

ATHENA RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

MSc Course

The EU and the Post-Soviet Space

The Republic of Armenia: an active,
ambivalent actor within the EU-Russia
geopolitical rivalry

Antonio

DE CARLUCCIO



Co-funded by
the European Union

ATHENA

- Jean Monnet Chair -



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the ATHENA Jean Monnet Chair, the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

This essay was originally written for the ATHENA Jean Monnet Chair MSc Course “The EU and the Post-Soviet Space” taught by Dr. Olga Burlyuk. It is published as part of our mission to showcase peer-leading papers written by students during their studies. This work can be used for background reading and research, but should not be cited as an expert source or used in place of scholarly articles/books.

Introduction

In the literature on Europeanisation, especially concerning the Eastern Partnership (EaP), scholars overwhelmingly focus on the successful conditions under which the EU exports regulatory and institutional templates, neglecting those under which third countries decide to adopt them (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 492). The case of Armenia helps identify this gap in the literature, as its specific regional, political, and economic context made it receptive to EU templates despite not aspiring to EU membership (idem: 492-493). This paper addresses this puzzle—it is unusual for a state to comply with an organisation's requirements and partially integrate without expecting or wanting official membership, related titles, or benefits. Understanding Armenia's foreign policy behaviour is crucial to improving the Eastern Partnership's success, especially considering Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union and the change of leadership post-2018 Velvet Revolution (ibid).

Thus, I formulate the following research question: “How does Armenia's current leadership pursue foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia and the EU?”. I employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to answer it because analysing verbal communication in official speeches and statements is paramount for identifying and interpreting the main factors underpinning a country's foreign policy. Therefore lies the academic relevance of this paper: EU scholars and policymakers should strive to comprehend the reasons behind Armenia's behaviour in foreign policy to re-evaluate the influence and results of the Eastern Partnership. The societal relevance of this investigation stems from a better understanding of the nature of Armenia's relationship with the EU, whether there are indications for deeper integration or cooperation in the future, and what kind. First, I provide a theoretical framework encompassing the literature's most relevant theories and concepts on Armenia. Subsequently, I explain the methodology more in-depth and report the results of the discourse analysis. Lastly, I discuss the main findings and end this research paper with concluding remarks, reflecting on its limitations and providing suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Silent Europeanisation*

At first glance, Armenia's Europeanisation seems understudied for a reason. It does not aspire for EU membership, unlike Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. Furthermore, the type of political regime would probably not survive the required EU reforms due to its non-competitive nature and the significant presence of oligarchs and corruption (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 493). More importantly, Armenia shares a strategic, security, and economic alliance with Russia, a rival regional actor (ibid). Indeed, trade interdependence with the EU is very limited – a fact that considerably lowers the EU's leverage on Armenia (idem: 495).

Nevertheless, contrary to this background, closer empirical scrutiny reveals that Armenia was actually surprisingly receptive to EU influences and willing to adopt EU standards without membership expectations, especially between 2010-2013 when there was little Russian opposition (ibid). Armenian adoption of EU templates was especially striking in food safety, sanitation and state aid, migratory policies, and visa facilitation, with the only significant exception being the energy sector (idem: 496-497). All these were highly relevant to the country's needs, as the EU's offer of cooperation through the Eastern Partnership overlapped with the Armenian government's intent to carry out significant reforms starting in 2010 (idem: 498-499). This intent was crucial due to Armenia's long-standing struggle with poverty, high unemployment, and rising inequalities, which framed the post-electoral violence of the 2008

elections. Armenia's ruling elites needed legitimisation, urging a consensus on reform for regime survival (ibid).

Thus, Armenia's elites welcomed EU interest in their country, formally included in the ENP in 2004, deeming the Eastern Partnership a desirable offer due to the unprecedented scale and intensity of linkages (idem: 499). Armenian leaders held highly favourable views of the EU because it guided the country's internal reform process, effectively modernising with minimal political costs as the EU initially left aside polity-related changes, such as human rights and the rule of law (idem: 501). EU tolerance of the Armenian non-democratic status quo, alongside Armenia's centralised political regime with few veto players, encouraged rapid reform and policy change, favouring the regime's domestic agenda (idem: 502). Armenia sought integration with the EU and Russia along different lines, a "complementarity principle" that saw no incongruence between dependence on Russia for security and energy and interest in the EU for economic development (ibid).

2.2 The geopolitical dimension

Armenia's "silent Europeanisation" ended abruptly in 2013, as Russia became concerned with EU influence in the post-soviet neighbourhood and actively started to propose an alternative, the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU), gradually forcing Armenia to reverse its European integration (idem: 503). Initially, the Armenian government carried out socioeconomic reforms aimed at facilitating this integration towards signing the Association Agreement (AA) being negotiated for over three years, while then-President Sargsyan stressed the "EU's civilisational importance" and "Armenians' historic and irreversible choice" to welcome it (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017: 341). The Armenian leadership actively sought to manage Russian discomfort by practising the complementarity principle mentioned above, aiming to keep "our strategic partner Russia always informed" while advancing the famous argument that Armenia did not need to join the ECU because it simply shared no common borders with it (idem: 342). However, a discussion behind closed doors between President Sargsyan and Vladimir Putin on 3 September 2013 quickly reversed this rhetoric (idem: 343). Afterwards, Armenia joined the ECU and backtracked from the AA, and Armenian leadership's justifications caused extensive debate (Terzyan 2017: 185-187).

A realist perspective emphasises security-related constraints within the broader geopolitical dimension as the primary justification for this volte-face. Most importantly, the conflict in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region with Azerbaijan reemerged as a fundamental foreign and national security threat when hostilities resumed in 2008 (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017: 344). The conflict became a comprehensive rationalisation that justified joining the ECU, especially considering Armenia's isolation due to the closure of 80% of its borders, as Turkey and Azerbaijan jointly marginalise it (ibid.). Thus, the decision became phrased as a "calculated choice", a necessary and "the only optimal" option to secure Russia's support and defence cooperation against Azerbaijan and Turkey's hostility (idem: 345). Securitisation theory from the Copenhagen School is relevant in this context: Armenian leadership securitised the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by fundamentally posing it as an existential threat to the survival of the state itself and its society, implying that they had no other choice except to join the ECU to prevent this outcome (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2010: 76). Thus, the decision to join the ECU was framed as a legitimate, urgent, exceptional political measure, outside of the realm of "normal politics" (ibid.). Crucially, this implies that the government failed to address it in the "normal sphere" of action (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017: 345). In close relation, they stressed the national security constraint by arguing how the EU was not a "hard power" and did not successfully address its promise to persuade Turkey to open its borders with

Armenia (idem: 346). Ultimately, they opted to continue their military dependence on Moscow, which sells them weapons at discounted prices and is considered a strategic partner and security guarantor (idem: 347-348).

Additionally, socioeconomic constraints also played a role. Despite economic progress and integration with the EU, Armenia retains significant economic and energy security deficiencies (idem: 348). Granted, both the EU and Russia are key external trade partners. Still, in 2013 Russia had a 40% share in accumulated foreign investments in Armenia, and Russian corporate giants were active in every sector of the Armenian economy (ibid). Moreover, Russia effectively leveraged gas prices to influence their decision—at least since 2006, the Armenian government had sold all energy assets to Gazprom, effectively preventing Armenia's opportunities to diversify its energy sources (idem: 349). Besides, Armenian and Russian ruling elites have always had mutual interests, and Russia's large Armenian diaspora community likely influenced the decision, too (idem: 353). Unfortunately for Armenia, the timing of its accession to the ECU – later turned Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) – coincided with Western sanctions and the depreciation of the Russian rouble. Their growth prospects were nullified, and their backtracking from the Association Agreement with the EU also failed to attract investors (idem: 351-352). Moreover, according to some critics, Russia's support for Armenia against Azerbaijan remains limited (idem: 347).

2.3 The domestic dimension: Armenia as an active actor

While most of the literature depicts Armenia as constrained in its foreign policy decisions, a recent trend emphasises the active role of Armenia in the political environment and, thus, the role of domestic factors. Ademmer et al. (2016: 4) point out the central role of Armenian “domestic constellations of actors, perception, and preferences” even in the context of the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the EU. Armenian political actors and civil society are not merely passive recipients of external EU and Russian influences, but actively react to them – the 2015 protests and the later 2018 Velvet Revolution are concrete demonstrations (ibid). These protests were often bottom-up processes driven by civil initiatives without political affiliations – they mainly addressed the government's corruption, lack of accountability, and transparency (ibid). Even the 2018 Velvet Revolution did not have a specific pro-EU connotation but focused on domestic issues, even though the EU almost doubled its support to Armenia when it happened (Terzyan 2019: 35). Therefore, it is crucial to conceptualise Armenia as an active actor with agency and capable of its strategies.

Following this reasoning, it is plausible that the EU and Russia's influences on Armenian domestic change have been over-emphasised (Ademmer et al. 2016: 4-5). Indeed, EU scholars have long been criticised for their top-down approach and disregard for domestic developments (idem: 5). The interests and beliefs of domestic actors crucially translate and adjust either EU or Russian policies to the local context (idem: 8). As seen earlier, convergence in certain policy areas, such as food safety and migration, can happen despite any proclaimed geopolitical orientation (idem: 7). Most importantly, domestic incumbents often cherry-pick and use multiple offers by external actors to pursue their interests and promote their agendas (idem: 8). This paper adopts this perspective and aims to investigate it within Armenia's foreign policy discourse. The Armenian leadership seems to have adopted a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, one grounded in a fundamental integration of “knowing” and “doing” as a “social, discursive activity” (Cochran 2012: 10). In other words, pursuing their best interests within the given constraints and hardships, producing useful knowledge in the process, through both achievements and failures, and even what appear to be contradictions at first glance (ibid).

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Methodology

To better understand Armenia's status and position within the geopolitical rivalry, its active role in the international scene, and what interests and strategies it is pursuing in foreign policy, I analysed the foreign policy discourse of Armenia's leadership since 2019.

I employed Critical Discourse Analysis to critically analyse and code Armenian foreign policy speeches and interviews. Based on the key theories and concepts outlined so far, I designed the CDA according to Fairclough's model of three interrelated processes of analysis: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation) (Janks 1997: 329). CDA is the most suitable method for the research question because it best addresses the explanatory power of ideas and beliefs by adopting a constructivism-driven perspective of their pivotal role in shaping foreign policy trajectories (Wendt 1999: 94-96).

3.2 Data collection

I used three relevant keywords to sample the sources for the coding process: 'Nagorno-Karabakh', 'Russia', and 'European Union/Europe'. Thus, I applied a purposive sampling method. These keywords are the most useful to identify the key areas where Armenia's foreign policy discourse, trajectory, and strategies might be most noticeable based on the theoretical framework and nature of the research question.

I utilised the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (MFA); in their "Foreign Policy" section, I inserted the three keywords and selected the sources through purposive sampling. I coded six brief speeches/statements, one interview with the Foreign Ministry of Armenia, and one video message, all already available in English. Considering the word and time constraints, as well as the website's database availability, I only looked at Armenia's current leadership, starting from the year 2019 in the post-Velvet Revolution context. The complete overview of sources is shown in Appendix A.1. I did not aim to focus on any specific speaker but applied a systemic level of analysis. However, Appendix A.2 presents the list of the speakers encountered in the analysis.

Finally, I used atlas.ti to code the selected source material. The coding process consisted of an initial coding followed by a more focused round based on a "values coding" strategy, which aims to look for values, emotions, appeals, and beliefs emanating from discourse (Saldaña 2013: 89-93). This strategy fits the purpose of the research question and allowed me to identify the most salient themes (group codes) underpinning Armenia's foreign policy. Appendix A.3 includes the complete codebook. As I coded, I kept writing memos to help me visualise and keep track of these themes, which turned into the analysis' sections. The memos are available in Appendix B.

3.3 Positionality

Lastly, outlining my positionality is a crucial requirement of qualitative research (Soedirgo & Glas 2020: 527). As a Western Master's student mainly drawing from Western and EU-centred theoretical literature, a certain amount of bias or interpretive liberty is inevitable, affecting the results of the discourse analysis. I addressed these implications and tried to minimise potential bias by collecting the sources directly from the official website of the Armenian foreign ministry.

4. Analysis

4.1 Open, multi-faceted foreign policy trajectory

Armenian leadership reiterated affirmations of their predictable, honest foreign policy throughout the analysis. In replying to the straightforward question of what kind of course Armenia's foreign policy followed, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan stressed these terms exactly:

The Republic of Armenia pursues a predictable, stable and reliable foreign policy (MFA 2021b).

This affirmation referred to stronger Armenian-Russian political ties in this specific instance. However, it underpins Armenia's approach and discursive appeals to the EU as well. This approach closely relates to Armenia's repeated descriptions of itself: "[...] from the perspective of a strong state, which cooperates closely with its allies and friends" (MFA 2020b). This perception of openness and reliability in their discourse seeks to increase cooperation and allies, mainly concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Most strikingly, this multi-faceted orientation reflects the complementarity principle mentioned in the theoretical framework: increasing cooperation with both Russia and the EU demonstrates how Armenia's current leadership still sees no incongruence between strengthening the alliance with Russia and more economical and diplomatic integration with the EU (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 502).

Moreover, this approach signifies a proper strategy that depicts Armenia as an active actor within the broader EU-Russia geopolitical rivalry, pursuing its national interest, which is mainly the resolution of the highly securitised Nagorno-Karabakh conflict against Azerbaijan. For instance, in 2019, at a press conference with EU Commissioner Hahn, Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan stated:

We know our capacity to protect and to inflict damage. *But it's not our goal* (MFA 2019a).

This statement indicates a defensive attitude aimed at strengthening and legitimising their discourse. They equate their perspective to the "position of the international community", constantly reaffirming their support for the internationally mandated format of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict (MFA 2021b). Interestingly, they pursue the complementarity principle by avoiding a clear position on the 2022 Russian war in Ukraine. In Brussels, during the Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting, Foreign Minister Hovhannisyan stated:

Living in the times that European security architecture is shaken, we witness a rise of tension in the South Caucasus, as well (MFA 2022).

This "shaken security architecture" is an implicit reference to the war in Ukraine and is done without any specific reference to Russia or its responsibility. The sentence immediately switches attention to the continuing border crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, demonstrating how Armenia cautiously pursues alliances with all valuable actors to benefit its national interests.

4.2 Seeking support over Nagorno-Karabakh

Predictably, the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is central to Armenia's foreign policy discourse. In virtually all sources analysed, it was at least mentioned once, even when not the main talking issue. Consequently, seeking the support of all useful allies over the issue is Armenia's main foreign policy objective. In turn, this means that the securitisation of the conflict was highly successful and adopted, if not considerably increased, by Armenia's current

leadership. They praise the Russian peacekeeping mission and further involvement in conflict resolution and mediation efforts:

Russia played a key role in cessation of the Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, *with its direct involvement...* (MFA 2021b).

Therefore, Russia remains a crucial actor in Armenia's main foreign policy objective, and thus a more robust alliance is central to Armenia's national interests. However, this factor does not prevent Armenia's leadership from seeking the EU's help over the conflict. In every meeting, regardless of the main topic, they praise or request EU help and further cooperation on the matter:

We highly appreciate those partners who do not shy away from pointing the aggressor and voicing the need to duly prosecute the war crimes and bring to justice their perpetrators (MFA 2022).

On other occasions, they aim to stimulate additional responses from the EU without appearing too assertive:

We are also looking very much forward to hearing the role of the European Union in addressing the consequences of this aggression... (MFA 2020a).

Thus, the practical application of the complementarity principle is ever more evident. The successful securitisation of the issue transpires from the leadership's perception of the conflict as a threat to Armenia's national stability and region (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2010: 76). As they seek support from all useful allies, they employ mainly two discursive strategies. First, they open discussions and focus on the issue by denouncing Azerbaijan and its war crimes and international law violations, besides the open support they enjoy from Turkey. For instance, this is how Foreign Minister Aivazian addressed EU partners in 2020:

You know that this aggression was directly supported by Turkey... It also put in evidence that Turkey and Azerbaijan *set a precedent for solving the conflicts in the area of Eastern Partnership* (MFA 2020a).

Crucially, they attempt to persuade the EU that these two actors directly threaten the purpose and success of the Eastern Partnership and, thus, their interests in the region. Compellingly, they use this same strategy with Russia:

Azerbaijan has not signed the mandate of peacekeepers yet, and is also carrying out *strong anti-propaganda against the Russian peacekeeping mission* in Nagorno-Karabakh (MFA 2021b).

Their discourse focuses on why Azerbaijan remains the sole aggressor and implies that the EU and Russia should intervene more severely, given that Azerbaijani behaviour damages their interests in the region. To further strengthen this discourse, the Armenian leadership frequently appeals to the right to self-determination for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, arguing to defend their right to a "free and dignified life in their homeland" (ibid). In this light, they present Armenia as fulfilling the role of protector. Finally, this discourse is balanced with de-escalation rhetoric and attempts, explicitly condemning Azerbaijan's warmongering behaviour

and framing their priorities around the “implementation of risk-reduction measures against escalation” (MFA 2019b).

4.3 Firm alignment with Russia

As already mentioned, Armenia’s foreign policy still frames Russia as an essential ally in the region. This point is very explicit in official speeches and statements. For instance, Foreign Minister Aivazian spoke to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov during one state visit:

The choice of my first visit in this position fully corresponds to the spirit of the Armenian-Russian allied relations based on the *deep ties of our peoples, centuries-old friendship and brotherhood* (MFA 2020b).

The choice of these precise words leaves no ambiguity. Armenian leadership adopts a foreign policy that reaffirms the strong alliance and friendship between the two countries. As seen, this is done by appealing to history, even recent history, such as remembering the joint efforts and solidarity to deal with the “Spitak earthquake” (ibid.). For any topic regarding bilateral relations, the general discourse focuses on “strengthening the friendship of our peoples”, a message closely followed by a firm call for deeper integration in “all spheres, including defence” (MFA 2021a). Moreover, Foreign Minister Aivazian expressed “deep gratitude for the Russian side, and to you personally, Sergey Lavrov, for your great contribution”, further stressing the amicable relations especially concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue (MFA 2020b). Most importantly, he stated that Armenia is ready for

allied cooperation in the political, defence, trade-economic and humanitarian areas, as well as to discuss the multilateral agenda within framework of the EAEU, CSTO and CIS... (ibid.).

The explicit mention of the EAEU and the willingness to increase integration within its frameworks ultimately demonstrate that Armenia needs Russia in its foreign policy.

4.4 Re-approaching the EU/Europe

Armenia’s current leadership further shows their application of the complementarity principle in how they resumed cooperation with the EU. In addressing Armenia’s status in the Eastern Partnership, Foreign Minister Hovhannisyan acknowledged that “the preservation of this format has been quite challenging”, calling for efforts to “re-define the values which are at the core of our cooperation” but ultimately blaming these setbacks on the regional security crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the turbulent changes in Armenia’s political scenery (MFA 2022). His speech had no reference to Armenia’s integration into the EAEU.

They similarly replicate the discursive appeal to shared values used with Russia. For instance, Foreign Minister Aivazian celebrated the 20th anniversary of Armenia’s accession to the Council of Europe by emphasising how Armenia joined “the family of European states” with whom it “shares common history, values, and ideals” and “a vision for a future Europe” guaranteeing rights and freedoms for all (MFA 2021c). Moreover, he specifically mentioned crucial EU values at the EU Partnership Council:

There will be an important reflection on our reforms agenda including *democracy, implementation of rule of law and protection of human rights* (MFA 2020a).

Reaffirming the values that the EU and the Eastern Partnership actively promote is very significant. Even more significantly, the Armenian leadership repeatedly tries to persuade EU partners of the progress Armenia made. In 2019, Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan praised the democratic success of the Velvet Revolution, which finally brought internationally recognised free and fair elections and “most importantly they were accepted by our public” (MFA 2019b). They particularly emphasise the popular and democratic legitimacy of the new government, framing it as significant progress in meeting EU standards (ibid.). Indeed, Armenia’s approach towards the EU is entirely focused on being perceived as a worthy, reliable partner in the Eastern Partnership to, once again, primarily gather support over Nagorno-Karabakh:

[...] when *Azerbaijan challenged* the values of the very initiative of the Eastern Partnership, *our core European values* (MFA 2020a).

Therefore, re-approaching the EU helps fulfil the needs of its national security interests. Nonetheless, economic interests are also evident in Armenia’s discourse, as they praise the benefits of the Eastern Partnership and frame the EU as “Armenia’s key partner in promoting the institution building and supporting our reform agenda” (MFA 2022). The most debated topics concern the ratification and further implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and the issue of visa liberalisation, which is framed as an “important mutual commitment” that would improve Armenia-EU relations “by way of bringing people together” (MFA 2019b). Therefore, Armenian leadership may not aspire to EU membership, but it still pursues this lower level of integration because it benefits their interests.

5. Discussion

Finally, I discuss the paper’s main findings. The discourse analysis on Armenia’s current foreign policy helped identify, visualise, and interpret its main themes and principles.

Most crucially, it showed how Armenia pursues a very active, cautious, and ambivalent foreign policy within the broader EU-Russia geopolitical dimension. More specifically, it pursues alliances and cooperation with all valuable actors to accomplish its national security and economic objectives. The overarching foreign policy priority is the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—seeking cooperation with all useful allies against Azerbaijan is a precise strategy to accomplish it. To do so, they increasingly securitise the issue and apply a complementarity principle in their relations with Russia and the EU, pursuing further cooperation and integration with both, albeit along different lines that may sometimes be conflictual. In this respect, not much has changed between the old and new Armenian leadership. Its foreign policy discourse leaves no ambiguity around Russia: it remains a needed and essential partner for the foreseeable future. Armenian leadership constantly emphasises historical bonds and shared values while genuinely praising Russian involvement and peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. In full accordance with the complementarity principle, they adopt a similar discursive appeal to the EU, emphasising core European values while attempting to be perceived as a reliable economic partner that also achieved considerable democratic progress and should thus be supported against the warmongering Azerbaijan.

Conclusion and Limitations

Thus far, the main findings of the analysis provide a comprehensive answer to the research question. Armenia’s current leadership pursues a cautious and ambivalent foreign policy not dissimilarly from the old leadership, attempting to increase cooperation with both Russia and

the EU along different lines, most importantly to gain their support over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict against Azerbaijan. Thus, it is a pragmatic foreign policy to meet specific and highly securitised national interests.

Due to time and word constraints, only eight sources were analysed, potentially overlooking the role of additional factors within the EU-Armenia-Russia triangular relationship and limiting the transferability of the findings (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 238-241). However, this paper's crucial contribution lies in having identified, detailed, and explained the basic structure of Armenia's current leadership's foreign policy, discernible even from a small sample size.

Therefore, despite a relatively low external validity of the findings towards the global context since the results are very context-dependent, the findings still allow for more generalisable claims towards the EU's future handling of the Eastern Partnership (ibid.). They show the need for future research and EU policymakers to learn from Armenia's pragmatic foreign policy and adapt the Eastern Partnership accordingly. Granted, concrete actions can differ from discourse; however, this discourse analysis reveals crucial principles signifying that the countries in the Eastern Partnership are active agents pursuing their own strategies and national interests and should not be conceptualised as passive recipients of external influences. Through Armenia's case, this paper helps show that a different conceptualisation and approach are needed to improve the success of the Eastern Partnership. Reevaluating objectives and ambitions could be a valuable start as, for instance, Armenia cannot be expected to detach from Russia anytime soon.

References

- Ademmer, E., Delcour, L. and Wolczuk, K. (2016). “Beyond geopolitics: Exploring the Impact of the EU and Russia in the ‘contested Neighborhood’”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57(1): 1–18.
- Cochran, M. (2012). “Pragmatism and International Relations. A Story of Closure and Opening”, *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 2(4): 1-22.
- Delcour, L. and Wolczuk, K. (2015). “The EU’s Unexpected ‘Ideal Neighbour’? The Perplexing Case of Armenia’s Europeanisation”, *Journal of European Integration*, 37(4): 491–507.
- Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Newbury Park, Ca: Sage.
- Janks, H. (1997). “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool”, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3): 29–342.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2019a). “Remarks and answers to the questions by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan at the joint press conference with EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn”, *Press Conference and Briefings*, https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2019/01/29/fm_hahn_asulis/9006.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2019b). “Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan’s remarks and answer to a question during a joint press conference on the results of the second Partnership Council meeting between the EU and Armenia”, *Press Conference and Briefings*, https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2019/06/13/fm_EU_press_conference_statement/9645.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2020a). “Doorstep statement by Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Aivazian at Armenia-EU partnership council”, *Interviews /Comments and Statements*, https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/12/17/fm_eu/10728.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2020b). “Remarks of Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia Ara Aivazian at the meeting with Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov”, *Speeches*, https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2020/12/07/fm_lavrov/10698.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2021a). “Opening remarks by Acting Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian at the extended meeting with Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov”, *Speeches*, https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2021/05/06/aivazian_lavrov_opening/10930.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2021b). “Interview of the Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan to “Ria Novosti” news agency”, *Interviews / Comments and Statements*, https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/09/01/Mirzoyan_Interview_Ria/11053.
- (MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2021c). “Video message by Ara Aivazian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia on the 20th Anniversary of

Armenia's accession to the Council of Europe", *Speeches*,
https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2021/01/25/fm_coe/10769.

(MFA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2022). "Remarks by Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannisyanyan at the EU Eastern Partnership Foreign Affairs Ministerial meeting", *Speeches*,
https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2022/12/12/easternp_meeting/11780.

Peoples, C. and Vaughan-Williams, N. (2010). "Securitization" in *Critical Security Studies*. New York: Routledge, 75–88.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Soedirgo, J. and Glas, A. (2020). "Toward Active Reflexivity: Positionality and Practice in the Production of Knowledge", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53(3): 527–531.

Ter-Matevosyan, V., Drnoian, A., Mkrtchyan, N. and Yepremyan, T. (2017). "Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union: Reasons for Joining and Its Consequences", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 58(3): 340–360.

Terzyan, A. (2017). "The EU vs. Russia in the Foreign Policy Discourse of Armenia: The Fragility of Normative Power or the Power of Russian coercion?", *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 8(2): 185–203.

Terzyan, A. (2019). "The Aftermath of the "Velvet Revolution": Armenia Between Domestic Change and Foreign Policy Continuity", *Eastern European Journal of Regional Studies*, 5(2): 24-43.

Wendt, A. (1999), *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-433.

Appendix A

Appendix A.1: Overview of sources analysed.

Keyword	Sources analysed
Nagorno-Karabakh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Doorstep statement by Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Aivazian at Armenia-EU partnership council” (17/12/2020) • “Remarks by Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Paruyr Hovhannisyan at the EU Eastern Partnership Foreign Affairs Ministerial meeting” (12/12/2022)
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Remarks of Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia Ara Aivazian at the meeting with Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov” (07/12/2020) • “Opening remarks by Acting Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian at the extended meeting with Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov” (06/05/2021) • “Interview of the Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan to “Ria Novosti” news agency” (01/09/2021)
European Union/Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Remarks and answers to the questions by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan at the joint press conference with EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn” (29/01/2019) • “Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan’s remarks and answer to a question during a joint press conference on the results of the second Partnership Council meeting between the EU and Armenia” (13/06/2019) • “Video message by Ara Aivazian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia on the 20th Anniversary of Armenia’s accession to the Council of Europe” (25/01/2021)

Appendix A.2: List of speakers

Speaker	Source
Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. In office: 12 May 2018 – 16 November 2020	MFA 2019a; MFA 2019b

Ara Aivazian, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. In office: 18 November 2020 – 27 May 2021	MFA 2020a; MFA 2020b; MFA 2021a; MFA 2021c
Paruyr Hovhannisyanyan, current Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. In office: 9 November 2021 - present	MFA 2022
Ararat Mirzoyan, current Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. In office: 19 August 2021 - present	MFA 2021b

Appendix A.3: Complete codebook

NB. The numbers next to the code groups' names indicate how many specific codes they include. The numbers next to each individual code indicate how often it is repeated across all sources analysed. A few codes are part of more than one group code.

Code group	Definition	List of codes	Illustrative quotes
Open and multi-faceted foreign policy trajectory (7)	This theme encompasses the key facets and clues of Armenia's general foreign policy trajectory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armenia with international community (1) • defensive attitude (2) • honest, straightforward foreign policy (3) • instability of South Caucasus (2) • neutral reference of Ukraine war (1) • no specific reference to Russia (1) • stressing peace and cooperation (4) 	<p>“The Republic of Armenia pursues a predictable, stable and reliable foreign policy. Yerevan has repeatedly demonstrated its consistency in the development of the Armenian-Russian strategic allied relations, both verbally and with actions in deed and in word...” (MFA 2021b)</p> <p>“In 2022, the EU and its Eastern neighbourhood faced enormous challenges. Living in the times that European security architecture is shaken, we witness a rise of tension in the South Caucasus, as well.” (MFA 2022)</p> <p>“We know our capabilities, but we want to resolve this process peacefully. That's why it is very important to have such an environment to achieve a progress in the process” (MFA 2019a)</p>

<p>Seeking support over Nagorno-Karabakh (24)</p>	<p>This theme focuses on Armenia's main foreign policy objective and the ways in which it transpires from the discourse and is promoted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking for EU help (4) • Azerbaijan threatens Eastern Partnership (1) • Azerbaijan violating international law (2) • Azerbaijani opposition to Russian peacekeeping (1) • call for Russia's help (1) • call for support in Nagorno (1) • call to address Turkey's and Azerbaijan's assertiveness (2) • call to protect Artsakh's cultural heritage (2) • centrality of Nagorno-Karabakh issue (9) • de-escalation rhetoric (3) • denouncing assertive behaviour (1) • denouncing Azerbaijan (6) • denouncing Azerbaijan's cultural violence (1) • denouncing Turkey (2) • denouncing war crimes (3) • praise of Russia's involvement (3) • praise of Russian peacekeeping (1) 	<p>“You know that this aggression was directly supported by Turkey, in overall this aggression undermined the security and peace in the South Caucasus. It also put in evidence that Turkey and Azerbaijan set a precedent for solving the conflicts in the area of Eastern Partnership” (MFA 2020a)</p> <p>“The most important issue is to ensure that Azerbaijan returns all prisoners of war and forcibly captured civilians. And this issue must be addressed as soon as possible, which is also attested by the mass violations of international humanitarian law” (MFA 2021a)</p> <p>“We are hopeful that Russia, both at the national level and as a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, will promote both the resolution of these issues and the peace process of the conflict in general, which makes the further activity of the co-chairing institution more relevant” (MFA 2020b)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reference to the end of 2020 war (1) • relevance of Russian peacekeeping (1) • Russia as mediator (1) • specific reference to genocide (1) • stressing Minsk group’s relevance (5) • stressing peace and cooperation (4) • support for self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh (4) 	
Firm alignment with Russia (10)	This theme highlights Armenia’s clear commitment to partnership and integration with Russia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • call for further integration with Russia (3) • centuries-old alliance (1) • personal praise of Lavrov (1) • praise of Russia’s involvement (3) • praise of Russian peacekeeping (1) • reassurance of strong alliance (2) • reference to historical bond with Russia (1) • reference to end of 2020 war (1) • specific mention of EAEU (1) • stressing partnership with Russia (4) 	<p>“The choice of my first visit in this position fully corresponds to the spirit of the Armenian-Russian allied relations based on the deep ties of our peoples, centuries-old friendship and brotherhood” (MFA 2020b)</p> <p>“The Republic of Armenia pursues a predictable, stable and reliable foreign policy. Yerevan has repeatedly demonstrated its consistency in the development of the Armenian-Russian strategic allied relations...I am convinced that the peoples of our countries will continue good traditions based on centuries-old friendship, mutual trust, transparency and full understanding.” (MFA 2021b)</p>

			<p>“Russia played a key role in cessation of the Azerbaijani aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, with its direct involvement, the trilateral statement of the leaders of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan on the cessation of all hostilities...” (MFA 2021b)</p>
<p>Re-approaching the EU/Europe (30)</p>	<p>This theme encompasses the different ways in which Armenia attempted to re-approach further cooperation and integration with the EU.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledgement of obstacles (1) • asking for EU help (4) • blaming security crises (1) • call for more cooperation (6) • call for re-defining values (1) • commitment to CEPA implementation (1) • denouncing lack of balance (1) • EU as key partner for reform agenda (1) • expressed bond with Europe (1) • fight against corruption (1) • fraud-free elections (1) • judicial reform (1) • mention of CEPA (5) • pandemic reference (1) • popular and democratic legitimacy (1) 	<p>“The European Union remains Armenia’s key partner in promoting the institution building and supporting our reform agenda” (MFA 2022)</p> <p>“We once again underscored the fact that our comprehensive partnership is based on shared values and strong commitment to uphold them. Relations are grounded on our common civilisational heritage, mutual aspirations for building strong democracies with sustainable institutions and resilient sustainable societies” (MFA 2019b)</p> <p>“Armenia has been faithful to the commitments undertaken at the accession to the Council of Europe, including the peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” (MFA 2021c)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • praise of 2018 elections and their democratic legitimacy (1) • praise of cooperation with EU (6) • praise of Council of Europe (1) • praise of democratic reforms (1) • praise of Eastern Partnership (5) • praise of EU (4) • praise of Velvet Revolution (1) • shared civilisational values (2) • shared value-based relationship (1) • specific mention of EU values (5) • stressing Armenia's active cooperation (2) • stressing Armenia's political changes (1) • stressing European values and family (1) • stressing the PM's engagement with European leaders (1) • visa liberalisation to improve relationship (1) 	
--	--	---	--

Appendix B: Code Memos

B.1 Open, multi-faceted foreign policy trajectory

An open and multi-faceted general trajectory of Armenia's foreign policy is highly discernible throughout the speeches, statements, or interviews. Armenia explicitly tries to reaffirm an open and linear foreign policy aimed at guaranteeing as many allies as possible. It pursues a deeper relationship with both Russia and the EU, very reflective of the "complementarity principle". This attitude is reaffirmed on each occasion to secure support against Azerbaijan and Turkey, further adopting a defensive position in the conflict and calling for peace and cooperation in order to address the increasing instability in the South Caucasus.

B.2 Seeking support over Nagorno-Karabakh

Seeking support over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the main overarching theme of Armenia's foreign policy discourse. It transpires as the main objective and utmost priority, signalling the increasing securitisation of the issue and the perceived level of threat for regime survival and/or stability. This priority transpires in the apparent "complementarity principle" – Armenia seeks support over the issue with the EU and Russia equally, praising both political entities whenever or wherever they help or promise to help Armenia. It seems like pursuing further cooperation and integration with both is a strategy in direct service of this overarching purpose. They take any opportunity to denounce Azerbaijan and Turkey, often by highlighting the need to protect the right of self-determination for the Nagorno-Karabakh people.

B.3 Firm alignment with Russia

While deepening ties with the EU, Armenia explicitly reaffirms their alliance and strategic partnership with Russia. In the same way they bring up and frame shared European civilisational values with the EU, they stress a historic bond and a centuries-old alliance with Russia. They seem to be extremely grateful for Russia's involvement and peacekeeping mission in the conflict against Azerbaijan, and aim to deepen military, economic, and political integration with Russia through the EAEU as well.

B.4 Re-approaching the EU/Europe

Armenia's current leadership has acknowledged the obstacles that slowed down deeper Armenia-EU integration on several occasions. Instead of the decision to join the EAEU, they seem to place the blame on security crises in the region, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the turbulent changes the Armenia had to go through. In a few instances, they stressed the need to re-evaluate the values underpinning the Armenia-EU relationship, aiming to reach a healthy balance with other interests. Overall, Armenia frames itself as fully part of the European family, upholding European values and more specific EU values such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights. In this regard, it stressed the progress made following the Velvet Revolution, highlighting the democratic legitimacy of the new leadership by PM Pashinyan. It also praised itself for the fight against corruption and stressed the active participation in the cooperation with the EU. As it called for more cooperation and economic integration, the main issues regarded the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and visa liberalisation, which were constantly framed as fundamental to deepen Armenia-EU ties.