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PROBLEMS OF EURASIAN AND POST-SOVIET COOPERATION

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NEW ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN THE CONTEXT OF GROWING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

The purpose of the article is to analyze the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia after the change of the country's political leadership as a result of the "velvet revolution." With regard to the development of integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union, it is considered as one of the most important vectors of the New Armenia's foreign policy in economic cooperation with the EAEU countries in the context of increasing geopolitical tensions. The article shows changes in the foreign policy of the "New Armenia," as well as the features of their manifestation in a sovereign state within the EEU. They are characterized by practical realism and a pragmatic approach to the development of integration processes in the Eurasian economic space, aimed at protecting the national interests of the country and the national dignity of citizens. Proposals and recommendations for further development of integration processes in the EEU are formulated, taking into account the specifics of member states with "minor economies."

Key words: *foreign policy, the New Armenia, the Eurasian Union, Eurasian integration, "minor economies," geopolitical tension.*

On the official website of the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Armenia's foreign policy vector is designated as "strengthening the country's security, providing favorable conditions for the development of the country, representing and protecting the interests of Armenia and its citizens abroad, increasing the country's authority and role in international organizations, further strengthening partnership

relations with friendly countries, and actively participating in resolving global and regional problems. The goals of Armenia's foreign policy are an effective representation of the country's positions on the foreign policy arena and promotion of the peaceful development of the international community, including a peaceful and fair resolution of the Karabakh problem on the principle of self-determination of the people of Artsakh" [1].

Economic Eurasian integration cooperation is singled out as one of the defining economic areas of cooperation, since "the EEU was created for comprehensive modernization, cooperation and increasing the competitiveness of national economies and creating conditions for stable development in order to improve the living standards of the population of the member states in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty on the EEU. The Armenian leadership highlighted the implementation of a coordinated macroeconomic policy in relation to the EEU, the main directions of which are: formation of common principles for the functioning of the economies of the member states of the Union, ensuring their effective interaction, as well as development of common principles and guidelines for predicting the socio-economic development of the Parties" [1].

An important milestone in the development of Armenia's foreign policy is cooperation with NATO in the areas of democratic, institutional, and defense reforms, as well as practical interaction, which is considered in the context of peacekeeping operations. The individual partnership action plan (IPAP) sets out the program of cooperation between Armenia and NATO and outlines an extensive roadmap for reforms, which is adjusted and approved every two years. But Armenia, by intensifying practical and political cooperation with NATO, does not actually seek membership in NATO (1).

The "velvet revolution" in Armenia was accompanied by an enhanced information campaign aimed at reducing Russia's real influence in the country, the need for which was justified by the goals of ensuring the national security of Armenia as an independent state. A number of Western experts emphasize, when assessing the results of the peaceful transition of power in the country, that Armenia has sacrificed the balance between Armenia's multi-vector foreign policy, which is sometimes diplomatically called "complementarity," and the country's national security in favor of national security. As a result, the geopolitical orientation has shifted towards Russia [7]. The result was the formation of a space for maneuvering Armenia's foreign policy, limited by the complex neighborhood and disputes between the West and Russia in Eurasia. However, Russia's growing influence in the region changes the essence of the supposed "strategic partnership" between Yerevan and Moscow. As Russia has become closer to Azerbaijan and Turkey, its main role as a guarantor of security and regional balance for Armenia has been compromised. At the same time, Armenia's dependence on Russia has increased [7].

In other words, according to Armenian analysts, all Western institutions of influence have actually accepted Armenia's place in the "Russian orbit." And this

Western detachment explains the growing skepticism of Armenians towards both Russia and the West.

Armenia has confirmed the multi-vector nature of its foreign policy, which has recently been called “Armenia-oriented.” Armenia’s foreign policy will be based on the realization of its sovereignty both in its relations with Russia and in strengthening cooperation with the West, including intensification of cooperation with Georgia and Iran [7]. In this regard, since the spring of 2018, the Armenian establishment has been dominated by the view that Armenia should not accept geopolitical determinism, where Russia plays a significant role. Therefore, the decision-making process needs to be reformed. Armenia’s security planning must also change, as democratic governance and sound foreign policy are now gradually recognized as important components of security. At the same time, if Western countries want to help Armenia, they need to participate more in reforming the state and creating a more secure environment in the region [7]. In this regard, it is stated that “Armenia’s subordination to Russia is a consequence of Russia’s imperial power, as before. As an argument, the process of monopolization of the energy sector in Armenia and the country’s complete dependence on Russia’s Gazprom is cited. The project of a railway route to the main port of Iran, Bandar Abbas, has also not been implemented due to the fact that the Armenian railway company is controlled by Russia. Russia’s control is so strong that there is interference in the activities of the Armenian army. In this regard, Pashinyan’s visit to Iran is considered a significant event, since Iranian President Rohani called Armenia a transit country for gas supplies from Iran to Georgia [6]. At the same time, by entering into more constructive relations with Iran, Armenia has been subjected to indirect US sanctions in the context of growing geopolitical tensions. The latter’s concern about the consequences of deepening Armenian-Iranian relations prompted a visit to Armenia by D. Bolton in 2018, who pointed out that interaction with Iran contradicts Armenia’s strategic interests. However, the country’s leadership intends to pursue an independent foreign policy that will focus primarily on the interests of Armenia, contradicting the political goals of the United States in the South Caucasus region. It is symptomatic that the New Armenia proclaims the thesis that “true foreign policy embraces morality, one of the aspects of which is the protection of national dignity.” Therefore, Russia’s top leadership should perceive New Armenia as a more independent country if Russia has decided to work with it and take into account its pragmatic approach” [6]. Thus, New Armenia will make its own decisions [5]. New Armenia will no longer serve the interests of others if they contradict its national interests. New Armenia will no longer ignore any attempts to humiliate the dignity of the Armenian people, no matter where it comes from. Finally, New Armenia will decide for itself with whom and to what extent it should develop its relations, taking into account the highest national and moral interests of Armenia and the Armenian people throughout the world [6].

Armenia's foreign policy is expected to address a number of important issues in the near future: overcoming uncertainty in relations with the EU, focusing on speeding up the ratification of the Armenia-EU agreement, and overcoming contradictions with its EEU and CSTO partners. It is expected that after overcoming the internal political turmoil, the process of settling the Artsakh conflict will be significantly intensified [4]. Armenia has entered into partnership agreements with the European Union (EU) for two decades, gradually expanding trade relations. In 2017, an agreement was signed on a comprehensive and expanded partnership to expand and deepen economic and political relations, in which Armenia can become a kind of bridge between the EU and the EEU. We can see an ambitious approach that should be further studied and continued by Armenia. In the past, the EU has repeatedly stated that Armenia can join the EU, but its membership in the EEU is a difficult obstacle to overcome on the way to the EU [3].

In the sphere of interaction with the EAEU countries [3], priority is given to building interaction with Russia. It acts as a strategic partner of Armenia in ensuring national security in the region to help protect its borders and those of Artsakh. Russia is called upon to ensure the security of the Armenian population, or at least to ensure that Turkey or other countries do not interfere in the conflict on the side of Azerbaijan. Russia and Armenia are members of the Collective Security Organization (CSTO), a military alliance led by Russia, which is still active and includes a significant Russian military presence in Armenia. Starting from 2019, the Russian-Armenian relations are expected to be reviewed, moving away from the historically established traditional alliance to a more pragmatic approach that provides for a pro-European and pro-Atlantic reorientation of Armenia. This is supported by the personnel policy, when the backbone is made up of people somehow affiliated with the West in the broad sense of the word: either through studies in English or American universities, or through the work for Western structures, including international organizations [2]. This is expected to bring greater pragmatism to the Russian-Armenian relations.

Armenia's new foreign policy is aimed at changing relations with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which, despite their common membership in the EEU, often evaded or did not support Armenia's position on the issue of territorial ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the new policy of Armenia with the post-Soviet countries, with the exception of Azerbaijan, can be characterized by the term "optimistic pragmatism," which assumes a stable improvement of relations, based not only on the traditions of past cooperation, but also on greater materiality and palpability [2].

As for relations with the United States, analysts describe Armenia's policy as a continuation of an idealistic approach. The country's leadership pursues a policy of more active positioning in international processes, strengthening contacts with other states and regions, while maintaining public neutrality in issues where the conflict of interests in the geopolitical plane has already led to an escalation

(the Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian civil war, the terrorist threat in the Middle East, the rapidly deteriorating US relations with Iran).

Armenia's relations with China are directly linked to the country's economic interests, as China is one of the Asian countries that continue to increase their influence in Armenia through humanitarian initiatives: opening schools with advanced Chinese language studies and increasing expert and academic mobility programs. Given the immediate intensification of China, Japan and other Asian countries' interest in Armenia, we can expect that it will try to create exclusively favorable export trade and economic conditions for cooperation [2].

Another option for Armenia in its foreign policy activities is to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes military, economic and cultural cooperation; three countries from the EEU, including Russia, are member states, and India and Pakistan have recently joined. Armenia has been a dialogue partner since 2008 and applied for observer status in 2012. The improvement of relations with Turkey, Azerbaijan's ally in the region, is complicated by the existence of long-term economic relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey regarding the use of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea [3].

U.S. policy towards Armenia is manifested in the following aspects: first, the position of the US State Department on the issue of Armenia's territorial concessions to Azerbaijan in the interests of peace; secondly, the imposition of sanctions on the accounts of Armenian citizens because of the development of Armenia's relations with Iran, that were abolished at the insistence of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States; third, provision of information to American tourists traveling to Armenia on the allegedly tense political situation in Armenia and the possibility of terrorist attacks, which is not true. All these unfriendly measures are aimed at ensuring Armenia's departure from the strategic partnership with Russia.

The priority directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, as a country with a "minor economy," sufficiently clearly determine the behavior of other EAEU member states in relation to their geopolitical priorities regarding the development of Eurasian integration processes, in economic Eurasian integration cooperation.

Conclusions: The EEU member states are united for economic purposes, as indicated by the provisions of Article 2 of the EEU Treaty. The Union is an international organization of regional economic integration. It has an international legal personality and fully exercises its right to carry out relevant international activities on behalf of and for the purposes of the EEU. Such activities are economic in nature, while the foreign policy of each of the EEU members is carried out on the basis of their sovereign rights as independent actors of international activities.

At the same time, insufficient coordination of the foreign policy of the EAEU member states cannot but affect the development of economic integration. This implies the need to model coordinated approaches to the implementation of foreign and foreign economic policies of the EAEU member states in the context of

increasing geopolitical tension, which will contribute to economic and geopolitical stability and will have a favorable impact on the development of the EAEU as an international organization:

1. The priorities of the Armenia's foreign policy in integration interaction with the EAEU member states are based not only on economic interdependence, but also on political cooperation, strengthened by a common history, culture and deeply intertwined national traditions and customs. The internal growth drivers of the EEU countries in general are used effectively to promote the competitiveness of States in international markets against the background of growing global problems.

2. In the context of growing geopolitical tension, the Republic of Armenia will continue to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy that involves positioning, based on the priority of national interests, ensuring the security of the country's citizens, and promoting the growth of their well-being.

3. The Republic of Armenia, giving priority to the development of Eurasian integration, is stepping up its foreign policy activities through the development of trilateral and multilateral contracts in the form of cooperation with third countries that are not members of the EEU. Armenia's foreign policy within the EEU is linked to Russia's policy as a guarantor of its security, including through the SCO and the CSTO.

4. The EEU member States, especially countries with "minor economies," occupy an important geopolitical geographical position in the strategic external priorities of the Russian Federation. Their membership in the EEU is not in doubt in public opinion, but is used by foreign countries in propaganda campaigns in the aspect of loss of national sovereignty, subordination to the interests of Russia, insufficient integration effects, lack of benefits and bonuses, paternalistic expectations in market relations.

5. Geopolitical pressure on the EEU members from the US and EU countries is increasing in attempts to reorient their political and economic policy from the development of Eurasian integration and political and economic interaction with Russia to a more in-depth partnership with the US and EU countries.

6. In the conditions of increasing geopolitical tension, the use of soft power tools is becoming more important. Political and economic elites, the population of Armenia and their diasporas are under increased influence of mass media and propaganda trying to falsify and distort integration interaction within the EEU framework, the development of cooperation with Russia, and form myths and idefixes educating young people in the spirit of unified values of Western culture. In this regard, the EEU should strengthen the institutions of mutual influence in the form of "soft power" on the territory of the EEU countries. In the context of growing geopolitical tension, it is advisable to expand the economic and humanitarian component of foreign policy interaction.

7. Russia's leading position in the integration within the Eurasian Economic Union has to be complemented by the restructuring of the national economy,

development of national investment and the real sector, establishing a policy of “soft power” in Eurasia with the consideration for the ethnic and economic specificities of each country.

NOTES:

(1) IPAP (individual partnership action plan) for Armenia is aimed at strengthening the political dialogue between NATO and Armenia, as well as supporting the implementation of democratic and military reform in the country. Due to the broad nature of the IPAP, Armenia cooperates with NATO not only in the defense sphere, but also holds regular consultations with the Alliance member states in the field of the rule of law, transparency of reforms, counter-terrorism and anti-corruption. In the framework of the IPAP, NATO agrees to support Armenia in achieving its reform goals by consulting on specific issues and providing concrete assistance. Armenia also makes an important contribution to the NATO-led operations. The Armenian armed forces contingent joined the contingents of NATO member countries in peacekeeping operations in Kosovo in 2004. In 2008, the number of the Armenian contingent in KFOR doubled to 70. Since February 2010, Armenia has also participated in the International security assistance force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Through the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Armenia also cooperates with NATO and other partner countries in a large number of other areas. Armenia determines its participation in the PFP program by signing up an Individual Partnership Action Plan every year, selecting activities that contribute to the achievement of the goals set out in the IPAP. Source: official website of the Armenian Foreign Ministry // <https://www.mfa.am/ru/international-organisations/3>.

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