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EROSION OF CIVILIZATIONAL CONSENSUS: ARMENIAN STATEHOOD DISCOURSE[1]

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ABSTRACT

Recent events in the post-Soviet space show the inertial continuity of the struggle faced by former Soviet member states between their axiomatic approach to their sovereign statehood and the factual challenges they confront. The result of this process is continuous socio-economic destabilization and frequent armed conflicts in the region, forcing the successor states to periodically implement a balancing and even rotational approach in their strategic orientation, along with a tendency to relocate basic pillars of their statehood to external actors who do not have a backup plan for their statehood in its sovereign form. Focusing on post-Soviet Armenia, the article argues that its statehood is predisposed to narrative-essentialism, which in its discursive form collapses under the pressure of a series of threats and events typical of sovereign state entities. The paper identifies the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia and the subsequent 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War II as such events. As a consequence of these two events and the contradictory balancing-rotation policies of the current Armenian elites, is the discursive erosion of the Armenian civilizational consensus over its sovereign statehood.

Key words: Armenian statehood, Armenian narrative, Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenian Velvet Revolution, Strategic U-Turn

Introduction

The direct result of the bipolar confrontation was the collapse of the Soviet Union and constitution of 15 independent republics. Newly formed state entities had to deal with the necessity of their complex transition towards democratic and capitalist principles as the core values of their recent ideological rivals. Qualitatively sufficient implementation of these mainstream post-bipolar

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statehood principles became an elementary condition for full membership in the international system. The situation has resulted in an incomplete and distorted implementation of market-economic and democratic values based on their cohabitation with the former principles of society ecosystem. In an analogous situation founds itself Armenia, as an entity existed for almost 15 centuries as a part of the other states without its own statehood and which after its constitution faced a number of challenges in the process of building its statehood around the national idea.[2] Young republic had to deal first and foremost with the socio-economic situation, suffering primarily from the pervasive corruption-clan system, ongoing war in Nagorno-Karabakh, migration wave as a brain drain process, and the genesis of an ideologically dissonant post-Soviet Armenian diaspora. However, notwithstanding the gradual problems that Armenia has faced since its constitution, the idea of an independent Armenia continues to be extensively interpreted as a consensual-dogmatic construction whose meaningfulness was not subject to the questioning and which is still a consolidating element of the Armenian nation (E.g., Atoyan:2022; Payaslian:2007; Panossian:2002; Suny:1993; Gismegian:1950).

Article disagrees with the interpretation of Armenian statehood as a transhistorical civilizational consensus of Armenian nation and argues that with the advent of Velvet Revolution and the subsequent defeat in Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, this civilizational-continuum consensus was discursively eroded and transformed into a social discontinuity. The article's purpose is to respond to the transhistorical interpretation of Armenian statehood discourse by reflecting on the genesis of the multipolar way of perception of this construction by Armenian communities against the background of political, socioeconomic and geopolitical realities. The paper interprets both events as crucial milestones in the process of disruption of Armenian narratives entering the process of transhistorical construction of Armenian statehood. First narrative is the continuous and multidimensional alliance with Russia as the guarantor of Armenian fundamental continuity and security. This narrative pillar, according to the article, is disrupted by the advent of the Velvet Revolution, proclaiming the necessity of establishing a multi-vector policy for the Republic of Armenia, which, notwithstanding the efforts of Armenian elites to euphemize it, was accepted by the Northern ally as

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[2] Certain Armenian scholars refer to the so-called Kingdom of Cilicia, which was headed by ethnic Armenians from time to time, or the Principality of Bagratid, which was part of the Byzantine Empire, as Armenian sovereign state entities.

a zero-sum game. Second narrative is the projection of Nagorno-Karabakh, which in its narrative form classifies this territory as an indivisible part of Armenian statehood in terms of its territorial integrity. However, after the end of the Second Karabakh War there was a discursive transition of this pillar towards the necessity of the construction of an alternative form of Armenian statehood by elites in order to retain at least partially a narrative-dogmatic and transhistorical consensus.

Article identifies a total of five basic discursive centres unfolding from these two milestones, which subsequently enter into the process of Armenian multi-dimensional rotation, which resulted in a total of two Armenian strategic U-turns, standing on the principle of changing the security, economic and geopolitical direction of Armenia as the basic discursive centres of Armenian statehood. The paper in its current form does not aspire to provide a discursive induction of the statehood of the post-Soviet republics, but it opens a broader discussion on the essence of these entities, perceptions and future development of its statehood in a sovereign form, using Armenia as an example.

1. Methodological framework

Methodological profile of the article is qualitative in nature. The main reason for choosing a qualitative approach is the need to identify and sufficiently reflect not only the explicit interpretation of Armenian statehood, but also implicit constructions of individual respondents. Capturing the implicit format of responses is one of the essential attributes of system of confronting narrative conception of Armenian statehood and its interpretation by selected respondents and Armenian political elites. Text database consists of two dimensions. The first dimension is secondary data, which are monographs, academic articles, opinion polls and press articles. As part of the discourse text analysis, a thematic review was conducted across Armenian online periodicals from 2018-2021. As a result, a total of 96 articles were selected to become part of the discourse database. The second dimension is primary data in the form of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2018 and 2021 across Armenians and the Armenian diaspora. The interview process was based on a multi-method variant of snowball sampling. Methodologically, the selection of respondents was based on capturing the relevant socio-professional spectrum across Armenian society, along with a parallel projection of external perceptions of Armenian statehood by Armenians continuously living outside Armenia. Including research on the Armenian diaspora also provides an opportunity to reflect on the implications of host states' socio-

ideological norms on the projection of their home statehood. The qualitative diversification of the included respondents was based on their division into four basic foci, namely military-political, cultural-spiritual, business and scientific, thus making the article's interpretation relevant in the context of research on basic discursive centres of Armenian statehood.

Overarching research method is discursive analysis, which allows text to capture linguistic and contextual dimensions of sources used. Paper does not use discursive analysis as a universal method, but rather as an interdisciplinary tool of data analysis, composed of a number of interpretive methods and research strategies. Within its research, the article uses a total of two interpretive methods of data analysis. First method is the analysis of political-economic discourse of Armenia through which the basic discursive pillars of Armenian statehood are thematically identified. Furthermore, text analyses the development and direction of these pillars in 2018-2021, i.e. the period of the onset of Velvet Revolution and the Second Karabakh War. In doing so, both events are conceived within the study in form of the key milestones of aforementioned discursive pillars, which cardinally change their discursive repertoire in less than four years against the backdrop of Armenia's strategic balance and rotation. Second method is a narrative and partial critical analysis of the Armenian statehood discourse in 2018-2021, based on both secondary and primary data. Methodological contribution of narrative discourse analysis is reflecting a turning point in attitudes towards Armenian statehood, showing an ascending or regressive approach to it, and the possibility of reconstructing the meanings of individual respondents' attitudes and projections by linking them to the narrative interpretation of Armenian statehood (Gee, 2011, p. 5; Bamberg, 2012, p. 87). The critical-analytical part of the discourse of Armenian statehood provides the research with possibility to project the power-ideological aspects of discourse along with pointing out the stability or, on the contrary, the transitivity of its individual pillars (Wodak, 2001, p. 3; Van Dijk, 2003, p. 260). A prominent example of the attributes of critical-power reflection is the asymmetrical role of Armenia within its alliance relations or the internal socio-economic constellation between the ordinary Armenian population and the political elites of Armenia. Notwithstanding its qualitative profile, research also uses quantitative sources in the form of public opinion surveys of the Armenian population, reflecting their attitudes towards the fundamental discursive centres of Armenian statehood (e.g. International Republican Institute; Freedom House; BTI Transformation Index; Caucasus Barometer). Key reason for this partial methodological triangulation is to enhance

the relevance of the individual qualitative discourse conclusions.

2. Independent Armenia as a pillar of civilizational consensus

Armenia as a sovereign state entity ceased to exist in the 5th century AD and, with a few exceptions, has been under domination of larger entities such as the Persian Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union (Fittante, 2015, pp.65-66).[3] Throughout its long history, the evolution of Armenian nation has been under direct influence of ethnoculturally alien central governments seeking national and territorial consolidation of their empires. The approach of the Armenian part of population to the efforts of national unification, whether in form of Ottomanization, Russification or Sovietization, can be characterized through historical optics as an alternately graduating and declining resistance caused by continuous idea of own sovereign state constitution (Suny, 2001, p.882). The historically inert belief of Armenians in the necessity of restoring Armenian independent statehood has periodically clashed with the imperialist paradigm of empires which this nation was a part. The turning point of Armenian statehood was year 1991, during which Armenian SSR declared its independence and a new sovereign state was created under the name of the Republic of Armenia (Lewy, 2006, p.23). Despite the catastrophic economic situation, ongoing first war in Nagorno-Karabakh, land blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, the first years of the constitution of sovereign Armenia were filled with euphoria and belief that the long-term goal of Armenian nation had been achieved (Armenians Vote to Leave Soviet Union, 1991; Laycock, 2016, pp.134-135).

The young republic found itself in a situation where it was no longer under the multidimensional patronage of a larger state unit and was forced to alone build its statehood, both in socio-economic and political levels, as well as in military and geopolitical aspects. Armenia also faced the necessity of selecting its next foreign policy direction. The first years of independence were marked by the construction of the now already traditional Armenian paradigm, when Armenia's security pillar of statehood was transferred to Russia, whether in form of establishment of a Russian military base in the second largest city Gyumri or entry into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while the socio-economic potential of development was interpreted as a perspective necessarily

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[3] In 1918-1920 there was the so-called First Armenian Republic, which ceased to exist after its conquest by the Red Army.

connected with the deepening of cooperation with the Western powers, due to the transition of Armenia from centrally controlled economy towards a market-capitalist system.

There is a wide range of approaches by different authors to Armenian statehood and its basic pillars. In many cases, there is also the interweaving of separate pillars, or the separation of a particular pillar and the presentation of parts of it as separate pillars. Among others, the most common alternative elements of the foundations of Armenian statehood are presented as the Armenian language, Armenian ancient Christian culture, historical legal-constitutional norms of Armenia or even the phenomenon of the Armenian diaspora abroad (E.g., Hovsepyan:2020; Tölöyan:2006; Ishkanian:2005). This article, due to its constructivist-discursive methodological basis and current events in the post-Soviet space, distances itself from essentialist attributes and concentrates its research on the political-economic and geopolitical aspects, which have an immediate real-time impact on the researched topic. By thematic analysis of first decades of Armenia's existence, 4 basic pillars of Armenian statehood can be classified. While the individual pillars are both interconnected, they themselves branch off into other pillars without a society-wide consensus and with intentions that often stand in opposition to each other. The first pillar is the issue of choosing the "right" ally of Armenia. Armenian community, as a geopolitically rather marginal entity, had to rely on stronger state and transnational entities throughout its history through which this nation sought to achieve its goals. The essentiality of an ally image construction within the Armenian nation arose primarily from the fear of falling into a complex dependence on this ally and finding itself at a certain moment in the role of a scapegoat for its current priorities. The main construction pillar of alliance is the identification of interests' secondary convergence with an individual ally within Armenian communities, due to the factual impossibility of a direct presentation of one's own interests.

The first pillar is largely followed by two other pillars, which are the economic and security verticals. Economic and commercial potential has been historically associated with the influence of Western, primarily Anglo-Saxon cultures, either in form of a reference to the Armenian intelligentsia studying abroad, who on a narrative interpretation brought modern statehood principles to Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, or trade-diaspora communities helping Armenian millets with financial donations, while this perception also became part of Armenia's Soviet heritage, due to the construction of Anglo-Saxon world, as an economic well-

being symbol. Analogously, there is also a depiction of the Russian ally as a source of brute force, providing long-lasting elementary security against a common enemy. The mentioned construction of the form of alliance with Russia is also reflected in the trade and economic motives to establish relations with it on the part of Armenia. An illustrative example of the conditionality of connecting the security vertical with the economic vertical in the case of Armenian-Russian relations is Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), within which the economic perspective of this membership is kept alive thanks to the security reality. The interconnectedness of these two verticals with a strong prioritization of security pillar in the relations framework with Russia could be seen in 2013, when Armenia rejected the further cooperation and integration development with EU and joined the Eurasian Customs Union due to concerns about the increase in Russian-Azerbaijani trade-military relations and the danger of a sharp gas prices increase supplied to Armenia from Russia (European Policies Research Centre, 2022, p.4). On a more general and at the same time narrative level, the extensive role perception of the alliance with Russia within the Armenian statehood discourse can be interpreted as a fundamental continuity guarantee, but without the perspective of achieving socio-economic well-being in the short term.

The last pillar is the Nagorno-Karabakh phenomenon, which has polarised Armenian society for nearly 30 years. While one part of the Armenian population approaches the Karabakh issue in an essentialist-primordial manner and is convinced of the dichotomous and multidimensional interdependence of Armenian statehood and the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, the other part advocates a more modernist-rational opinion and highlights primarily the political-economic aspects of this conflict that has been ongoing since the constitution of the Armenian Republic. However, the dividing line of discursive opposites does not only concern the romanticism and rationalism clash, but is present also in traditional Armenian statehood discourse on the East versus West level. While the supporters of the Nagorno-Karabakh essential construction as s part of the Armenian statehood were more inclined to remain within the Russian sphere of influence and to continue Russian Karabakh Armenians support in their struggle, the so-called progressive camp strives to demystify the image of the enemy in form of Turkey and Azerbaijan by opening the borders with these states and the trade relations establishment with them.

Armenian statehood discourse from 1991-2018 accumulates a diverse range of approaches, interpretations and mutually incompatible constructions,

branching into many other discursive trajectories. As part of the discourse, there is a periodic clash of fundamental principles and formations of the Armenian state future, dividing both the political elites and society itself into supporters of the preservation of traditional state values referring to intergenerational memory and protagonists of progress regardless of transhistorical narrative dogmas. However, regardless of their high heterogeneity, all of the aforementioned contradictory and often forcibly cohabiting attitudes, at least in their publicly proclaimed level, aim at the continuous preservation of sovereign Armenian state without questioning meaningfulness of this entity. The conclusion of the Armenian statehood discourse from the moment of the proclamation of Armenian republic to the Velvet Revolution period in 2018 and subsequently the Second Karabakh War in 2020 became a multifaceted and diverse construction, but standing on a national civilizational consensus in the inviolability of Armenia construction as an absolute and transcendent element of Armenian nation.

The study links Armenia's internal development directly to external factors and actors due to the structural and historical liminality of Armenian sovereignty. Historically, Armenia has been directly dependent on external actors and their decision-making processes for many centuries. This was a period of domination by great empires and the de facto non-existence of states as we know them today. While the linear development of statehood in the world (see Spruyt, 1994) and the cumulative system-structural development made Armenia sovereign, its internal development remained largely dependent on external powerful actors. In short, the system of statehood has changed, but the internal structure of dependency has changed only marginally.

3. Armenian Second Strategic U-Turn

Armenia's sudden rejection of closer economic integration with EU and its entry into a Customs Union under the patronage of Russia in 2013 were qualified as Armenia's first strategic U-TURN (E.g. Giragosian, 2014; Terzyan, 2018). This decision by Armenia's third president, Serzh Sargsyan, returned Armenia fully to the Russian sphere of influence, but already in role of an "unreliable" partner seeking to strengthen its integration with Russia's potential economic and geopolitical rival. Russia's response to the new construction of Armenia's image as an uncertain player trying to balance between Russia's orbit and Western world has been manifested itself in greater assertiveness towards Yerevan, both in security-energy sector and in its efforts to find a more stable partner in the

region (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2020). Culmination of this trend in the relationship between the historic allies was the Armenian Velvet Revolution in 2018 (Miholjcic, 2021, pp.121-122). In the concept of this study, the so-called strategic turn is understood as a process that emphasises the relationship between actor and structure as two interacting entities that enter into the process of system construction. If, from an economic point of view, one of the fundamental pillars of Armenian statehood is the relationship with the Anglo-Saxon world, then the rejection of economic rapprochement with this space implies a strategic turn, in this case towards Russia as the primary security object. It is a disruption of the historical-structural perception (for general discussion see Walker, 1989) by a particular actor, based on the current prevalence of the security factor. The reverse process can now be seen in the context of Armenia's refusal to participate in CSTO meetings. In this case, it is no longer a strategic reversal, but a comprehensive change of direction.

The internal socio-economic system of Armenia, existing since the moment of its independence and based on the principles of corruption, clientelism and nepotism, was gradually becoming unaffordable for a major part of Armenian population (Avetisyan-Khachatryan, 2014, pp.13-14). Inability to obtain basic needs has catalysed frustration and a sense of urgency for the complex change in a significant part of population (Freedom House, 2018). The main trigger for the mass street protests and riots was the attempt to practically implement the constitutional amendments initiated by **Serzh Sargsyan** at the end of 2015. The essence of this crucial reform was the transformation of Armenia from a presidential system to a parliamentary system and the accumulation of all executive power in hands of the prime minister. Through this constitutional change, **Serzh Sargsyan** wanted to circumvent the expiry of his repeated presidential mandate and retain the political power (Derluguian, 2018). The protests were spearheaded by **Nikol Pashinyan**, young charismatic opposition leader. Escalating street riots finally forced **Serzh Sargsyan** to abdicate and **Nikol Pashinyan** became the new Prime Minister.

The Pashinyan's government has set as its main domestic policy goals the elimination of corruption-clientelist system, criminalization of oligarchs among elites, establishing the rule of law, and the strengthening of national consciousness of population on a cultural and social level (Miarka, 2019, p.47). In foreign policy, new Prime Minister clearly proclaimed interest in establishing multi-vector relations, with the stress to maintain closer relations with Western Powers (Shirinyan, 2019, p.2). Another cardinal problematic in foreign policy was

the nearly 30-year-long conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijan. The initial approach of new government to this issue followed on from its predecessor and took an uncompromising position towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Chosen directions, both in domestic and abroad, were set as the main goal of strengthening the sovereignty of Armenia and eliminating its dependence on regional leaders. In their declared level, all approaches of Pashinyan's government to individual issues were conformed to the narrative interpretation and vision of Armenian statehood, whether in domestic or foreign policy. The breakthrough moment came in 2020, when the long-term negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan finally reached an impasse and it became evident that the Karabakh conflict would not be resolved peacefully. After the fruitless Munich conference in February 2020, large-scale armed clashes broke out on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in the summer of the same year, and at the end of September, Azerbaijani troops went on a full-scale frontal offensive, both in the adjacent districts and in Nagorno-Karabakh itself. After 44 days of fighting, Armenians were defeated and 7 previously occupied districts and a larger part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself came under the control of Azerbaijan (Nikhogosyan; Ter-Matevosyan, 2022). Additionally, based on a joint statement by **Vladimir Putin**, **Ilham Aliyev** and **Nikol Pashinyan**, a large contingent of Russian peacekeepers was deployed in Karabakh for at least 5 years with the main objective of protecting Armenians and enabling the safe return of refugees (Rácz, 2021).

The defeat in Second Karabakh War definitively polarized Armenian society into Pashinyan's supporters and opponents, while it can be stated that the main dividing line was no longer only the person of Prime Minister, but overall essence of the existence of Armenian state, as a sovereign entity and its comprehensive direction, both in the domestic and foreign policy dimensions (Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2021a). The loss of direct control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has eroded of the Armenian consensus on its own sovereign statehood on four main levels. The first level was need to delimit oneself and thus to move beyond the disillusionment of Nagorno-Karabakh narrative as the last stronghold of an intact, ancient Armenian identity. It was no longer possible to insist on the principles of the necessity of the existence of an independent Armenian state and, in parallel, to acknowledge the loss of the essential core of this narrative, standing on the claim that the preservation of Karabakh territory was a necessary condition for the continuous existence of Armenia itself. The aforementioned situation within Armenian society began to

manifest itself primarily through internal hierarchical structuring. Individual Armenian communities beginning the process of self-limitation towards other communities based on the absolving their own community of blame for the national consensus disillusionment. An illustrative example is the tendency of Armenians to ethnoculturally demarcate themselves from the Karabakh Armenians, or the tendency of Armenian diaspora to individualize their national-evolutionary narrative so that there is a clear distinction between them and the population of Armenia. The second level is the presence of Russian troops on Nagorno-Karabakh, which brought this territory under the direct control of Moscow along with the security of the Armenian population there. By handing over the security guarantee of their own ethnic group to the Russian peacekeepers' hands, the inability of Armenian elites to provide the basic security of their own population was confirmed, and thus also the refutation of elemental sovereignty principle (Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2021a). The penultimate level was the weakening of Armenian positions during implementation of its multi-vector policy, and that was the disruption of its constructed Finlandization (Palonkorpi, 2013, p.86). Armenia could no longer perceive itself as Russia's unique corridor to the Asian region due to possibility of Russia's reorientation to Nagorno-Karabakh which in this sense could fully replace Armenia, which would leave Yerevan in strategic irrelevance. The last level is the securing of the buffer zone against Azerbaijani troops, which de facto has led to a situation where the security of both the western and eastern borders of Armenian Republic is now not able to provide by itself alone, but is handed over to foreign forces (Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2021b).

The polarization of society on the background of a deep socio-economic and political crisis, another massive emigration wave, together with the impossibility of fulfilling the elementary principles of sovereign statehood, such as the protection of own population and handing over the protection of its own borders to the external hands, have brought Armenia to a situation where a significant part of previously proclaimed principles of its own independence and the multi-vector direction of foreign relations were pushed aside, and Armenia once again fully entered the sphere of influence of its northern ally. The second Armenian strategic U-TURN at the end of 2020 was primarily manifested in the economic and security pillars. Economically, Armenia abandoned its efforts to develop and deepen cooperation with the EU by leaving trade and political cooperation with the Union only at the level of the CEPA (Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement) and began to actively deepen its integration within the

EAEU, but again in the role of a member that sought to balance between West and East (Madatali-Jansen, 2022, pp.5-9). Within the security sphere, Armenian priority has become the preservation of its own positions in the CSTO, which was accompanied by the Armenian presidency of this collective security organization from 2021 and the suppression of protests in Kazakhstan at the beginning of 2022 (Cornell, 2022, p.18).

4. Evolution of Armenian satehood discourse 2018-2021

The Armenian discourse of statehood, as a complex whole, can be divided into five basic discursive centres, while it cannot be said that individual discursive centres are completely autonomous, but it is necessary to perceive them as constructions that are multidimensionally interconnected. Armenia's relations with the Russian Federation, Armenia's relations with the Western powers, related economic-security verticals of the Armenian state and the construction of the role of Nagorno-Karabakh have been classified as the aforementioned discursive centres within the framework of this study. The main objective of this part of the text is an interdisciplinary analysis of the significant discursive centres of Armenian statehood on the basis of the evolution of its interpretation by the political elites of Armenia, the population of the Republic of Armenia and the representatives of the Armenian diaspora, with an emphasis on capturing the transition of the approach to the principles of Armenian statehood and its sovereignty in terms of their conformity or dissonance with the Armenian civilizational narrative.

4.1. Western economic attractiveness and geographical and historical proximity to Russia

Newly post-revolutionary Armenia in the second half of 2018 was perceived by a broader society as an entity that is facing dynamic changes, both in internal and foreign policy spheres (New Poll: Armenians Optimistic About Future, New Government, 2018). The new positioning of the Armenian state was formulated by elected Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan** during his visit to Brussels in July 2018, when PM predicted the future of his country as a potential "bridge" between EU and the EAEU (Armenia mozhet stat mostom mezhdu EAES i ES, 2018). Basis for the construction of Armenia as a link between two economic-integration organizations is the multi-vector structure of foreign policy and its own integration into both organizations. Prime Minister resorted to a more explicit assertion of

Armenia's multi-vector direction in December 2018, when he said that Armenia is cooperative, both with EAEU and the EU, and it is not under anyone's influence except of Armenia's citizens (My yavlyaemsya partnerami i Rosii, i Evropeiskogo Soyuza, 2018). Along with the economic dimension of Armenia's foreign relations, the security dimension has also emerged during this period. A parallel discursive line of the foreign economic vertical has also become a new internal socio-economic constellation standing on perception of new post-revolutionary Armenia, as a state that has finally broken free from the grip of ruling kleptocratic clans and that must regain confidence of its population in its viability and sovereignty (Miarka, 2019, pp. 41-50; IRI, 2019). Respondent 6, a member of the Armenian Parliament and respondent 4, a doctor of educational sciences and author of well-known school textbooks, describes the situation in an analogous way.

> *"There has been a corrupt and kleptocratic system in Armenia for 20 years. Nation cannot choose, it does not feel it owns its state. Nation has lost confidence in the state. Now the Velvet Revolution has happened. There is hope."*
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> *(Respondent 6, Armenia 2018)*

> *"In our country, everything is divided between slaves and slaveholders. I hope that now after revolution the situation will change. Two years ago, I had no faith in the future of our nation. Now I hope it does. Our former elitists are the main enemies of Armenia."*
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> *(Respondent 4, Armenia 2018)*

Respondent 6, by projecting Velvet Revolution as a renewal of the Armenian people's hope for repossession of their state, projects a wave of enthusiasm among the Armenian people and a complex perception of this event as a new beginning (Direction of national politics in Armenia, 2008-2019). By the time horizon of 20 years, respondent 6 refers to the period of Robert Kocharyan's presidential mandate, during which the unwritten socio-normative order of Armenia flourished to its greatest extent. Respondent 4 and his diversification of Armenian society into slaves and slaveholders reflects the internal structure of Armenia. While the representatives of political elites profiled themselves as slaveholders, seeking to obtain as many material goods as possible in exchange for their services, the major part of Armenian population was constituted as slaves, forced to pay increasingly higher financial and other material sums for

these services (Baghdasaryan, 2017, pp.1034-1035).

The vision of „New Armenia", articulated by **Nikol Pashinyan** in 2018, became the mainstream approach to Armenia's development in the first post-revolutionary years (Poll: Armenia in 2018 on the Attitude of the Armenian Society to International Organizations, the EU, EEU, CSTO and NATO, 2019). Leader of the opposition movement (respondent 8) and the doctor of medical sciences (respondent 2) project an analogous position in their interpretation of Armenia's future foreign and domestic direction.

> *"We must not give priority to anyone. We must have a harmonious relationship with everyone. It is not to be Russia, US, EU or anyone alone. The most important thing is our independence, and we don't want to create an ally that will ultimately damage us."*
>
> *(Respondent 8, Armenia 2018)*

> *"Armenia must get Russia and the EU to stop playing us like a ball. We must be sovereign. We must be respected by all. We should not be under someone's wing forever."*
>
> *(Respondent 2, Armenia 2018)*

Both respondents implicitly emphasize the need for a structural reorganization of Armenia's foreign policy towards the branching out of its strategic partnership, thereby eliminating its existential dependence on only one foreign ally. By a deeper analysis, two implicit narrative-dogmatic constructions can also be identified in their interpretation. The first construction is the implicit interpretation of Russia as the main and even the only strategic ally of Armenia. The second construction is the characterization of this strategic ally as a patron providing continuous protection to Armenia, but at the risk of abusing its position for its own subjective benefit.

4.2. Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia as a security guarantor

The Armenian government's stance on the security pillar in this period also lies on the polarizing East-West axis and the tendency of constitution of relations with other security blocks outside the CSTO. This position is again evident from a PM´s statement, claiming that Armenia is a member of the CSTO, but also cooperates with NATO and intends to enhance this cooperation but with no ambition to become a member of this organization (Pashinyan reaffirms that CSTO member, 2018). Accompanying the rhetoric of Armenia's multi-sectoral

and multi-vector policy, the new post-revolutionary Armenian government also implicitly noted the dysfunctionality and inadequacy of the economic pillar of Armenia's integration in the EAEU and the need to reassess effectiveness and contribution to Armenia its membership (Trade between EAEU member states still has not reached the level, 2018). The constancy of situation within the security vertical and the preservation of the security-strategic alliance with Russia is a consensual dogma across Armenian society (Davtyan-Markarov, 2018, pp. 539-541; New Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2018). However, a variable factor that has been changing over time across Armenian community and acquiring new interpretative repertoires is the qualitative evaluation of that alliance and its classification as an alternative-less, necessary evil (Terzyan, 2019, p.29). This approach to Armenia's security issues is also taken by a high-ranking official of the Armenia's Ministry of Defense (respondent 1) and a lieutenant colonel of military intelligence (respondent 5).

> *"It is obvious that in the coming years, building the security within the framework of a strategic alliance with Russia is not possible. All ideas of US, EU, France, etc. are all impossible in the nearest future. It is a very dangerous romanticism. However, we must build our relations with Russia wisely and be strong."*

(Respondent 1, Armenia 2018)

> *"Naturally, the Russian Federation. But the whole misery of this impasse and choice is that there will always be a price for which Russia will be willing to sell out Armenia. And it has done so several times and is doing so now."*

(Respondent 5, Armenia 2018)

A key discursive pillar of Armenia's security vertical is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, that has polarized Armenian society into two camps for nearly 30 years (New Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2018). However, this pillar is not only reflected in the security discourse, but is also closely related to the economic vertical of Armenian statehood, in the context of the land blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Projection of Nagorno-Karabakh as an essential element of the continuous existence of Armenia itself, is also reflected in the interpretations of Lieutenant Colonel of the Russian Air Force (respondent 7), and the former ambassador of the Republic of Armenia in southern Europe countries (respondent 11).

"It is a question of principle. If I were the prime minister of Armenia, I would immediately recognize Nagorno-Karabakh and merge with it into one state. Karabakh is Armenia and there is no other alternative. The issue of blockade is a bit inflated from the point of view of Armenia's economy."

(Respondent 7, Armenia 2018)

"Nagorno-Karabakh should be addressed in connection with genocide, because Azerbaijan's behaviour is a continuation of the genocidal policy. The political elites of Armenia are divided into those who want to make concessions and those who claim that there will be no concessions. The Karabakh issue is an issue of Armenia's security, it is not an economic issue, but the challenge to Armenian statehood, which is of course more important."

(Respondent 11, Armenia 2018)

In their approaches to Nagorno-Karabakh phenomenon, respondents 7 and 11 refer to narrative-traditional projection of Karabakh territory in three constitutive dimensions. The first narrative-dogmatic pillar of this form of interpretation is the aforementioned belief in the inseparable and multidimensional connection between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Second dimension is the romantic marginalisation of economic factor with reference to the primacy of Armenian statehood. The last dimension is represented by hyperbolic interconnection between Armenian genocide and Karabakh conflict, standing on the enemy image construction due to identical Turkic origin of Turks and Azerbaijanis (Chernobov-Wilmers, 2019). The opposite or more "rational" position on the Karabakh security pillar is taken by respondents 6 and 4.

"Whole conflict and blockade have a negative impact on Armenia's economy. Economy is not developing and there is no employment. There is a possibility of peace with Turkey, opening the borders and leaving the right of self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh at the same time."

(Respondent 6, Armenia 2018)

"Whoever was in power before Pashinyan tried to impose on us the image of the enemy in form of Turkey and Azerbaijan and we had to endure everything they did. It was as if they were lying to us and trying to impose this idea on us. We have to live in peace with our neighbours. We don't have access to the sea and whether we want to or not we have to have a

good relationship with them. The ordinary people in Turkey apologised to
me for what happened. The U.S. also dropped atomic bombs on Japan
and they are still friends with each other, why shouldn't we be?"

(Respondent 4, Armenia 2018)

Respondent 6's assertion of the possibility of abandoning Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination while making peace with Turkey (meaning also Azerbaijan) implicitly refers to one of the most touted formats for resolving this conflict, the so-called step-by-step system, which was subsequently de-facto implemented to a large extent after the Second Karabakh War (Gasparyan, 2016, pp.268-269). Economic rationalisation of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is the main basis and interpretation of respondent 4. In his construction of peace possibility between US and Japan after the dropping of atomic bombs, the respondent realises an implicit parallel between this event and the Armenian genocide carried out by the Turks.

If the first post-revolutionary months of 2018 were in spirit of implicitly expressing plans for changes in Armenia's future direction, 2019 and 2020 can already be classified as a period of progressive gradation of the **Pashinyan** government's explicit expression of their visions of a "New Armenia". In January 2019, Prime Minister declared that an economic revolution and the strengthening of democratic institutions must take place in Armenia. The basis of this process, according to **Pashinyan**, must become the development of cooperation with the EU institutions, while the role of the EU was envisaged as structural, through which a series of political and social reforms will occur in Armenia (Armenia Needs Economic Revolution, 2019).

"I have already said that there will be no radical changes in Armenia's
foreign policy. We are members of the EAEU, which is very important for
Armenia's economy, because it is a huge market for Armenian business.
But we also signed a CEPA with the EU, which we will also put into
practice. This agreement means social and political reforms. Through this
agreement and cooperation with the EU we will strengthen democratic
institutions in Armenia."

***(Nikol Pashinyan**, Prime Minister of Armenia, 2019)*

The re-emphasis on the immutability of Armenia's foreign policy and its membership in the EAEU, along with the assertion that deepening integration with

the EU will bring a number of structural reforms, is a clear depiction of Armenia's democratic deficit implicit construction in the context of its membership in EAEU to date and parallel interpretation of rapprochement with the EU as an instrument of democratisation (Abadijian, 2020, p.125). The deepening of a similar line of direction continued in the following year 2020. The necessity of development of all-round economic cooperation with countries outside the EAEU and implementation of structural-democratic principles in Armenia was noted. However, a more fundamental change began to be the labelling of this partnership as a strategic one and the move towards the so-called second stage of the strategic dialogue with the US (Armenia will consistently develop and deepen relation, 2020). In a complex measure, first two post-revolutionary years can be assessed as a period of efforts to return to original perception of Armenian state and the visions that dominated immediately after the declaration of its independence. According to prospects of future at that time, Armenia was moving towards adopting new principles of sovereign statehood, establishing multilateral relations with potentially beneficial partners, and actively developing its own economic and security verticals, given the post-war state in which it found itself after the First Karabakh War (Panossian, 2006). The Pashinyan's government, in its declarative level, has continuously followed the approaches to Armenian statehood in its narrative interpretation, both economic and political-security dimensions. The essence of the concurrent rhetoric in 2018-2020 was the intention to point out the weaknesses and insufficiencies of cooperation and integration in organizations under Russian Federation auspices (Shirinyan, 2019, pp.18-21).

The turning point of Armenian discourse in the context of the direction of Armenia and the further constitution of its statehood profile was the end of 2020 and the defeat in the Second Karabakh War. In doing so, it is possible to say that a comprehensive transition of discursive trajectories occurred only in 2021, when the consequences of Armenian narrative and civilizational consensus erosion began to be fully manifested. Across the political spectrum, Armenia began to proclaim a temporally regressive position, pointing to the period before the declaration of its own sovereignty in 1991. The foundation of this transition in Armenian discourse became four basic pillars referring to perception of world order and the place of the Armenian state in it. The first pillar and the most essential one became the dogmatic construction of the uniqueness and absolute necessity of Russia in the existential sectors (Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2021a). An illustrative example of the return to this essential-

dogmatic position is the statement of the Nikol Pashinyan in November 2022, standing on the claim that the CSTO is the key structure of Armenian security (The confirmation of the CSTO zone of responsibility in the Republic of Armenia, 2022). Subsequently, in the autumn of the same year, he classified the role of the Russia as essential for Armenia's economy as well (Pashinyan: In addition to traditional areas of interaction with Russia, 2021). The second pillar is based on the conviction of the necessity of further economic-security integration with the Russia as a direction without an adequate alternative (The allied nature of Armenian-Russian interstate relations already…, 2021).

> *"The allied nature of Armenian-Russian interstate relations already predetermines constant, continuous work in terms of their further strengthening and adaptation to the current realities conditioned by both time and developments we have at the regional and global levels. We intend to carry out this work in a coordinated manner, based on the need to safeguard the indigenous interests of the peoples of our countries."*

> *(**Ara Ayvazyan**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, 2021)*

> *"We must all continue to develop our allied relations with our main security partner, the Russian Federation. We must continue to develop our relationship within the framework of the CSTO, as well as to ensure the security of our country and people through international mechanisms*

> *(**Nikol Pashinyan**, Prime Minister of Armenia, 2021)*

4.3.   Rationalisation and romanticisation of the Karabakh narrative

The third discursive pillar is the Karabakh territory and its role in the process of Armenian statehood construction. In doing so, this pillar forks into two interrelated trajectories. Underlying the first trajectory is the need to construct a new perception of Nagorno-Karabakh, no longer as an integral part of the Armenia (Pashinyan is ready to recognize Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan, 2021). The main argument of this discursive trajectory has become the abandonment of original narrative interpretation and the emphasis on more rational-economic and commercial perspective (Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, 2022). The second trajectory is represented by the role of Russian peacekeeping troops in Nagorno-Karabakh, where one form of interpretation refers to the narrative image of Russian-Armenian relations and portrays Russian troops as protectors of Armenians, while the other emphasizes the geopolitical rationality of Russian Federation and assigns the presence of Russian forces in region to Moscow's

revisionist ambitions (Rácz, 2021, p.6; Ambrosetti, 2021, p.9). The last pillar can be characterized as a discourse that partially accumulates the discursive trajectories of the previous three pillars and formulates them in form of an interpretative repertoire with a graduating scepticism towards the benefits of the current form of sovereignty of Armenia (Freedomhouse, 2021; Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, 2022). The head of the patent institute in Germany (respondent 11) and a high-ranking UN representative (respondent 3), in their perspectives on the further development of Armenia after its defeat in Karabakh war, emphasize the key role of Russia as a historical ally of Armenians.

> *"It looks like Russia will not leave our region which is the key thing. Russia saved us in 1925 from complete extinction. We were on the verge of total extinction. We have to rebuild everything with Russia. We have never won anything on our own, it has always been thanks to Russia and at the same time we have never appreciated it. We create myths about our strength and our victories, but they are just false myths. We have never defended or won anything on our own. We have destroyed our mentality over the last 30 years."*

(Respondent 11, Germany 2021)

> *"Hypothetically, if today we announced that we are leaving the CSTO, we are evicting Russian troops etc…what happens tomorrow? Tomorrow we will have NATO troops in Armenia protecting us? I sincerely doubt it, the top NATO's leader in region is Turkey."*

(Respondent 3, France 2021)

Respondents portray Russia in the role of an unmistakable and key link in the existence of Armenian nation and statehood, along with a parallel inclination towards a constant regressive approach to the process of heroization of Armenians, and emphasis on the necessity of deepening integration with Russia, with an implicit rejection of Armenia's westernization. The primary argument of such an approach is the acceptance of a construction based on the assertion of the imperative of choosing only two options for Armenia's future existence, either under the patronage of Russia or Turkey. Priest of the Armenian Church in Europe (respondent 12) and editor-in-chief of Armenian magazine in Europe (respondent 10) take the opposite position, corresponding to a more political-rational trajectory.

"Russia's role is, in fact, a political question. During the first war Russia also had no influence at the beginning and only at the end it did become more involved on Armenian side. In second war, unfortunately, Russia was more neutral. Azerbaijan was strongly supported by Turkey and Armenia by no one. Everything was prearranged."

(Respondent 12, EU 2021)

*"It was a Russian-Turkish project. The leader of Velvet Revolution, due to his incompetence, backed down and started this war. **Pashinyan** did nothing to avert a second war. It all smacks of a pre-arranged move. We are now even talking about Armenia being part of Russia and being a military base for the Russian Federation in South Caucasus."*

(Respondent 10, EU 2021)

Respondents 12 and 10 formulate their perception of Armenia's post-war development on the principle of rejecting the narrative-romantic construction of Russia as Armenia's historical ally and interpret the relationship on the basis of Russia's continuous prioritization of its own geopolitical interests rather than on the essential brotherhood of Russian and Armenian peoples. However, notwithstanding this purely modernist-instrumentalist interpretation, the aforementioned respondents construct the negative image of the Russian alliance paradoxically precisely on the implicit-narrative formation. An illustrative example is respondent 12's assertion of Armenia's predestination according to the "Russian-Turkish project", which given the narrative construction of Turks as the arch-enemies of Armenians, reflexively equates the realization of this project with the destruction of Armenia.

The discursive centres of Armenian statehood have undergone cardinal transitions in their development direction during 2018-2021. In a banal classification, it can be said that 2018, 2019 and even a large part of 2020 were marked by the pursuit of a multidimensional Armenian sovereignty consolidation by way of the absorption of socio-economic and geopolitical principles that are unconventional for Armenia. The construction of Armenian state, as a bridge between two different worlds, was to become the basis of this direction. However, this vision, at least in its discursive form, failed to classify and represent the form of cohabitation of these two worlds within Armenia and failed to adequately reflect the social polarization of Armenia, which has become a simultaneous process. If the first post-revolutionary years can be described as a period of abandonment

of traditional approaches and ways of perceiving the issue of Armenian statehood, the first post-war years, on the contrary, can be classified as a period of return to the original values in an even more radical form. However, in both time periods, there is, within the discourse, an interpretation of the essential verticals of the Armenian state as formations mainly dependent on external actors, whether in form of Western powers or Russia. Through its ambiguous, balancing and, to a large extent, contradictory internal and foreign policy, Armenia found itself in a paradoxical situation, where the tendency to proclaim and consolidate sovereign principles of its statehood became, on the contrary, a motive to question their viability, given the condition of the continuous existence of these principles by a complex transfer them to the other actors.

Conlcusion

The article's purpose was to respond to transhistorical interpretation of Armenian statehood discourse by reflecting on the genesis of the multipolar mode of perception of this construction by Armenian communities against the backdrop of political, socioeconomic and geopolitical realities. The overall objective was to overcome the axiomatic construction of Armenian statehood as a civilizational consensus by analysing the evolution of discourse. To this end, the article first identifies in a historical perspective the key discursive pillars of Armenian statehood, the development of which is then analysed in the context of the two most pivotal events of modern Armenia in the 21st century, which were the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. It is these two events that the article classified as milestones of fundamental transformation of the mentioned pillars, having a significant impact on the direction of their development. These pillars were determined to be the construction of the image of an ally, the economic and security verticals, and the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These constructions first became the foundation of a new image of Armenia as a bridge between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian worlds in the early post-revolutionary period, seeking to remove the dissonant aspects of two poles, through its own knowledge of their political and socio-economic principles. However, the result has been an ambiguous and contradictory position of Armenia, which has once again brought it to a state of complex-essential dependence on external actors.

Subsequently, the article conducted an analysis of the Armenian statehood discourse development based on secondary and primary data and supported by

the results of public opinions. The analysis concluded that at the beginning of the third decade of its existence, the Republic of Armenia found itself in an unprecedented and at the same time paradoxical situation, when the most striking social outburst of patriotic emotions of its people during the Velvet Revolution turned, in the interval of three years, into a historically unprecedented regressive attitude towards the principles of its own sovereign statehood. While the germ of this process was the tendency to cardinally change the traditional socio-economic, political and geopolitical values of Armenia towards the supposed construction of better times, a parallel phenomenon of this process has been the deep polarization of society along the dividing axis between the rise of structural scepticism towards the narrative of Armenian statehood and the vision of rationalizing the construction of it. Since the issue of socio-economic, political and geopolitical rationalization is a continuous existing element of the Armenian Republic issues, it is the genesis of scepticism and patriotic deficit as a substitute opinion stream of the Armenian statehood narrative that is the structural aspect of the Armenian civilizational consensus erosion beginning over its sovereign statehood.

It is a prospect of the near future whether even now the Republic of Armenia is on the verge of its next strategic U-turn. Recent events in the region show a renewed gradation of the rotational politics of current Armenian elites, this time primarily in the sense of rejecting the traditional form of Armenian security vertical, which has long been based on Russia. However, the question is whether this time the potentially new direction of Armenia will be oriented only towards the West, for example in form of the Armenian-French vector, or whether new vectors will also appear on the Armenian scene, such as the Sino-Turkic one, which is rapidly developing in the post-Soviet space.

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