[14] Indeed, Peter and Catherine II's reign marked a defining moment in the Russian viewpoint on the Caucasus, as it transformed the region from a relatively peripheral frontier to the core vector of Russian expansionism and paved the way for the Russian nexus with the Armenian people.[15]

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[9] Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia*.
[10] Petrosyan, *The Problem of Armenian Origins*.
[11] Stephen Badalyan Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801-1914*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 40-45.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Richard G. Hovannisian, "Russian Armenia: A Century of Tsarist Rule", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 19, H. 1 (March 1971): 31-48.
[14] Farid Shafiyev, *Resettling the Borderlands* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018).
[15] Ibid.

Besides economic connections, religious commonality offered pivotal leverage for Russian influence. Despite the relatively tolerant stance of the Persian and Ottoman authorities, employing religious compromise to attain loyalty and social stability, the imposition of the Islamic *jizya* tax and other religious constraints on the prosperous Armenian merchant class fuelled resentments and quests for Christian emancipation.[16] While the division between Russian Eastern Orthodoxy and the Armenian Apostolic Church, part of Oriental Orthodoxy, represented a point of friction, the Russian Empire maintained an ecumenic approach, often exerting pressure on its neighbours to guarantee religious freedoms to Christians, such as in the case of the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.[17] This attitude remained pervasive during the rule of Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825), whose new religious policies incorporated leniency towards dissenting orthodox groups and other branches as a political tool to establish Russia as a universal guarantor of orthodoxy. [18]

Consequently, religious-cultural proximity and economic liaisons translated into deep political and security connections, becoming the cornerstone of a peculiar kinship relationship between the Armenians and Saint Petersburg. As the Empire progressively entered the South Caucasus, absorbing the Georgian protectorate kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801 and triumphing in the 1804-1813 Russo-Persian war, Armenian communities provided valuable agents, informers and military allies, aligning with Russian imperial and commercial goals.[19]

The causes behind this Armenian-shepherd Russian penetration in the region are multifaceted and ignite heated debate among scholars, with some authors, such as historian Dominic Lieven and Geoffrey Hosking, pointing out the geographical nature of Russian expansionism in the Sarmatian plains and the Eurasian heartland as a defensive necessity, dictated by local morphological characteristics.[20] In this cyclical interpretation of Russian history, expansive phases follow contractions to defend the core of the Russian state, roughly identified in the former Grand Principality of Muscovy and its surroundings, in light of the absence of precise geographical protective barriers such as mountainous ranges. Despite the scholarly popularity and fascinating nature of this reasoning, it falls short of providing a substantial and comprehensive explanation of the

[16] Benjamin Braude, "The Success of Religion as a Source for Compromise in Divided Empires: Ottoman and Safavid, Past and Present", in *Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places*, ed. Joanne McEvoy and Brendan O'Leary (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 176-197.
[17] Badalyan Riegg, *Entangled Embrace*.
[18] Nicholas Breyfogle, Heretics and Colonizers, (Cornell University Press, 2011).
[19] Badalyan Riegg, *Entangled Embrace*.
[20] Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 45; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 60-67.

Russian conquest of the South Caucasus, beyond the defensive line represented by the Caucasian range, and the active role of the native populations, such as the Armenians, in this process. Others, especially Soviet historians, emphasised economic interests and exploiting natural resources as drivers of conquest.[21] Control of strategic East-West trade routes, often managed by Armenians, represented a primary source of interest from Petrine Russia to its successors, and so did the vast mineral resources and the silk-producing base of the region. However, as noted by Professor Mikail Mahmedov, these considerations acquired a primary character only after incorporating what would be later known as Transcaucasia, when an adequate influx of capital, infrastructural projects and labour could fuel the utilisation of the South Caucasus economic potential.[22]

Thus, this dissertation suggests that the first impetus of the Russian conquest was propelled by what researcher Sean Pollock identifies as "an invitation".[23] Recalling Geir Lundestad's Cold War conceptualisation of "Empire by Invitation", which stipulates that hegemonic powers often first assert their influence over smaller polities in response to requests for assistance, Pollock argues that Russia was initially drawn into the Caucasus by the Caucasians themselves in exchange for security guarantees. Inspired by the original instances of Armenian and Georgian diplomatic missions in the 18th century, other ethnic groups such as the Kabardinians also increasingly sought Russian protection in the 19th century to secure their political autonomy vis-à-vis the volatility of Persia-Ottoman territorial strives. This factor catalysed Russia's commitment to the region more than any other incentive, as it captured the dominant *Zeitgeist of* the times.[24] Complementing Pollock's line of reasoning with perspectives from further authors, such as Farid Shafiyev and colonial historian Alexander Morrison, a different picture emerges. Russian receptiveness to those demands, rather than a physiological geopolitical imperative or a merely economic design, originated from an emulation logic of Western Europe's colonialism, which represented, from Tsar Peter II's opening of the "window towards Europe", a pivotal point of reference for Russian decision-makers.[25]

Indeed, Russian expansion in the region strongly mirrored the colonial ventures of its contemporary rival European powers, complementing pragmatic geoeconomic goals with a deep-rooted sense of

[21] Mikail Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier: The Russian Empire's Changing Views of the Caucasus (1801-1864)", *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (2014): 142-162.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Sean Pollock, *Empire by Invitation?: Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006), 10-25.
[24] Daniel H. Nexon, "Zeitgeist? The New Idealism in the Study of International Change", *Review of International Political Economy* 12, no. 4 (2005).
[25] Alexander Morrison, "Review Essay: Muslims and Modernity in the Russian Empire", *Slavonic and East European Review 94*, no. 4 (2016): 718; Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 45-60.

cultural superiority, encapsulated by the recurring employment of the civilising mission theme.[26] In this field, Edward Said's 1978 masterpiece *Orientalism* still represents a pivotal lens of analysis, emphasising the socio-cultural component of colonial expansion, albeit with the specific nuances of the Caucasian theatre. [27] For instance, the 1801 annexation of the Kartli-Khaketi protectorate was announced by Tsar Alexander I as a "sacred duty" driven by humanitarian considerations, in the benefit of those conquered rather than acting in mere pursuit of Russian interest.[28] Subsequently, two, sometimes contradicting, vectors emerged driving the colonial effort: the humanitarian rescue of Christian populations and the civilisation of the, often Muslim, native Caucasian mountaineers (the so-called *gortsy*). Embraced by many among the Russian progressive intellectuals and former Decembrists, cultivating liberationist aspirations against Oriental despotism, this theme offered a resonating justification for military conquests as a bastion against "Asiatic backwardness".[29] Prominent writers such as Lermontov, Pushkin and Bertushev-Marlisnkii praised the legitimacy of the European colonial cause, while celebrating the freedom-loving spirit of the Caucasian natives.[30] Despite the underlying Eurocentric, if not openly xenophobic, nature of this discourse, it reflected the ambivalent tensions within the Russian colonial ethos and Russian Orientalism.[31] Unlike its Western counterpart, whose fascination was mainly built on a clear-cut divide between Westerners and those seen as Orientals, Russian Orientalism alternated admiration and paternalistic contempt, interpreting Russia's role as a spiritual bridge between the peoples of Europe and Asia and, consequently, viewing the country as the depository of a unique political mandate.[32]

Whether genuine or not, these sentiments resulted in concrete political reverberations. In this context, defying the traditional coloniser-colonised divide, Armenians developed a dualistic role of simultaneously constituting subjects of the Russian colonial effort and a fundamental tool and a recruitment source for the Imperial administration and military apparatus, offering key officers and settlers to the colonial cause, such as Generals Ivan Lazarev and Mikhail Loris-Melkov.

The uniqueness of the Armenian subjects before Russian eyes stemmed from a combination of their economic relevance and strategic transnational links, but more importantly, their role in first triggering the "imperial invitation", and their perceived cultural differences with neighbouring

[26] Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission" .
[27] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* (Pantheon Books, New York), 1978.
[28] Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission".
[29] Ibid.
[30] G. L. Bondarevskii and G. N. Kolbaia, "The Caucasus and Russian Culture", *Russian Studies in History* 41, no. 2 (2002): 10-15.
[31] David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
[32] Ibid.

peoples. As opposed to the equally orthodox Georgians, Armenians had long lost their full political autonomy, making their pleas substantially more viable and politically inexpensive. On the contrary, Russian patronage of Georgian kingdoms, established in 1783, often proved costly as it provoked tensions with Persia and with the Georgian élites when it jeopardised their political prerogatives.[33] After the annexation of Kartli-Kakheti, Georgian-Russian relations repeatedly turned openly conflictual, despite the imperial army's appreciation of the Georgian aristocracy's warlike reputation.

Within the Russian Orientalist paradigm, Armenians were seen as a more "European-like breed", a sort of Asiatic analogue of the Russian Euroasian identity. They were still regarded as *asiatsy*, but commonly referred to as *nashi asiatsy*, "our asians".[34] When compared to the "indolent character" of the Georgians, their commercial activities exemplified an industrious and laborious nature, allegedly reminiscent of their ancient civilisation. In the words of Decembrist poet and officer Edvokim Lachimov, his romantic tones evoke an almost mystical connection between Armenia and ancient Greece, both at the time intertwined with Russia's imperial ambitions:

> *"But you, once renowned Armenia... what is in store for you? Will you reappear on the field of glory, or are your sad sons doomed forever to a doleful existence? Important events must be revealed in our century, [and] it will decide the following question: can kingdoms that have had their day be revived? The minds and souls of all people are turned now to Greece and with an involuntary beating of the heart are awaiting the outcome of the great cause".*[35]

The 1815 establishment in Moscow of the Lazarev Oriental Languages Institute, named after the influential Armenian Karabakhi family, reinforced the Armenians' role as a bridge between the Russo-European centre and the Caucasus Asiatic periphery of the Empire and cemented their influence in Imperial politics. Parallelly, the concession of the 1836 *polozhenie* (agreement) with the Armenian Apostolic Church formalised the convergence with Armenian élites while enforcing strict cultural control.

The final stage of this process of entanglement between Russian colonialism and the Armenian nation is represented by the conquest of Erevan Khanate in the 1828 Russo-Persian war, in which numerous Armenian settlements welcomed Russians as liberators, as testified by a quote from Armenian writer and thinker Kachatur Abovian engraved on the wall of a church in Gyumri: "May the moment be

[33] Badalyan Riegg, *Entagled Embrace*.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier".

blessed when the foot of Russian steps on this soil".[36] Armenian clerics also directly participated in the war efforts, with Archbishop Nerses leading a contingent of auxiliaries from Karabakh.[37] These policies cemented Armenians' feeling of belonging to a "European civilisation", a concept still recalled in Armenian government officials' discourse.[38]

The partially symbiotic relation between Russian Imperialism and Armenian authorities, both tools in the Imperial designs and agents able to stir and shape its policies in their interests to a substantial degree, culminated in the creation of an Armenian province (*Armjanskaya Oblast'*), encompassing the former Persian Erevan Khanate and its surroundings, albeit leaving mountainous Karabakh separated. The *oblast'* enjoyed significant communal self-government and bore the emblems of the kings of ancient Armenia, symbolically alluding to the restoration of an Armenian polity after eight hundred years.[39] Armenian communities well received the decision, representing the most tangible manifestation of Russia's role as the protector of Armenians. While Russian co-optation of local élites is not an anomaly in the history of colonialism, neither the Kabardians, the Georgians, nor any other ethnic group in the Empire were granted similar privileges and a designated province.

Nonetheless, this trajectory of alignment was shaken by a sudden turn of events. Firstly, the abolition in 1840 of the *oblast'* by Tsar Nicholas I was adopted in the framework of South Caucasus administrative integration with the rest of the Empire. After a long-lasting debate about the status of the newly annexed territories, Imperial authorities opted for full incorporation and removal of any national characteristics and economic privileges from administrative units to ensure efficiency and harmonisation.[40] The event did not initially prejudice relations between Saint Petersburg and the Armenians, whose importance even grew to some extent vis-à-vis Russian foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire and the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman war, but tensions emerged. Armenian irredentist agitations towards the so-called "Western Armenia", under the control of the Sublime Porte, caused tensions with authorities as the expansionist drive had lost momentum. Since the 1880s-1890s, in what Professor Badalyan Riegg designates as "The Nadir of Russo-Armenian Relations", Tsar Alexander III's reactionary policies and harsh russification attempts against minorities collided with the rising Armenian national movement and revolutionary elements within the Armenian

[36] Mikail Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier"; George Bournoutian, *Eastern Armenia on the Eve of the Russian Conquest: The Khanate of Erevan under the Governorship of Hoseyn Qoli Khan Qajar, 1807-1827* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982).
[37] Ibid.
[38] Serzh Sargsyan, "Speech at the European People's Party Congress", President of the Republic of Armenia, October 17, 2012.
[39] George Bournoutian, "Armenia and Imperial Decline: The Yerevan Province, 1900-1914", London, *Routledge,* 2018.
[40] Hovannisian, "Russian Armenia".

intelligentsia.[41] Once seen as useful intermediaries in the Russian imperial project, Armenians were gradually recast as potential subversives, especially as the emergence of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or *Dashnaktsutyun,* prompted a shift from paternalistic inclusion to repressive containment.[42] It must be noted that, in contrast to similar nationalistic movements across the empire, the Armenian emancipatory movement antagonised Imperial authorities only on the grounds of progressive-democratic cultural affirmation and defence of Ottoman Armenians, rather than exposing *tout-court* anti-Russian velleities or separatist ambitions.[43]

The First World War's outbreak marked a significant turning point in Russo-Armenian relations, effectively ending the *fin de siécle* crisis and restoring interest alignment. Nevertheless, while Russia emerged even more as a protector of the Armenians in light of the first dispatches reporting atrocities in the Ottoman Empire, the symbiosis remained altered, returning to the more security-dominated paradigm that had emerged in its original developments.

In conclusion, Imperial expansion in the South Caucasus progressively established Russia's historical role as the main guarantor of Armenians' safety and religious-political autonomy, by combining spiritual and security-related prerogatives. This outcome resulted from a deep-rooted, dialogical special relationship which traces its origin to the 18th-19th "imperial invitation" primarily conducted by the Armenians. Not only had the Armenians sparked the Russian Empire's intervention in the region, cleverly stirring the colonial orientalist *Zeitgeist*, but they also became a fundamental vector of its expansion, especially. Driven by a logic of imperial emulation, Russia was drawn into the region to pursue a civilising mission, in which Armenians' alleged uniqueness made them natural interlocutors. Despite the inherently hierarchical nature of the relationship, with even conflictual moments recurring, Armenians held an unusually significant leverage in the political decision-making of the Southern Caucasus. This analytical approach challenges some previous preconceptions, mostly among some post-colonial scholars, depicting Armenians as mere loyal Christian subjects of the Empire, and more geopolitical perspectives downplaying the agency of Caucasus natives.[44] Moreover, it sheds light on the hegemonic prominence of Russia as the security provider in the Caucasus, whose evolution during the Soviet and afterwards era laid the foundation for Armenian Complementarism. To the present day, President Vladimir Putin describes the two nations as "bound

[41] Badalyan Riegg, *Entangled Embrace*.
[42] Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, (Indiana University Press, 1993).
[43] Hovannisian, "Russian Armenia".
[44] Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

by centuries-old strategic relations, built on common cultural, historical and spiritual values".[45] Moreover, Aleskei Arbatov, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute for the World Economy and International Relations, underscores Armenia's peculiarity in Russian strategic considerations vis-à-vis the so-called Near Abroad, deeming it "our forepost in the Southern Caucasus", and considering it of greater political and spiritual value than Israel is for the United States of America, in a significant testimony of the persistence of historically built symbolic bonds in modern policymaking.[46]

1.2. Soviet Armenia: The special relationship in the context of an Affirmative Action Empire

The collapse of the Empire did not mark a *tout-court* halt in the special relationship developed between Russia and Armenia, yet signified a crucial moment of recalibration and vast rearrangement of ethnic relations in the region.[47]

In the aftermath of World War One, the South Caucasus traversed a turbulent period marked by the ephemeral experience of the sovereign Transcaucasia republic and incessant intra-ethnic violence, particularly between Armenians and Azerbaijani/Tatars, whose relations deteriorated partly as a consequence of Russian favouritism. Armenia (1918-1920), briefly independent after the disintegration of Transcaucasia, faced a two-sided war against Azerbaijan and the moribund Ottoman Empire over contested border areas, including Nagorno-Karabakh and Wilsonian Armenia. These events, combined with the large influx of refugees who had escaped the genocide, constituted a primarily traumatic event and contributed to catalysing Armenian public opinion on the Karabakh issue.[48] In 1921, the Treaty of Kars between the Soviets and Kemalist Türkiye terminated the hostilities, leaving Azerbaijan and most of Armenia to the former, and Western Armenia and vast former Imperial territories to the latter.[49]

The subsequent Sovietisation process inevitably affected the institutional structure of the region from a socio-economic, administrative and cultural standpoint. Imperial Russia refrained from

[45] Alexandr Avanesov, "Vladimir Putin: Russian-Armenian Allied Relations Are Based on Common Historical, Cultural and Spiritual Values", Arminfo, October 14, 2016.
[46] Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Pawn of Great Powers: The East-West Competition for Caucasia", Journal of Eurasian Studies 1, no. 1 (2010).
[47] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[48] Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).
[49] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*.

administrative territorialisation of ethnic groups, favouring co-optation of local élites with a preference for Christians, particularly Armenians, albeit in a deeply asymmetrical alliance. It also alternated incorporation and cultural autonomy with administrative centralisation and Russification, which became more pronounced during Alexander III's reign (1881-1894).

Conversely, the emerging Soviet Union engaged in a complex process of balancing decolonisation efforts with the perpetuation of a centrally directed, invasive, authoritarian party-state.[50] To do so, the Bolsheviks, having abandoned most of their original internationalist velleities, opted for institutionalising territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality by establishing a system of ethno-territorial quasi-federalism and formally recognising personal nationality. This state and nation-building project, well captured by the notion of "Affirmative Action Empire", actively promoted and reinforced the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the titular nationality of each republic, under the "indigenisation", or policy of *korenizatsiia*, from the Russian word "root".[51] Parallelly, national élites and *intelligentsias* were drawn from local party cadres, trained in their language and promoted to leadership positions in government, cultural institutions and industries of their republic. Under a pyramid-like structure, the model was replicated from Union Republics to Autonomous Republics, autonomous oblasts and other lower-level jurisdictions, to account for ethnic minorities.[52]

In the context of the Southern Caucasus, Soviet *korenizatsiia*, despite its empowering objectives, played a significant role in crystallising ethnic differences and inadvertently nurturing nationalism rather than diluting it in favour of a new Soviet identity as it had planned to do.[53] Hence, the formal incorporation of ethnicities in the legislative framework became a key socio-political component of local administrative divisions, laying the foundations for an institutionalized architecture prone to the resurgence of nationalisms and ethnic animosity.[54]

Indeed, all three republics in the region became increasingly more culturally homogeneous, especially Armenia, where the arrival of genocide refugees and the promotion of *ad hoc* programs of diaspora resettlement and immigration from other USSR republics favoured Armenisation.[55] Authorities drove a top-down controlled, yet unprecedented, process of enhancing national expression embedded in the soviet paradigm to acquire legitimacy and establish ideological control. Armenian literature,

[50] Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 186-189.
[51] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Geukjian, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict, 180-189.
[54] Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 211-213.
[55] Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia, 1920-1936* (Leiden: Brill, 1962).

language, and history were encouraged through Soviet academic institutions. [56] At the same time, the Armenians progressively lost their prominence vis-à-vis other groups, as the dissolution of Imperial paternalistic networks and the creation of republics on a formally equal footing undermined their *sui generis* role. Furthermore, the reduced presence of influential Armenians in Tbilisi, Baku and other former economic centres of the Armenian community curtailed their inter-USSR leverage.[57] Prominent vectors of the Russian-Armenian entanglement were discarded with the demise and persecution of the Armenian Church, the curtailment of any nationalistic expression and the dismantlement of the élite structures that had mediated Russo-Armenian relations under the Tsars.

Nevertheless, Armenia retained a degree of peculiarity in comparison to other republics, as Armenian nationalistic tendencies were prone to overlap with soviet patriotism and communist loyalty, rather than espousing dissent.[58] From the 1930s, Stalin partially reversed *korenizatsiia*, adopting a more outspoken policy of "fusion of peoples" (*sliianie narodov*). This course entailed the prominence of the Russian core as the "elder brother" of the other nationalities and revived a Russia-led feeling of Soviet patriotism.[59] Amid the Second World War efforts, the fusion of peoples' doctrine permitted the resurfacing of some of the traditional linkages between Armenia and Moscow, in particular with the formal rehabilitation of the Armenian Church in 1945, which became a state-controlled entity supportive of communism, and the celebration of the Armenian war participation as a form of controlled nationalism.[60] The Church also strongly perpetuated the historical memory of the Armenian-Russian special relationship during the Imperial times, emphasising its connection with the Russian Orthodox Church and justifying Soviet rule as the continuation of the protective role exerted by the Empire.[61] In this perspective, also shared among some non-communist diaspora organisations, Sovietisation in the 1920s spared Armenia from annihilation by the reactionary forces of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, bringing emancipatory socialism rather than imposing a foreign domination.[62]

The process of promoting a new Armenian patriotic feeling, strongly embedded in the Soviet system yet atypical in comparison to the other Soviet Union republics, persisted and acquired more strength during Nikita Khruschev's relatively liberalising era (1953-1964), which ignited unforeseen relaxation in ethnic expression in the republic. This turn was officially announced by USSR Sovmin

[56] Geukjian, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict, 189-194.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Lehmann, Maike. "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia". *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9-31.
[59] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 230-232.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 189-194.
[62] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*.

Vice President Anastas Mikoyan, an old-guard communist of Armenian origins, during his 1956 visit to Erevan.[63] In the subsequent years, authors such as Gurgen Mahari, Gevork Emin, Vahram Alazan and Vagharshag Norents, who had been persecuted for nationalist praising of the Armenian historical past, resumed their production.[64] The publication of works with a national connotation, often decrying the loss of Armenian traditional lands or celebrating symbols such as Mount Ararat, blossomed and reinforced a sense of national collective memory with the blessing of local authorities.[65] In particular, Anton Kochinian, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Armenian Republic (1952-1966) and subsequently First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia (1966-1974), conjugated hybrid policies of national cultural revival and soviet loyalism, in a phenomenon later dubbed as "apricot socialism", from the staple fruit of Armenian cuisine.[66]

1.3 Apricot Socialism as the foundation of Armenian Foreign Policy

Furthermore, the transposition of the so-called "Piedmont principle" in Soviet foreign policy to Türkiye favoured the close alignment of the Soviet Armenian leadership with Moscow.[67] This formulation, initially developed in the 1920s to leverage Soviet influence against Poland, mirrored the role of the Italian state of Piedmont-Sardinia in unifying the peninsula by portraying the Ukrainian SSR as a "Piedmont" for the Ukrainian people, from which they would eventually liberate their homelands of Eastern Galicia.[68] Similarly, in the 1940s and 1950s, the USSR used the principle to advance territorial claims over eastern Türkiye, contesting the Treaty of Kars and the Montreux Convention and envisioning the Armenian SSR as the nucleus of a potential Soviet expansion. This move contributed to channelling nationalist sentiments against Türkiye, cementing the USSR's heirloom of Imperial Russia's prerogatives.[69] The Armenian SSR leadership, in parallel to Soviet requests, reciprocated these demands, expressing open irredentist remarks in what could be seen as a prelude to an autonomous foreign policy.[70] The Nerkaght (in Armenian, "repatriation") campaign reached a climax in 1946-1949 in preparation for demographic consolidation, anticipating border

[63] R. H. Dekmejian, "Soviet-Turkish Relations and Politics in the Armenian SSR", *Soviet Studies* 19, no. 4 (April 1968).
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Maike Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism", 10-13 .
[67] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 200-250.
[68] R. H. Dekmejian, "Soviet-Turkish Relations",15.
[69] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 200-250.
[70] R. H. Dekmejian, "Soviet-Turkish Relations",15.

readjustments.[71] While Turkish accession into NATO in 1952 revealed the tenuous character of this posture, which was soon replaced by Kruschev's rapprochement policy with Türkiye, it left an indelible mark in signalling a conjunction between Armenia's leadership, renewed national consciousness and central Soviet authorities. Apricot Socialism marked a fundamental turn in Armenian politics; it revived national consciousness and mobilised history as a source of political legitimacy, laying the foundation of a proto-foreign policy dictated by idealistic considerations. At the same time, by accentuating continuity between Imperial Russia and Soviet demands to pursue irredentist claims, it enhanced the "Russia as the protector of Armenia" narrative and its entanglement with the local ruling class.[72]

From an economic perspective, Armenia also enjoyed a certain degree of favouritism in the Soviet planned economy system, exemplifying the mutual commitment from Moscow over the special relationship. Between 1950 and 1978, industrial output grew by an average of 9%, more than the USSR average and remarkably more than the Azerbaijani SSR.[73] Despite the considerable underdevelopment of the South Caucasus region within the USSR, Armenia had by 1978 reduced its gap in national income with the rest of the USSR to a mere 17% difference, much less than Azerbaijan and Georgia.[74] The complex and multifaceted genesis of these economic outputs is not the focus of this study; nevertheless, discrepancies in net transfers and per capita investments, which in 1960s Armenia equalled the USSR median, while they lagged considerably behind in Azerbaijan and Georgia, suggest that the republic had a much prominent place in Gosplan considerations than its neighbours.

Nevertheless, Apricot Socialism's cultivation of historical memory also faced tension with central authorities. In particular, when it gradually opened the public debate on the memory of the Armenian Genocide, whose remembrance had historically been a taboo in the USSR and was associated with nationalism and the rhetoric of the Dashnaktsutyun, the former ruling party of the First Republic of Armenia (1918-1920) before the Soviet invasion. This *overture* culminated in the 1965 grand public commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Genocide at the Erevan Opera House, sponsored by the party and attended by Kochinian, the *Catholicos* of the Armenian Church and the most prominent

[71] Joanne Laycock, "The Repatriation of Armenians to Soviet Armenia, 1945-49", in *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-1950*, ed. Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 140-150.
[72] Arus Harutyunyan, *Contesting National Identities in an Ethnically Homogeneous State: The Case of Armenian Democratization* (Western Michigan University, 2009).
[73] Gertrude E. Schroeder, *Transcaucasia Since Stalin: The Economic Dimension*, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Occasional Paper no. 101 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1980).
[74] Ibid.

party members in the republic, such as then party secretary Yakob Zakonian.[75] The event ended up being a catastrophe, as protesters stormed the location, calling for the return of Armenian lands and official recognition of the genocide by Türkiye. Demonstrations of unprecedented scale erupted in the city, prompting debates about the resurgence of dissident nationalism in Armenia. However, as highlighted by Professor Lehmann's analysis of the protests and their discourse, they expressed the twofold nature of apricot socialist identity within the "affirmative action" institutionalised paradigm, rather than a contestation of the Soviet order.[76] They mostly addressed Türkiye or appealed to Soviet authorities for more recognition of the Genocide, a more assertive policy vis-à-vis Türkiye and the assignment of Karabakh to the Republic of Armenia. The repression of the demonstrations was also reported to be relatively lenient, at least when compared to similar contemporary events in other cities of the USSR.[77]

In the aftermath of the incident, which coincided with the height of Kruschev's rapprochement with Türkiye, the 1966 XXIV Congress of the Armenian Communist Party was shaken by purges of numerous members, notably including the dismissal of party secretary Zarobian and half of the Praesidium. Nonetheless, the assessment of the events carried out in the Congress reported a generally deferential attitude towards the demonstrations, which were deemed legitimate except for instances of "hooliganism". Kochinian was sworn secretary and, albeit denouncing the "nationalistic tendencies" of his predecessor, he also firmly attacked the Turkish policy of denial of the Genocide, paving the way to the continuation of apricot socialism.[78] In the subsequent years, the hybridisation of national revival in conjunction with the Soviet project thrived through the realisation of several evoking monuments in Erevan, such as the 1968 Mother of Armenia statue, celebrating Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War through a national lens, and the 1967 Genocide Memorial Complex, whose construction represented the apex of state sponsored narration of ethno-symbolism on the Genocide. Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated into this narration as a reminiscent icon of a nation under siege.[79]

[75] Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism".
[76] Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism".
[77] Ibid.
[78] R. H. Dekmejian, "Soviet-Turkish Relations".
[79] Ibid.

1.4 Nagorno-Karabakh: The main prism of the Armenian identitarian revival

Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K), once again, represented the most critical point for the soviet architecture of ethnic relations in the region and the most sensitive issue for the Armenian political class. After Sovietisation, despite its overwhelmingly Armenian population at the time, the area was assigned to the Azerbaijan SSR, in compliance with the previous surrender of the local Karabakh Council to the forces of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in 1920. Nonetheless, it retained a separate status as an Autonomous Oblast, embodying the complexity of the Soviet nationality policies and the most evident case of its paradoxical effects of enhancement of ethnic identities and inter-ethnic tensions. For centuries, as previously covered, the Karabakhi élites were among the most active actors in the Russian-Armenian entanglement and detachment from Azerbaijan proper, and consolidated their sense of non-belongness to it. While autonomy and local power structures reinforced links with neighbouring Armenia, where most of the Nagorno-Karabakh public officials attended university and took part in cultural activities, belonging to the Azerbaijan SSR exposed the Oblast to its indigenisation policies, often contradicting the principle of ethno-territorial representation. In this context, the construction and affirmation of a primordial national history became an imperative for local ruling establishments, in particular in Karabakh, where the parallelism with the ancient independent Melikdoms (princedoms), which first ignited the imperial invitation and repelled foreign dominations for more time than Armenia proper, acquired increasing symbolic relevance.[80] The Melikdoms had also appealed to the Catholic Pope and Western European rulers for protection against Islamic invasions, based on Armenia's character as "the first Christian nation". Consequently,as ethnoreligious tensions reemerged abruptly, reevoking the need to appeal to either Russia or Europe for the sake of Nagorno-Karabakh's protection became a common practice among the nationalist Nagorno-Karabakh's élitesa.[81]

Azerbaijan frequently meddled in the affairs of the oblast, incentivising the migration of ethnic Azeris, selecting school curricula, and removing public servants who were considered disloyal. Moreover, Nagorno-Karabakh was the only autonomous oblast, along with Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan, whose name did not reflect an official titular nationality, granting Azerbaijan notable influence in this matter. According to the constitution of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh did not hold a representative in its Council of Ministers, unlike the autonomous republic of Nakhichevan, and its

[80] Hratch Tchilingirian, "Nagorno Karabakh: Transition and the Elite", *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 4 (1999): 435-461.
[81] Ibid.

Executive Committee was subordinated to Azerbaijani oversight for most matters, making its autonomy *de facto* very limited.[82] Reports of economic discrimination and unfair allocations of infrastructural investments were widespread, as Azerbaijani authorities often diverted investments meant for N-K. Azerbaijanis strongly contested the Armenian dominance of local power structures, despite reflecting common practice in the indigenisation framework.[83]

In 1965-1966, in the aftermath of the Erevan disorders and public appeals for Armenian SSR-Karabakh integration during the Armenian Communist Party Congress, prominent Karabakhi leaders delivered formal requests to the Kremlin for the assignment of the oblast to Armenia, gathering more than 2,000 signatures from intellectuals and activists. While the petition received scarce attention from Moscow, it catalysed attention from the Armenian élites from both sides of the border on the issue and contributed to an open confrontation with Azerbaijan. In the same years, the government of the Armenian SSR engaged in negotiations with central authorities, depicting the separation of N-K from its "motherland" as the result of pressure from reactionary Türkiye to pursue further destruction of Armenians, albeit appealing to the fraternal bond with soviet Azerbaijan. Rapidly, rather than the pursuit of anachronistic irredentist demands against Türkiye, Nagorno-Karabakh became the main prism driving the identitarian revival fuelled by Apricot Socialism, paving the way to what the soon-to-be Armenian foreign policy would have become. The importance of Karabakh also derives from its cultural significance, with both Armenians and Azerbaijanis identifying the region as the cradle of their nations.

The seventy-year-old USSR domination produced a long-lasting, profound institutional and imaginative revolution in the South Caucasus region. Firstly, it dismantled the colonial bonds that had characterised the special relationship between Russia and the Armenian people. Nevertheless, it did not entirely interrupt it, reframing it under a different context and even reinforcing it to a certain extent. Moreover, the *ensemble* of USSR ethno-territorial policies aimed at constructing an egalitarian pan-soviet corpus, which led the Sovietologist Terry Martin to dub it an "Affirmative Action Empire", reaffirmed and reinforced ethnic identities, paving the way to subsequent inter-ethnic animosity and conflict, even amplified by the temporary Armenian-Soviet foreign policy conjunction vis-à-vis Türkiye. In particular, the peculiar status of Nagorno-Karabakh, a semi-autonomous Armenian-dominated entity placed under Azerbaijani jurisdiction, characterised by no formal titular nationality, represented a fertile ground for hostility and nurtured a local ruling class resentful of Azerbaijan. In this regard, the narrative of the Armenian indigenisation policy, in its "apricot socialism" post-World

[82] Constitution of the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic, Presidential Library of Azerbaijan, accessed April 7, 2025.
[83] Tchilingirian, "Nagorno Karabakh".

War declination, increased the salience of Karabakh by incorporating it in its national memory revival language and linking it to the remembrance of the genocide. Moreover, given its entrenchment in socialism and Moscow loyalism, it echoed the traditional Special Relationship between the Armenians and Russia, appealing to the intervention of central Soviet authorities for support rather than adopting a conflictual relationship with them, unlike the majority of the nationalist movements that emerged during the sunset of the USSR. As the Russian Empire was seen as the main, if not the only, guarantee of the threatened cultural and physical security of the Armenians, the Soviet Union was equally perceived as its successor in this role in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh's menaced state.

1.5 Ter-Petrosyan's mandate and the vulnerability of the Armenian way to multivectorialism

During the Brezhnev period (1964-1982), the Karabakh question temporarily lost prominence due to the authorities' crackdown on potential nationalistic activities. Gorbachev's transformative election did not represent a significant change in this matter, as he vehemently stressed during the 1986 27th CPSU Congress that the nationality policy of the Soviet Union was not subject to modifications and that the Party should guard itself against chauvinism and the resurgence of reactionary territorial demands. Nonetheless, as his leadership ignited the profound reformist campaign, which went down in history by the names of its two major programmes, *perestroika* (political restructuring) and *glasnost* (publicity, or often translated as transparency), the local ethnic ruling classes of the region exploited this window of opportunity to foster ethnic mobilisation. While part of the literature in ethnic conflict studies places significant importance on socio-psychological aspects, such as discursive phenomena of "alterisation" and growing "we-them" rhetoric, which undoubtedly took place in the South Caucasus, the purpose of this research is to trace the historical trajectory leading to the development and limitation of independent Armenia's foreign policy conduct.[84]

In particular, it suggests, in line with the previously illustrated dynamics, that conflictual relations emerged as a byproduct of the conjunction between the top-down ethno-territorial soviet power structure and its related ethnic policies and the legacy of the special relationship between Russia and the Armenians, with particular regard for its apricot socialism version.

[84] Anatoly N. Yamskov, "Ethnic Conflict in the Transcaucasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh", *Theory and Society* 20, no. 5 (October 1991).

Following Professor Suny's unique interpretation of Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as an "imaginative political community, which suggests that a nation consists of an ideational construction bounded by objective institutional and territorial limitations, it appears that the ethnic-based undemocratic élites modelled from *korenisatsia* leveraged national revendications as tools to assert their importance and autonomy.[85] This resonates with other fields of study, such as élite-group conflict theories' scholars, Donald L. Horowitz and Marc Howard Ross, depicting and understanding political élites as gatekeepers and instigators of ethnic conflict.[86]

In this context, it is no coincidence that ethnic mobilisation in the region first appeared in Nagorno-Karabakh under the guidance of local communist party cadres in what would later be known as the "Karabakh Movement", a loose nationalist coalition of Karabakhi officials aiming for Karabakh-Armenia unification, which progressively affirmed itself as a pivotal force in Armenian politics. As in the case of many other Soviet Republics towards the twilight of the USSR, nationalism replaced communism as the ideological *raison d'être* and unifying bond of the ruling élites.[87] In this regard, French-Armenian politologist Taline Papazian highlighted that when the Karabakh issue resurfaced in 1988, only the *intelligentsia* was deeply aware of the persistence since Tsarist times of the atavistic, or sometimes referred to as "primordial", contention between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.[88] Between 1987 and 1988, four N-K's *nomenklatura* delegations visited Moscow, engaging in negotiations for the attachment of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR, appealing to Moscow for the protection of their interests. Although they received attention and guarantees of ethnocultural protection, Gorbachev personally reiterated to them his staunch opposition to any sort of internal ethnic-driven territorial reorganisation of the USSR.[89] Meanwhile, violent tensions erupted in Karabakh and the neighbouring republics, with heated demonstrations and reciprocal pogroms carried out by Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In February 1988, the leaders of the Karabakh Movement formalised their political pursuit by creating the Karabakh Committee; among the few non-Karabakhi members was Levon Ter-Petrosyan, an Orientalist scholar and expert on Armenian national history, who had been arrested in 1966 during the Genocide Remembrance riots.[90] Two years later, he was elected chairman of the

[85] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*.
[86] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
[87] Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[88] Taline Papazian, "State at War, State in War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and State-Making in Armenia, 1991-1995", *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 8 (2008).
[89] James J. Coyle, *Russia's Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
[90] Ibid.

Armenian Supreme Soviet, anticipating his subsequent overwhelming election in 1991 as the first President of independent Armenia, guiding the Armenian National Movement (ANM).

The 1990 "Law on the Free National Development of Citizens of the USSR that Occupy Areas Outside their National-State Formations" represented a legislative *extrema ratio* to reform the USSR's ethnic policy framework and offer representation for peoples living outside their designated titular republics, such as Karabakh Armenians.[91] Other exceptional measures, namely the deployment of troops and the enactment of temporary direct control exercised by Moscow over N-K, were employed to tone down inter-ethnic tensions and colliding territorial claims. In May 1991, the USSR launched "Operation Ring" to disarm ethnic paramilitaries, especially Armenian *fedayi,* despite harsh opposition from the Russian SSR's establishment, notably Yeltsin, claiming that it would damage Russian-Armenian relations.[92] Nonetheless, amid the convulsive days of the USSR's fall, the Karabakh Parliament, under the advice of the Karabakh Committee, unilaterally declared the independence of the autonomous oblast on the 2nd of September 1991. The event ignited Armenia's government, which was until that point extremely reluctant to openly break ties with the Union, to call for a referendum and proclaim its declaration of independence.[93]

Thus, Armenia reasserted its position as a sovereign nation after eight centuries of foreign domination in a precarious context dictated by the incessant national security concerns and salience of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which from 1992 became a full-scale war. The Levon Ter-Petrosyan administration faced the complex task of navigating the post-Soviet transition and ensuring the country a newly conceived international posture, which was embodied by the so-called principle of Complementarism. In the words of Professor Giragosian, the concept encapsulates "bridging the inherently conflicting interests of Russia and the West at the benefit of Armenia, as a natural result of its historical and geopolitical considerations".[94] Armenia's second President, Robert Kocharyan, described it as a "process of widening the partnership with Russia and deepening collaboration with the US and the EU".[95] Among the earliest steps of opening towards the West and multilateral governance, Armenia joined the OSCE in 1992 to internationalise the Karabakh issue in a cooperative

[91] Yamskov, "Ethnic Conflict".
[92] Coyle, *Russia's Interventions,* 80-90.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Sergey Minasyan, "Evaluating Multi-vectorism in the Foreign Policy of Post-Soviet Eurasian States", *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 268-273.
[95] Elena Gnedina, "'Multi-Vector' Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or Bargaining?", *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 7 (September 2015).

framework, the Council of Europe as an observer in 1996, and signed in the same year a comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.[96]

Despite its premature development, this aspiration does not represent an uncommon feature in the post-Soviet space, where it aligns with the *genus* of foreign policies that emerged after the demise of the USSR under the collective name of multivectorialism, whose most illustrative and formalised example is provided by the case of Kazakhstan.[97] Central Asian multivectorialism entails a rejection of any zero-sum game logic whatsoever, often evoked by employing captivating metaphors such as the "Great Game", and the pursuit of strong non-exclusive strategic autonomy through partnership diversification.[98] Nursultan Nazarbayev, former Kazakh president and inspirer of this stance, argued in an economicist understanding of multivectorialism that the only means of survival of the state is integration in global economic zones and governance mechanisms, alternating proactiveness with skilful reception of external *stimuli*.[99]

While Armenian Complementarism does not necessarily fully overlap with multivectoralism and its Kazakh declination, whose nature is a puzzling question for theoretical categorisation in IR studies, it certainly represents an Armenian way of multivectorialism as part of the same phenomenon.[100]

Levon-Ter Petrosyan's agenda envisioned pacification with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which he dared to provocatory call "our most natural allies" in open defiance of parts of the Armenian political élite, to avoid encirclement and never-ending regional instability, and recalibration of the relations with the Russian Federation, which he saw as profiting from the conflict to reassert its past colonial prominence possibly.[101] More specifically, this line of thought suggested that prolonged hostility with Azerbaijan would have inherently pushed Armenia into the Russian orbit. Internally, it featured political and economic liberalisations in the wake of the prevailing Western-led consensus of the 1990s, and the reinforcement of the significant parliamentary structure, albeit in a semi-presidential system, which Armenia's newly adopted constitution was conceived to safeguard democracy. Indeed, Ter-Petrosyan's new approach to foreign policy placed great importance on redefining and downplaying the identitarian dimension of foreign policy, which had already emerged when Armenia was a Soviet Socialist Republic, avoiding the characterisation of the country as a European, Christian

[96] N. Nyshanbayev and B. Tarman, "The Republic of Kazakhstan's Multi-Vector Foreign Policy: Re-evaluation under President Tokayev", *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 45, no. 3 (2024).
[97] Ibid.
[98] Misayan, "Evaluating Multi-vectorism".
[99] Nyshanbayev and Tarman, "The Republic of Kazakhstan's Multi-Vector Foreign Policy".
[100] Minasyan, "Evaluating Multi-vectorism".
[101] Levon Ter-Petrosyan, interview by Jon Sawyer, *Caucasus Context* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2007).

or Eurasian nation, and instead focusing on its unique position as a bridge between the West and the East.[102]

To a certain extent, this could be understood as a deeply revolutionary programme against the collective memory and identitarian character established from the emergence of apricot socialism, which Levon-Ter-Petrosyan saw as detrimental to national interests and, more generally, the entire colonial trajectory of close entanglement with Russia's interests, rooted in the history of Armenian-Russian relations since the 17th century. Indeed, the fall of the USSR not only jeopardised the region's stability but also opened a heated debate on Armenian history and its political reverberations. This critical reinterpretation of Armenia's past, shaping security and foreign policy concerns, is exemplified by a series of articles published by intellectuals and political figures close to the ANM, such as Rafayel Ishkhanyan's "Our three-hundred-year mistake", denouncing Armenia's historical counterproductive overreliance on a "third force" (referring to Russia and the European powers) to guarantee its security.[103] In Ishkhanyan's view, under cultural biases such as Christian culture, Armenia had traditionally opted for sacrificing political autonomy in favour of short-sighted international commitments to elude external threats, inadvertently fuelling further antagonism in the region. Following this line of thinking, excessive reliance on Russian patronage had nurtured tensions with neighbouring powers such as the Ottomans and the Persians for centuries, and Franco-American support during the brief experience of the first Armenian Republic (1918-1920) entangled the country in conflictual international dynamics it could have avoided. Similarly, Gérard Libaridian, Senior Advisor and Secretary of the Security Council, advocated for abandoning the "emotional founding ground" of the relations with Türkiye, which had emerged under apricot socialism driven by the Genocide's symbolic relevance.[104] Libaridian was part of a series of private foreign-policy consultants Ter-Petrosyan hired from the diaspora, signalling open discontinuity with former Soviet diplomats and bureaucrats and the heritage of Apricot Socialism. However, rupture with the past was not absolute, since the main objective of independent Armenia under Ter-Petrosyan remained to ensure Nagorno-Karabakh's safety, albeit in an unusual attempt to seek autonomous agency and emancipation from its past.

Nevertheless, this agenda faced opposition from its initial conception from parts of the Armenian élites, with foreign minister Raffi Hovannisyan resigning in 1992, and growing tensions with the

[102] Aram Terzyan, "The Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy Identity: The Conception of Identity Driven Paths. Friends and Foes in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse", in Values and Identity as Sources of Foreign Policy in Armenia and Georgia, ed. Kornely Kakachia and Alexander Markarov (Tbilisi: Universal Publishing, 2016), 145-183.
[103] Stephan H. Astourian, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia", *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies,* (University of California, Berkeley, 2000),1-61.
[104] Astourian, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian".

Karabakh Movement and its influential political representatives, rather than Armenian opposition parties per se, such as the restored *Dashnaktsutyun*.[105] Hovannisyan's early departure from government was provoked by the alleged neglect of the Genocide Recognition issue in foreign policy, which was reformulated in search of a "happy narrative medium" to appease Türkiye.[106] Some reinterpretations of Armenia's history, including Ishkanyan's, came under accusations of historical revisionism and Genocide apologism. Parallelly, the importance of the Karabakhi political groups grew exponentially throughout the 1990s in light of their armed participation in the Karabakh conflict and the affirmation of the internationally unrecognised Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which also occupied other adjacent former Azerbaijan provinces. Artsakh did not receive any official recognition from Armenia in line with Ter-Petrosyan's *detente* strategy vis-à-vis Azerbaijan and Türkiye, despite being heavily politically and militarily backed by Armenia, in what has been described as a patron-client state relationship.[107]

At the same time, Russia's unofficial intervention in the conflict through substantial military aid to both Armenia proper and Karabakh troops and a diplomatic bridge with Azerbaijan reconfirmed its role as the security guarantor and peace broker of the region, fuelling its popularity among many supporters of Armenian nationalism and permitting Armenia to negotiate from a position of strength.[108] Furthermore, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (1992-1996) stated that Russia would have defended Armenia from Türkiye, in response to claims that Türkiye was ready to intervene against Armenia to defend Nanchikevan if threatened. Generally speaking, despite these assertive projects, Armenian-Russian relations remained positive during Ter-Petrosyan's mandate, and so did the personal relationship between him and Yeltsin, as testified by the 1995 defence pact between the two countries, which established a Russian permanent military presence in Gyumri, Northwestern Armenia.[109] The interpretation of the agreement later became controversial, since the new Russian Foreign Minister, Yevgeni Primakov (1996-1999), adopted a more transactional attitude towards the compatibility of Russian-Armenian interests in the South Caucasus. Russia's strategy towards post-Soviet conflicts throughout the 1990s reflected a complex balancing of contrasting principles. While the first war in Chechnya and the resurgence of Islamic separatism in the Russian North Caucasus, coupled with Russia's position on the parallel Kosovo issue pushed the country towards a firm defence of the principle of territorial integrity and curtailment of any sort of destabilising force, as

[105] Terzyan, "The Evolution of Armenian Foreign Policy".
[106] Astourian, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian".
[107] Rafael Biermann, "Conceptualising Patron-Client Relations in Secessionist Conflict: A Research Agenda", *Territory, Politics, Governance* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1-20.
[108] Coyle, Russia's Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts.
[109] Ibid.

exemplified by its intervention in the Tajikistan Civil War, the necessity to maintain leverage in what it regarded as its "Near Abroad" as a decisive power broker, prompted different calculations, such as its involvement in peacekeeping missions in the PMR, Abkhazia and Ossetia, later turned in explicit support for these entities as a mean to assert its influence. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh falls in between these two categories, since Russia maintained a calculated ambiguity akin to its historical approach in the "Special Relationship", privileging Armenian pleas as vectors of its post-Imperial influences without entirely neglecting Azerbaijani perspectives. Under the terms of the 1992 Tashkent agreement, Russia allocated equal non-nuclear shares of Soviet military equipment to the two states, officially striking for balance, yet it not only offered the aforementioned guarantees and aid to Armenia, but it also granted it a 600 billion ruble loan to sustain the burden of the conflict.[110]

Complementing the political and economic opening to the so-called West and restoring some of the strong traditional ties with Russia, particularly regarding defence relations, permitted Armenia to receive economic and military aid from a wide spectrum of actors and exploit the momentum against Azerbaijan.[111] For instance, Armenia's strong commitment to democratic transition and human rights made it one of the most significant recipients of assistance under the USAID scheme and helped it to leverage its influential diaspora lobbying groups in the US, such as the ANCA. The most relevant example is the introduction of Section 907 in the 1992 "Freedom Support Act", which prevented Azerbaijan from receiving US assistance, isolating it diplomatically until its waiver in 2001 in the context of the War on Terror.[112] Moreover, it benefited from substantial EU assistance programmes, firstly through the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), and subsequently as part of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), aiming at sustaining the socio-economic recovery of former USSR countries.

The 1994 adoption of a cease-fire in Karabakh marked the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh War, crystallising the situation in a "frozen conflict", perhaps its most evocative example. It offered Levon Ter-Petrosyan an ephemeral political victory, receiving praise for his peace efforts from both the Kremlin and US President Bill Clinton, who warmly welcomed him in Washington, DC, in 1997.[113] Complementarism, as intended by the Levon Ter-Petrosyan agenda, appeared to be an effective synthesis of Armenia's past with the task of developing a newly independent nation's international

[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992, Pub. L. No. 102-511, 106 Stat. 3320 (1992).
[113] Annie Jafalian, ed., *Reassessing Security in the South Caucasus: Regional Conflicts and Transformation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

posture, as Professor Minasyan labelled it as one of the most genuine manifestations of multivectorialism.[114]

Nonetheless, the agreement brokered under the aegis and the mediation of the Russian Federation, which was at the same time the first arm and military equipment supplier of Azerbaijan, favoured the resurfacing of deeply rooted political cleavages on the nature of Armenia's foreign policy posture. Indeed, the ceasefire prompted the de facto institutionalisation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, or Artsakh, the name it adopted recalling the homonymous 10th province of Ancient Armenia (189-387) to affirm statehood continuity with the ancestral political entity. Nagorno-Karabakh foreign minister Naira Melkoumiam commented on the event, reading contemporary events through the lenses of Armenia's national memory, as set by Apricot Socialism's precedent, with such words: "After a history of tragedies, we have won a war at last".[115] The birth of the Republic as an organised entity represented an obstacle to Levon-Ter Petrsoyan's ambitions of rapidly closing the conflict and reaching an agreement with Azerbaijan, which refused to negotiate directly with its representatives. It also crystallised Russia's reestablished role, until that moment precarious, as the guarantor of power balance in the region and protector of both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. More importantly, it provided a platform of resonance to the critical voices of Armenia's detachment from its traditional standing. From that point, N-K authorities became necessary interlocutors of the Ter-Petrosyan administration, which attempted to court them by offering to their most notable representative, N-K President and war hero Robert Kocharyan, the position of prime minister in Armenia in 1997. This move was meant to consolidate the ANM's political base and exclude the most radical nationalist elements, reaffirming the presidency's commitment to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue amid falling approval ratings and growing political tensions.[116] However, by the end of the decade, Armenia's adoption of a "multivectorial approach", once a seemingly paradigmatic example for other post-Soviet countries, appeared increasingly frail and under pressure from multiple perspectives, both in the international and domestic political arenas.

1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the centuries-long role played by the Armenians in the Russian advancement in the Southern Caucasus as a means to protect their political autonomy and religious identity gave birth to an unusual Special Relationship and path of entanglement with Moscow, hardly comparable to the status attained by any other population of the Empire. Despite the fall of the Russian Empire, this trajectory remained almost unvaried, intersecting with the ethnic and territorial policies of the Soviet

[114] Minasyan, "Evaluating Multivectorialism".
[115] Astourian, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian".
[116] Ibid.

Union in a complex national revival phenomenon that has been dubbed "Apricot Socialism". While the end of the USSR appeared to have brought an end to this process, its legacy still presents concrete reverberations on the modern political Armenian landscape, particularly regarding foreign policy making, whose foundations largely reflected the imprinting of Apricot Socialism's policies. Under Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the country attempted to reconcile this heritage with a more assertive foreign policy posture, rejecting predetermined alignments in the international system, in favour of Complementarism, similarly to many other post-Soviet countries. This pursuit was initially proven successful, given the military success vis-à-vis Azerbaijan and the diplomatic recognition achieved from foreign powers. Notwithstanding that, this dissertation argues that the conjunction of growing changes in the regional sphere and, more importantly, in the domestic understanding of what Armenia's place in the global stage should be, ignited a process of revision of Complementarism, resulting in significant limitations to its scope and enforcement. As Armenian poet Gostan Zarian wrote, "Being Armenian is a destiny that history has imposed on us from the depths of centuries", stressing Armenia's embedded nature in the dynamics that had shaped its history and the almost messianic tone of its memory.[117]

[117] Gostan Zarian, *The Ship on the Mountain* (Boston: Hairenik Publishing House, 1943).

CHAPTER 2: Between Russia and the West, the curse of identity politics and securitisation

2.1 A methodological premise: Between Foreign-Policy Analysis and Neo-realist Balancing

As a newly emerged little nation surrounded by hostile countries (Türkiye, Azerbaijan), ambivalent partners (Georgia)[118], and a former colonial patron cultivating regional hegemonic aspirations (Russia), Armenia's international foreign policy may appear as a mere result of the structure of the intricate international system in where it lies. This line of thought follows Kenneth Waltz's benchmark work "Theory of International Politics", whose publication in 1979 led to the birth of the Neo-realist, or sometimes referred to as Structural Realist, School of International Relations.

Neo-realists tend to understand states as unitary rational actors, under the well-known recurring analogies of the "billiard ball" or "black box", entirely downplaying the relevance of domestic political dynamics.[119] In the words of Waltz himself: "*International political systems are formed by the coaction of self-regarding units. Domestic politics is hierarchically ordered*".[120] Domestic politics is almost totally severed from the rules of the international system, given the inherently dissimilar nature of the entities comprising it, thus making the study of foreign policy-making processes an irrelevant exercise.

Consequently, the behaviour of states is largely determined by the structural constraints and incentives imposed by the international system, characterised by anarchy and the hierarchical distribution of relative power. When applied to small states, whose conceptualisation may vary a lot based on resource availability, population or territorial extension, this framework prescribes that they may resort, vis-à-vis great powers, to either *bandwagoning*, which implies complete alignment with stronger states' exigencies, or *balancing*, which includes entering into any alliance or analogous mechanism to counter their excessive influence. A third option is represented by *hedging*; a more nuanced risk management strategy that combines the two previous approaches, as formulated by Eveline Goh in her study of Southeast Asian politics.[121] According to Professor Miriam Fendius Elman, Neo-realist literature pays particular attention to small states as it considers them the most

[118] Mane Babajanyan, "Armenian-Georgian Relations in the Post-Soviet Era: Challenges and Opportunities", *Contemporary Eurasia* 8, no. 2 (2019): 21-36.
[119] Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (March 2005): 1-30.
[120] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics (*Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979),p.91,81.
[121] Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analysing Regional Security Strategies", *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 113-57.

explicative and revealing illustration of the functioning of the international arena, being highly susceptible to systemic changes in light of their limited resources and influence.[122] Following this reasoning, their foreign policies represent, rather than a calculated choice or complex internal bargaining between political forces, an almost automatic, straightforward compulsory reaction to external *stimuli.*

In the context of Armenia's foreign policy, these paradigms have led to two distinct visions of its international posture. A first one, encapsulating Armenia and its Caucasian neighbours as "Pawns in the designs of Great Powers"[123] within East-West competition, reminiscent of Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1997 "The Grand Chessboard", which first suggested the resurgence of intra-great power competition in Eurasia and the South Caucasus.[124] Armenia's foreign policy is seen as entirely dictated by different conflicting hegemonic projects, corresponding to a form of *balancing*.

Regarding the second Neo-Realist vision, it understands Armenian Complementarism as a cosmetic pretext to mask total alignment with Russia, hence assimilating it to *bandwagoning* and regarding it as a subject worth studying only in the context of a wider analysis of Russian influence and foreign policy towards the Caucasus.[125] The two approaches share, in addition to their systemic perspective, an overlooking view of Armenia's agency and capability to assert itself as an actor in the international arena during the post-Soviet transition.

While the pre-eminence, or in the words of Ria Laenen, the "pragmatic hegemony", that the Russian Federation exercises in the Southern Tier of its self proclaimed Near Abroad sphere of influence, constitutes a significant structural limit to the agency of local states, purely mechanicists conceptions tend to struggle to provide comprehensive explanations of their foreign policy standing and the political nuances expressed by their historical trajectories and multidimensional variables affecting policymaking.[126]

For example, Georgia's foreign policy after the fall of Shevardnadze has significantly diverged from its neighbouring counterparts, abandoning multivectorial projects in favour of open confrontation with Russia and closer relations with the US and the EU, until the rise of the Georgian Dream party

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[122] Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard", *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (1995).
[123] Suny, "The Pawn of Great Powers".
[124] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
[125] Syuzanna Vasilyan, "'Swinging on a Pendulum': Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union and With the European Union", *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 1 (2016): 32-46).
[126] Ria Laenen, "Russia's 'Vital and Exclusive' National Interests in the Near Abroad",in *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: The United States and Europe in a Changing World*, ed. Roger E. Kanet and Maria Raquel Freire (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

in the 2010s brought new nuances to Georgian foreign policy. Conversely, Azerbaijan has followed a more multivectorial path, combining political closeness to Russia with diversified economic ties with the EU and the restoration of its traditional cultural Turkic links with Türkiye, on the basis of the resounding formula "One Nation, Two States". In recent years, this deep bilateral partnership has acquired even more political salience after the issue of the joint 2021 Shusha Declaration on Karabakh and the proposed Zangazur Corridor. In the case of Armenia, the Special Relationship developed under the Empire and its "apricot socialist" continuation provides a quintessential dimension, which, coupled with a peculiar foreign policy posture, collides with a solely receptive and structure-dependent understanding of its foreign policy. Moreover, Thomas De Waal, British journalist and widely recognised expert on the Caucasus and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, expressed profound scepticism regarding the notion of the region as "Great Chessboard", stating: "However the geopolitical weather changes, the locals always manage to manipulate the outside powers at least as much as the other way round".[127]

The dissonance between the Neo-realist vision and the complexity of the regional dynamics, and more in general, of small states' agency, reflects longstanding theoretical *querelles* within International Relations and related fields. More specifically, the agent-structure debate and the nexus between politics and foreign policy *per se*, which has sometimes been described as a double-level game between foreign and domestic forces.

This is outlined by Elena Gvedina's production within the multivectorialist literature, which stresses the uniqueness of multivectorialism as a *genus* of foreign policies distinct from the strategies that Neo-realist theorists had traditionally ascribed to small states. In her vision, multivectorialism is assimilated to a multidimensional bargaining between foreign-policy decision makers vis-à-vis external powers and obstructing factions in their own country.[128] Whether this conceptualisation fully reflects or not the nature of multivectorialism, it entails a fundamentally different understanding of international politics from Neorealism, by opening the "black box" of the state and regarding foreign policy as a complex process outcome, which, despite its inherently elusive nature, constitutes a pivotal subject of study.

Indeed, this purpose has been the central focus of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which traces its origins to the pioneering work of James Rosenau in the 1960s, who first advocated for a shift away

[127] Ahmet Doğru, "Nationalism and Democratization Process in Armenia: Impacts of the Nagorno-Karabakh Issue", in *Nationalism and Democratization Process in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, ed. European Stability Initiative (Berlin: ESI, 2001).
[128] Elena Gnedina, "'Multi-Vector' Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or Bargaining?", *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 7 (September 2015).

from system-level theorising toward the study of decision-making processes, leadership behaviour, and domestic political factors in foreign policy. FPA, rather than abiding by the traditional Grand Schools of International Relations, comprises several methodologically pluralist approaches revolving around the nexus between international dynamics and the internal decision-making process. For Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin**,** FPA is a discipline that studies how states make and implement decisions in the international arena, focusing on the specific actors**,** institutions**,** and internal dynamics that shape foreign policy decisions.[129] This dissertation employs FPA as the most appropriate tool to reclaim Armenian agency, emphasising that the constraints to the ambitious Complementarist agenda are the results of multifaceted dynamics, only partly attributable to structural limitations.

According to Professor Sergio Fabbrini, in terms of academia, FPA constitutes a bridge between Comparative Politics and International Relations, filling some of the inherent gaps created by the division between the two.[130] It employs a narrower perspective, precisely focusing the analytical study of foreign-policy determinants within a single state. Valerie Hudson, a FPA-specialised scholar, argues that, unlike classical actor-neutral IR, FPA is a multi-level, multifactorial actor-centred approach, albeit that does not necessarily tear apart the two disciplines.[131] Hudson suggests that the methodological ground of FPA is the centrality of humans, a common pillar of social sciences, which at times seems neglected by IR in light of its reliance on the state understood as a universal, rational and unitary ideal type.

Given the wide spectrum and interdisciplinary character of this academic domain, often intersecting with other IR and CP theoretical frameworks, Morin and Paquin warn against the risks of excessively comprehensive approaches, advocating for using limited variables and methodological rigour.[132] For instance, Elman's criticism of Neorealism regarding small states focuses on the role of domestic institutions, using the case of the US before its international ascendance, draws concepts from historical institutionalism, while many authors employ diametrically opposed methods within the FPA paradigm.

The present dissertation forges its understanding of foreign policy on two main camps of FPA, the historicist-constructivist perspective, such as in the works of Vendulka Kubálková[133] and Lyna

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[129] Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
[130] Sergio Fabbrini and Raffaele Marchetti, "Dysfunctional Domestic Policy", in *Still a Western World? Continuity and Change in Global Order*, ed. Sergio Fabbrini and Raffaele Marchetti (London: Routledge, 2018), 140- 55.
[131] Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis".
[132] Morin and Paquin, *Foreign Policy Analysis.*
[133] Vendulka Kubálková, *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Klymenko[134], suggesting that historical memory, as socially constructed and politically mobilised, plays a key role in shaping a state's foreign policy, and the Neo-Classical Realist one, represented by authors such as Norrin Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, which emphasises the reconciliation of structural pressure with domestic dynamics. While notions such as Klimenko's "memory diplomacy" provide a useful theoretical tool extremely well fitting Armenia's foreign policy, a historically developed focus on identitarian salient issues, Ripsman and Taliaferro's foreign policy decision-making scheme, outlined in the book "Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics", offers a comprehensive analytical framework of reference.[135] More specifically, they suggest that structural pressure is mediated in producing foreign policy outcomes by domestic filters, namely: élite cohesion or fragmentation, regime type and institutional strength, societal dynamics, leaders' perceptions (individual agency) and national strategic culture.

Nevertheless, this thesis does not blindly replicate this structure in its analysis. Indeed, as Kubálková and Klymenko stress, élite narratives and historical memory are not ancillary elements but constitutive determinants of foreign policy, hence adopting domestic dynamics' filtering role as an independent variable on equal footing with structural pressure, rather than a mere intervening variable. Adding this ideational layer to Ripsman and Taliaferro, historical memory (comprising, for the sake of simplicity, strategic culture and society) intersects with the role of élites, individual agencies and with institutional architectures, generating the domestic dimension of foreign-policy making, whose filtering action of external *stimuli* produces foreign policy strategies.

[134] Klymenko, Lina. "The Role of Historical Narratives in Ukraine's Policy Toward the EU and Russia". In *Historical Memory and Foreign Policy*, edited by Lina Klymenko and Marco Siddi, 31-47. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
[135] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

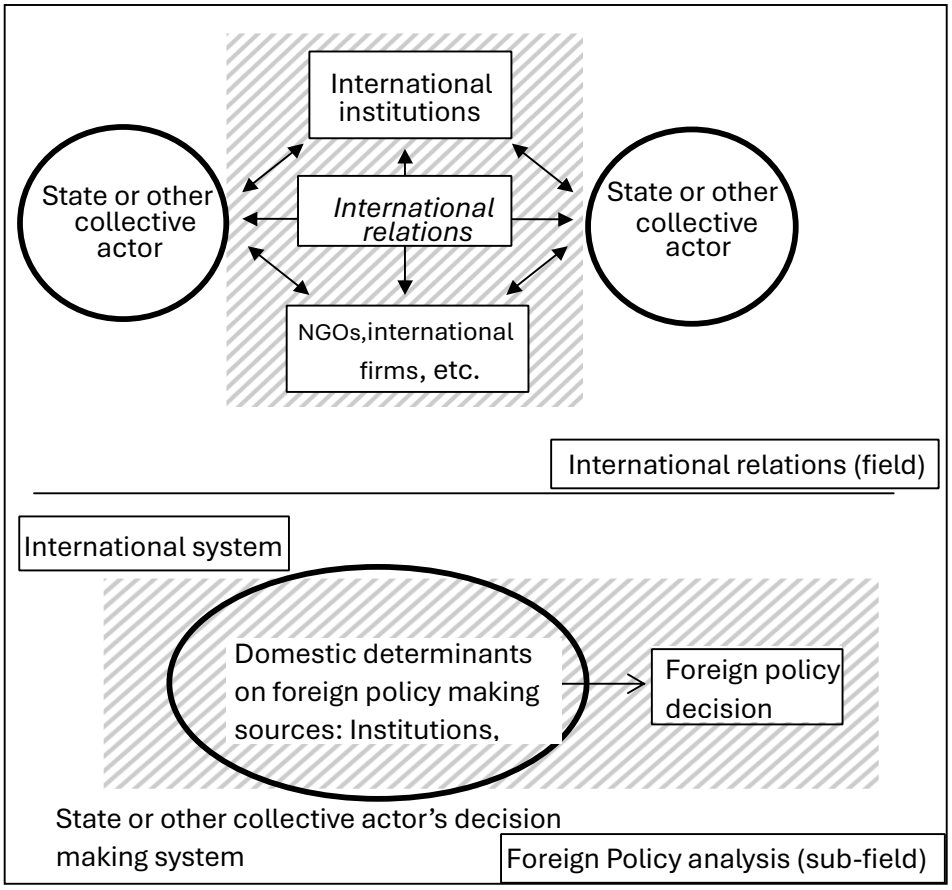

Fig.1: General scheme of foreign policy making in FPA in comparison to IR.[136]

[136] Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Analyzing Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

2.2 A Review of Complementarism as Armenia's strategic compass through the lens of FPA

Complementarism, the core pillar of Armenian foreign policy since 1991, revolves around bridging the interests of Russia, Iran and the West, understood as the US and the EU, to benefit the Armenian nation. As suggested by many commentators, this position mirrors, to some extent, Finland's neutrality stance during the Cold War, aimed at establishing predictable and productive relations with all its neighbours, irrespective of political blocs.[137] In the words of the 2007 Armenian National Strategy, the first providing official recognition of the policy, it represents "*simultaneously developing prosperous relations with all states in the region and states with interest in the region".*[138] More practically, from its very onset it focused on the continuation of the military alliance with the Russian Federation, exemplified by the Gyumri military presence and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) framework and deep energy procurement contracts between the two nations, combined with multidimensional interactions with the West, largely on a normative, techno-economic and cultural basis. At the same time, it particularly emphasises pursuing multilateral *fora,* such as the OSCE, and regional integration initiatives such as the 1992 Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), to develop cooperative frameworks and ensure the cultivation of peaceful relations in the region.

Nonetheless, despite a vast military entanglement with Russia, Armenia parallelly joined the NATO Science for Peace and Security programme in 1994. It pursued cooperation with the alliance, institutionalised through NATO Individual Partnerships Action Plans and participation in Kosovo peacekeeping operations. Russia also remained one of the main trade partners of the country, stressing openness to collaboration in every field. In this regard, exactly as in other multivectorial foreign policies, the "complementarity" principle entails an ambitious non-conflictual understanding of these dimensions, explicitly rejecting any thug-of-war logic in favour of a proactive syncretic project seeking to enhance strategic autonomy. Indeed, Multivectorialism, including its Complementarist declination, has often been erroneously understood as a mere distancing from Russia policy.[139] While it represents a severance of the previous colonial and deeply asymmetric linkage, it does not aim to

[137] Sergey Minasyan, "Nagorno Karabakh after Two Decades: A Conflict that has Forgotten to Die",in *Armenia's Foreign and Domestic Politics: Development Trends*, ed. Karen Harutyunyan (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute/Aleksanteri Institute, 2013), 14-24.
[138] Republic of Armenia, *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia*, approved 26 January 2007 by the National Security Council of the President's Office (Yerevan: Presidential Office, 2007).
[139] Minasyan, "Evaluating Multi-vectorism".

break away from the Russian Federation diplomatically, but rather to reshape this Special Relationship in a mutually productive partnership embedded in multilateral arenas and parallel *liaisons*. In this vision, Russia represents a primus inter pares among partners, rather than the depositary of a unique political and security mandate in the region.

The present thesis argues that this aspect represents the most significant theoretical divergence of Complementarism and Multivectorialism from realist *balancing*, which implies an adversarial and reactive nature to counterbalance dominant or threatening powers.[140] Balancing, as testified by historical examples, such as the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War, often prescribes choosing an alternative international positioning vis-à-vis preexisting alliances or blocs. Conversely, Multivectorialism, echoing what Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard conceptualised as the "Choice of not choosing", manifests a deliberative indecision and refusal to enter antagonising commitments. In Professor Misayan's interpretation, Complementarism distinguishes itself from other Multivectorialist approaches due to the relevance of the Armenian diaspora's soft power in both the US and Russia and the lack of a hydrocarbon-driven diplomacy, such as in Kazakhstan and other Central Asia States.

Concerning the study of Armenian foreign policy making and FPA, the research paper "Structure or agency? Explaining Armenia's foreign policy evolution" by John H.S. Aberg and Aram Terzyan represents a quintessential point of reference for this dissertation, challenging Neo-realist inevitability and outlining a dynamic interplay between structure and agency in Armenia.[141] The paper, through the lens of Walter Carlsnaes' analytical framework based on the structural, dispositional and intentional dimensions of decision-making, highlights the role of Armenian presidents, with particular focus on their agendas and the expansion of presidential powers in the 2000s.

However, despite the inspiring perspective of Aberg and Terzyan, who first suggested an evolution of Complementarism in contrast to authors depicting it as a monolithic entity[142], they fall short of providing a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. Firstly, their paper understands the Armenian presidential agendas as *per se* elements detached from a wider historical narrative and national memory, a pivotal element in light of Armenia's Special Relationship with Russia. Additionally, it explores some institutional developments (the growth of presidentialism) and

[140] Karen Harutyunyan, ed., *Armenia's Foreign and Domestic Politics: Development Trends* (Yerevan: Noravank Foundation, 2010).
[141] John H. S. Åberg and Aram Terzyan, "Structure or Agency? Explaining Armenia's Foreign Policy Evolution", *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 2018).
[142] Denis Papazian, "Explaining Continuity in Armenian Foreign Policy, 1991-2003", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 49-73.

superficially alludes to the Karabakh origins of President Kocharyan and Sargsyan, without acknowledging the wider political-institutional context and the core role played by political élites. More importantly, it emphasises incidental contingencies, which partially contradict the long-term strategic prospects of Complementarism, and may reduce the rigour of the analysis, according to Morin and Paquin's "toolbox of FPA". Through the blended framework built of constructivist and neo-classical realist notions of FPA, this thesis aims to trace the processes that determined the evolution of Complementarism and aspires to make sense of Armenia's international posture vis-à-vis conflicting theoretical understandings of small states' strategic posture in the global arena.

2.3 The Domestic Dimension: Memory Diplomacy and Strategic Culture

Levon Ter-Petrosyan's mandate set a robust agenda on foreign policy, partially rejecting some historically established principles deeply entangled in Armenia's self-perception and its relationship with Russia and setting he foundation of Complementarism, in a quest for pragmatism and reshaped relations with neighbouring countries. This vector collided in the subsequent years with harsh opposition in the domestic environment, leading to Ter-Petrosyan's convulsive resignation in 1997 amid controversies over his "phased" settlement of the Karabakh conflict, under the OSCE aegis and with Azerbaijan's approval. The event signalled the dissonance between ambitious policy aspirations, represented by the individual agency of Ter-Petrosyan, and other determinants of foreign policy.

Indeed, as Kubálková and Klymenko stress, memory represents a strategic tool for states to legitimise, assert and drive their interests and alignment choices, making some appear unthinkable and others natural. In this sense, it overlaps with what Ripsman and Taliaferro conceptualise as "strategic culture", namely, the set of established norms and beliefs among foreign policy decision makers. It does not represent an inherent, predefined corpus, but a historically and politically constructed one. In the present case, this construction is reflected by the progressive entanglement of Armenia, precisely its ruling élites, with Russia and its establishment as their security guarantor in light of the traumatic Genocide experience as described in the first chapter. The ascendence of the "Apricot Socialism" phenomenon, within the general framework *korenisatsya*, connected the nationalist cultural revival with entrenched USSR loyalism, reinforcing this trajectory with deep repercussions on foreign policy.. In particular, it catalysed Armenian politics on the Recognition of the Genocide issue and Nagorno-Karabakh, developing an identity-driven proto-foreign policy, within the agency limits of a Union Republic, ostensibly antagonistic towards Türkiye while reliant on Moscow. Furthermore, the parallel cultural revival in Karabakh catalysed a renewed political usage of national

history, under the emergence of "primordialism". The movement specifically focused on the reframing of the Meliks' invitation as a symbol of how Karabakh's freedom was achieved through Russian assistance. [143]

The notion of "memory diplomacy", formulated by Klymenko vis-à-vis Ukrainian elites' attempt to leverage collective memory of Soviet repression (e.g., Holodomor, Stalinist terror) to foster closer ties with the EU, perfectly fits this paradigm, as nationalist élite groups in Armenia increasingly leveraged the Genocide and the Karabakh conflict to assert political influence and pursue maximalist war goals against Azerbaijan and Türkiye.[144] In this cultural and memory-driven approach to foreign policy, Russia represents the natural interlocutor and point of reference for such ambitions. This phenomenon's first manifestation appeared during Apricot Socialism, as previously discussed, and reemerged abruptly after independence.

According to Klymenko, national memory, when enhanced by the political usage of history, as it extensively happened from the 1960s, becomes a vivid ideational layer influencing the decision-making process. The diffusion of memory diplomacy in the Armenian political environment reflects what Ishkanyan and others vehemently labelled as the "three-hundred-year-mistake" and an "emotional turn in foreign policy", signalling profound latent tensions connecting foreign-policy dynamics with domestic political cleavages.[145] During the early 1990s, as the Ter-Petrosyan administration toned down the emotional component of Armenia's diplomatic initiatives, historical memory remained a relatively secondary driver of Armenian foreign policy, in search of a compromise position with Türkiye. Nevertheless, the issue remained at the heart of the agenda and public debate, as exemplified by the controversy on the existence of an alleged "national ideology".[146] Indeed, many suggested that Armenia, being deprived of socialism, required a national ideology, intended as a unifying historical collective mission akin to the USA's "Manifest Destiny" or Russian Eurasian exceptionalism. In particular, the protection of Armenia and Armenians in neighbouring countries from cultural genocide was understood as the founding principle of this alleged national ideology. Levon Ter-Petrosyan contested this notion, pointing out the illiberal character of a hardly definable pseudo-category, entailing, according to the ANM, a mythological distortion of history. [147]

These tensions reached an apogee in 1997 when the militant "Yerkrapah" (Guardians of the land) union of Karabakh veterans, led by former communist cadres and military strongmen such as the

[143] Tchilingirian, "Nagorno Karabakh", 435-461.
[144] Klymenko,*The Role of Historical Narratives*, 41-46.
[145] Astourian, , "From Ter-Petrossian to Kocharian".
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

disloyal Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, played a key role in organising demonstrations and propelling Levon Ter-Petrosyan to resign, in what has been described as "an internal coup" within the Armenian élite.[148] According to Thomas de Waal, the group represents one of the most influential organisations in Armenian politics, deeply entangled with political and business power centres.[149] Prime Minister Kocharyan, whose nomination was intended to reconcile Ter-Petrosyan's policies with the symbolism of Karabakh, was reported to be complicit with part of the military apparatus in exercising pressure to force the president's resignation, under the reasoning that he was acting against Armenian national interests.

2.3.1 The role of élites' cohesion and structure

The importance of élites' mobilisation of narratives also intersects with Ripsman and Taliaferro's conceptualisation of élite cohesion and structure as a core determinant of foreign policy. While the notion of "élite" itself may seem elusive, as Ripsman and Taliaferro merely refer to all the key decision-making actors within a state, such as the apical bureaucratic apparatuses and senior politicians, the case of Armenia provides a more concrete example. In the aftermath of the post-Soviet transition, marked by weak rule of law, lack of transparency in political and economic restructuring and extensive growth of corruption, the country was invested, similarly to other former USSR member states, by widespread clientelism and the emergence of the oligarchic phenomenon. Paraphrasing Russian sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya, oligarchs are small heterogeneous groups of individuals who accumulated extensive economic power amid and after the fall of communism and use it to exercise control and influence in the sphere of politics or media.[150] This process often followed a tumultuous trajectory, especially in Russia, during the convulsive transition from state-planning to a market economy.

However, in the case of Armenia, as noted by Cristoph H. Stefes, the presence of influential paramilitary groups and the smooth reconversion of communist *nomenklatura* to the nationalist cause, has facilitated power continuity and the birth of a highly centralised and institutionalised system of endemic corruption, where myriad patronage networks and tight businessmen-public officials clans

[148] Christoph H. Stefes, "Governance, the State, and Systemic Corruption: Armenia and Georgia in Comparison",*Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 73-83.
[149] Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 244.
[150] Olga V. Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, "The Rise of the Russian Business Elite", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005).

dominate the political landscape.[151] Unlike other former soviet republics, such as Ukraine, where the fragmentation of oligarchic clans has partially prompted political pluralism[152], the ANM's uncontested dominance until the late 1990s played a key role in shaping state-building, favouring vertical decision-making and power concentration in clientelist networks.[153] Yulia Antonyan's study on Armenian oligarchy, drawing a parallelism between modern Armenia and the feudal system of Ancient Armenia based on the wording employed by the oligarchs she interviewed, accurately describes the vertical centralisation of corruption. In particular, she identifies the president as the "King" and the *Catholicos* as his closest political counterpart, with oligarchs as "vassals".[154] In this scheme, proximity to the King and the Catholicos represents the founding principle of hierarchy between oligarchs. The phenomenon, also known as "state capture" by élites, evolved in direct connection with the Karabakh war, as political entrepreneurs and military leaders known as "*asfalti fidayi*" (asphalt fighters) amassed wealth and influence in the conflict, reinvesting it in the construction sector and other business ventures.[155] The linkage between the conflict, political power and wealth became increasingly relevant, especially in neighbouring Karabakh, where the military dominated local institutions and the economy. Moreover, the South Caucasus is the region of the former Soviet Union where wealth and political influence are most closely intertwined, making allegiance to oligarchic networks a core characteristic of political ventures.[156]

Ter-Petrosyan's fall did not negatively affect this trend, which became even more pronounced under his successor, President Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008). The 2014 Transparency International Report further confirms the tendency, suggesting that roughly 35% of the nation's GDP at the time was to some degree under the control of oligarchic clans and that rampant corruption constituted the norm rather than the exception.[157] According to researcher David Petrosyan, around 40-50 families who exploited voucher liberalisation in the early 1990s controlled 50% of the wealth by 2010.[158]

The cultural heritage of Apricot Socialism and the élites' involvement in warfare activities led their "state capture" result in a newly pervasive diffusion of memory in Armenian politics, and the

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[151] Stefes, Governance, the State, and Systemic Corruption.
[152] Wojciech Konończuk, Denis Cenușa, and Kornely Kakachia, *Oligarchs in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as Key Obstacles to Reforms* (Centre for Eastern Studies, Expert-Grup, Georgian Institute of Politics, May 24, 2017).
[153] Ibid.
[154] Yulia Antonyan, "Being an 'Oligarch' in the Armenian Way", in *Elites and "Elites": Transformations of Social Structures in Post-Soviet Armenia and Georgia*, (Yerevan: Academic Swiss Caucasus Net, 2016), 110-169.
[155] Yulia Antonyan, "Being an 'Oligarch'".
[156] Ion Marandici, "Oligarchs, Political Ties and Nomenklatura Capitalism: Introducing a New Dataset", *Europe-Asia Studies* 76, no. 5 (2024).
[157] Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2014*, (Transparency International, December 2014).
[158] David Petrosyan, "Oligarchy in Armenia", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 53-54 (July 17, 2013).

establishment of memory diplomacy as the bulk of Armenian strategic culture in foreign policy making. Monuments commemorating and connecting past and present wars sprawled along the country as *asfalti fidayi* institutionalised their presence in the political life.[159]

Moreover, the Apostolic Church, which had played a fundamental role throughout the Special Relationship, remained a powerful, politically involved institution, enjoying unprecedented levels of trust in the Armenian society (74%).[160] Isabelle Burmester identifies the Church as a liaison actor with Russian authorities, fulfilling a role of cultural othering towards the EU and the US, depicted as incompatible with Armenian traditional values. While this claim is hardly empirically verifiable, from the late 1990s, the Church became profoundly entangled with Armenian nationalism and memory cultivation, as some religious celebrations were incorporated with secular ones, such as Vardanants Day, celebrating the victory of Christian Armenians over the Sasanids, and Church-State cooperation blossomed on the occasion of the newly established festive Yerkrapah Day.[161]

Returning to Ripsman and Taliaferro's framework, these considerations suggest high levels of élite cohesion, hence a propensity to privilege continuity in foreign policy rather than change, and unquestionable relevance of élites in dictating foreign-policy priorities, especially vis-à-vis Nagorno-Karabakh, echoing their past role in cementing Armenia's connection with Russia. The cohesion of the élites, which represents a core element in cementing continuity in foreign policy, was only partially undermined by the military-sponsored takeover of power, leading to the demise of the ANM. The event did not substantially alter the coherence of the system, which became even more centred on the warfare-oligarchy nexus. These elements overlap with a further determinant of foreign policy in the framework: regime type and institutional strength.

2.3.2 Regime Structure: reverse patron-client relations and façade democracy

In this regard, Armenia's institutional architecture presents almost unique features in its relationship with the Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, the *de facto* state that emerged in the aftermath of the "Bishkek Protocol" of 1994. According to the wide consensus in the literature studying *de facto* states, Armenia and Artsakh display traditional patron-client relations, understood as the patronage

[159] Lusine Kharatyan and Gayane Shagoyan, *Memory Politics of the Republic of Armenia: 30 Years in Review* (Yerevan: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2022).
[160] Isabell Burmester, ed., *EU and Russian Hegemony in the 'Shared Neighbourhood'* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).
[161] Kharatyan and Shagoyan, *Memory Politics*.

exercised by a sponsoring state regarding the client state's achievement of *de facto* independence.[162] For instance, Armenia's military and political contribution played a pivotal role in the Karabakh war, with Armenian nationals accounting for roughly 50% of the Karabakh Defence Army.[163] Armenia officially recognised this commitment in its national security strategies as "the duty to protect the security and the human rights of the people of Artsakh".[164] Parallelly, the Constitution of Artsakh also enshrines this close relationship, stating that Artsakh shall implement a policy aiming at political, economic and military cooperation and ensuring comprehensive ties and security with Armenia[165]. Indeed, the two entities pursued deep integration in military and economic matters, as Artsakh's budgetary constraints made it increasingly reliant on Armenian financial assistance.[166] At first sight, analysing the level of penetration of the patron state in the client state institutions, it appears that Armenia exercised a high degree of control on its client, akin to other examples in the post-Soviet space, given the number of ministerial and high-level positions occupied by Armenians and the scale of the economic dependence.[167] However, as noted by Helge Blakkisrud, the circulation of élites from the late 1990s also suggests a reverse phenomenon, a unique client penetration, if not control, over the patron's institutions and political scene.[168] Firstly, this development is exemplified by the fact that, between 1997 and 2018, the Armenian presidency was held by individuals, respectively Kocharyan and Sargsyan, who were not only Karabakhis, but former influential members of the Karabakh Committee and the Artsakh Government, as Kocharyan himself was its first president (1994-1997). Moreover, multiple apical positions were destined for former Karabakh officials. Seyran Ohanyan, a Karabakhi war veteran, first served as Defence Minister of Karabakh (1999-2007) and subsequently assumed the post of Defence Minister in Armenia (2008-2016).[169] Movses Hakobyan, General of the N-K Defence Army and Defence Minister (2007-2015), became Deputy Chief of Staff and later Chief of Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces as part of a "job swap" with Levon Mnatsakanyan, who left the position for Artsakh, where he assumed the role vacated by Hakobyan.

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[162] Helge Blakkisrud, Tamta Gelashvili, Nino Kemoklidze, and Pål Kolstø, "Does Recognition Matter? Exploring Patron Penetration of De-Facto State Structures", *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 22 March 2024.
[163] International Crisis Group, *Post-war Prospects for Nagorno-Karabakh*, Europe Report no. 264, June 9, 2021.
[164] Republic of Armenia, *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia*, approved by the National Security Council of the President's Office (Yerevan: Presidential Office, 2016)
[165] *Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh*, adopted by referendum on February 20, 2017 (Stepanakert: Republic of Artsakh, 2017), chapter I.
[166] Vincenc Kopeček, "Political Institutions in the Post-Soviet De Facto States in Comparison: Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh", *Annual of Language and Politics and Politics of Identity* 10 (2016): 73-94.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Blakkisrud et al., "Does Recognition Matter?"
[169] Franziska Smolnik and Uwe Halbach, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in Light of the Crisis over Ukraine", in *Not Frozen! The Unresolved Conflicts over Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Light of the Crisis over Ukraine*, SWP Berlin, September 2016, 61-80.

[170] In one of the most evident examples, Samvel Babayan, a Karabakhi paramilitary leader, ran as a candidate in the 2007 parliamentary elections from Karabakh. Later accused in 2011 of representing chauvinistic tendencies within the Karabakh movement, he fled to Russia seeking asylum. Generally speaking, a "Karabakh Klan", comprising politicians and officials from the Artsakh Republic or directly connected to its government, progressively overcame the post-*perestroika* local Armenian ruling class, resulting in an overlapping of Armenian-Artsakh state power structures.[171] While, as aforementioned, the ANM ruling class was already extremely connected to the Karabakh issue, the post-1997 birth of a reverse client-patron relationship further entangled Armenia's policy-making prerogatives with Stepanakert's needs and reinforced the memory diplomacy approach that the Levon-Ter Petrosyan presidency had staunchly opposed.

Parallelly, this phenomenon was followed by a replication of Karabakh's domestic institutional architectures by the Karabakh Klan. In Artsakh, the "siege culture" dominating the political scene regarded the Armenian parliamentary tradition as a luxury the country could not afford, leading, under Robert Kocharyan presidency in the early 1990s, to a *de facto* level of power concentration in the office of the president comparable to the scholarly popular concept of super-presidentialism constitutional designs in many post-Soviet countries.[172] This passage was later formalised in 2017 with the abandonment of semi-presidentialism in favour of a presidential system of government. At the same time, in Armenia, Kocharyan increasingly centralised power through constitutional rearrangements, which granted him extensive oversight over the nomination of judges, prosecutors and the national anti-corruption agency officials.[173] Indeed, while the state of democracy in the country already presented several vulnerabilities during the Ter-Petrosian mandate, as allegations of fraud were widespread during the 1996 elections, the subsequent decade was marked by a significant deterioration of democratic institutions and civil liberties and tightening of government control on the media.[174] According to the OSCE, the 2003 parliamentary elections were marred by political violence and systemic suppression of indipendent media. Moreover, Freedom House indicates a slight worsening of the Political Freedom index, which passed from an average of 4.1 in 1991-1998 to 4.6 in 1998-2008, signalling a curtailment of political liberties.[175] Despite often ranking freer than other

[170] Smolnik and Halbach, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.
[171] Stefes, "Governance, the State, and Systemic Corruption".
[172] Kopeček, "Political Institutions".
[173] Stefes, "Governance, the State, and Systemic Corruption"
[174] Doğru, "Nationalism and Democratization".
[175] Ibid.

proximate post-Soviet countries, Armenia has been generally regarded as a façade democracy or a hybrid regime from the beginning of the new millennium.[176]

Reading these developments in conjunction with the consolidation of a centralised and vertically directed system of endemic corruption and oligarchic networks, it becomes evident that the emergence of a more authoritarian and Karabakh-skewed system of government, dominated by the political instrumentalisation of historical memory, represents a key prism for understanding the development of foreign policy. Ter-Petrosyan's pragmatic declination of Complementarism found a hostile cultural environment, driven by the concrete political repercussions of deeply rooted historical trajectories. The cohesion of élite networks, as active political actors and interpreters of history, represented a further constraint to his aspirations, especially after they consolidated their *raison d'être* around the Karabakh issue and contested the president's legitimacy through the lens of the conflict. Recalling the initial theoretical debate on structure and agency, Neo-realists' premises appear almost reversed, as historical-ideational patterns and institutional dynamics primarily lead to change and continuity in foreign policy.

2.3.3 Individual agency: The Kocharyan and Sargsyan's agendas

In parallel to these domestic components of foreign policy (strategic culture, élite cohesion and regime structure), the role of individual factors has to be comprehensively analysed. Given the personalised character of Armenian politics and the presidential pre-eminence in decision-making, the agendas espoused by presidents represent the most tangible and relevant example of individual agency. In line with Aberg and Terzyan's analysis, this dissertation argues that Robert Kocharyan's agency was notably more solid than his predecessor's precarious foreign policy legacy. Under Kocharyan, foreign policy formulation became a presidential appanage, mostly directed in tandem with the deferential Security Council, sidelining the National Assembly, similar to its conduct in Russia. Consequently, the Security Council, originally intended to handle only delicate matters such as Nagorno-Karabakh, became the core centre of foreign policy decision-making in light of the growing "Karabakhization" of Armenia's security concerns. [177]

Nevertheless, while the two authors entirely attribute its agency to the super-presidential character of his administration, it should be rather understood through this framework as a result of the

[176] Ibid.
[177] Papazian, "Explaining Continuity".

realignment and convergence of the country's foreign-policy determinants. From his inauguration speech, Robert Kocharyan stressed the importance of Genocide recognition and judicial reparations by Türkiye, returning to the "emotional" approach of memory diplomacy and putting the matter at the centre of Armenia's agenda at the 1998 UNGA, marking the 50th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention. Particularly, he declared, "We are neighbours, and we must find a common ground, but not at the expense of our historical memory".[178] The pursuit of material gains at the expense of national identity was regarded as inconsistent with the country's strategic culture, or national ideology, in the terms used in the Armenian public debate. Furthermore, private foreign-policy consultants from the diaspora, such as Gerard Libaridian or former minister Raffi Hovannisian, were discarded in favour of the traditional Soviet bureaucracy.

Indeed, the new president, rather than a powerful actor of his own, represented the convergence of the presidency with the ruling élites and their strategic culture in rejection of colliding individual aspirations, enhanced by the centralisation of decision-making and the affirmation of Karabakh as the ultimate source of political legitimacy. Thus, the embrace of memory diplomacy by the new administration served a twofold function. In the domestic environment, it fostered power consolidation; in the external domain, it aimed at leveraging the military gains against concessions deemed as counterproductive. Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, this understanding entailed halting the peace negotiations and maintaining the status quo. In particular, it aimed at keeping under Artsakh's control the roughly seven districts not originally part of the N-K oblast, which it occupied as a safety belt against Azerbaijani incursions and as a bridge to Armenia proper. In the words of Robert Kocharyan, his commitment meant that: "The Nagorno-Karabakh issue is a national issue, and we should achieve the international recognition of the Karabakh people's right to self-determination, ensuring its development within safe frontiers and the permanent determination of geographic connection with Armenia".[179] While some authors[180] highlight the similarities with Ter-Petrosyan's stance, whose firm support for Nagorno-Karabakh was driven by fear of ethnic cleansing of the local population and emphasis on self-determination, there was a significant shift in both rhetoric and substance. The new policy did not consider Artsakh as a problematic contingency, as the previous administration did, but rather the main tool to temporarily protect Karabakh Armenians in preparation for an eventual annexation, adopting a securitisation understanding of Armenian

Parallelly, concerning Complementarism, the new administration reconciled continuity with notable changes. The Complementarity notion remained the main guiding compass for Armenia, even

[178] Terzyan, "The Evolution of Armenian Foreign Policy".
[179] "Armenia: New President Is Sworn In", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 9, 1998.
[180] Papazian, "Explaining Continuity".

receiving formal recognition in the 2007 National Security Strategy, as the new foreign minister, Vartan Oskanian (1998-2008), espoused its core tenets at the 62nd United Nations General Assembly. The Complementarity notion remained the main guiding compass for Armenia, even receiving formal recognition in the 2007 National Security Strategy, as the new foreign minister, Vartan Oskanian (1998-2008), espoused its core tenets at the 62nd United Nations General Assembly. Oskanian, reiterating its adherence to this principle, suggested a "lack of alternative" for the region's stability.[181] At the same time, Complementarism underwent significant modifications, as exemplified by Armenia's view of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which represented a major failure of the Georgian pro-Western ideological reorientation.[182]

Indeed, instead of entailing a parallel and equal development of complementary foreign-policy vectors, this new course established a clear-cut hierarchy between them. Alignment with Russia acquired, or more precisely, reacquired, a privileged status in the presidential agenda, in terms of importance and temporal horizons. Hence, following the signing of the 2000 Armenia-Russian Federation Strategic Partnership, relations intensified significantly, driven by the exponential growth of military procurement contracts and the deepening of energy ties. The bottom line logic of this position, the relevance of the precarious Karabakh security environment, determined the prioritisation of short-term security guarantees over alternative engagements.

Despite losing prominence and temporal priority, engagement with the EU and the US was reconciled with Kocharyan's identitarian agenda, recalibrating it through the lens of memory diplomacy and the Karabakh conflict. Indeed, rather than an immediate pragmatic necessity to enhance Armenia's autonomy, it became a long-term civilisational choice, signalling belonging to a common Euro-Christian cultural environment. This idea conflicted with the characterisation of Armenia as a unique East-West bridge, and implied distance from Azerbaijanis, whom Kocharyan even addressed as ethnically incompatible with the Armenians, in light of the 1988-1990 anti-Armenian pogroms in the Azerbaijani SSR.[183] Adherence to a European Model of Development became the guiding vision of Armenian Complementarism, as reflected in the words of national security advisor Hayk Kotanijan, describing it as an inherent by-product of Armenia's European roots and non-conflictual to other vectors of foreign policy, such as reinforced cooperation with Russia.[184] Thus, Kocharyan's vision

[181] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, "An Exclusive Interview by Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian to the Mediamax Agency", press release, 2002.
[182] Babajanyan, "Armenian-Georgian Relations".
[183] Terzyan, "The Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy".
[184] Ibid.

expressed a rationalised, yet less assertive and strongly identitarian form of Complementarism, with a more established divide between short-term priorities and long-term civilizational aspirations.

In this context, autocratisation and the élites' acquiescence significantly shaped and strengthened Kocharyan's agenda, which largely reflected the views of Armenian-Karabakhi élites. The ascendance of Sargsyan, a close ally of Kocharyan and member of the Karabakh movement, to the post of president in 2008 marked a new phase in the presidential approach to Complementarism. Given his involvement in Karabakh and Yerapakh political activities, his takeover was generally understood as a continuation of the previous president's policies.[185] Indeed, the lack of significant changes among the other components of foreign policy-making at the moment of his inauguration paved the way for continuity, such as in the form of renewed emphasis on Armenian identity as the founding ground of its foreign policy, and representation of Europe as the "civilisational choice" and a staple European Model of Development to which Armenia is destined. Parallelly, Sargsyan continued to describe the partnership with Russia as the main pivot of Armenian security and independence.

Nevertheless, his agenda deviated slightly from his predecessor's. While Kocharyan's maintained a façade attitude towards Europeanisation, akin to the model of declarative Europeanisation, Sargsyan's vision of Complementarism placed particular importance on the concept "Armenia as a small nation",[186] whose only means to assert its independence was via economic development. Hence, through an economicist understanding of foreign policy, engagement with Europe indirectly reacquired prominence within the Complementarism compass. Sargsyan, while not drifting away from the path Armenia embarked on from the onset of Karabakhisation, aimed at striking a better balance between the constitutive vectors of Complementarism. At the same time, his agency capabilities partially suffered from a degree of de-Kahrabakhisation of state institutions the country endured, since many local Armenians demonstrated resentment towards the Karabakh-dominated public administration and corruption.[187] Sargsyan's last act before leaving office was to reluctantly sign a constitutional reform transforming Armenia into a parliamentary Republic.

[185] Anahit Shirinyan, *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*, Chatham House Research Paper (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, March 2019).
[186] Manvel Sargsyan, "Armenia's Foreign Policy: The Main Challenges and the Key Issues", in Armenia's Foreign and Domestic Politics: Development Trends, ed. Karen Harutyunyan (2013), 35-47.
[187] Ibid.

Fig.2: Presidential Agendas' Summary Table

	Levon Ter-Petrosyan	**Kocharyan**	**Sargsyan**
	Scarcely identitarian, pragmatic, Russia is a *primum inter pares* partner; Artsakh is a problem rather than a solution.	Highly identitarian, hierarchy of objectives, Artskah is a tool to protect ethnic Armenians.	Identitarian, The economy is the main tool to protect Artsakh and Armenia
Compatibility with other FP determinants	-Low with strategic culture -Initially medium-low with élites, low after Kharabakhisation. - Centralised corruption agency limited by parliamentarism and liberal reforms	-High with strategic culture -High with élites -Centralised corruption agency enhanced by vertical decision-making	-High with strategic culture -Medium-high with élites - Limited de-Kharabakhisation

2.4. The External Dimension: Foreign Powers' activism vis-à-vis Complementarism

The structure of the international environment, as proposed by Ripsman and Taliaferro, represents a pivotal *stimulus* to which internal political dynamics are subject, dialogically interplaying in the formulation of foreign-policy considerations and doctrines, such as Complementarism. In the present case, it is particularly significant, as, by definition, Complementarism aims to find a synthesis between the stances of all the parties involved in the region. In particular, as it entailed engagement in non-conflictual relations and the development of peaceful regional integration initiatives, and viewed constructive region-building as one of its main tools, Complementarism faced the rise of foreign activism as a co-factor in driving its evolution trajectory.

For instance, Levon Ter-Petrosyan's assertive policy towards Russia not only faced widespread domestic reluctance to accept his understanding of Russia as a "chauvinistic empire" but also international developments that collided with his foreign-policy assumptions and hindered their implementation.[188]

His strategy was partly prompted by Türkiye's president Turgut Özal's (1989-1993) expression of openness to some degree of recognition of the Armenian Genocide and his policy of restitution of land and properties to Armenians as part of the "Van project".[189] Özal saw the issue as detrimental to Türkiye's reputation, especially vis-à-vis Europe, and a source of tensions with its neighbours.

Under "Özalism", which represented a Western-looking reconciliation of Islam with the Turkish political environment, Türkiye envisioned a partial revisionism of its Kemalist tradition. [190]It was among the first countries to recognise Armenia's independence in 1991, albeit hesitantly, and it even conceded the passage of European humanitarian aid to Armenia during the harsh winter of 1992-1993. This was part of a newly developed concept of active foreign policy (Aktif Dış Politika), in the context of the opening prospects at the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, for Türkiye's multilevel regional commitment.[191] The creation of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), reuniting Türkiye, Armenia and Azerbaijan, represented the most significant achievement of Özal's and Ter-Petrosyan's initiatives.[192]

However, as the Karabakh conflict escalated, Ankara became more aligned with Azerbaijan and hostile to Armenia's conciliatory stances, providing technical and military support to Baku amid the resurgence of inflammatory pan-Turkist sentiments. Furthermore, since Ter-Petrosyan's normalisation policy entailed setting the past aside and avoiding its politicisation, even before the rising salience of Karabakh, Türkiye was only partially receptive and demanded stronger guarantees. More specifically, it set two preconditions for normalisation: explicit recognition that Armenia had no territorial demands over Eastern Anatolia, in a clear break with Apricot Socialism's memory diplomacy, and official abandonment of its international campaign for Genocide recognition, in exchange for some degree of historical revaluation in Türkiye's narrative.[193] While the first point was considered problematic but merely symbolic, as Armenia already endorsed Türkiye's territorial

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[189] Vicken Cheterian, "The Last Closed Border of the Cold War: Turkey-Armenia", *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32, no. 1 (2017): 70-90.
[190] Berdal Aral, "Dispensing with Tradition? Turkish Politics and International Society during the Özal Decade, 1983-93", *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2001): 72-88.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Astourian, "From Ter-Petrossian to Kocharian".
[193] Cheterian, "The Last Closed Border of the Cold War".

integrity through participation in the UN and the OSCE, the second one represented an unacceptable censure of Armenia's political tradition. These demands made Ter-Petrosyan's position unsustainable vis-à-vis the internal nationalist opposition, reinforcing the resurgence of memory diplomacy as the core of the strategic culture of the Armenian élites and a filter to interpret external events. [194]

Özal's sudden death in 1993 put a sudden end to this new phase of dialogue and marked a turn in the Turkish Active Foreign Policy, which became from the late 1990s increasingly more assertive and dictated by pan-Turkist and pan-Islamic geo-strategic imperatives, leading many commentators to redub it as "Neo-Ottomanism".[195] Threatened by Turkish involvement in the conflict, Artsakh authorities issued an official protest against what they deemed as the birth of a Pan-Turkist anti-Armenian alliance. By the end of 1993, Türkiye had enacted a border blockade against Armenia. This phenomenon, in conjunction with domestic developments, remarkably influenced the evolution of Complementarism, creating a conceptual imbalance between its original vectors and favouring Kocharyan's push for a hierarchical rationalisation, putting immediate security reassurances first.

The Russian Federation's activism represents the second international vector posing a limit to the evolution of Complementarism. Under Yetlsin, who broke the Soviet stance of relative neutrality towards the Karabakh issue, Russia partially reasserted its position as the security guarantor and peace broker of the region. The birth of the Community of Independent States (CIS) framework and its security counterpart, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which Azerbaijan left in 1999 in pursuit of deeper relations with Türkiye, institutionalised a close cooperation between the Russian Federation and Armenia. As aforementioned, the Russian Federation leveraged the Karabakh conflict to its advantage from its earliest stages, employing a policy of strategic ambiguity.[196] However, Russian involvement in the region and Armenian politics remained relatively limited until the late 1990s and did not inherently constitute a threat to Complementarism, being one of its founding elements. Moreover, Russia was more prone to use the conflict to pressure Azerbaijan, as it did to force its entry into the CIS in 1992 and impose unfavourable accords on the exploitation of the Caspian Sea, rather than exert more influence on Armenia.

From the early 2000s, this began to change with Vladimir Putin's ascendance and the adoption of a significantly more assertive and geo-economic foreign policy, especially towards the South Caucasus, where Russia abandoned its "pragmatic hegemony" phase (1996-2001), characterised by resounding

[194] Ibid.
[195] Astourian, "From Ter-Petrossian to Kocharian".
[196] Kavus Abushov, "Policing the Near Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (June 2009): 187-212.

great power rhetoric followed by scarce actions, in favour of new hegemonic ambitions.[197] More specifically, it aimed, in parallel with a renewed and strengthened CIS project, to pursue robust bilateral and Russian-led initiatives.[198] In this context, Armenia represented the main pivot of Russian efforts in the region, since relations with Georgia were already deteriorating and Azerbaijan was considered a less reliable actor. The Russian Federation, after the conclusion of the 2000 Strategic Partnership Agreement, leveraged its energy surpluses vis-à-vis Armenian security requests, offering allegedly mutually beneficial asset-for-debt in connection with security guarantees. These agreements included scrapping off around 100 million dollars of the Armenian debt with the Russian Federation in exchange for control of strategic energy assets, including hydroelectric and thermoelectric power plants, which, coupled with Armenia's integration into Russia's energy grid, resulted in a nearly total dependence (90%) on Russian energy production or distribution networks. [199] For instance, in 2006, Gazprom Armenia, a subsidiary fully controlled by Russia's state-owned company Gazprom, acquired the entire Armenian natural gas distribution network. These events signalled Russia's will to become more than a security provider for Armenia, establishing a relationship of clear-cut asymmetric dependence built on the monopoly of military deterrence and control over energy and key economic sectors.

However, Armenia did not perceive these actions as hostile or as a threat to Complementarism. Firstly, because the Russian neo-hegemonic approach initially relied more on rewards and co-optation than coercive methods, albeit accumulating influence and a large coercive capital for the future.[200] The Russian Federation, given its relative weakness on the international stage, largely unopposed Armenia's parallel entanglement with the EU.[201] It also charged Armenia an extremely discounted price for energy, around 40% than the one applied to Georgia, masquerading its assertiveness through beneficial contracts.[202] The Russian energy supply permitted Armenia to overcome its exclusion from Azerbaijan energy projects via Georgia, such as the Baku-Ceyhan oil, the Baku-Erzurum gas, and TAP/TANAP pipelines, in a further submission of political and economic policies to security needs.

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[197] Ria Laenen, "Russia's 'Vital and Exclusive' National Interests in the Near Abroad", in *Russia and Its Near Neighbours*, ed. Maria Raquel Freire and Roger E. Kanet (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 17-38.
[198] A. S. Naumenko, "Rossiiskaia politika povorota na Vostok 2014-2024 gg.: osnovnye rezul'taty", *Vlast*, 2025.
[199] Aram Terzyan, "Russian Policy, Russian Armenians and Armenia: Ethnic Minority or Political Leverage?",*CES Working Papers* 11, no. 2 (July 2019): 124-140.
[200] Syuzanna Vasilyan, "'Swinging on a Pendulum': Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union and With the European Union," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 1 (2016): 32-46.
[201] David A. Grigorian, Russia's Influence and Disinformation Campaign in Armenia, Policy Brief No. 12/2024 (European Council Initiative, 2024).
[202] Laure Delcour and Hrant Kostanyan, "Towards a Fragmented Neighbourhood? Policies of the EU and Russia and Their Consequences for the Area that Lies In-Between", *CEPS Essay* no. 17 (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, October 17, 2014).

Secondly, because of the growing nexus between Russian assertiveness and the Armenian political environment. Russia appealed to Armenian élites networks by actively employing the Special Relationship narrative and presenting itself as the benevolent protector of the Armenians.[203] Russia recalled explicitly its previous role in protecting Armenia from existential threats and guaranteeing its political and cultural autonomy. Thus, it increasingly mobilised history to pursue political goals, propagating through textbooks, patronage networks, official statements and Russian-speaking media its claim of being the historical defender of the country.[204] As Armenian-Kharabakhi élites were utilising memory diplomacy to assert their influence and pursue their maximalist and identitarian war goals, they provided fertile grounds for such initiatives. The Armenian Church repeatedly attacked "Turkophile liberal groups", allegedly acting against Armenian national interests.[205] Catholicos Karenin II also personally expressed to Putin his gratitude for the measures taken to preserve the historical heritage of the Armenians. President Putin met Karekin II multiple times, even granting him in 2023 the "Order of Honour" medal. [206] Russia identified and significantly exploited the overlap between its interests and the importance of memory in Armenian politics, stirring memory diplomacy to its benefit. This process was significantly enhanced by the growing business connection between the Armenian oligarchy and Russian authorities.

Indeed, numerous Armenian oligarchs, either belonging to the diaspora or possessing interests in Russia, became pivotal political assets. This is the case of billionaire Aram Abrahamyan, former president of the Armenian Union in Russia and recipient of the Russian "Order of Merit of the Fatherland" for deepening Russo-Armenian friendship.[207] In particular, he fully funded the construction of a Museum of Russian-Armenian Friendship in his native town in Armenia and developed cultural projects in Nagorno-Karabakh on behalf of the Russian Federation. According to Azerbaijani sources, Abrahamyan was also one of the biggest arms suppliers to the Artsakh Army. Moreover, Russian authorities invited Samvel Karapetyan, an influential Armenian-Russian oligarch, to invest more in Armenia and represent there the interests of Armenians. In 2015, the Russian

[203] Zarhui Margaryan, "Armenia's Foreign Policy: Between Diversification and Dependence". *Foreign Trade: Economics, Finance, Law*, no. 139, (2025).
[204] Daniela Sagramoso, *Russian Imperialism Revisited: From Disengagement to Hegemony* (New York: Routledge, 2020).
[205] Lilit Hakobyan, Memory Politics of the Republic of Armenia: Analysis of the Main Trends (Yerevan: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023)
[206] Kostas Onisenko, "'Thank You' of Armenian Patriarch to Putin for His Stance on War with Azerbaijan",*Orthodox Times*, November 21, 2020.
[207] *The Oligarchic System in Armenia and the Influence of Diaspora Tycoons*, Center of Analysis of International Relations (2022).

company RAO sold the control of Armenian electric networks to the Tashi group, owned by Kharapetyan.[208]

This narrative and interests conjunction proceeded in pairs with Kocharyan's power centralisation and autocratic turn, in what Professor Terzyan identifies as an example of authoritarian learning, cemented by following the example of other Russian-sponsored autocratic and deferential regimes in the post-Soviet space. Whether this interpretation accurately reflects reality or not, the Russian interception of Armenian political dynamics well captured Kocharyan's pursuit of rationalisation and quest for security guarantees and identitarian policies.

Indeed, the interplay between foreign pressure (Turkish and Russian assertiveness) and internal dynamics represents the driving force of Armenian foreign policy making, leading to a *de facto* Russian-oriented shift within Complementarism, despite pervasive claims of continuity. While Russian assertiveness did not prejudice Armenia's engagements with the West, particularly its path towards EU integration, it paved the way for a redefinition of its foreign policy posture. It embarked on a process of growing *tout-court* dependence on Russia, falling outside the notion of a primus inter pares, and reinforcing its understanding of its foreign policy priorities through the identitarian lenses of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The 2007-2008 biennium, characterised by Vladimir Putin's historic Munich Speech and Russian military intervention in Georgia, enlarged the scope of this assertive turn, with the Russian Federation assuming a more antagonistic posture against the West.

These events ignited the anticipated launch of the 2009 EU Eastern Partnership (EaP), which represented one of the most significant turning points in the regional geopolitical equilibrium, further derailing the *status quo* on which Complementarism relied. Elaborated as a component of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) aimed to promote political and economic integration and democratic reforms without a path to EU membership. It signalled a never-before-seen level of EU activism in the region and the abandonment of a "post-Soviet" approach in relations with former Soviet Union countries, albeit explicitly rejecting geopolitical or power politics bloc logics.[209] In the words of Carl Bildt, Swedish foreign affairs minister and one of the proponents of the project, "The Eastern Partnership is not an influence sphere, but a community founded values".[210] Commissioner Füle explicitly stated that "the Eastern Partnership is not against Russia or against their interests".[211]

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[208] Ibid.
[209] Laure Delcour, "Dealing with the Elephant in the Room: The EU, Its 'Eastern Neighbourhood' and Russia", *Contemporary Politics* 24, no. 1 (2018): 1-17
[210] Valentina Pop, "EU Expanding Its 'Sphere of Influence,' Russia Says", *EUobserver*, March 21, 2009.
[211] European Commission, "Statement on the Pressure Exercised by Russia", press release, 2013.

For a country like Armenia, the EaP presented the perfect opportunity for modernisation and the embrace of the European Model of Development, without renouncing the Russian security umbrella, as envisioned by Sargsyan's economicist agenda. Indeed, from the early 2010s, Azerbaijan's exponential oil revenues significantly benefited its military capabilities, leading to an arms race between the two countries and budgetary concerns among the Armenian establishment. While Armenia's economy generally outperformed its rival in the previous decade, after the 2008-2009 crisis deeply affected the country, it started to lag behind Azerbaijan's GDP growth.[212] More specifically, the construction sector, which had represented the core source of revenue of the *asfalti fidayi* class and the driving motor of the economy during the 2000s, crumbled dramatically, revealing massive ineffective state subsidies and corruption networks. In this context, as Sargsyan stressed, economic modernisation and development began to represent an existential matter no longer detached from national security concerns, and the EaP became a fundamental and timely vector for his agenda. Rather than pursuing Kocharyan's declarative Europeanisation, Sargsyan's focus on the economy led to the opposite outcome, resulting in what researcher Laure Delcour labels as "silent Europeanisation".[213] Indeed, Armenia demonstrated growing receptivity to EU standards, legal templates and economic directives, while minimising political costs by avoiding emphasising joining the EU or pursuing further political integration. The country became a frontrunner in convergence to EU norms and trading regulations in comparison to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus. The EaP's stimulus represented an ideal progression of the 1990s PCAs after a decade of Russia-first Complementarism, while at the same time it did not alter Armenia's preference for security-driven choices and its strong commitment to Russia. Sargsyan's policies lead to a more distinct sectoralisation of Complementarism, accentuating the economic-military divide between engagement with the EU and Russia.

Besides economic and defence necessities, EaP's reference to common values and economic models also intersected well with the memory diplomacy filter, although not to the extent of Russian conscious exploitation of it, given the importance Kocharyan and Sargsyan attributed to the "civilizational choice" of belonging to a community of European nations. [214] Moreover, the bottom-line non-conflictual and post-modern character of the EaP mirrored the Complementarist rejection discourse of zero-sum games and mutually hostile alliances.

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[212] Laure Delcour, "Faithful but Constrained? Armenia's Half-Hearted Support for Russia's Regional Integration Policies in the Post-Soviet Space", in *The Geopolitics of Eurasian Integration*, ed. David Cadier, LSE IDEAS Reports no. 42 (London: LSE, January 2014), 38-45.
[213] Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczuk, "The EU's Unexpected 'Ideal Neighbour'? The Perplexing Case of Armenia's Europeanisation", *Journal of European Integration* 37, no. 4 (June 2015): 491-507.
[214] Terzyan, "The Evolution of Armenian Foreign Policy".

Nevertheless, despite these velleities of non-antagonistic engagement, the EU-led region-building attempt soon collided with Russian neo-hegemonic ambitions in the region, as Russia's foreign minister Sergej Lavrov harshly commented: "We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence?".[215] More specifically, Russia contested the incentive-based conditionality approach underpinning the EaP as a coercive mechanism to exert political influence and fragment the unity of the "Near Abroad". The EU's inclusive attitude towards Russia collided with its stringent regulatory requirements and Russia's assertive actions, leading to the emergence of a "Contested Neighbourhood" concept, rather than a Common Neighbourhood.[216] Concerning Armenia, the Russian Federation objected to the securitisation of economic concerns, which appeared as a further political move to distance the South Caucasus from its traditional allegiances.

In turn, Russia responded by launching its regional economic integration project, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), initially comprising Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. This initiative, by offering deeper levels of integration, demonstrated immediate incompatibility with the Association Agreements and the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) that Armenia was negotiating as part of the EaP and planning to finalise by the EaP the Vilnius summit of November 2013. It represented an example of competitive regionalism to the extent that it was able to jeopardise Armenia's aspirations of peace-building through regionalism.[217] However, as the Armenian ruling class regarded the EU as the most effective paradigm for economic prosperity, and the country lacked physical borders with the other EAEU members, the EAEU's appeal remained extremely limited. By 2013, the EU had become Armenia's first trading partner and the DCFTA's establishment was projected to increase imports from the EU by 30%.[218]

In contrast to the EU's incentive-based and goal-specific approach and its previous stance, the Russian Federation enacted a vast campaign of punitive and erratic coercive measures. Since 2010, in parallel with the AA negotiations, it gradually increased its military support to Azerbaijan, until that, highly circumscribed to maintain a balance of power, providing advanced weaponry to Armenia's adversary. In August 2013, Vladimir Putin visited Baku, showing unprecedented proximity to the Aliyev's government, and signed a 4 billion dollar arms deal.[219] This choice fuelled

[215] Mats Braun and Anna Gromilova, "Competitive Regionalism in Eastern Europe? The Regional Organizations' Perceptions of Each Other", (European Union Studies Association, November 2023).
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Alexander Iskandaryan, *Armenia's Foreign Policy: Where Values Meet Constraints* (Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, August 2013).
[219] Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum".

new tensions, such as the 2014 Azerbaijan-Armenia border clashes. Furthermore, in the same year, Russia reversed the benevolent tone of its geoeconomic power position, hiking gas prices by 50%.[220] It also politicised the vast Armenian diaspora in Russia (accounting for circa 2 million people), both using it as a channel of its soft power and tightening its visa and immigration regime. As 90% of Armenian remittances come from Russia, corresponding to roughly 10% of its GDP, this threat represented a serious concern for Yerevan.[221]

Thus, Armenia first signed a non-binding cooperation agreement with the EEAU. On the 3rd September 2013, amid Sargsyan's visit to Putin in Moscow, the president abruptly announced his intention to renounce the AA/DCFTA to enter the EAEU in a sudden *volte-face*. Armenia's highly centralised decision-making system favoured such unenvisioned presidential choice, which appeared dictated by Russian pressure. As Sargsyan openly acknowledged: "*Our choice is not civilizational. It corresponds to the economic interests of our nation. We cannot sign the Association Agreement and increase gas price and electricity fee three times*". [222] Moreover, he stated that: "*participating in one military security structure (the CSTO) makes it unfeasible and inefficient to stay away from the relevant geo-economic area*".[223] Nonetheless, at the Vilnius Summit, Sargsyan partially reverted this stance, emphasising again to some degree the importance of the EaP, despite defending the renunciation of the AA/DFCTA.

These declarations remarkably contrasted with Sargsyan's agenda and pursuit of a sectoral understanding of Complementarism, making military and geo-economic security necessities inherently entangled. At the same time, they highlighted how the increasing competition and conflictuality between the EU and Russia-led region-building initiatives significantly shrank Armenia's room for agency, establishing mutually exclusive divides which pose a significant limit to Complementarism. The growing ascendance of multifaceted dependence on Russia resulted in what Laure Delcour labelled as a "security trap", from which maintaining a genuine capability to complement different vectors appears strongly hindered. According to Syuzanna Vasilyan, Sargsyan's U-turn reduced Armenia's policy to "Supplementarity", understood as a diminished understanding of Complementarism, bound to compliance with Russian political necessities.[224]

[220] Terzyan, "Russian Policy".
[221] Ibid.
[222] Aram Terzyan, "The EU vs. Russia in the Foreign Policy Discourse of Armenia: The Fragility of Normative Power or the Power of Russian Coercion", *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 8, no. 2 (2017).
[223] Laure Delcour, "The EU's Unexpected 'Ideal Neighbour".
[224] Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum".

2.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, Armenia's Complementarism is hardly explicable relying uniquely on structural or domestic factors, as the conjunction between the two groups of foreign policy determinants represents the key lens to understand the behaviour of the country amid shifting geopolitical scenarios. Through the present Constructivist-Neoclassical Realist FPA framework, it emerges that Armenia's unique history and involvement in the Russian conquest of the South Caucasus still generate deep and tangible reverberations on its domestic political dynamics and foreign policy standing. The filtering action of politicised historical memory, combined with the role played by élites networks, has increasingly shifted Complementarism towards Russia, under the dominance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the main prism for understanding foreign policy priorities. This securitisation phenomenon was not solely driven by the heritage of Apricot Socialism and Armenian-Karabakh nationalists, but also by the growing assertiveness of foreign actors, which limited some of the founding assumptions underpinning Complementarism and heightened the identitarian component of Armenian foreign policy. More specifically, Russia, following the "Armenia as our forepost" principle, significantly exploited Armenian memory politics, actively proposing itself as the historically benevolent protector of the Armenians.

However, alignment with Russia did not progress on a straight linear trajectory, as the Armenian leadership maintained a strong commitment to Complementarism, albeit adapting to changing political environments. While the pursuit of locally driven regional building and détente with Türkiye and Azerbaijan revealed its ephemeral character by the end of the 1990s, the hierarchization of Complementarism under Kocharyan left engagement with the EU as the long-term objective of Armenia, albeit in a context of growing dependence on Russia. This oscillating attitude further reemerged as Armenia's security needs prompted demands for economic modernisation as part of a European Model of Development, to which the EU's region-building attempts seemed to respond swiftly. Nevertheless, the increasing conflictual nature of regional relations and Armenia's enhanced exposure to Russia, as a result of its prioritisation of identity and security concerns, left the country victim to punitive coercive measures and demonstrated the growing pressure on the Complementarist model. While structural limitations were relatively secondary in embarking on this path, unlike what some Neo-realist scholars may suggest, they appear to be fundamental co-factors with memory diplomacy in detaching Complementarism from its original objectives and limiting its scope, resulting in *de facto* uni-vectorial reliance on Russia.

Chapter 3: The War in Ukraine as an epiphany: Evidence of limitation and quest for re-shape

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the disruptive impact of an exogenous intervening event, namely, the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, on the present model. The conflict does not entirely encapsulate the source of Armenian-Russian relations, which, as highlighted, reflect deep-rooted historical and regional dynamics. However, it offers a peculiar exemplifying case, given the entanglement between memory politics, political élites, the Karabakh War and Russia. Under Neo-realist premises, a small nation's international positioning represents, to put it succinctly, a mere result of systemic power relations. Following this reasoning, the War in Ukraine should either account for a negligible contingency to Armenia, incapable of stirring relevant foreign policy considerations, or be a cause of systemic change to the extent that it can remodulate its foreign policy standing.

Conversely, this dissertation suggests that its impact lies within the intersection of foreign and domestic policy, moving along the lines of memory diplomacy and ideational filters and interacting with domestic determinants of foreign policy. In particular, the War manifested the limitations of Complementarism vis-à-vis analogous foreign policy doctrines, for example, Kazakah Multivectorialism, firstly affecting the ideational dimension sustaining it, and only in a second moment influencing Armenia's conduct on the international arena. The translation of its effect to this domain, which is still ongoing, was developed in tandem with internal political dynamics, in a mutually reinforcing trend denoting Armenia's persisting agency, albeit in a complex and volatile context.

3.2 Unmasking Uni-vectorial reliance on Russia and the reverberations of Ukraine on the Caucasus

While foreign assertiveness in the South Caucasus and the growing incompatibility between different region-building attempts partially jeopardised the foundation of Armenia's Complementarism and undermined its ambitions of promoting regional integration, the Armenian leadership remained formally committed to its foreign policy posture. Sargsyan's "U-turn" sparked great controversy in the country[225], especially among the European-leaning youth; nonetheless, it did not prejudice the

[225] Ruzanna Stepanian, "EU Sees No Association Accord With Armenia", *Azatutyun*, September 13, 2013.

deeply entrenched memory-driven rhetoric in the political environment, as he reaffirmed that "*Building and strengthening Armenian nationhood upon the European model has been the conscious choice of ours, and that process is hence irreversible*".[226] Compatibility between Europe and Russia was promoted as a direct by-product of Armenia's belonging to a common cultural and political cradle, irrespective of the international scenarios. This stance mirrored the political heritage of Russian Colonial policies, which, as previously highlighted, had established the Special Relationship under the idea of the Armenians' alleged peculiarity vis-à-vis their neighbours and proximity to Europe. Decades of historical memory politicisation, despite limiting Complementarism's capability to reframe patronage relations with the Russian Federation, offered a partial justification of its existence based on identity notions.

Thus, Complementarism retained a merely formal character. Armenia vehemently repeated its commitment to continuity and adherence to multivectorialism, in the name of common "Europeanness", while de facto resorting to a univectorial alignment. This behaviour, akin to the *bandwagoning* strategy that Neo-realists erroneously had attributed to the country from the early 1990s, became the driving foreign-policy compass, as the illustrative cases of the Association Agreement and Russian coercive measures suggest.

A further indicator of such evolution is provided by Professor Shatlik Abanov's analysis of the voting cohesion of the EAEU country members at the UNGA. The study highlights that the EAEU represents a relatively weak platform for foreign policy coordination, with a voting cohesion score of around 80% and significant variability in intra-EAEU voting patterns.[227] Abanov suggests that the EAEU functions as an enhancing driver of political choices, rather than an independent framework for foreign policy-making. For instance, the emergence of Kazakhstan's multivectorial posture led to a significant decline in its cohesion with Russia, from 75% to 65%, despite its longstanding support for economic cooperation and integration through the EAEU.[228] On the contrary, Armenia's accession to the Union was followed by a remarkable +4% increase in voting cohesion with Russia, from an average of 76% in the 2000s and 2010s, signalling the culmination of the turn towards Russia that the emergence of memory diplomacy and Karabakhization had first ignited.[229] Sargsyan's oscillating

[226] Serzh Sargsyan, "Statement by Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia at the Third Eastern Partnership Summit", *The President of the Republic of Armenia*, 29 November 2013.
[227] Shatlyk Amanov, "The External Convergence of the EAEU on Global Issues: Evidence from the UN General Assembly Vote, 2000-2020", *Journal of Globalization Studies* 15, no. 1 (2024): 36-58.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.

economicist agenda, which aimed to reinvigorate Complementarism, ultimately failed to escape the security trap path on which the conjunction of domestic and external factors set Armenia.

However, this changed significantly with the progressive unfolding of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, this dissertation argues that such a profound exogenous shock drastically reshaped the regional geopolitical balance of the South Caucasus, unmasking Armenia's uni-vectorial reliance on Russia and exposing the risks of security dependence on a foreign patron. More specifically, the magnitude of this international systemic shift sparked a vast sequence of transformative repercussions affecting Armenia's security and internal foreign policy determinants. Indeed, according to FPA's literature, an external s*timulus* may fundamentally alter a country's international positioning, but only through mediation and by interaction with its domestic environment, especially in light of Kubalkova's view of politically and dialogically constructed memory as a core substrate for foreign policy making.

Firstly, the crisis strained relations between Armenia and Artsakh, de-coupling their interests and political positions. The authorities of Artsakh immediately welcomed the Crimean seizure in the name of the principle of self-determination, drawing a parallel with their case, and promoted massive public celebrations in Stepanakert.[230] On the contrary, Armenia's first reaction was more cautious and nuanced, as the Armenian Foreign Ministry issued a statement endorsing the peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis and distinguishing it from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[231] The chief of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Relations explicitly rejected any Crimea and N-K parallelism, deeming it entirely inappropriate and ill-founded. Consequently, against the wishes of Artsakh, Armenia announced its intention to abstain from the 68/282 UN resolution in defence of Ukrainian territorial integrity and condemning the referendum.[232] This voting position would have been coherent with the Complementarist approach of "choosing not to choose" and avoidance of antagonising positions and "block politics" dynamics.

Nevertheless, after a telephone conversation between Putin and Sargsyan, where the latter defined the referendum as an "exercise of self-determination", Armenia ultimately voted against the resolution, in line with Russia, Syria, North Korea, Eritrea and a few other countries.[233] The event, similar to the previous year's unexpected abandonment of the free trade agreement, represented a

[230] Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, "Armenia and the Ukrainian Crisis: Finding the Middle Ground", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 67–68 (2014): 14-17.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.
[233] "Armenian and Russian presidents say Crimea referendum an example of people's right to self-determination", ARKA, March 20, 2014.

significant blow to the aspiration to secure Armenian agency via Complementarism. It resurfaced the contradictions within the Armenian international posture that emerged in 2013 and manifested the recurrent usage of coercive power by the Russian Federation. It also weakened the common European cradle rhetoric, as Armenia not only rejected what it previously deemed as a "civilizational choice" (the Association Agreement) but also voted against the vast majority of European countries on an extremely politically sensitive issue. Despite the complex state of Armenian democracy, vast parts of the civil society, the opposition, and the Armenian press strongly deplored the association of Armenia with openly authoritarian regimes, as the country represents one of the most advanced democracies in the region.

At the same time, this late reorientation did not halt the Armenia-Artsakh disentanglement, given that Armenia consistently refused to recognise occupied Crimea as part of the Russian Federation, contrary to Artsakh's wishes.[234] Further frictions between the two emerged in the context of the negotiations with Azerbaijan during the aftermath of the brief 2016 Nagorno-Karabakh War, where Azerbaijani troops were for the first time able to move the 1994 line of contact in their favour and gain terrain.[235]

Indeed, an additional significant effect of the Ukrainian crisis on the Caucasus was the partial reversal of Russia's traditional policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its military repercussions. After having abandoned its Armenian-skewed balance of power approach by substantially supporting Azerbaijan in 2013-2014 to exert pressure on Armenia during the DFCTA negotiations, Russia was unable to counterbalance these actions with a pivot to Azerbaijan's ambitions. The Ukrainian conflict significantly compromised Russia's military and political capabilities to retain its role as the regional peace broker and Armenia's security guarantor, especially after the 2022 full-scale invasion. For instance, Russia's arms exports fell by 65% between 2020 and 2024 in comparison to 2015-2019, and its share of the global arms trade declined from 21% to 9%.[236] After 2016, Azerbaijan began exerting military pressure, benefiting from the Russian 2013-2014 military supplies, and continuous, unprecedented support from Türkiye. Azerbaijan's renewed assertiveness escalated in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War (or 44-day War), meeting a feeble Russian response and achieving control of the vast majority of Artsakh territory.[237] Russia substituted arms supplies to the involved parties with

[234] Vincenc Kopeček, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia: Who Instrumentalizes Whom?", in *De Facto States in Eurasia*, by Tomáš Hoch and Vincenc Kopeček (London: Routledge, 2020), 225-246.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Mathew George, Katarina Djokic, and Zain Huss, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2024*, SIPRI Fact Sheet (March 2025).
[237] International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War*, Europe Briefing No. 91 (December 22, 2020).

a peace-keeping mission guarding the new contact line as the main tool to maintain the conflict frozen. This softened military approach was also politically echoed by the Kremlin's official spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, who claimed that Russia has always maintained a "completely balanced stance", in stark contrast with its traditional preference towards Armenia.[238] The Russian Federation brokered a tripartite ceasefire agreement, excluding Nagorno-Karabakh. However, as Russia's military reputation remained tarnished by ambivalent military results on the Ukrainian field, and troop deployment to the Caucasus became increasingly difficult in light of manpower shortages, significant portions of its peacekeeping contingent were withdrawn, and control over several villages was handed over to Azerbaijan by 2022. The subsequent 2023 Azerbaijani offensive marked the end of the 30-year-old self-proclaimed state, which ceased to exist after Russia negotiated its surrender to Azerbaijan. Russia, given its undermined position in the region, seemed to return to its pragmatic hegemony approach towards the South Caucasus, leaving wide room for initiative to Azerbaijan. While military relations are not exhaustive of Russia's commitment to the South Caucasus and Armenia, which encompasses multiple dimensions and is currently under continuous evolution, they played a pivotal role in leveraging the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and perpetuating the historical security guarantor role as the core foundation of the Special Relationship with Armenia.

This development demonstrated the ephemeral character of Complementarism, whose equilibrium pursuit as a means to assert Armenian agency had been derailed by memory considerations and security concerns in light of the sensitive Nagorno-Karabakh question, attributing a quasi-monopoly of its security domain and external relations to Russia. By partially sacrificing political autonomy and alternative engagements, such as further involvement in the EaP or NATO cooperation, for the sake of the Russian security umbrella and Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia achieved neither. In particular, this was openly recognised by Prime Minister Pashinyan, who affirmed that Russian military involvement in Armenia "*not only does not guarantee Armenia's security, but it creates threats to Armenia*".[239] Such a strong statement not only conflicted with the Armenian National Security Strategy but also with the general idea of Complementarism, even in its original pragmatic understanding. It challenged the heritage of Apricot Socialism and memory diplomacy, as well as the centuries-old trajectory of entanglement with Russian interests in the Caucasus.

The fall of Nagorno-Karabakh also manifested its epiphany effect on the geopolitical imaginary of the Armenians, with the level of trust towards Russia plummeting from overwhelming levels in 2013

[238] Neil Melvin, "When the Chips Are Down: Russia's Stance in the Current Azeri-Armenian Confrontation", *RUSI Commentary*, October 6, 2020.
[239] Thomas de Waal, "Armenia Navigates a Path Away From Russia", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2024.

(83%) to a mere 56% in 2022, according to research conducted by Professor Atanesyan. [240] A plurality of 46% also showed confidence in the EaP, in comparison to only 29% in the EAEU. Parallel to this, France, whose president's international activism in favour of Armenia struck a chord with public opinion, was seen as the friendliest country according to a vast majority of Armenians (84%). While the role of the general public in shaping foreign-policy decisions represents a controversial point in the FPA literature, especially in countries characterised by a partially democratic institutional regime, a public opinion reversal of this magnitude embodies a deep identity crisis and a significant strategic culture shift. Subsequent polls indicate a further remarkable worsening of Russia's popularity in the country in recent years.[241]

The sudden collapse of the Artsakh project, without any meaningful resistance, and followed by the mass exodus of nearly the entire Armenian population of Karabakh, was perceived not only as a strategic failure but as the collapse of a national myth at the origins of Armenian statehood and foreign policy. Nagorno-Karabakh represented Armenian defiance against foreign invaders and was the first cradle of the Russian-Armenian Special Relationship, constituting the core pillar of memory politicisation and nation-building in the aftermath of independence.[242] Its destruction put into question the symbolic nature of such a Special Relationship and its necessity to ensure Armenia's safety. Moreover, the parallelism between the Genocide and the threatened status of the population of Karabakh, often evoked by war monuments and nationalist groups, materialised before the eyes of the Armenians as refugees fled in mass from Karabakh, fearing ethnic cleansing.[243] From the emergence of Apricot Socialism, symbolism and mythization of history had permeated Armenian Politics and perpetuated the Relationship with Moscow, which became inherently entangled with Armenian irredentist aspirations and the Karabakh issue.[244] This sense of betrayal was amplified by the fact that views were reciprocated and exploited by the Kremlin, especially in light of Vladimir Putin's "Armenia as a forepost" policy as part of his renewed commitment to the South Caucasus.

The end of Artsakh undermined the legitimacy of this discourse and tested the vulnerability of the previous regime's outsourcing of security prerogatives, even sparking demands in the academic

[240] Arthur V. Atanesyan, Bradley M. Reynolds, and Artur E. Mkrtichyan, "Balancing between Russia and the West: The Hard Security Choice of Armenia", *European Security* 33, no. 2 (2024): 261-283.
[241] International Republican Institute, *IRI Armenia Poll: Increasing Negative Views of Russia, Strong Support for Nagorno-Karabakh Refugee Response*, March 11, 2024.
[242] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia", *International Security* 24, no. 3 (1999): 139-178.
[243] Philip Gamaghelyan and Sevil Huseynova, "Challenges to Building a Viable Alternative to Ethnonationalism in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict Setting", *Caucasus Survey* 12, no. 3 (2024): 265–293.
[244] Vahagn Stepanyan, "Symbolic Politics: The Main Problems in Armenia", *The Politnomos. Journal of Political and Legal Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 14, 2024): 38-4

community for new memory-based security guarantees. In some instances, they suggested that France could intensify its military supplies to Armenia and replace Russia in its security-provider role, given its contribution in protecting the Armenians during the Genocide, having offered humanitarian aid and militarily intervened in Cilicia in 1915.[245] Despite the velleity nature of these proposals, which were only partly followed by a closer Franco-Armenian security partnership, they highlighted the continued importance of politicised historical memory in the Armenian political environment and the depth of the spiritual fracture with Moscow.

3.3 The Velvet Revolution against self-reinforcing trends

The transformative impact of the war in Ukraine since 2014 has contributed to reshape the foreign policy horizons of Armenia, in parallel with the unfolding of domestic developments. Indeed, it coincided with and influenced significant political transformations in the internal political environment. In 2018, after Armenia transitioned from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary system of government, a series of unprecedented mass protests mobilising civil society broke out against Sargsyan's nomination as Prime Minister to elude term limits. The event, known as the Velvet Revolution, marked the end of the 20-year rule of the Republican Party and the political dominance of the Kocharyan-Sargsyan tandem, paving the way for opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan to become Prime Minister.

The revolution was characterised by scant emphasis on foreign policy issues, unlike the wave of "Colour Revolution" investing the post-Soviet world in the early 2000s, and it received wide international acceptance, including by the Russian Federation.[246] However, although the revolutionaries' objectives did not aim to reject Armenia's international standing, they aspired to radically redefine the internal political environment that underpinned it. More specifically, they revolted against the widespread corruption and patronage networks that had centralised governance around an élite in the previous decades and the power system revolving around it. During the protests, Pashinyan rallied his followers under the slogan: "*We want Armenia without violence, extremism, corruption, falsification, oligarchy*".[247]

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[245] Hayk Nazaryan, "The Cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the French Republic in the Defence Sphere", *The Politnomos. Journal of Political and Legal Studies* 3, no. 1 (2024): 7-15.
[246] Bartłomiej Krzysztan, *"Unique or Modular? Armenian Velvet Revolution in Comparative Approach", Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 18, no. 3 (2020): 143-171.
[247] Armenpress, "Pashinyan Heralds End of Oligarchy Era in Armenia", October 19, 2018.

After winning the subsequent elections in a landslide, the newly ruling "Civil Contract" party continued to focus primarily on domestic reforms, limiting itself to mild criticism of the efficiency of Russia's role in Armenian affairs and its connection to oligarchs.[248] Foreign policy remained on the sidelines of the political debate, except for expressions of continuity with Complementarism.[249] The main priority was represented by fuelling economic renovation and modernisation, based on Sargsyan's failure to improve the economy after renouncing the free trade agreement with the EU.

This new course broke away from the mutually reinforcing patterns of autocratization and ethnonationalist élite dominance characterising the evolution of Complementarism and challenged the total hegemony of the Karabakh issue in Armenian politics. The "Kharabakh Clan" was politically marginalised, as some of its prominent members, such as Movses Hakobyan and Yuri Khachaturov, were dismissed or came under legal scrutiny. [250] Liberal anti-monopolistic and competition reforms were launched, dismantling the economic control of *asfaltyi fidayi* over key sectors. A special independent Anti-Corruption Body was introduced in 2019, and vast judicial reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary system were enacted. The Venice Commission and the EU delegation praised such evolutions, despite accusations of politically motivated prosecutions against members of the former élite.[251] Freedom House confirmed this democratic opening, registering significant improvements in political rights and civil liberties after 2018.[252]

The Security Council, once the pillar of Kocharyan's management of foreign policy decisions, was rearranged into a new configuration under the name "National Security Council". Nevertheless, it retained its important character in the decision-making process, signalling a perpetuation of Armenia's personality-driven political history and foreign policy.[253]

Thus, despite not affecting Armenia's foreign policy *per se,* the revolution developed in conjunction with the War's unmasking of Russian dependence and provided fertile ground for demands of policy reconfiguration, weakening the domestic factors limiting the development of Complementarism. After the Crimean issue detached Armenia and Artsakh's political priorities, the revolution further separated Yerevan and Stepanakert, as the latter remained governed by the remnants of the Republican

[248] Hovhannes Nikoghosyan and Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, "From 'Revolution' to War: Deciphering Armenia's Populist Foreign Policy-Making Process", *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23 (2022): 1-21.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Kopeček, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia".
[251] Agnieszka Miarka, "Armenia's Domestic Policy After the Velvet Revolution: Selected Issues", *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 21, no. 2 (2020).
[252] Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Armenia*.
[253] Miarka, "Armenia's Domestic Policy".

Party and the old élites, whereas, in Armenia, the political panorama drastically changed. [254] Between 2018 and 2019, relations became tense as Pashinyan and the Karabakh leaders engaged in heated verbal disputes. Armenia contested the monopolisation of the peace talks by the former élites, with Pashinyan affirming that he would have represented in negotiations solely the interests of Armenia.[255] Subordinating foreign policy to domestic politics, the Pashinyan government vocally stressed the importance of its democratic legitimacy, in contrast to the oligarchic nature of the old regime and its representatives in Nagorno-Karabakh.[256] This position was also reflected by large international recognition of its efforts, which, for example, was manifested by a Carnegie Endowment op-ed calling for the removal of the local Karabakhi *siloviki* to ensure a smooth and functional peace process.[257]

The partial downplay of the Karabakh issue also corresponded to a diminishing emphasis on identity and memory politics. While the new government inaugurated a "Park of Life", in memory of those fallen in Nagorno-Karabakh, it refrained from measures indicating revenge or suggesting a connection between the Genocide and Karabakh, opposing, for example, the construction of a new memorial dedicated to operation "Nemesis", the armed vindication of the Genocide carried out during the 1920s.[258] It also proposed to amend the Constitution to remove the constant references to Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh appearing in its preamble.[259] The current constitution was adopted in 1995, in the aftermath of the Armenian victory in the first conflict and the resurgence of memory diplomacy. At the same time, new efforts were made to commemorate the Genocide. Thus, while not abandoning remembrance of key sensitive events such as the Genocide, whose cultivation remained at the height of the agenda, the new executive renounced leveraging historical memory on the international field. This policy partly reflected the Turkish attitude of "Dialogic Remembering", which the Armenian élites harshly rejected before the Velvet Revolution.[260] However, the government cautiously avoided officially engaging with Türkiye on memory issues, conversely to what it did in the 1990s, given that an overwhelming majority of the country viewed the country as one of the primary security threats to Armenia.[261]

The gradual abandonment of memory diplomacy, unlike Ter-Petrosyan's flawed attempt, was made possible by the reconfiguration of other foreign policy determinants sparked by the revolution and by

[254] Kopeček, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia".
[255] Ibid.
[256] Nikoghosyan and Ter-Matevosyan, "From 'Revolution' to War".
[257] Ibid.
[258] Kharatyan and Shagoyan, "Memory Politics".
[259] Ibid.
[260] Arthur Atanesyan, "Traumatic Past and the Politics of Memory: What Should Be and Should Not Be the Armenian Approach?", *Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan University* 15, no. 2 (December 2024): 15-26.
[261] Ibid.

the Russian military commitment to Ukraine. It benefited from the prioritisation of domestic concerns and reforms over radical foreign-policy shifts, thereby evading the controversial aspects of the "national ideology" debate. In this phase, Pashinyan's agency, despite Armenia's new parliamentary system of government and signs of democratic renewal, remained largely uncontested, given the demise of the former regime representatives and the historic high approval ratings his premiership recorded during its first years.[262]

The only significant foreign policy turn in this initial phase, marked by domestic politics predominance, was a return to the multilateral and proactive spirit that had characterised Complementarism in the 1990s, without any other noticeable change in substance or strategy. More specifically, Pashinyan aimed to reframe the bilateral security-driven relationship with Russia through a reinvigorated CSTO, reducing dependency without rejecting the security architecture connecting the two countries. This stance strongly reflected the new government's attempt to emphasise distance from the previous regime more than abandoning Armenia's traditional foreign policy posture.[263] Rather than a reversal, it represented an attempt to pursue defence relations on Russian-led multilateral tracks.[264]

However, as aforementioned, the final withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers and the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh prompted a significant identity crisis, leading Pashinyan to criticise Russia more openly than any other Armenian leader had since independence. In 2020, the Armenian government officially invoked the activation of the CSTO's mutual defence clause, Article 4, in response to Azerbaijan's aggression. The alliance, heavily centred on the Russian Federation and comprising Turkic-speaking countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), rejected the request and offered a mere monitoring mission, signalling the impossibility of a reinforcement of Complementarism via Russia-led security frameworks.

The epiphany of Russian ineffectiveness in the international arena soon translated into a shift in the domestic domain of memory politics, which the Civil Contract government subtly initiated by sparking demands from civil society for a deeper foreign policy revision and cementing the strategic culture's drift away from the Special Relationship. For instance, a growing segment of the public began urging Prime Minister Pashinyan to pivot towards a more balanced and diversified foreign

[262] Miarka, "Armenia's Domestic Policy After the Velvet Revolution".
[263] Alexander Markarov, "Armenia's Foreign Policy Priorities: Are There Any Major Changes Following the Spring 2018 Political Transformation?", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 104 (2018): 3-7.
[264] Ibid.

orientation.[265] The demise of memory diplomacy, albeit primarily directed against the Karabakh-dominated nationalist élites, increasingly assumed a strong connotation vis-à-vis Russia, given the entanglement between Armenian primordialism, memory cultivation and Russian Imperial legacy.

The 2021 snap Parliamentary elections marked a crucial moment in this process. Pashinyan's renewed mandate, despite the military defeat of 2020, confirmed his strong popular legitimacy and the marginalisation of the old ruling class. This favourable electoral outcome, which saw the defeat of Robert Kocharyan's party, consolidated the transformation of Armenia's domestic political environment and further legitimised the government's cautious efforts to recalibrate its foreign policy priorities, attributing military difficulties to the previous' élite miscalculations. By this stage, the combination of internal reformism, the erosion of memory diplomacy, and the crumbling of Russian guarantees created the conditions for questioning the trajectory of Armenian foreign policy, a theme which saw increasing salience during the electoral campaign.[266]

In conclusion, the Velvet Revolution developed in parallel to Ukraine's crisis projection over the South Caucasus and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reciprocally influencing each other. The entanglement of these two processes, one domestic, one regional, did not immediately result in Armenia's foreign policy deviating from the course it had embarked on in the previous decades. Yet, they catalysed a gradual but cumulative transformation of the factors limiting the development of Complementarism and profoundly altered its strategic culture and imagination, undermining the consensus over the role of Russia vis-à-vis Armenia and reducing the salience of domestic factors sustaining it.

3.4 Kazakhstan as the antithesis of the Armenian case

While the purpose of this dissertation is not to provide a comprehensive comparative study of Armenian Complementarism and Central Asian multivectorialism, the case of Kazakhstan offers an insightful point of reference and comparison for understanding the limits of Complementarism. Indeed, despite some evident structural differences between the two countries in terms of population size, territory, and natural resources, they share a similar yet entirely reverse foreign policy trajectory from the end of the USSR to the present day.

[265] Sergey M. Markedonov, "Early Parliamentary Elections in Armenia in 2021: Domestic and International Significance", *Eurasia: Expert Analytical Journal of the Post-Soviet Space*, no. 5 (2021).
[266] Ibid.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev declared during his inauguration speech that the country would follow a foreign policy based on the principle of multivectorial relations from that moment forward.[267] Despite the resonating message behind these words, at the time, they appeared as a mostly declarative stance without an underlying genuine commitment or comprehensive political project.

Indeed, Kazakhstan represented a relatively marginal Soviet Socialist Republic whose fertile agricultural plains and mineral resources constituted a mere source of raw materials and agricultural products for the Soviet industrial base in other republics.[268] Its limited industrial capacity, albeit superior to the rest of Central Asia, was confined within the Soviet economic planning system to an ancillary role of component production and first processing for the national supply chain.[269] In comparison to the privileged economic role and diversified character of the Armenian economy, it possessed a status of more clear-cut economic dependence on the central Soviet authorities.

In the aftermath of independence, nothing seemed to suggest a significant break from this condition, which continued in the development of economic relations with the Russian Federation, representing roughly 50% of the volume of Kazakh imports.[270] Moreover, Russian state-owned corporations, such as Lukoil, managed large parts of Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon reserves and of the oil pipelines transporting them. Politically speaking, the Kazakh ruling élite was deeply entrenched in the Soviet *nomenklatura*, to which Nazarbayev himself belonged as former First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party (1989-1991) and Chairman of the Council of Ministers (1984-1989). However, unlike the Armenian nationalist *nomenklatura*, the Kazakh Moscow-loyalist leadership was among the most sceptical of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms and nationalist emancipatory movements.[271] In this context, it is no coincidence that Kazakhstan was the last SSR to declare independence in December 1991, only after the Belavezha Accords, technically comprising the entirety of the Soviet Union for a few days.

Consequently, to some extent, Kazakhstan appeared in the 1990s to be less prone than Armenia to assert its agency and develop an independent foreign policy strategy vis-à-vis Russia or other great powers. While it was not a recipient of a Special Relationship on the scale and historical depth of the one between Armenia and Russia, it was deeply embedded in political and economic frameworks

[267] Jonathan Murphy, "Illusory Transition? Elite Reconstitution in Kazakhstan, 1989–2002", Europe-Asia Studies 58, no. 4 (2006).
[268] Jean-François Caron, *Kazakhstan and the Soviet Legacy: Between Continuity and Rupture* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
[269] Ibid.
[270] International Monetary Fund, *Kazakhstan: Recent Economic Developments* (Washington, DC: IMF, 1997), 127.
[271] Murphy, "Illusory Transition".

dominated by Moscow and economically dependent on it. From a security perspective, although it did not experience the same challenges as Armenia during the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the country strongly relied on Russian defence contributions and military presence in a region marked by a deteriorating security environment. In particular, the civil war in neighbouring Tajikistan (1992-1997) and the emergence of Islamic terrorism spill-over risks prompted increasing security cooperation with the Russian Federation, whose intervention in the conflict partially reaffirmed its role as the Central Asia security provider. Moreover, the country lacked the same degree of historical precedents of statehood that Armenia took great pride in and valued as a key component of its identity.

At the same time, in what Zbigniew Brzezinski dubbed "The Grand Chessboard" or the "Eurasian Balkans scenario", the strategic position and natural wealth of Central Asia fuelled growing interest by foreign powers, above all China and the EU, leading many to hypothesise a further curtailment of local states' agency capabilities. [272] In Neorealist terms, the nation navigated a contested buffer zone where structural constraints imposed by a hegemon and competing great powers limited its room for manoeuvre.

Nevertheless, despite a seemingly more complex international environment, Kazakhstan's multivectorialism maintained a steady course, avoiding some of the limitations Armenian foreign policy endured. Firstly, it benefited from the absence of an established strategic culture, which the Special Relationship with Russia and the Apricot Socialism policies modelled in the case of Armenia. This does not entail a rejection of memory diplomacy and politicisation of history, which was instead built top-down with the precise design to support foreign policy ideologically. Indeed, multivectorialism finds its roots and legitimisation in the school of thought of Eurasianism. Unlike its more widely known Russian counterpart, which represents a chauvinistic and internationally revisionist set of beliefs, Kazakh Eurasianism does not possess such a militant connotation.[273] Conversely, it views Kazakhstan as a unique bridge between Europe and Asia, from both geographic, cultural, and economic perspectives.[274] In this sense, it rejects reductionist views assimilating the country to a spur of the so-called *Russkiy Mir,* and interprets its role as the central pillar of Eurasia.

To this aim, the promotion of Eurasianism has been incorporated into education curricula and state policies as a driver of national affirmation and political agency. [275] Between 1994 and 1999, President

[272] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York, 1997).
[273] Diana Kopbayeva, "Eurasianism under Nazarbayev's Regime: Nation-Branding and Regime-Building", in *Central Asia Transformations: Politics, Economics and Society*, ed. Kazakh-German University (2025).
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ahmad Vakhshiteh, Marina V. Lapenko and Aisha Mukasheva, "Genesis of the Eurasian Idea and Eurasian Practice in the Republic of Kazakhstan", *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2022): 60-76.

Nazarbayev authored several books on the notion of Eurasianism and its significance for Kazakhstan.[276] The Kazakh national identity was actively promoted, reinterpreting the significance of Russian and Soviet domination in the context of the country's centuries-old history.[277] By tracing the roots of Kazakhstan's modern statehood in the fusion of Turkic and Mongolic elements during the 15th-century Kazakh Khanate, rather than in the Soviet *korenisatsya* and the demarcation of the different SSRs' boundaries in Central Asia, the Nazarbayev leadership aimed to distance symbolically its source of legitimacy from Moscow.[278] More precisely, Kazakh Eurasianism leveraged historical memory, to some extent actively building it from scratch, to assert its independent foreign policy course. For instance, massive celebrations were held in 2015 to commemorate the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate's foundation by Janybek Khan and Kerey Khan. Despite the solemnity of the event, it was the first time the recurrence was publicly observed. Similarly, several new museums were opened, advertising the khanates and ancient nomadic civilisations as the political predecessors of Kazakhstan.[279] In 2019, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a joint plan to reconnect Kazakhstan to its cultural roots and history, including the international publicization of relevant cultural figures such as poet Abai Qūnanbaiūly, to whom public squares were dedicated in Tbilisi, Istanbul and New Delhi.[280]

Thus, this phenomenon differs remarkably from Armenian memory cultivation and primordialism, while striving for the same establishment of a "primordial" national identity, as it promotes a sense of exceptionalism and affirmation vis-à-vis its colonial domination past. Rather than a byproduct of Kazakh political history, as in the case of Armenia, it represents a wisely developed choice, almost *ex nihilo,* providing a strategic cultural substrate for foreign policy development.

Additionally, given the Eurasianist emphasis on depicting the country as a bridge between the West and the East, Kazakhstan's multivectorialism possessed from its very onset a strongly economicist character, incorporating modernisation and economic development as integral parts of its foreign policy. According to the Kazakh Foreign Policy Concept, one of the main priorities is: "Achieving a higher level of integration of Kazakhstan into the international community and world economic relations, including through the diversification and digitisation of the national economy".[281]

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[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Rob Kevlihan, "State building, Identity and Nationalism in Kazakhstan: Some Preliminary Thoughts", *Centre for International Studies*, Dublin City University (2011).
[279] Daniyar Baibekov, "Taraz Celebrates 550th Anniversary of Kazakh Khanate", *Astana Times*, October 9, 2015.
[280] Kopbayeva, "Eurasianism under Nazarbayev".
[281] Akorda, *On the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030* (Presidential Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan), 2020.

Indeed, opening the country to foreign investors and external markets became a core component of the multivectoral agenda of national affirmation on the global stage. Since the adoption of the 1994 Law on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), FDI from the EU, China, and multiple other countries rose steadily, reaching an annual volume of 3-4 billion dollars per year in the early 2000s.[282] In this regard, Kazakh multivectorialism maintained the character that Complementarism lost due to the growing prominence of the security dimension in its foreign policy agenda.

This commitment to economic openness and engagement also resulted in a continuous proactive role in regional and international integration and cooperation initiatives, in stark contrast to Armenia's recipient attitude. Despite initial attempts to foster regional integration during Levon Ter-Petrosyan's era, such as the BES, Armenia remained entangled in external actors' region-building projects (the Eastern Neighbourhood and the EAEU) with scarce agency in such initiatives. Conversely, Kazakhstan has balanced its participation in the Russian-led EAEU, the Chinese Belt and Road initiatives (BRI), commonly known as the Silk Road, and EU programmes towards Central Asia through an articulate combination of multilateral engagement frameworks. For instance, it promoted the birth of the now inactive Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) in 1994, reuniting all the so-called "Stans" in a single regional economic framework aimed at fostering trade, cooperation, and integration among the newly independent Central Asian republics. Parallelly, under Nazarbayev's proposal, Kazakhstan launched the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), an Astana-based international organisation dedicated to the maintenance of peace and security across the continent. While the political relevance of the entity has been contested, it represents a considerable diplomatic venture aiming at establishing the country as an independent driver of peace-building. Furthermore, Kazakhstan complemented its participation in the BRI with the Nurly Zhol (Bright Path), sometimes dubbed the Kazakh Silk Road, an ambitious infrastructure and investment plan aimed at transforming the country into a logistics and trade Eurasian hub.[283] Kazakhstan also developed a Path to Europe programme as part of its 2009 chairmanship of the OSCE, seeking to align with EU governance standards and promote closer relations between the two parties on its initiative and regardless of external *stimuli.*

Consequently, a coherently developed strategic culture and economic proactivity favoured the emergence of Multivectorialism and channelled foreign assertiveness to the benefit of Kazakhstan and regional stability, shaping a memory diplomacy approach targeted for its aims. These policies coincided with a parallel opening of the energy and oil market, resulting in a wide diversification of

[282] Jung-Wan Lee and Simon W. Tai, "Adjusting the Structure of International Trade and Its Effects on the Economic Growth of Kazakhstan", *International Journal of Trade and Global Markets* 1, no. 4 (2008).
[283] Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan, "State-building, Identity and Nationalism in Kazakhstan", 2011.

management and ownership across multiple stakeholders. In contrast to Armenia's subordination of energy policies to security guarantees, Kazakhstan's fragmentation of concessions among Western, Russian, Chinese and local state-owned corporations constituted a pillar of its economically driven assertive foreign policy. Economic development became synonymous with the Kazakh cooperative engagement with foreign powers, fuelling a 9% average annual GDP growth from the late 1990s.[284] For example, while in 1995 Armenian GDP per capita was converging towards Kazakh levels after the tumultuous post-Soviet war years, by 2020, a stark 120% gap divided the two economies.[285]

Nonetheless, returning to Neo-Classical Realist FPA, Kazakhstan's political agenda was also shaped by a beneficial élite and institutional framework. Despite the staunch Moscow loyalism of the Kazakh ruling *nomenklatura* during the USSR's downfall, Nazarbayev did not face significant opposition to his foreign policy agenda. Indeed, the country did not experience the same dynamics that generated a conflict-nurtured elite, such as the *asfaltyi fidahi*, and the emergence of conflictual cleavages surrounding foreign policy. In the Kazakh case, which displays even more élite cohesion than Armenia, the president surrounded himself with complacent networks of technocrats and family members in an environment marked by severely conflated political pluralism.[286] Familial ties grew particularly important, as KazMunayGas, the national natural oil and gas company, was entrusted to a nephew of the president.[287]

Thus, the multivectorial foreign policy programme, rather than a personalised sharp turn against the historically established sentiments in the country, proceeded gradually with the acquiescence and under the direction of Kazakhstan's ruling elites. While energy resource management represented a limitation for Armenian Complementarism, given the economic entanglement between the Armenian élites and Russia, in Kazakhstan, using the allocation of positions in state-owned energy conglomerates and benefits from oil revenues to political allies permitted the regime to cement a domestic consensus and co-opt economic interests over its foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, investment attraction in the energy sector strategically contained the dependence on Russia, without adopting a confrontational stance against it.

A relevant measure of Kazakh multivectorial adaptiveness is once again provided by its UNGA voting patterns, signalling renewed dynamism. Coherence with Russian positions remains high (61-65%),

[284] Lee and Tai, "Adjusting the Structure of International Trade".
[285] World Bank, *GDP (current US$) - Kazakhstan*, accessed July 31, 2025.
[286] Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime: Balancing Uncertainties among the 'Family', Oligarchs and Technocrats*", Demokratizatsiya: Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20, no. 4 (2012).
[287] Ibid.

but in a sharp decline in comparison to the early 2000s.[288] Parallelly, China became the closest voting partner in the UNGA (80%), with Kazakhstan overwhelmingly preferring Chinese positions or abstention in case of China-Russia contrasting votes. In line with multivectorialism's general policy of cautiousness, Kazakhstan tends to abstain from matters involving border controversies in the post-Soviet space.[289]

The transition from Nazarbayev to Toqaev's leadership in 2019, vertically directed by its *entourage*, did not alter the foundation of this political architecture, as the new president strongly affirmed his will to pursue a multivectorial path. The presidential agenda is strongly embedded in the regime structure, leaving scarce room for deep restructuring. Indeed, the post-independence Kazakh political regime and its multivectorial foreign policy acquired a symbiotic character, given the existential framing of multivectorialism as a basis for statehood, offering each other a legitimacy rooted in stability and pragmatism. It comes as no surprise that Nikol Pashinyan, in a recent interview with Kazakh media, mentioned Kazakhstan as an example to be emulated by Armenia.[290]

Regarding the domestic environment, some cosmetic reforms were launched from 2021, partially enhancing freedom of assembly in the country and providing a degree of party politics, as a means to acquire international legitimacy vis-à-vis certain partners, such as the EU. However, Kazakhstan remained characterised by a heavily centralised and authoritarian decision-making system, offering strong agency to the president in the field of foreign policy, akin to Kocharyan's Armenia. The emergence of the War in Ukraine appears not to have significantly altered this stance, given that Toqaev has expressed the country's neutrality vis-à-vis the conflict, endorsing Ukraine's territorial integrity while engaging in dialogue and visiting Vladimir Putin multiple times.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan presents an almost antithetical case in comparison to Armenia. Despite appearing for many aspects less prone to an independent foreign policy posture than Levon Ter-Petrosyan's Armenia in the 1990s, its different domestic environment, marked by the lack of the same strategic culture, political cleavages and elite dynamics, modelled a more coherently developed and economicist foreign policy, navigating the complexities of post-Soviet Central Asia and establishing the country as a prosperous and proactive diplomatic actor. For example, as part of the 2016 Astana process, Kazakhstan even became a key negotiator in the Syrian peace process. In this context, a peculiar attitude towards historical memory, unshaped by processes such as Apricot Socialism,

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[288] Roman A. Yuneman, "How Kazakhstan's Multi-Vector Foreign Policy Works: Voting in UNGA Analysis", *International Organisations Research Journal* 18, no. 1 (2023): 151-169.
[289] Ibid.
[290] "Armenia Consistently Pursues a Multi-Vector Foreign Trade Policy, Taking into Account the Preferential Trade Regime with Kazakhstan within the EAEU Framework", *Aravot.am*, April 15, 2024.

offered a fertile substrate for Multivectorialism and avoided the oscillating and personalised tendency that characterised the evolution of Armenian Complementarism over the past three decades. These considerations underscore the significance of domestic factors and historically entrenched cultural and ideational dimensions, whose analysis ought to be taken into account for understanding international dynamics.

3.5 A complex rebound: Pashinyan's Attempts towards Neo-complementarianism and alternative partnerships

Despite the most tangible effect of the manifestation of Complementarism's limits being a restructuring of Armenia's strategic culture and a change in its memory politics environment, in the past years, numerous elements seem to suggest a deeper and more substantial turn. More specifically, some indicate that the Armenian government aims to move beyond Pashinyan's rhetorical challenge against the established strategic culture and the related Special Relationship, towards a reconfiguration of its foreign policy. While the extent of such change remains contested, due to the volatility in the regional geopolitical balances and the current lack of a formalisation of this will with a new National Security Strategy, several scholars openly considered the emergence of a "Neo-complementarist" foreign policy. [291] The aim of this section is to briefly assess the existence and the scope of this phenomenon and to contextualise it vis-à-vis the Armenian domestic foreign policy determinants and the general trajectory of Complementarism.

Firstly, the most significant element of this new course is the complete reversal of Pashinyan's strategy towards the CSTO. In February 2024, Armenia froze its participation in the CSTO.[292] Subsequently, it suspended the payment of its membership contributions, expressing in June its intention to leave the alliance by an unspecified future date. Military coordination and joint drills were also interrupted. In parallel, Russian soldiers stationed in Gyumri were invited to remain in the base and were removed from the local airport. Federal Security Service (FSB) operators and Russian troops previously employed in border management and patrols were replaced with Armenian personnel.[293]

Not only were military accords with France expanded, but defence cooperation with non-Western actors, such as India, was introduced for the first time, involving the purchase of Pinaka missiles,

[291] Arthur V. Atanesyan et al., "Balancing between Russia and the West".
[292] Thomas de Waal, "Armenia Navigates a Path Away From Russia".
[293] Ibid.

SWATHI radars, and Indian-made drones.[294] Dialogue with NATO reacquired a primary role, intensifying cooperation and training programmes. Moreover, Armenia hosted the 2023 and 2024 "Eagle Partner" joint military exercise with the US Army, promoting interoperability and reinforcing peacekeeping capabilities.[295] The presence of US soldiers on Armenian soil was publicly regarded as a hostile act by the Russian Federation.[296] A new intelligence agency was inaugurated, signalling discontinuity with previous security structures.[297]

From a diplomatic perspective, Armenia also displayed a renewed pursuit of strategic autonomy and institutional *overture* to the West, having adopted in October 2023 the Statute of Rome and accepted the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction. Thus, since the Court issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin, Armenia would be technically bound to arrest him. As part of its reaction to Azerbaijan's assertiveness and border, Armenia also requested and obtained a monitoring mission from the European Union. The European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) was accordingly launched in January 2023. Despite its civilian and merely observing character, limited to the internationally recognised boundaries of Armenia, which did not impact the security deterioration caused by the 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh War, it manifests growing EU involvement in Armenia's internal security matters and Armenian interest in adopting a more proactive stance vis-à-vis the Union.[298] In this regard, it is relevant to notice that EUMA was coupled with a transition in the Armenian-Azerbaijan negotiations from the 2020 Russian-led trilateral format to EU-mediated talks, as shown by the recurrent meetings between Pashinyan and Azeri president Heydar Aliyev held in Brussels under the auspices of the European Council. The Union's intercession, albeit not resolutive, ultimately led to the adoption of the 2023 roadmap for long-term negotiations.

Furthermore, already in 2021, Armenia entered the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the European Union. While the agreement precedes the turn towards a potential Neo-Complementarist policy, as it offers a residual form of engagement in substitution for the previously rejected Association Agreement, it provides a remarkable example of the government's persistent will for reapprochement with the West. The CEPA was cautiously designed to maintain a deep level of economic and legal integration, without compromising Armenia's position in the EEAU. It must be noted that, similarly to what happened under Sargsyan's rule, Gazprom increased natural

[294] Hayk Nazaryan, "The Cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the French Republic in the Defence Sphere", *The Politnomos. Journal of Political and Legal Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 19, 2024): 7-15.
[295] Thomas de Waal, "Armenia Navigates a Path Away From Russia".
[296] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement on Military Cooperation Between the United States and Armenia", July 2023, official website.
[297] Thomas de Waal, "Armenia Navigates a Path Away From Russia".
[298] Ibid.

gas prices to Armenia by 10% following the CEPA negotiations.[299] The limited nature of this hike reflects Russia's acquiescence towards "Supplementarity", albeit showing its coercive power potential through calibrated pressure.

The most significant element suggesting an evolution towards a new foreign policy architecture remains Armenia's voting pattern within the UNGA. As previously highlighted, from the 2010s, Armenia had increasingly converged towards Russian positions, and the Velvet Revolution and Ukraine's aggression did not significantly alter this trajectory. Especially when voting on relevant matters, such as the Ukrainian War, Armenia still consistently sided with Russia. However, David Shapiro's analysis of post-Soviet countries' voting trends suggests that already in 2022, Armenia's "voting distance" from the Russian Federation slightly increased as a result of the war, remaining, at the same time, among the closest voting partners of the Russian Federation.[300]

This partially changed in April 2023, when Armenia voted in support of a resolution regarding cooperation between the UN and the Council of Europe, which included open condemnation of the Russian aggression against Georgia and Ukraine.[301] Paradoxically, Armenian officials declared to the press that Armenia did not endorse those paragraphs, despite UN resolutions generally possessing a unitary character. In April 2025, Armenia abruptly broke its line of voting, endorsing an EU-sponsored resolution explicitly mentioning the illegal Russian aggression, without any ex-post clarifications to the press.[302] The resolution *per se* does constitute condemnation against Russia; nevertheless, it endorses a rhetoric and language diametrically opposed to the voting positions Armenia pursued until that moment. Moreover, in 2025, Armenia also adopted a law laying the legislative foundation for opening negotiations for accession to the European Union, a merely declarative move, yet almost unthinkable in the past decade.

Concurrently, the Armenian government temporarily suspended some Russian media outlets in the country, introducing in 2023 a brief 30-day ban on Sputnik Armenia and suspending the programme "Evening with Solovyov", hosted by the famous Russian TV host and outspoken Kremlin supporter, Vladimir Solovyov. These measures aim to curtail one of the main channels of Russian influence and coercion.

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[299] Aram Terzyan, "The Anatomy of Russia's Grip on Armenia: Bound to Persist?", *CES Working Papers* 10, no. 2 (2018): 234-250.
[300] Daniel Shapiro, "Year Two of the Invasion: Where Do Former Soviet Countries Stand?", *European Leadership Network*, July 2024,
[301] Nane Sahakian, "Armenia Explains Vote on 'Anti-Russian' Resolution at UN", *Azatutyun*, May 3, 2023.
[302] "Armenia Votes for UN Resolution Citing 'Russian Aggression", *Azatutyun*, April 17, 2025.

Thus, there is robust evidence suggesting that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is embarking on a substantial revision of Armenian foreign policy rather than a mere rhetorical and memory diplomacy turn. In particular, as previously highlighted, the recalibration of domestic foreign policy determinants between 2018 and 2023 constituted a key facilitating element for this phenomenon, interrupting the trajectory of Russian dependence that emerged throughout the 2000s and hindering Armenia's multivectorial pursuit. Nevertheless, the magnitude of this shift and its direction towards an alleged "Neo-Complementarism" doctrine remain disputable. First of all, since this approach mainly revolves around the military sphere, it remains highly susceptible to security contingencies, which may impair or reduce its effectiveness. While the diminishing of Russian defence monopoly suggests Armenia has identified in the overoutsourcing of the security domain one of the core elements limiting Complementarism, it remains unclear whether it possesses the capability or the political will to further disentangle from Russian military structures. Moreover, despite moves indicating a wider political spillover, it is too early to determine if this strife for a more balanced Complementarism includes a deep restructuring of multiple dimensions other than military relations. Widely televised events, such as an altercation between Pashinyan and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka in the middle of an EAEU summit, did not alter Armenia's economic embedment into the block, which, as of now, accounts for roughly 43% of its foreign trade volume and has Russia as its leading export powerhouse.[303] Pashinyan has frequently met Putin since the beginning of his Neo-Complementarist turn, attending the Moscow Victory Day parade in 2023-2025 and even consulting him before preparing Armenia's bid to join the EU. Russia currently remains not only Armenia's first trading partner but also a key energy provider, given the almost unchanged dependence on its infrastructure and natural gas supplies.

In this context, the notion of "Neo" Complementarism appears vaguely defined. It is difficult to determine if it entails a return to Levon Ter-Petrosyan's pragmatism or the foundation for a new foreign policy course. Indeed, a rebound to a more balanced multivectorial path, such as the one originally attempted, oddly, contrasts with some of the confrontational attitudes and statements expressed vis-à-vis Russia. According to Ter-Petrosyan: *"A country like Armenia can ill afford to abandon an existing security architecture and incur the almost certain hostility of a great power resulting from it, without alternatives. And such alternatives simply do not exist*".[304] As shown by Kazakhstan, the pursuit of multivectorialism is intrinsically subject to finding a synthesis between seemingly contrasting *stimuli*, rather than elaborating a mere design of distancing from, or, in Neo-

[303] Grigor Hayrapetyan, "Analysis of the Republic of Armenia's Foreign Trade at the Framework of EAEU", *Bulletin of Yerevan University G: Economics* 14, no. 2 (2023).
[304] Thomas de Waal, "Armenia Navigates a Path Away From Russia".

realist terms, balancing against, Russia. At the same time, the persistence of vulnerabilities before potential Russian coercion jeopardises the scope of new evolutions.

However, the greatest menace to this Neo-Complementarist foreign policy course remains the domestic environment's preparedness for further deviations from Armenia's traditional stance. While the repercussions of the Ukraine War and the Velvet Revolution substantially altered the country's strategic culture and its elite and institutional framework, it appears difficult to determine whether these changes are deep enough to sustain a truly transformative shift or whether any future attempt in that direction will face a clash akin to Levon Ter-Petrosyan's case.

Regarding the Prime Minister's agenda and agency, the passage to parliamentarism and a more democratic system of governance may impair Pashinyan's capability to steer the country's foreign policy and international positioning, as it is now more dependent on public opinion and civil society pressure. From a Parliamentary perspective, the Prime Minister's coalition still holds a clear supermajority; however, recent pollings show that the uncontrasted popular support the government enjoyed after the revolution vanished amid the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and rising disillusionment towards political institutions. Moreover, abandoning memory diplomacy and the historically entrenched Special Relationship to break free from the so-called "security trap" is unlikely to be a straightforward process. For instance, the 2023 roadmap for peace incorporated as its legal foundation and basis for peace the 1991 Almaty Declaration on border delimitation and mutual recognition of sovereignty, following Soviet era borders.[305] Building negotiations on the Almaty Declaration implies a total renunciation of claims over Nagorno-Karabakh and the potential resurgence of domestic tensions as part of the border delimitation. This was clearly illustrated in 2024, when Armenia agreed to hand over several villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan in accordance with Soviet cartography. This was clearly illustrated in 2024, when Armenia agreed to hand over several villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan, in accordance with Soviet cartography. While official sources framed the event as part of the mutual steps towards peace, such concessions, without any reciprocal Azeri withdrawals from the exclaves occupied during the 1990s, triggered widespread protests. They showed the existence of segments of strong societal resistance to the dismantling of long-held narratives, underscoring the fragility and contested nature of Armenia's current foreign policy reorientation.

The protests escalated in the so-called "Tavush Homeland Movement", guided by Apostolic cleric Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, which attempted to block crucial roads to halt the transfer. The events

[305] Alessandro Caprile and Jan Przetacznik, *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Between War and Peace*, report, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023.

highlighted the endurance of the former elite structure, in which the Church played a role as a political kingmaker and a means of perpetuating the Special Relationship. The alleged neo-Complementarist turn has alienated the Armenian Church and further compromised the symbiotic relationship it possessed with parts of the Armenian state until 2018. Indeed, the Supreme Spiritual Council issued an official statement condemning the border delimitation and Armenian foreign policy as defeatism.[306] More recent developments seem to confirm this Church-State conflict embitterment, as in June 2025, Armenian authorities arrested several individuals, including archbishop Galstanyan, archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan and the tycoon Samvel Karapetyan, under accusation of staging a coup d'état. [307] Karapetyan's company, the Tashir Group, which replaced the Russian state-owned Inter RAO as the concessionaire of Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) in 2015, is currently the target of a nationalisation process, and it is unclear whether the executive is planning to finalise the state seizure of the ENA. Parallely, Catholicos Karenin II adopted a harsher rhetoric against Pashinyan and his government, resulting in violent reciprocal accusations exchanged between the two.

Despite the still ongoing nature of these unfolding events, whose impact remains largely speculative, reading them through the lenses of the present framework, it appears that Armenia's current elite landscape is highly fragmented and conflict-ridden. This fragmentation is marked by a deep cleavage over the country's international positioning, between proponents of further, yet loosely defined, multivectorial affirmation and those favouring some degree of return to the tracks and the protective sphere of the Special Relationship. Not only does it constitute a primary obstacle for the Prime Minister's objectives, but it also reflects the vivid and persistent heritage of Armenia's history and practice of memory cultivation as a political tool by ruling elites. The ideational impact of the War in Ukraine and the Revolution, albeit able to significantly impact the country's strategic culture and public opinion, is now being tested by the transformative foreign policy propositions of the New Civil Contract Government. Church activism and nationalist agitations signal a profound malaise, at times directed top-down by the remnants of the oligarchic networks traditionally dominating Armenian politics and limiting Complementarism. The domestic reforms carried out after 2018, including de-oligarchisation laws, laid the foundation for new foreign policy developments without entirely disrupting the previous order and fully consolidating a new strategic culture. The Church, and more broadly Christianity, not only represents a key political actor, but also a primordial component of

[306] Supreme Spiritual Council of the Armenian Church, "Supreme Spiritual Council Issues Statement on Tavush Border and Protest March", *Armenian Church (Eastern Diocese)*, May 7, 2024.
[307] Onnik James Krikorian, "Arcivescovi armeni accusati di ordire un golpe",*Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa*, July 11, 2025.

Armenian identity and statehood throughout history, making it unlikely an abrupt diminishing of its political importance.[308]

While so far, the Pashinyan government has navigated a reduction of memory consideration in international politics and de-escalation with Azerbaijan as the foundation for new engagements, it may lead to a resurgence of primordialist feelings. For instance, reports suggest Armenia is ready to abandon parts of its official anthem, Mer Hayrenik, considered bellicist and martyrdom-invoking.[309] The event, presumably part of the negotiations, according to the Armenian press, may further ignite domestic contention, as seemingly politically inexpensive symbolic concessions risk being interpreted as identity erosion through the lenses of the former identitarian memory diplomacy approach.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, after merely acting in the domestic field and the rhetorical domain, it is safe to affirm that the Pashinyan government, on the wave of Armenia's epiphany, is attempting to reorient Armenian foreign policy towards a more balanced and multivectorial form of Complementarism, in contrast with the general trajectory of Armenian foreign policy from the 1990s. Nevertheless, the scale and direction of this phenomenon, still subject to contingencies, remain unclear, and it appears to be too early to determine the emergence of a clear-cut "Neo-Complementarist" doctrine. At the same time, such a rebound contributes to showing the impact that external *stimuli* and shocks can have in conjunction with domestic factors, underlying the multifaceted origins of foreign policy making, even in what has been arbitrarily dubbed a small state. In this light, the continuation of this course will likely depend on the extent to which internal foreign policy determinants will fully align with such change. Currently, given its importance as a substrate for foreign policy, Armenia's strategic culture remains the most contested domain, signalling the tension between recent developments and the deeply entrenched processes that have historically offered the foundation for Armenia's international standing.

Thus, the disruptive impact of the Ukrainian War, which partially reframed military and political relations in the South Caucasus, offers tangible evidence of Neo-realist explanations' shortcomings in describing Armenia's foreign policy standing. Firstly, given its manifestation effect, it further confirms that Complementarism's limitations developed progressively on the basis of the conjunction between internal and external foreign policy determinants, rather than as an inherent byproduct of the

[308] Yulia Antonyan, "Political Power and Church Construction in Armenia", in *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus* (2015), 81-95.
[309] "Armenia Adopts Revised Version of the National Anthem with New Final Verse, Replacing Martyrdom-Themed Ending That Honored Sacrifice for the Nation", Zartonk Media, 2025.

international system that emerged in the aftermath of the USSR's fall. Moreover, contributing to ignite political change, it provides proof of Armenia's persisting agency and complex foreign policy-making process, in contrast to reductionist views labelling it as a "small country" ideal type bound to automatically align to the exigencies of foreign powers or to system-induced processes.

Conclusions

Returning to the research question at the foundation of this dissertation, Complementarism's limitations can hardly be explained relying solely on the logic of great power competition and systemic understanding of foreign policy formation. As shown by the first chapter of this dissertation, the peculiar historical entanglement of the Armenians with Tsarist Russia, resulting in what can be labelled as a "Special Relationship", and its continuation and memory political usage under the Apricot Socialism era, provided a substrate, or, in better theoretical terms, a strategic culture for Armenian foreign policy. This politically and historically constructed ideational layer constituted, in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the first and most persistent obstacle to Ter-Petrosyan's multivectorial agenda at the turn of the new millennium.

Nevertheless, as proved by its development during the 1990s, Complementarism established itself as the main compass of Armenia's international relations. Rather than following a linear trajectory, as could be expected from a "small country" driven by external calculations, it evolved, oscillating multiple times on the basis of the interaction between internal and external foreign policy determinants. Ultimately, the conjunction of the legacy of memory diplomacy with the securisation of Armenian politics due to the continued relevance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and foreign actors' pressure shaped a political and institutional environment, especially during the Kocharyan presidency, unfavourable to the pursuit of Complementarism in its original conceptualisation. This led Complementarism to acquire a mere façade character, in favour of *de facto* uni-vectorial reliance on the Russian Federation. In this sense, albeit through a different and multifaceted process, the resulting outcome of Complementarism until the beginning of this decade closely resembled the scenario depicted by Neo-Realist scholars after the end of the USSR.

The Ukrainian War, through its impact on regional power balances and, more importantly, on the strategic cultural environment of Armenia, acted as an epiphany of this evolutionary process, prompting political change and intersecting with parallel domestic trends. While it is difficult to state with certainty if the country is embracing a form of renewed Neo-Complementarism, as the peace process with Azerbaijan remains in constant unfolding, this FPA-based analysis strongly suggests that Armenia, despite its complex international surroundings, possesses a pronounced political agency, and the factors limiting its ambitious foreign policy aspirations do not constitute inherent characteristics of the country's position in the international system, but derive instead from an elaborated foreign policy-making process within the Armenian state and its components.

In particular, foreign policy appears to be the byproduct of deeply entrenched historical dynamics and their interplay with external *stimuli*, rather than a mechanical response to the latter. Following these considerations, the founding assumption of Neo-Realist interpretations of foreign policy, viewing the State as a monolithic entity, appears scarcely reflective of Armenia's recent history. In light of this, it can be possible to further trace Complementarism's position within the *genus* of post-Soviet foreign policies labelled as Multivectorialism. Indeed, besides the aforementioned theoretical *querelles* on the definition of Multivectorialism, the demarcation element vis-à-vis the paradigmatic example of Multivectorialism, Kazakhstan, is represented by the unique nature of Armenian foreign policy formation and its evolution in the past three decades, more than the great powers' different roles in influencing the two countries' foreign policies.

To conclude, this study identified, on the basis of a composite Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theoretical framework, the limitations of the Complementarian foreign policy in the conjunction of external pressure with long-lasting historical processes and their ideational and institutional legacy in modern Armenia. These results not only deepen the academic understanding of Armenian foreign policy but also place it in dialogue with IR literature on the nature of foreign policy, the debate on the behaviour of small states in the international arena, and the discussion on Multivectorialism as a category of post-Soviet foreign policies. They validate the research's initial assumptions, albeit recognising the importance of some Neo-realist postulates regarding Armenia. By doing so, this study provides a base for further research and contributes to filling some gaps in the field, acknowledging the role that post-Soviet states acquired in the international system and challenging mainstream views among Neo-Realist scholars on small states' behaviour.

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