

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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From Natural Allies to Belligerent Neighbours: The Evolution of Foes' Conceptions in Armenia's Foreign Policy Discourse*

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Conventional wisdom presumes that the portrayal of the foe in a state's foreign policy discourse is quite indicative of the core characteristics of its foreign policy identity. Relying on discourse analysis of Armenian Presidents' speeches, this study explores the evolution of foe's conception in Armenia's foreign policy discourse from 1991 to 2016. More specifically, it scrutinizes major ups and downs of Azerbaijan's and Turkey's conceptions, examining their identity-related and situational determinants and constraints. It markedly departs from political and economic explanations of Armenia's troubled relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, focusing chiefly on Armenian Presidents' beliefs about country's staunch foes. Remarkably, foes' conceptions have experienced puzzling fluctuations in Presidents' discourse from 1991-2016. The characteristics of Azerbaijan and Turkey have shifted from the notions 'natural allies' and 'indispensable neighbours' to 'belligerent', 'bellicose', 'destructive', 'Armeneophobic', 'Ottoman' and 'unreliable' actors. Along with situational constraints, the principal causes of the shift lie in different belief systems of Armenian Presidents, and most, importantly, Azerbaijan's and Turkey's mounting animosity towards Armenia.

Keywords

Azerbaijan, Turkey, foe, Armenophobia, belligerence

Introduction

The long-standing logjam over Armenia's troubled relations with

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Azerbaijan and Turkey has prompted a focus on a wide array of regional-level (geo) political and (geo) economic constraints. Remarkably, a bunch of studies adopt geopolitical notions to account for the anatomy of belligerence and ensuing bitter divisions among Armenia and its neighbours. In essence, there is a tendency for the emphasis to be placed on regional-level geopolitical and geoeconomic constraints determined by major regional powers, such as Iran, Turkey, Russia and the US¹. Additionally, some studies focus on the conceptual framework of Turkey's modern foreign policy, scrutinizing the implications of "Neo-Ottomanism" ideology and "Strategic Depth" doctrine for its relations with friends and foes².

Alternatively, some authors devote significant attention to the core constraints, stemming from Armenia's smallness³ - incapability of redefining its relations with neighbors. It is generally assumed that alongside other political and economic constraints, historical controversies with Turkey⁴, as well as historical development of the Armenian and Azerbaijani national identities and the overlapping claims to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh⁵ militate against achieving a breakthrough.

Whereas little to no attention has been devoted to social constructivist perspective of key policy-makers' core beliefs and their role in policy making.

Departing from mainstream explanations of troubled relations, this study focuses particularly on Armenia's Presidents' beliefs about Azerbaijan and Turkey in the operational code approach. The concept of operational code refers to the set of axioms, postulates, and premises that

¹ **Jafalian A.** ed., *Reassessing Security in the South Caucasus: Regional Conflicts and Transformation*, Ashgate Publishing, 2011; **De Waal T.**, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

² **Torosyan T., Arshakyan G.**, Turkey's Modern Foreign Policy: New Challenges and New Opportunities, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2015, 2, 3, 73-90.

³ **Kotchikian A.**, The Dialectics of Smallness: State-Making in the South Caucasus, *AIPRG Working Paper No. 06/13*, pp. 1-21.

⁴ **Mirzoyan A.**, Armenia, the Regional Powers, and the West: Between History and Geopolitics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 55-106.

⁵ **Geukjian O.**, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy, Routledge, 2012.

appear to constitute the foundation of more specific beliefs and practices. According to a widely adopted definition “the individual’s belief set represents all the hypotheses and theories that he is convinced are valid at a given moment”⁶.

The beliefs have been classified into two broad categories: those concerned with the leader's philosophical beliefs about the nature of the political universe and those concerned with the leader's choices and instrumental tactics⁷. These beliefs focus on overall perception of the reality (philosophical beliefs) as well as the conception of the methods and instruments to attain policy goals within the constraints of the perceived reality (instrumental beliefs)⁸. Additionally, a belief system entails *normative* beliefs (beliefs about what ought to be) and *positive* beliefs (beliefs about what is), *central* and *peripheral* beliefs (beliefs which are unshakeable and beliefs which are less central), and *open* and *closed* belief systems (belief systems which are or are not open to change in general)⁹.

Given the challenges and constraints of tracing complex systems of beliefs, feelings, and motivations in the brain of an individual, there is a propensity in studies to explore the contents and relationships of a belief system through its effects as manifested in the language of human subjects. It is generally assumed that *words* represent the exercise of power in the form of making threats and promises or in the form of invoking authority to support or oppose actions between states or other agents in world politics¹⁰.

Overall, the study relies on discourse and content analysis of Armenian Presidents’ speeches to elucidate their principal beliefs about the nature and core characteristics of Armenia’s foes, say, the evolution of Azerbaijan’s and Turkey’s conceptions in their political thinking.

⁶ **Houghton D. P.**, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases*, Routledge 2009, p. 106.

⁷ **Jerold M ed.**, *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*, The University of Michigan Press, 2003, pp. 35-42.

⁸ **Houghton**...Op. cit., pp. 106-107.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ **Schafer M. and Walker G. S. ed.**, *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 31.

While process tracing sheds light on major situational constraints that, alongside Presidents' beliefs, have determined their perceptions of foe.

The portrayal of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Levon Ter-Petrosyan's discourse (1991-1998)

The conception of Turkey has experienced dramatic ups and downs in Armenian foreign policy discourse since the restoration of Armenia's independence in 1991. The newly formed political elite, known as the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM), embarked on ambitious objective of redefining Armenia's traditional friends and foes in Armenian political thinking. More precisely, it started to shape a new neutral and civic identity that was believed to be conducive to the challenges threatening the country. At the core of this policy was the transformation of the Armenian-Turkish relations. Given the Ottoman past and, in particular, the strong mark that the Genocide has left on Armenian collective memory and identity, "Turkey" appeared to represent everything that opposed the essence of "Armenia." "Turkey's" perception as a historical foe in Armenian collective memory was reinforced following the Turkish blockade of the country, a gesture of solidarity with Azerbaijan.

Armenia's political elite, however, viewed anti-Turkish sentiments as a threat to Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, which was viewed as indispensable for Armenia's steady development and regional stability. The political elite worked hard to overcome Armenian society's deep-seated anger toward Turkey. "We always remember historical conflicts but, guided by our country's realistic interests, we must overcome our pain and establish normal interstate relations... The psychological barriers appear to be overcome, which is the greatest achievement of our movement"¹¹. In an attempt to alleviate the severe suffering caused by the economic blockade and transition, the ruling elite was consistently striving to prepare ground for the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. The discourse analysis of Armenia's foreign policy from

¹¹ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, Yntrani: Eluytner, Hodvacner, Harcazruycner {Selected Speeches, Articles, Interviews, Archives of the First President of the Republic of Armenia}, Erevan, 2006, p. 300.

1991-1998 indicates that despite the challenges facing Armenia due to the blockade by Turkey, there was no outright anti-Turkish rhetoric. To this end, it attempted to transform Turkey from a historical foe to an indispensable neighbor. Furthermore, Turkey's core characteristics in Ter-Petrosyan's discourse are intimately linked to the notion of "friend" rather than that of "foe."

Ter-Petrosyan's administration did not put the issue of the Genocide recognition on the foreign policy agenda, viewing it as prejudicial to the Armenian-Turkish relations. "Armenia regards the events that occurred in 1915 as a genocide against the Armenian people. Nevertheless, Armenia does not view that issue as a prerequisite for normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations... Mutual understanding between two societies is contingent upon rapid settlement of bilateral relations"¹². In Ter-Petrosyan's view, Turkey's historical depiction as a hostile enemy in Armenian collective memory had to be overcome in order to prepare society for dialogue and mutual understanding. He declared: "As neighboring states, Armenia and Turkey have to forge mutually beneficial economic ties and gradually overcome historical conflicts, rebuild confidence between Armenian and Turkish societies via the establishment of friendly relations... this obliges each party to display political will and moral attitude"¹³. The president of Armenia tended to attribute the lack of progress in Armenian-Turkish relations to Azerbaijan's aggressive stance against any sort of normalization: "We stand ready to establish relations without any preconditions right away... Turkey does not reportedly oppose this but seems to have been fallen into a trap which it set by linking the improvement of its relations with Armenia to the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and in particular to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict"¹⁴. Ter-Petrosyan avoided taking a harsh position towards Azerbaijan since he believed that the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was essential for Armenia's national interests and regional cooperation. Ter-Petrosyan tended to interpret the conflict as a Kremlin-led conspiracy against two nations, rather than a manifestation of ethno-political antagonism

¹² **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 480.

¹³ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁴ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 595.

stemming from racial, cultural and religious divisions: "There is no ethnic, racial, national or religious factor behind the conflict...the conflict itself has been artificially incited and retained by colonial nation [Russia]. Without the Kremlin's interference, Armenia and Azerbaijan would find a common language... If there was a democratic government in Azerbaijan that was open to dialogue, any sort of mediation would be rendered obsolete"¹⁵. President Ter-Petrosyan was adhering to the "democratic peace" theory, which believes democracy promotion is essential to breaking the impasse in the "frozen" conflict. "I am confident that, once we have a fair settlement for the Karabakh conflict, our societies will quickly rediscover the devices necessary to retain the traditions of peaceful co-existence"¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Armenia's foreign policy discourse was free of rhetoric that propagated contempt against Azerbaijan. Ter-Petrosyan made a clear distinction between the Azerbaijani state and society, contending that the core hindrance to Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute resolution was the deficit of democracy in Azerbaijan and its unwillingness to remain committed to a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, Ter-Petrosyan's discourse tended to be more negative than positive about Azerbaijan; there was a blurred line between the notions of "friend" and "foe." Ter-Petrosyan criticized Baku's policy, which in his view, used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to deflect attention from domestic economic, political and social shortcomings¹⁷.

The core conceptions of Azerbaijan in Armenia's foreign policy discourse under Ter-Petrosyan's presidency were reflected in the following terms: "destructive", "belligerent", "nondemocratic", "natural ally", "neighboring partner", etc. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was seen as the major obstacle to the rapprochement with "natural allies", Azerbaijan and Turkey. The ruling elite stressed the potential economic significance of the Armenian-Turkish and the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, claiming that historical conflict and identity-related constraints

¹⁵ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁶ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁷ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 194.

must come second to economic interests. In Ter-Petrosyan's view "Karabakh's foe is the international community rather than Azerbaijan"¹⁸.

Nevertheless, his efforts at redefining Azerbaijan and Turkey in Armenian strategic thinking beyond the notion of "the other" and reconciling collective memory with economic considerations proved futile. His "pro-Turkish" and "pro-Azerbaijani" views, especially the emphasis on concessions in the NKR conflict resolution in exchange for lifting the blockade, were at odds with widely held views among the public. This ultimately resulted in his resignation in 1998.

The conception of foes in Robert Kocharyan's discourse (1998-2008)

The Armenian government's positions toward Azerbaijan and Turkey in foreign policy discourse hardened markedly throughout Robert Kocharyan's presidency. He firmly asserted: "After 10 years of a re-evaluation of our approach, now I think that it was politically wrong [to make concessions]. It gave no results. And what happened in 1998-2000 regarding the toughening of the position towards Turkey was logical as we got nothing from our concessions..."¹⁹ In Kocharyan's speeches, Turkey is fiercely condemned for subjecting Armenia to an unlawful blockade, which hindered Armenia's advancement toward European integration and steady development. Yet, despite the historical conflict and the Turkish blockade, there was a tendency to regard Turkey as an important neighbor that could play a crucial role in regional stability if it reversed its policy toward Armenia. "History and geography have thrown us together, we are neighbors... some distance between our two countries might have allowed us to put distance between our past and our future. But we have no such luxury. There is no space, no cushion, between us"²⁰. The National Security Strategy states: "The absence of normalized

¹⁸ **Ter- Petrosyan L.**, Op. cit., p. 630.

¹⁹ Armenian leader tells Turkey not to meddle in Karabakh, January 2003, <http://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/armenian-leader-tellsturkey-not-meddle-karabak> (11.09.2016).

²⁰ Speech by Vartan Oskanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of Armenia, June 26, 2002, <http://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/item/2002/06/26/turk/> (09.03.2017).

relations adversely affects the stability of the region... The normalization of Armenian Turkish relations would lower the possibility of new dividing lines emerging in the region and would help to create a more conducive environment for the final settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict"²¹.

Throughout Kocharyan's presidency, Yerevan repeatedly expressed its readiness to bypass the issue of Genocide recognition in order to break the impasse in the Armenian-Turkish relationship. The National Security Strategy of Armenia states: "Armenia has long advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations without any precondition and will continue its efforts to surmount the obstacles and improve the bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey"²². The lack of any tangible progress in normalization was attributed to Ankara's aggressive policy. When asked about the main obstacles to the normalization of bilateral relations, Foreign Minister Oskanian was quick to cite Turkey's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: "The establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey or the complete re-opening of the border before the conflict's final settlement is not probable... the Karabakh issue has become a precondition for normalizing relations"²³. The core characteristics of Turkey in foreign policy discourse under Kocharyan are linked to contrary notions of "important neighbor" and "historical foe", characterized by "non-European policy" and "belligerent rhetoric". Regarding Azerbaijan, Armenia's foreign policy makers started out on a positive note, placing strong faith in peaceful negotiations. Initially, Kocharyan abstained from adopting a harsh position toward Azerbaijan, calling on the latter to tone down its ambitions and resume negotiations over a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without preconditions²⁴. In the president's view, a breakthrough in the conflict settlement could be

²¹ Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy,

http://www.mfa.am/u_files/file/doctrine/Doctrineing.pdf (07.08.2015).

²² Ibid.

²³ An Exclusive Interview by Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian to the Mediamax Agency, October 18, 2002,

<http://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/item/2002/10/18/mediamax> (26.02.2016).

²⁴ **Kocharyan R.**, *Eluytner ev harcazrucner {Speeches and Statements}*, Yerevan, 2011, p. 19.

achieved only via intensified and persistent efforts at moving beyond the deep-rooted hostilities. Like his predecessor, Kocharyan invariably stressed that, despite Azerbaijan's efforts at presenting the conflict in religious and cultural realm in order to win the Muslim world's support, there is no religious or cultural reason behind the conflict²⁵. Nevertheless, over time he started to respond to Azerbaijan's propaganda and threats to resume war against Armenia. A new line in Yerevan's foreign policy discourse regarded Azerbaijan as an "aggressor". "The war of 1992-1994 was precipitated by the aggression unleashed by Azerbaijani authorities seeking to conquer the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh through ethnic cleansing...the conflict settlement should build upon its essence rather than Azerbaijan's build-up stemming from oil dollars. That is a recipe for confrontation rather than compromise"²⁶. Guided by European patterns of conflict settlement, Armenian foreign policy makers believed intensified interaction between Armenia and Azerbaijan would be instrumental in breaking the impasse: "The history of the EU formation indicates the advantages of regional cooperation as a path to prosperity and stability...Lack of regional cooperation is one of the core impediments to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement. Armenia believes in the possibility of conflict settlement through regional cooperation, whereas Azerbaijan rules out the possibility of cooperation unless the conflict is settled"²⁷. Kocharyan began to question the ethnic compatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis: "The anti-Armenian pogroms (in 1988 in Sumgait and in 1990 in Baku) have shown that Armenians and Azerbaijanis are ethnically incompatible. People who have lived through a genocide cannot allow it to repeat itself"²⁸.

The parties have drifted further apart during President Aliyev's presidency. The nadir came when Azerbaijani Army lieutenant, Ramil Safarov, killed 26-year-old Armenian officer, Lieutenant Gurgen Margaryan in his sleep, during a special NATO-backed course in Budapest on February 19, 2004. Safarov was subsequently hailed as a

²⁵ Kocharyan R., *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

²⁶ Kocharyan R., *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

²⁷ Kocharyan R., *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

²⁸ Armenian leader...

hero in Azerbaijan, gaining Aliyev's explicit support²⁹. In statements following the incident, Kocharyan emphasized that Azerbaijan's hostility left little room for optimism in regards to peaceful conflict resolution. The murder widened the conflict, and consolidated anti-Azerbaijani sentiments across Armenian society. The portrayal of "the other" became increasingly savage. President Kocharyan said, "Armenian society would never glorify an axe-murderer decapitating a human being who is asleep. I am confident that in such a psychological condition a society cannot succeed..."³⁰ The National Security Strategy of Armenia stresses the need for conflict transformation, referring to Azerbaijan's policy as detrimental to conflict settlement and regional cooperation: "Azerbaijan has adopted a policy aimed at the exclusion of Armenia from all projects of regional cooperation. Azerbaijan continuously refuses to open its communication routes with Armenia and denies all Armenian and international initiatives to engage in bilateral cooperation in an attempt to exert pressure on Armenia regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia believes that bilateral and regional cooperation could build confidence and have a serious positive impact on the overall situation. Armenia will continue its confidence building efforts and to this end will encourage cooperation, contacts and visits on every level"³¹.

To sum up, unlike his predecessor, Kocharyan adopted a harsher position *vis-à-vis* Turkey invariably stressing that Armenia was not going to ignore the history. Yet Kocharyan abstained from putting preconditions on the establishment of bilateral relations, which he believed were essential for Armenia's eventual European integration.

The core characteristics of Azerbaijan and Turkey in Armenia's foreign policy under Kocharyan's presidency revolved around the notions "belligerent", "bellicose", "destructive", "ethnically incompatible", and "aggressive"³².

²⁹ Azerbaijani Kills Armenian at Peace Program, February 19.2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/articles/A54979-2004Feb19.html> (22.09.2016).

³⁰ Kocharyan R., Op. cit., p. 297.

³¹ Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy...

³² Terzyan A., Galstyan N., The Portrayal of "The Other" in Foreign Policy Discourse and Public Consciousness in Armenia (2008–present), *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, Centre for Security Studies (CSS), September 2015, 77, pp. 2-6.

The conception of Turkey in Serzh Sargsyan's discourse (2008-2016)

The outset of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency coincided with large-scale geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus, including the Five Day War fought between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. The unfreezing of "frozen" conflicts sent ripples of apprehension through Armenia at the possibility of a "spill-over" of instability into the country. To mitigate possible risks, Sargsyan expressed the political will to move beyond deep-rooted hostilities and identify the means for peaceful co-existence with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Sargsyan placed special emphasis on redefining Armenia's general and foreign policy identities, a process seen as essential to achieving a breakthrough in regional cooperation: "We should formulate and define a new Armenian identity, an identity that should become our beacon in the new century"³³. The call implicitly stressed the necessity to resolve the Armenian-Turkish conflict and turn the page on the long-stalled relations between the two countries. The Turkish notions of "zero-problems with neighbors" and "rhythmic diplomacy" seemed to reflect Ankara's new position, particularly concerning the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, which were previously perceived as a "red line" issue. This warming received a further impetus from Ankara's 2008 proposal to establish the "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform". The new developments were expressed in Sargsyan's foreign policy discourse, characterized by a strong emphasis on the notions of a united Caucasus and Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. Sargsyan declared: "I believe that the August (2008) events have made it clear for everyone how tense the situation in the Caucasus actually is, and how serious the challenges and threats are"³⁴. He attached critical importance to regional cooperation as a recipe for addressing these new challenges. Armenian-Turkish rapprochement was

³³ Speech delivered by President Serzh Sargsyan in the United States at the official reception hosted by the Embassy of Armenia to the US, Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations and leading Armenian-American Organizations, September 24, 2008, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2008/09/24/news-18/> (04.02.2016).

³⁴ Speech by President of the Republic of Armenia H.E. Mr. Serzh Sargsyan at the 45th Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2009, <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2009/02/07/news-395/> (17.04.2016).

placed at the heart of the renewed regional policy: "I truly believe that the time has come to solve problems in Armenian-Turkish relations"³⁵. To bring these visions to fruition, Sargsyan invited the Turkish president to visit Armenia on September 6, 2008 to watch the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey. Abdullah Gül's historical visit to Yerevan, coupled with Sargsyan's commitment to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without setting pre-conditions, profoundly challenged the status-quo. All subsequent developments and statements appeared to support the establishment of diplomatic relations within a very short time. The "roadmap" for normalizing relations was finalized in April 2009 and on October 10, the two countries' foreign ministers signed the "Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey" and a "Protocol on the development of relations between of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey". The ratification of the protocols seemed to be just a matter of time, given the parties strong rhetoric supporting the end to the deadlock. Regrettably, the reality shaped up differently and, shortly after signing them, Turkey backtracked on its commitment to establishing relations with Armenia without setting preconditions³⁶.

The conciliatory policy spotlighted many identity-related obstacles to the establishment of bilateral relations. From the outset, Armenian-Turkish rapprochement sparked political and public debates in Armenia. The nationalist party Dashnaktsutyun pulled out of the ruling coalition in protest over the talks. The party harshly criticized Sargsyan's conciliatory policy towards Turkey, in particular, the normalization "roadmap", which it believed did not reciprocate Armenia's concessions. Dashnaktsutyun expressed deep concerns over the possible preconditions imposed on Armenia by Ankara, referring to the fact that Turkey had not lifted the economic blockade³⁷. Armenians in Diaspora – the descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors – viewed Sargsyan's conciliatory policy

³⁵ Speech delivered by President Serzh Sargsyan in the United States...

³⁶ **Terzyan A.**, *The Evolution of Armenia's Foreign Policy Identity: The Conception of Identity Driven Paths. Friends and Foes in Armenian Foreign Policy Discourse, Values and Identity As Sources of Foreign Policy in Armenia and Georgia*, ed. Kornely Kakachia and Alexander Markarov, 'UNIVERSAL', pp. 170-171.

³⁷ Dashnaks Quit Armenia's Ruling Coalition, April 27, 2009, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/1616799.html> (14.03.2016).

towards Turkey as a "betrayal". To reduce widespread anxieties and clarify the process, the president went on a pan-Armenian tour to major Armenian communities. He repeatedly emphasized that the process would not jeopardize the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and was not dependent upon the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through unacceptable concessions³⁸. Notwithstanding this intensified effort to break the deadlock, over time other obstacles came to the light. Specifically, Turkey proved incapable of resisting Azerbaijan's staunch opposition to Armenian-Turkish conciliation. Sargsyan suspended the procedure of ratifying the Protocols³⁹. Following the failed process, Sargsyan toughened his position towards Turkey: "The policy of "zero problems" with neighbors yielded zero results. That occurred because Turkey is trying to solve all problems with neighbors at the expense of those very neighbors"⁴⁰. The failed outreach had deep repercussions with Armenian society, reinforcing fears that Turkey's imperial nature was unchanged. Sargsyan's discourse expressed this idea clearly, when he branded Turkey's regional policy as a vivid manifestation of a "New Ottomanism": "What did the Ottoman Empire bring to the peoples under its yoke other than massacres, oppression, and tyranny? Does anyone miss Ottomanism, or support a reason to deliver a "New Ottomanism"?⁴¹ Foreign Minister Nalbandian questioned Turkey's adherence to "zero problem with neighbors", stressing the disconnect between its rhetoric and policy: "Turkey pretends that all problems in the region must have a "comprehensive solution" once and for all. This is a beautiful phrase, but how realistic is it? It is mere rhetoric, all words and

³⁸ Address by President Serzh Sargsyan during the meeting with the Armenian-Iranian community - Statements and messages of the President of RA - Updates - The President of the Republic of Armenia [the official site], April 14, 2009, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2009/04/14/news-34/> (21.03.2016).

³⁹ Terzyan A..., Op. cit., p. 172.

⁴⁰ Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Extended Meeting Held at the RA Ministry of Defense, January 15, 2013, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2013/01/15/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-session-Ministryof-Defense/> (18.06.2017).

⁴¹ Speech of S. Sargsyan in the House of Representatives of Cyprus, January 17, 2011, <http://www.aysor.am/en/news/2011/01/17/serzh-sargsyan-cyprus-address/237747/> (20.06.2017).

no performance... It seems we speak in different languages. On the one hand, the Turkish leaders pretend that they always respect the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept), but on the other hand, they refrain from ratifying and implementing the agreements signed by themselves in Zurich"⁴². Turkey's withdrawal from the protocols eroded Armenian confidence in Turkey and further hardened the view of Turkey as an unreliable and unpredictable neighbor which pursued anti-Armenian policies. "To hell with you, ratification"⁴³. This crude phrase, which Sargsyan delivered to Ankara at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2014, is indicative of the difficulties that his position towards Turkey has undergone throughout his tenure. On February 16, 2015 the president sent an official letter to the Chairman of the National Assembly Galust Sahakyan to recall the Armenian-Turkey protocols from parliament⁴⁴. In essence, Sargsyan's initial attempts at redefining Armenia's foreign policy identity to bring it in line with Armenian-Turkish rapprochement proved futile. Subsequently, the terms "Ottoman", "destructive", "belligerent" and "unreliable" became the core characteristics of Turkey in Armenia's foreign policy discourse.

From sheer optimism to infinite disillusionment: the evolution of Azerbaijan's conception in Serzh Sargsyan's discourse

From the very outset of his presidency, Sargsyan stressed the necessity of political will in achieving a breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Armenian foreign policy makers have consistently stressed that Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian propaganda, coupled with the full-blown arms race between the two countries, doomed initiatives for

⁴² Edward Nalbandian, Turkey Has Gone Back on its Word: Armenia's foreign minister says Ankara needs to prove its good intentions, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703794104575545663167622050> (14.04.2017).

⁴³ Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly, September 24, 2014, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2014/09/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-UN-New-York-speech/> (12.02.2016).

⁴⁴ Serzh Sargsyan Recalls Armenia-Turkey Protocols, 2015, http://civilnet.am/2015/02/16/serzh-sargsyan-recallsarmenia-turkey-protocols/#.VOhbh_msWSo (08.07.2016).

regional cooperation and conflict settlement to failure. This disappointment particularly applies to the EU's peace-oriented Eastern Partnership. Sargsyan questioned the viability of its regional cooperation component, noting that Azerbaijan's resolve to extort unilateral concessions from Armenia render it meaningless. In his view, there is no common ground between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to Baku's aggressive and uncompromising policy. "The Eastern Partnership had some problems in its formation period yet... I still do not understand the criterion of grouping Armenia and Azerbaijan into one partnership – different opportunities, different approaches, different goals – and this is the reason that this component did not work"⁴⁵. Nevertheless, unlike his predecessor, Sargsyan has utterly rejected the identity-based notions of ethnic incompatibility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. He has made a clear distinction between Azerbaijani state and society, expressing a hope that the people of Azerbaijan or a significant percentage of them do not endorse state-run Armenia-phobic propaganda: "I am confident that our peoples will have a better future than the one contemplated by some leaders who preach hatred and war... I do not consider the people of Azerbaijan to be the enemy of the Armenian people. We are capable of respectfully resolving our disagreements and peacefully co-existing as neighbors"⁴⁶. Armenian foreign policy makers - President Sargsyan and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian - have fiercely criticized speculations about the religious nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, asserting that any attempt to package the dispute in a religious context is not constructive. Nalbandian has repeatedly condemned Baku for propagating ethnic contempt against Armenians. In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, Azerbaijan is largely characterized

⁴⁵ Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-Level Meeting on the 5th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, April 24, 2014, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2014/04/25/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Eastern-Partnership-Prague/> (28.11.2016).

⁴⁶ Statement of Serzh Sargsyan the President of the Republic of Armenia in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, October 2, 2013, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2013/10/02/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participated-at-thesession-of-the-PACE-speech/> (17.10.2016).

as Armenophobic and uncompromising⁴⁷. Despite the commitment by both Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a compromise settlement for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, ample evidence indicates there are misconceptions about the very term of "compromise". President Sargsyan's statement at the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly on September 29, 2015, in addition to his address at the 31st Ministerial Conference of the Francophonie on October 10, 2015, is indicative. "I shall note that aggressive policy pursued by Azerbaijan resulted in the absence of any meaningful progress of negotiations for the conflict settlement, and the situation drifts toward increasing tensions. The dictatorial regime of the country made disgraceful repression an instrument to strangle the people's anger ... It is obvious to us that the Azerbaijani leadership has irreversibly lost both the sense of reality and all norms of human conduct⁴⁸. The President expressed his frustration: "Unfortunately, there is currently a huge gap between the perceptions of the Azerbaijani authorities and the norms accepted by the civilized world. While the civilized world is creating the necessary conditions for a people's exercise of their right to self-determination, Azerbaijan, blinded by its oil revenues, is trying in all possible ways to impose its views on not only Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, but also on the mediator countries..."⁴⁹ In Armenia's foreign policy discourse, Azerbaijan is largely associated with the terms "non democratic", "uncompromising", "belligerent", "bellicose", "destructive", and "Armenophobic": "Coercion, violence, terror, war; these are our opponent's notions of reality. They are trying to impose upon us the same notions they force on their own people. We have rejected these terms, and will never accept them. We are creating a different reality: economic growth, the rule of law, strengthening of democracy. The word "Armenia" must first of all entail

⁴⁷ **Terzyan A.**, *The Role of Beliefs in Armenia - Azerbaijan Confrontation: A Glance Into Presidents' Discourse*, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2016, 1, 76-79.

⁴⁸ President Makes Address at Session of UN General Assembly, <http://www.president.am/en/pressrelease/item/2015/09/29/> President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-UN-General-Assembly/ (12.10.2016).

⁴⁹ Address by President Serzh Sargsyan to the Representatives of the U.S. Expert Community at the Carnegie Endowment, October 1, 2015, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-andmessages/item/2015/10/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-Carnegie/> (28.03.2017).

these notions"⁵⁰. Armenia's foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis "the other" has undergone considerable changes throughout Sargsyan's presidency. Unrealized expectations for reconciliation with Turkey led Yerevan to toughen its positions, which shifted from optimistic to critical. The latter was precipitated by Azerbaijan's rhetoric and aggressive policy towards Armenia, as well as the failure to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without setting preconditions.

Conclusion

The conceptions of Azerbaijan and Turkey in Armenia's foreign policy discourse have undergone considerable changes from 1991 to 2016. Armenian Presidents' beliefs, along with situational constraints have led to distinct perceptions of foe. More specifically, first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan tended to conceive of Azerbaijan and Turkey as Armenia's natural allies, stressing the necessity of addressing all the obstacles standing in the way of strategic alliance. His discourse analysis prompts to posit that the issue of Genocide recognition and complete self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh took a back seat to immediate establishment and further development of comprehensive partnership with Azerbaijan and Turkey. It follows that identity-related beliefs, particularly towards Armenia's staunch foes were peripheral to his central beliefs about immense economic benefits stemming from rapid settlement of disputes with neighboring countries. Remarkably, the terms 'natural allies' and 'indispensable economic partners' were frequently used in Ter-Petrosyan's discourse to characterize Azerbaijan's and Turkey's importance to Armenia.

Whereas, second President Robert Kocharyan overturned Armenia's foreign policy discourse about Azerbaijan in Turkey. In his view, the troubled relations owed to devastatingly belligerent and bellicose policies adopted by Azerbaijan and Turkey towards Armenia.

⁵⁰ Statement by the President of The Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Ceremony of Inauguration, April 9, 2013, <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/04/09/Statement-by-Serzh-Sargsyan-at-the-Ceremony-of-Inauguration/> (20.03.2017).

Thus, the recipe for tackling disputes had to do with dropping Azerbaijan's and Turkey's anti-Armenian pursuits, rather than unilateral concessions on Armenia's part for the sake of promising economic benefits. One could argue, that unlike his predecessor, identity-related beliefs were not outweighed by instrumental beliefs about economic benefits of establishing partnership with neighbours, even at the cost of unilateral concessions.

He tended to conceive of Turkey as destructive and aggressive actor, which strives to strangle Armenia through blockade. As for Azerbaijan, Kocharyan went so far as to question the ethnic compatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Thus, Kocharyan's beliefs towards Azerbaijan and Turkey were quite closed, given that he deemed them (particularly Azerbaijan) hostile, belligerent and even incompatible with Armenia.

Regarding third President Serzh Sargsyan's conceptions of Armenia's foes, it is noteworthy that he started off with an upbeat note, striving for a breakthrough on the logjam over troubled relations with neighboring countries. Nevertheless, situational constraints and particularly foes' mounting belligerence towards Armenia translated his initial optimism into profound disillusionment. Turkey's abrupt withdrawal from disclosing the border with Armenia, as well as Azerbaijan's mounting resentment towards Armenia, vividly manifested in full-blown arms race, prompted a rethink of his related beliefs. Not surprisingly, Azerbaijan was largely associated with the terms "non democratic", "uncompromising", "belligerent", "bellicose", "destructive", and "Armeneophobic" in his discourse. In a similar fashion, he frequently used the terms "Ottoman", "destructive", "belligerent" and "unreliable" to characterize Turkey and Turkish policy particularly towards Armenia.