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Armenia's Foreign Policy: Where values meet constraints

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1. The doctrine

The official foreign policy doctrine of Armenia is called “complementarism”; the idea at the core of this approach is that various foreign policy dimensions can and should complement each other and need not be perceived as mutually exclusive. Complementarism has, in a way, become Armenia’s trademark, making the country different from those post-Soviet republics which have opted for a particular foreign policy orientation, such as Georgia with its widely advertised “pro-Western” stance and Belarus with its explicit “pro-Russian” or “anti-Western” orientation. Other post-Soviet countries beside Armenia have also adopted versions or elements of complementarism; e.g. Kazakhstan’s “multi-vector foreign policy” bears similarities to Armenia’s approach. In contrast to the orientation model, implementing a complementary policy involves carefully balancing between external players; some experts have called this approach “sitting on the fence” and pointed out the precariousness of this position¹. In the existing political and geographical reality, the main practical advantage of Armenia’s complementary foreign policy has so far consisted in allowing the country to avoid making one specific choice: that between Russia and the West. For twenty-plus years, Armenia has been an illustration to the (rather unpopular) premise that being pro-Western does not require being anti-Russian, and likewise, being pro-Russian is not necessarily synonymous for being anti-Western.

On a day-to-day basis, the choice is not easy to avoid and the equilibrium remains fragile. Given the tense competition between global and regional players in the South Caucasus, Armenia’s failure to make up its mind makes the West

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regularly criticize it for being pro-Russian, whereas Russia frowns at each move that Armenia makes in the pro-Western direction. The benefit of the openly declared complementarity is that neither the West nor Russia considers Armenia a hostile actor; one can say that in contrast to the orientation model, complementarity does not enable a country to make many friends, but allows it to avoid making enemies. Indeed, in the eyes of the West, Armenia still looks nothing like Belarus, and at the same time, Armenia's relationship with Russia is not marred by the convolutions and tensions that have become typical for Russia-Georgia ties.

The balancing game began the moment Armenia was established as a sovereign state in 1991. Armenia's first government was openly pro-Western and anti-Communist, a natural development given Armenia's tense confrontation with Moscow in the years leading up to the disintegration of the USSR. What began as a dispute over the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-populated enclave in Soviet Azerbaijan that aspired to unification with the Soviet Republic of Armenia, soon evolved into a mass movement of Armenians for independence from the USSR. Back then, the Soviet army supported Azerbaijan in the

territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas the Soviet political authorities did their best to crush Armenia's growing independence movement. In late 1988, the leaders of Armenia's 'Karabakh Committee' were arrested and flown to Moscow where they were held in jail until May 1989. Very shortly, these same men were going to become the core of independent Armenia's first political leadership; Armenia's future first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan was one of them. In 1991, his government would launch large-scale liberal reforms and welcome cooperation with the West in every sphere.

Seen in retrospective, the outspokenly pro-Western first government of newly independent Armenia was also one of the most, if not the most pro-Russian in the former USSR. Although complementarity did not become Armenia's official policy doctrine until much later, it took effect on the ground once the USSR disintegrated, with Levon Ter-Petrosyan rising to power in Armenia and Boris Yeltsin in Russia. Tensions with Moscow were forgotten overnight, the slate was wiped clean, and the relationship between Armenia and Russia became almost idyllic. The fact that the two presidents were on very good terms may have played a part, but could not

have been the decisive factor: there were practical issues at stake.

By 1992, Armenia and Azerbaijan were fighting a full-scale war. In the first decade after the disintegration of the USSR, all wars on its former territory were fought with Soviet (and later Russian) weapons: the newly independent post-Soviet states simply had nowhere else to go for arms, ammunition, technical assistance or fuel but to the Russian army. The NATO alliance, or any other bodies or countries, were not present or involved in the South Caucasus, whereas the old Soviet military bases and networks were still within easy reach. Its newly found friendship with Russia did not just provide Armenia with a source of military power but also with a security umbrella. As long as the former Soviet, now Russian army base was located on Armenia's territory, Armenia could feel secure that its powerful neighbor, Turkey, despite its proclaimed solidarity with Azerbaijan's cause in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, would not become directly engaged in the warfare. The potential risks of ruining the relationship with Russia were clearly more than Armenia could afford; as a result, Armenia's first leadership immediately began learning to be pro-Western and pro-Russian at the same time.

The Western dimension never ceased to be a priority; Armenia began to actively engage with European and U.S. bodies the moment it was technically possible, i.e. right after the 1994 ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, although now involved in EU and NATO projects and activities on a par with neighbouring Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia also made sure to institutionalize its cooperation with Russia. In the military sphere, Armenia's complementarism is perhaps the most vivid: whereas its institutional engagement with the NATO is the same as that of the other two South Caucasus states (in the form of the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan and involvement in NATO peacekeeping operations in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan), Armenia is also a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russia-led military alliance that also includes Belarus and three Central Asian republics. For all these years, the Russian army base has continued to operate on Armenia's territory. Arguably, the military sphere is also where Armenia's complementarism has been most effective: to date, Armenia is the only country in the South Caucasus which fully controls its territory, whereas the conflict over Nagorno-

Karabakh, although still unresolved, does not flare up again despite the ongoing “cold war” and escalating arms race.

2. The region

Although the South Caucasus is treated by external actors as a regional entity, and may indeed appear to be an entity when seen from afar, after remaining within the Russian Empire and then the USSR for two hundred years, the countries of the South Caucasus have become difficult for external observers to differentiate, if only because there was no need to do so. By virtue of inertia, external players usually place their policies with regard to the South Caucasus states within one paradigm, despite the apparent cultural dissimilarities. Language-wise, Azerbaijan is thus extremely close to Turkey, whereas Shia Islam brings it much closer to Iran than any other country in its region. The language spoken in Armenia is Indo-European, closer to English or French than to those of its two neighbors in the Caucasus. The Georgians are the only nation in the region to speak a Caucasian language, distantly related to languages spoken in the Russian Northern Caucasus; they also share Orthodox Christianity with the Russians. Both Armenians and

Georgians consider contacts with Ancient Rome and Greece to be an important part of their histories. This list can be continued, reflecting the highly heterogeneous cultural space that from the outside, is treated as a single region.

The same degree of heterogeneity has been manifest in the political culture and political trends in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia since the disintegration of the USSR.

Azerbaijan is thus very unlike its neighbors due to its rich oil reserves. Due to gigantic revenues that it gets from the sale of hydrocarbons, the ruling regime of Azerbaijan feels sufficiently secure and independent to afford a power rotation system in the spirit of Near Eastern monarchies. On the ground, Azerbaijan has even gotten rid of the basic political institutions that could jeopardize the perpetuation of the current regime, namely, the political opposition, free press and elections as a mechanism of power rotation. As a result, notwithstanding all the setbacks of democratic progress in Georgia and Armenia, these two countries are a jump ahead of Azerbaijan in terms of political development; as it has happened to many countries worldwide, oil acts as an objective

deterrent to democratization in Azerbaijan. While relying on international companies to mine the oil, and on European consumers to buy it, Azerbaijan is mistrustful of Western efforts to “democratize” it that would endanger the regime’s control over all spheres of governance.

Georgia is special in that it has a common border with Russia and a traumatic experience of interacting with its powerful neighbor. Back in the 1990s, when Georgia was fighting –and losing– wars in its former autonomies Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia was almost openly involved on the opposite side. The 2008 Russia-Georgia war brought tanks to the outskirts of Georgia’s capital Tbilisi and caused Georgia to lose all remaining prospects of ever regaining its secessionist autonomies. The resulting relationship between Georgia and Russia is mistrustful at best. Combined with the geographical fact that routes for transportation of oil and gas from Azerbaijan and Caspian to the West go via Georgia, it is rather predictable that Georgia chose a “pro-Western,” or rather, “anti-Russian” orientation. This orientation is rather objective in the case of Georgia, depending very little on personalities; as long as the Abkhazian and Ossetian issues persist, Georgia will remain intimidated by its huge and powerful neighbor, even though the new

government led by Bidzina Ivanishvili has been trying to tone down the hostility and enable some extent of neighborly collaboration, such as cross-border trade.

Meanwhile, Armenia does not directly border Russia; Georgia lies between the two. As a result, Armenia feels much less threatened by its former parent state, and can therefore try to place its relations with Russia within a more complicated paradigm that involves several power centers. Being landlocked in a bad way, Armenia is doomed to a multi-vector policy as the only alternative to becoming an apple of discord for international as well as regional players. With its options heavily restricted, Armenia needs to cooperate with all neighbors or non-neighbors that have any incentive at all to become involved with this poor post-totalitarian country. Just as in the cases of Georgia and Azerbaijan, this feature of Armenia’s policy is determined by external objective parameters and has little relevance to the domestic political situation. For Armenia, a policy based on a quest for consensus and balance is just as justified as mistrust of Russia is for Georgia, and mistrust of the West is for Azerbaijan. As a result, the three countries of the South Caucasus are so

different from one another that all external attempts to promote their integration have unsurprisingly been futile, and are likely to remain so in the near future.

3. The geographic layout

The geographic aspect of Armenia's political situation is reflected in its officially declared determination to continue sitting on the fence indefinitely. As a consequence of the conflict and war over Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia only has political ties to two of its four neighbours. Armenian-Azerbaijani relations amount to a cold war that never stopped since the 1994 ceasefire, whereas Turkey sealed its border to Armenia back in 1993 in a gesture of solidarity with Azerbaijan. Internationally mediated formats for settling the Karabakh conflict have so far failed, as have efforts to re-establish diplomatic ties between Armenia and Turkey.

In the political reality, Armenia has only two functional neighbours, Iran and Georgia, with which it sustains overall positive relations and on which it depends entirely for communication and trade with the outside world. Roughly one-third of Armenia's communications run via Iran and about two-thirds via Georgia, whereby lie

Armenia's only routes to Russia and European countries.

Given the still-unresolved disagreements between Russia and Georgia and the open hostility between the United States and Iran, an open orientation towards one particular external player would not fail to affect Armenia's relations with the respective regional neighbour. A pro-Western orientation would jeopardize trade with Iran. A pro-Russian stance would endanger communication via Georgia. These are opportunity costs Armenia cannot afford. Instead, it bears the reputational costs of being neither here nor there, in the form of constant criticism from both Russian and Western counterparts and increasingly, from its own society which, as new generations enter adult life, tends to embrace a "European" or "American dream."

Notably, despite all impediments and perceptions to the contrary, Armenia's largest trade partner is the European Union, not Russia. However, Russia's weight remains crucial in two spheres in which the first is military security, which could well be decisive on its own, and the other is investment, first and foremost in energy production. For a

developing post-Communist state like Armenia, foreign investment is obviously crucial for economic growth and reform. However, since Armenia is small, landlocked and lacks significant mineral resources, Western businesses or international corporations have very limited incentives for investing in it. Armenia's domestic market of about three million people is not large enough to justify exuberant transportation expenses: with the direct route to Europe shut off by the sealed Armenia-Turkey border, shipments have to take a long detour via Georgia while also invoking additional transit costs. This leads to a situation where the Armenian market is not attractive to most businesses except ones expecting to make a profit from sales to domestic consumers. Given Armenia's 3-million strong market with a rather low per capita GDP of roughly \$5,600 by PPP, such companies are neither numerous nor highly active in the market. To boost its economy, Armenia needs investors to set up businesses with an export potential²; hence, the popularity of software engineering in the country, and of other trades, such as diamond cutting, whose products are easy to move across borders.

In addition, given the still unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the region's generally poor reputation for stability, it is a

challenge to Armenia –and to its neighbours– to attract capital to industries requiring large investments but not promising rapid payback. In the case of Armenia, investment from Russia has become an acceptable solution. Russia has its own, apparently atavistic and post-imperialist motives, enhanced by the fact that it faces difficulties when trying to invest outside the post-Soviet realm. Old economic ties and surviving Soviet networks make the investment process comparatively smooth in Armenia. By now, Russian companies have invested in several key sectors of Armenian economy, first and foremost into the production of electricity, of which Armenia is the region's only exporter. By increasing production of electricity that it sells to Georgia and Iran, Armenia can hope to develop other industries. Russian investment thus serves to boost the energy export potential of a country that has no hydrocarbons of its own.

The fact that Russian investment is apparently politically motivated is an acceptable challenge that falls within the logic of complementarism. Political incentives lead to investment on a scope that a country with Armenia's constraints can never hope to attract for purely economic reasons. On a

scale comparable with Russian business, investors from no other country have had the incentives to commit to Armenian markets. The political costs to Armenia are largely reputational; despite popular apprehension, economic cooperation with Russia does not strongly affect Armenia's domestic politics. Russia is not particularly concerned with the domestic policies or reforms that are being implemented in Armenia as long as Armenia commits to remaining under Russia's military wing and does not openly proclaim a pro-Western orientation. Armenia, meanwhile, has a number of constraints, apart from Russia's wishes, that prevent it from adopting a political orientation of any kind. And as long as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved and borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey remain sealed, Armenia cannot opt out of partnership with Russia in the military and energy realms.

On a wider scale, military security and the transportation and production of hydrocarbons are the two primary spheres in which Russia exerts influence over the former Soviet republics. As to the impact of Russian presence in these spheres, it varies noticeably across the former USSR. For some post-Soviet states, Russia's security involvement has become a

heavy burden, with grave repercussions for domestic politics. For example, Russia successfully manipulates some countries, such as Ukraine, using energy prices as a lever; some countries, among which Georgia is the most vivid example, were even subjected to Russia's military pressure. Contrastingly, other post-Soviet countries are –to varying degrees of success– using Russia's presence to their advantage and even benefiting from Russia's geopolitical ambitions. Specifically, Armenia uses its 'complementary' approach to exploit Russia's atavistic post-imperialist ambitions to the extent that they coincide with Armenia's aspirations. This is a rather ambitious task; however, recent history has revealed cases when a country created a paradigm for cooperating with two global powers in the midst of a cold war, one of which was that country's former parent state. For example, starting from the end of World War II and until the disintegration of the USSR decades later, Finland was part of the Western world but made allowances for the Soviet Union, taking the strategic interests of its powerful neighbor and former imperial centre into account while preserving its own sovereignty, and even found ways to benefit from this situation.

The reasons why some countries suffer from Russia's engagement and some manage to benefit from it are certainly quite complex; an educated guess is that each specific country's geographic situation may play a part. Specifically, in the case of Armenia, a possible factor is that, unlike Georgia, Armenia does not have a common land border with Russia. Therefore, in contrast to Georgia, Armenia does not experience many of the fears or complexes that are typical for a small country directly bordering the former territorial empire that had dominated it for centuries.

4. The European dimension

Naturally, orientation toward and relations with non-European countries and cultural realms affect the prospects of a country's integration with Europe. One can argue, as many experts do, that Armenia's lack of a pronounced pro-Western political orientation and its refusal to acknowledge the exclusive status of its ties to the West can hinder Armenia's prospects for integration with Europe. Additionally, in contrast to Russia, European bodies place very specific demands on the domestic policies of partner countries, making integration and cooperation contingent on the implementation

of reforms and commitments to democratic standards. In this aspect, Armenia is under much stronger pressure from Europe than from Russia.

However, provided that the progress of Armenia's technical cooperation with Europe continues, Armenia's "geopolitically ambivalent" status may, paradoxically, pave the way to a more profound if rather slow integration of Armenia into the European realm. By playing its rather intricate game of complementarism, Armenia is evolving an intrinsically European culture of balancing between the concerns of various political entities. In Armenia's case, a consensus culture and the ability to coordinate the interests of many players and to play on many fields are not dictated by a pro-Western ideological paradigm or European value system, but instead, by Armenia's geographical, economic and political situation as a small, poor, landlocked country involved in a territorial dispute. Conversely, doing the right things for the wrong reasons very often works in politics; whatever their causes, consensus-making and multi-dimensionality fit European political culture very well. A tradition of avoiding external conflict and surviving in a multi-cultural and multi-player

setting can bring Armenia closer to Europe even though many of the players in its game are anything but European. The constant need to connect and coordinate policies so as to avoid clashes between domestic and external players is making Armenia rather good at *modus vivendi*. In the context of European integration, this means taking consistent steps towards institutional cooperation with Europe while carefully avoiding any declarative moves or ideological rhetoric that could make Russia nervous.

As to its institutional format, Armenia's integration with Europe dates back to the EU-Armenia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that laid the legal basis for the mutual relationship, regulating economic, social and other ties between the EU and Armenia³. The PCA came into force in 1999, in the same year as the European Union's PCAs with Azerbaijan and Georgia. The EU-Russia PCA was signed two years earlier. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been members of the Council of Europe since January 2001. Since 2004, Armenia has been included in the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy alongside fifteen other countries neighbouring on the EU, including former Soviet republics, Balkan and Northern African states. In 2005, the EU adopted

a cooperation Action Plan with a special focus on democratization, anti-corruption measures and the empowerment of civil society.

In 2008, the EU announced the prospective launch of a new initiative: the Eastern Partnership project, or EaP, that would involve only six post-Soviet countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP is one of the components of a new approach to the EU neighbourhood launched in 2009 in Prague. The approach envisions Europe's cooperation with its neighbours on a regional scale; alongside the Eastern Partnership, it includes the Northern Partnership, the Mediterranean Union and Stabilization and Association Agreements implemented with various Balkan countries. In May 2011, the Eastern Partnership project acquired its own parliament, called the "Euronest Parliamentary Assembly". Euronest consists of sixty members of the European Parliament and sixty members of the parliaments of Eastern Partnership member states, ten from each country.

The gradual unfolding of cooperation with the EU agrees with the overall trend of Armenia's foreign policy of "sitting on the fence." Until

2008, Armenia's second president Robert Kocharyan prioritized the country's relationship with Russia and the CSTO over that with the EU and NATO. President Serzh Sargsyan, incumbent since 2008, has adhered to a more balanced policy: according to him, Armenia does not aspire to membership in the EU or NATO but wishes to deepen its cooperation with both. While being diplomatic with respect to Russia, this stance is also reasonably pragmatic, given the fact that becoming a member of the EU or NATO is by no means a realistic prospect for Armenia, in the mid-term at the very least.

As to trends in public perceptions, they are much steeper. The general view of integration with Europe lacks the diplomatic caution of political positions while also ignoring the complexity and long-term nature of the integration process. According to a poll done in late 2004 by the Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS), 64 percent of Armenians supported the idea of EU accession for Armenia, and just under 12 percent were against it. A poll done by Vox Populi in the same year in Armenia's capital city, Yerevan, yielded an even larger number of proponents of European integration, 72 percent⁴. The Armenians' support for EU membership reached a peak of 80 percent in 2007⁵ and has declined

ever since, albeit not abruptly. According to the Caucasus Barometer produced by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in the end of 2011, 62 percent of respondents were in favor of Armenia's integration with the EU, and 8 percent opposed it. Trust in the EU went down to 37 percent in 2011; as many as 18 percent told CRRC they did not trust the EU⁶. Apart from discrepancies between methodologies used by different think tanks, the decline can be attributed to the global financial crisis, which in public perceptions is strongly associated with the West, and therefore, with Europe –for most people in Armenia, the two are synonymous. In the last few years, the Eurozone crisis has come to the foreground. Should this explanation be correct, it can also serve as factual proof of the hypothesis formulated above: that for the general public in Armenia, European integration is not so much about values as about material well-being, of which Europe is the key symbol in Armenia.

Over the years, cooperation projects with Europe unfolded stably and consistently. About half of Armenia's exports go to EU countries, more than to CIS states, even though exports to the CIS increased slightly in 2011 with the re-opening of the Russia-

Georgia border. Armenia's imports from the CIS are slightly larger than those from the EU, and are growing; as per type of goods, the two are quite different, with Armenia chiefly importing consumer goods and industrial products from the EU and energy sources from the CIS. People-to-people ties have also been expanding. For example, according to official data, citizens of EU countries accounted for 39.4 percent of all tourists who entered Armenia in January-September 2012. Most European tourists to Armenia came from Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy.

As the next development of the Eastern Partnership project starting in June 2010, Armenia was engaged in negotiations of an Association Agreement with the EU, of which a key element will be the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the European Union. According to the to-do lists of the Eastern Partnership countries, Armenia is next only to Moldova in its progress on the way to DCFTA, followed by Georgia, and with Ukraine significantly lagging behind. Azerbaijan still has a long way to go, and Belarus does not have a negotiations agenda.

By the calculations of the European Friends of Armenia, exports from the EU to Armenia would

grow by 30 percent should the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area be established⁷. These prospects create additional incentives for the Armenian elite; the Road Map for the Association Agreement and DCFTA adopted in May 2012, with an action plan until November 2013, includes reforms and improved regulations in the sphere of trade but also a section on democratic reform, human rights (improvement of the justice system and support for independent media) and efforts towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia originally planned to finalize negotiations with the EU by autumn 2013 and sign an Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius in November. However, a new obstacle arose, once again bringing to light the inevitability of complementary politics. On September 3, 2013, Armenia's President Sargsyan announced that his country would be joining the Russia-lead Customs Union that also includes Belarus and Kazakhstan. This decision crippled Armenia's potential progress towards an Association Agreement with Europe. In Armenia's priorities, security comes first and cannot be sacrificed to anything. When a change in external circumstances –in this case, a bend of Russia's policies in the

post-Soviet space in general– made Armenia face this choice, the result was pre-determined. Whenever Armenia has to choose between security and anything at all, it has to choose security.

Despite this setback, there is no doubt that Armenia will continue its European integration efforts to the maximum extent possible under the circumstances. Just a few weeks after September 3, work was resumed on the EU-Armenia agreement on readmission and visa facilitation. Armenian officials, including the president, have since made many statements to the effect that Armenia's quest for collaboration formats with Europe will continue in various spheres. The main reason behind this policy is that it stems from the structure of Armenia's priorities and not from external factors.

5. Public perceptions and values

An important domestic aspect of the European integration trend is the meaning that is associated with it in Armenia, and arguably in many other former soviet countries –a meaning that is quite a bit wider than integration with particular European countries and institutions. Whereas Armenian society at large is still relatively little informed about the actual

process of interaction and cooperation with European bodies which is unfolding on the ground, the expression “European integration” or “integration with Europe” is mentioned very frequently by politicians and the media, most of the time in a rather positive sense. In the last decade, it has even become one of the most important keywords of Armenian domestic discourses. Arguably, the need to integrate with Europe is currently one of the least questioned policy issues, especially in the parlance of politicized intellectuals and political leaders. Meanwhile, the way it is presented by the media and perceived by the public, “European integration” does not necessarily relate to Armenia's ongoing efforts to cooperate with the European Union in the legal, economic or political realm.

For people living in Armenia as in most other post-Soviet countries, “integration with Europe” is synonymous with transition from one cultural realm into another. This transition is about de-Sovietization, but also about modernization. In this context, becoming part of Europe implies replacing archaic Soviet values and practices with modern European ones. Attraction to European values, European political culture and nation-building paradigms exists

throughout the post-Communist world, especially in spheres such as democratization, elimination of corruption, establishment of rule of law, protection of human rights and creation of efficient modern institutions and mechanisms. None of this is in fact about foreign policy; this is a predominantly domestic trend, in Armenia and elsewhere. Europe comes across as a role model rather than a geographical area or political entity, and integration in this context is not about mechanisms or bodies, but about “becoming like Europe”: not integration but rather, Europeanization. When mentioned in Armenian domestic discourse, “European integration” is mostly used in this sense. Meanwhile, the two are in fact quite different things: a country can have a pro-European political orientation but no desire or intention to adopt European-values, and vice versa. This fact is well illustrated by Armenia’s relationships with other countries and cultural realms: although Armenia maintains very positive relations with the United States, Iran and Russia, it would be very unusual for an Armenian citizen to wish to become an American, Iranian or Russian while also remaining an Armenian citizen living in Armenia. Contrastingly, an average Armenian often aspires to become “a European” and does not see this option as

incompatible with remaining Armenian and continuing to live in Armenia. In the public opinion, “Europeanization” is an attainable and desirable goal.

That said, one can only wonder to what extent this is about culture; the fact that European countries are rich and welfare-oriented plays a huge part in forming Europe’s attraction as a role model. In Armenia’s public discourse, the European model is viewed as the best method of achieving the material well-being of society by means of a cultural mechanism (as opposed, for example, to natural resources). Arguably, this is what makes the mechanism so attractive to poor countries like Armenia. Indeed, for many in Armenian society, European values, such as the rule of law or the protection of human rights, are not appreciated for their own sake but rather based on the assumption that they can be instrumental to achieving economic well-being and social welfare.

In reality, projected onto the developing world, the connection between affluence and democratic norms is not necessarily straightforward and is being widely debated by political scientists and economists, who

usually point out that citizens of democratic nations are generally better off and more protected than people living in authoritarian regimes. The Armenians' urge to overcome poverty can become an incentive for accepting the European value system, and vice versa, the wider dissemination of European norms can be conducive to better social welfare and the improvement of living standards. Moreover, the concept of "Europe" is also one of diversity and heterogeneity; European countries vary greatly in terms of cultures and lifestyles. This fact also makes integration with Europe look like a realistic and attractive perspective, since one can become European while also remaining Armenian.

Whatever its motivation, the aspiration that the entire Armenian nation can one day become "European" is gaining popularity in the society at large, thereby creating a powerful incentive for integration with European institutions and implementation of European standards.

6. Conclusions

The challenges remain immense. It is extremely difficult to adopt a set of values that evolved in a very different cultural context, and start using it as your own. The main hope for Armenia lies

in the fact that the multi-dimensional and multi-layer quality of its foreign policies will stimulate it to evolve the kind of political culture that is characteristic of Europe: consensus-making, balancing the needs and concerns of various actors, and elaborating ground rules for the complex interaction between players with contrasting agendas.

Whatever its motives may be, support for European values –and more importantly, the introduction of European practices– in Armenia is strongly enhanced by practical steps on the road to integration, such as membership in European bodies, e.g. the OSCE and the Council of Europe, if only because the membership come with commitments in the political, legal, economic and social spheres. The commitments specifically require the Armenian government to change domestic rules and practices, not just its relations with Europe. Once institutionalized in the form of memberships, a pro-European political orientation comes with a domestic agenda, proscribing the establishment and reform of a wide variety of institutions.

Rather than stemming from an ideological orientation, Armenia's prospects for integrating with Europe thus rely on two very

practical pillars: accession to European bodies and organizations, on the one hand, and the domestic institutionalization of European models and practices, on the other. The two do not necessarily develop at the same speed but are mutually stimulating. Should Armenia improve its record of human rights and freedoms, efficient institution building and market reforms, this will encourage European bodies to increase the scope of their cooperation with Armenia. Meanwhile, integration with European institutions ensures support for domestic reforms and creates a convenient framework for their implementation.

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