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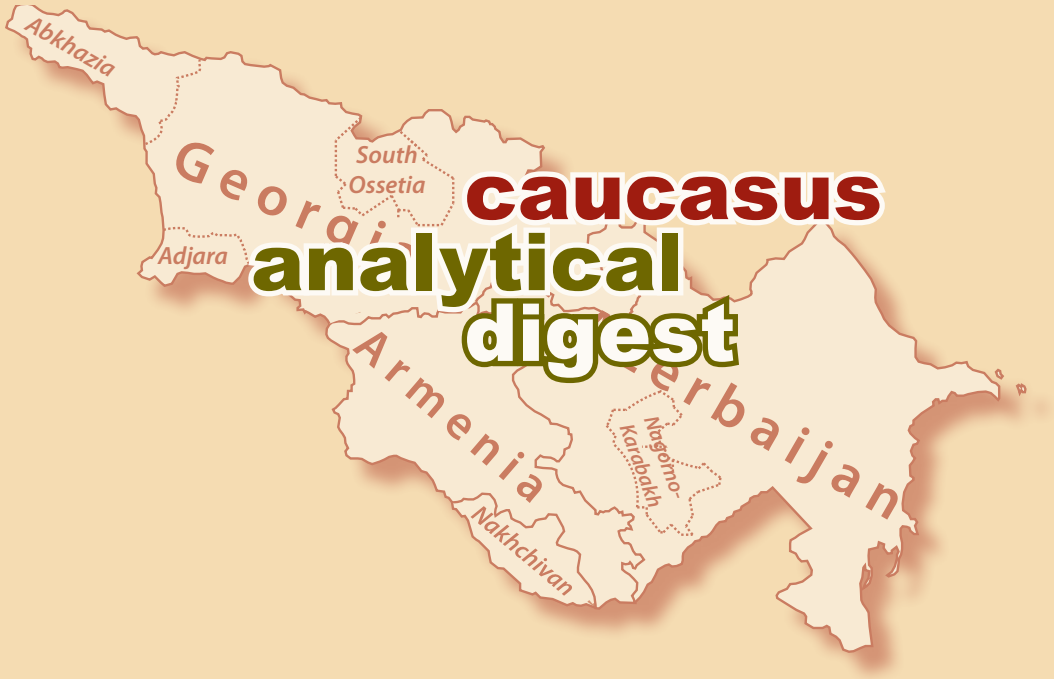

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ARMENIA'S VELVET REVOLUTION: CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICY

Special Editor: Licínia Simão, University of Coimbra

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Introduction by the Special Editor

Armenian politics are in flux after years of stagnation and accommodation to a perceived constraining regional context. Popular demonstrations, which took place in April 2018, in Yerevan and in some of the country's major cities resulted in the unexpected resignation of Serzh Sargsyan, the country's then-prime minister and former president for the past decade. Armenia's velvet revolution was received both regionally and internationally as a major surprise, largely due to the established idea that Armenia's geopolitical context lacked alternatives. The country remains at war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh; has failed to normalise relations with Turkey; depends largely on Russia for political, economic and military issues; and has a very limited political agreement with the European Union under the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. In fact, these regional constraints were usually perceived as a major obstacle to democratisation and helped explain why Armenia had been immune to the revolutionary trends that swept the post-Soviet space over the course of the last decade.

Faced with the paradox of explaining how a homegrown revolutionary movement was possible under these conditions, this special issue of the Caucasus Analytical Digest addresses the international dimension to gauge the perceived reactions to these events, as well as expected changes in Armenia's regional setting. Although the most important issues raised in demonstrations and by the new leadership were essentially domestic, foreign policy remains to be a fundamental dimension of the possibilities open to Armenia.

This special issue begins with a piece by Alexander Markarov, who addresses the main issues that the revolutionary movement now in power faces in Armenian foreign policy and traces the challenges ahead. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the balancing of relations with the EU and Russia—a remnant of the policy of complementarity—stand out as the most important issues in the country's foreign policy agenda.

The second piece by Farid Guliyev looks at how Azerbaijani political elites perceived changes in Armenian domestic politics and seeks to explain why Azerbaijan has remained largely immune to these revolutionary trends. His argument—that the initial "wait and see" attitude by the Azerbaijani leaders quickly shifted towards a more typical nationalistic tone as a reaction to Nikol Pashinian's non-conciliatory and, to some extent, revisionist position on Nagorno-Karabakh—raises important issues regarding the future of peace talks on Karabakh and how the international mediators will accommodate the new expectations raised by the new Armenian leaders on this issue.

The third contribution by Ghia Nodia on Georgia argues as to why events in Armenia will have little impact on Georgia, considering the strong consensus among Georgians of their pro-western foreign policy. In fact, for Georgians, Nodia argues that the idea of having a revolution that does not push a "pro-western" foreign policy agenda remains to be largely inexplicable. In that sense, for Georgians, the impact of Armenia's revolution on the regional balance of power between Russia and western institutions remains the fundamental issue. Moreover, the extent to which both Armenia and Georgia will be able to overcome "street democracy" and institutionalize democratic procedures at all levels of government remains a common challenge.

The two final contributions address European Union (EU) and Russian views—the former by Laure Delcour and the latter by Pavel Baev. For Delcour, the EU is being fundamentally challenged in its ability to diffuse its normative standards on democracy, human rights, and rule of law in its vicinity. The Armenian revolution exposes the limitations of the EU's neighbourhood policy in achieving political and societal transformations despite offering new possibilities for increased differentiation. Baev's piece looks at the reasons why the Armenian revolution was largely unnoticed in Moscow. In his view, the Kremlin's unusual ease with pro-democratic reforms in Armenia can largely be explained by the over-centralisation of decision-making in the Russian political system and its attention to a series of competing issues in the agenda—namely, Syria. Overall, the fact that Armenian leaders recurrently articulated a discourse that portrayed the revolution as a domestic affair with no implications in the country's foreign policy orientation may have been successful in keeping Moscow at ease. However, the implications of this passivity for Russia's foreign policy of support to autocrats needs to be further gauged.

With these contributions, the special issue seeks to contribute to better understanding the important and inspiring events in Armenia and the shift that they might entail for regional relations.

Licínia Simão

Armenia's Foreign Policy Priorities. Are There Any Major Changes Following the Spring 2018 Political Transformation?

By Alexander Markarov, Yerevan State University

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Abstract
For decades after independence, Armenia's foreign policy emphasized complementarity and prioritized national interests in its dealings with external actors. Nikol Pashinyan's foreign policy will be subject to the established priorities partially following previous trends in Armenian foreign policy. That means that Armenia will maintain strategic relations with Russia, but will also continue and expand its interactions with the EU, the US, and regional players. Security threats associated with the unresolved Nagorno Karabakh conflict and complex relations with Turkey will also remain key challenges for the current Armenian government. Under an unchanged regional power configuration and remaining challenges, Armenian foreign policy might become more proactive but is likely to rather retain its main directions and features. However, under unstable regional security politics, which is somehow dependent on (and sometime easily manipulated by) external actors and dynamics, changes may come about in the regional geopolitical environment that might affect Armenia.

Introduction
The long-time political leadership of Serzh Sargsyan ended after days of mass protests headed by the leader of the 'Way Out' parliamentary faction and the Civil Contract party, Nikol Pashinyan. The very fact that Prime Minister Sargsyan had to resign just days after the protests began poses many questions regarding the depth of and reasons for such massive dissatisfaction, and the fragility of a system that did not survive increasing instability and decreasing legitimacy. In part, the mobilization of protests succeeded by personalizing it and uniting various social groups—youth movements, rural populations, socio-economically disadvantaged and dissatisfied groups—all frustrated by the monopolization of power and the oligarchization of the economy.

Pashinyan, who spent his entire political life in civil and eventually political opposition, articulated a rhetoric that was clear, straightforward and predictable—to fight against a political system that was personified by Serzh Sargsyan, against the power concentration and domination of the Republican Party, for the rule of law and equal opportunity, against corruption and monopolies, against the dispensation of privileges, against economic oligarchs, and for greater opportunities for small and medium enterprises. This rhetoric emphasized the domestic nature of the nonviolent resistance movement, a velvet revolution of love and tolerance. The leaders of the movement claimed that domestic changes aimed at establishing rule of law, fighting oligarchy and monopolies, addressing corruption and creating equal opportunities for all economically active actors would be a decisive factor in Armenia's future social-economic development, leading to a decrease of the shadow economy, attracting and increasing investments into a better functioning economy and increase public wellbeing.

While domestic revolutionary changes were at the top of the political protest agenda, Pashinyan's foreign policy faithfully emphasized his determination to continue Armenia's foreign policy priorities and commitments, as well as its international obligations. Despite the fact that in the fall of 2017, the 'Way Out' parliamentary faction initiated a temporary National Assembly commission on the possibility of withdrawing from the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (Avanesov 2017), Pashinyan always stated during the protests and later on in his meetings with various Russian officials that he does not intend to leave either the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organizations (CSTO) or the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and is committed to Armenia's existing international agreements and obligations. In a recent article, the Secretary of Armenia's National Security Council, Armen Grigoryan, also confirmed that Pashinyan, being a pragmatist, would not change the course of foreign policy while the "political dialog with Moscow will reach a fundamentally new qualitative and pragmatic level" (Gazeta.ru 2018).

Keeping Foreign Policy Priorities Intact
For decades after independence, Armenian foreign policy emphasized complementarity and prioritized national interests in its dealings with external actors. In general there has been a certain consensus among the majority of Armenian political parties. They agree that Armenia must implement a balanced and complementary policy toward regional players and Armenia must guarantee security for Karabakh. (For a more detailed account of

the foreign policy approaches of on Armenia's elite see Gasparyan 2016). While the majority of political actors would rather agree that Armenia benefits from multifaceted cooperation with Russia, including in the military sphere, some had been advocating "more equal relations" or making cooperation with Russia more efficient. Assumingly there would be some space for maneuver to keep strategic relations with Russia but emphasizing equal status of the parties in those relationships. That is a trend that Pashinyan's foreign policy will try to follow. That also means that while Armenia will maintain strategic relations with Russia, it will also continue and expand its interactions with the EU, the US and regional players. This will take place under the constraints of the unresolved Karabakh conflict and closed borders with Turkey. These are facets of Armenia's security cooperation with Russia, rather than with the US or the EU, since neither currently offers Armenia any viable alternatives to its security challenges or the resolution of regional problems.

Another important dimension of Armenia's foreign policy are strategic relations with Georgia and Iran. They are also viewed through the prism of current regional geopolitical realities, and those countries are the main transportation routes that connect Armenia with the rest of the world. Both Georgia and Iran are important to Armenia as transportation hubs, and Iran additionally plays a regional balance-of-power role as a player that is considered as a counterbalance to the expanding influence of Turkey. The roles of both Georgia and Iran are emphasized in the government program adopted by the Armenian parliament in June 2018. While a state visit to Iran might still be in the planning stage (assuming that it was difficult to organize this visit during Ramadan), during Pashinyan's official meeting with the Georgian Prime Minister at the end of May 2018, he stressed that there are no issues in Armenian–Georgian relations that could not be solved and that the further development of the relationship with Georgia will continue to be one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy. In general, Armenia is interested in expanding its cooperation with Georgia in various areas such as trade and the economy, energy, transportation, agriculture, tourism and culture (Primeminister.am 2018).

The policy of complementarity presupposes that Armenia is building effective and cooperative relationships with all actors who are interested in mutually beneficial cooperation and can contribute not only to the country's development but also to peace and stability in the region. So, based on those priorities, Armenian elites were participating in international processes considered to be consistent with Armenia's national interests. The complementarity principle presumed the continuation of a strategic relationship with the Russian Federation but also presupposed maintaining positive, cooperative relations with the West and a European development path. It also considers feasible its membership in and close cooperation with the CSTO in parallel with NATO cooperation in the area of political dialog. This was reconfirmed during the NATO Partnerships and Cooperative Security Committee + Armenia meeting that took place in May in Brussels. Armenia indicated in this meeting that it is prepared to continue implementing the IPAP—Individual Partnership Action Plan (NATOinfo.am 2018).

The All-Important Karabakh Conflict

A complicated regional security architecture, the unstable dynamics of a prolonged ethno-political conflict, and the economic and political blockade of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan form another layer of foreign policy priorities and determinants for the country. Resolution of the Karabakh conflict is one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign and security policies. Armenia's position is to exclusively support a peaceful settlement based on compromise and that must incorporate the following principles: any final agreement on conflict resolution must be approved by the Artsakh1 authorities; Armenia will only accept "a resolution which would affirm the irreversible reality of the existence of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh", so the current *de facto* status of an unrecognized but independent state would then be *de jure* and supported by international guarantees; Artsakh should also be geographically connected to Armenia and its security must be internationally guaranteed (National Security Strategy 2007). In addition to those principles, the Armenian position emphasizes that the conflict settlement must be based on the recognition of the Artsakh people's right to self-determination, and that Artsakh should have an uninterrupted land connection with Armenia, under Armenian jurisdiction (MFA 2018a).

Resolution of this conflict is being thwarted by various factors, but the major disagreement seems to be completely mutually exclusive views on the final status of Nagorno Karabakh. Armenia wants to obtain de jure status for a currently unrecognized but institutionalized state through a legally binding document that is internationally recognized and recognition of the de jure existing state with internationally existing sovereignty guarantees. This approach appears to be unacceptable to Azerbaijan, who will only agree to autonomy but not independence for Artsakh. The official position of Baku is that Karabakh's status should not affect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and constantly refuses to negotiate with Karabakh officials. Azerbaijan further demands the return of

1 Armenians refer to the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic as Artsakh. The two terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

lands surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh that the Armenian side has controlled since the end of the war in the 1990s. These territories are sometimes viewed as a possible bargaining chip for Armenia to extract concessions from Azerbaijan. Although after the four-day war of April 2016 this position gets much less support in Armenia.

After Pashinyan was elected as Prime Minister, he presented his position on the issue subsequent to his meetings with Bako Sahakyan during a visit to Karabakh in May 2018. He was adamant that the conflict must be resolved peacefully and that negotiations must continue under the cochaired OSCE Minsk Group process. But he also called for the Artsakh Republic to be included as a full-fledged participant in the negotiation process. He also stressed that making progress in the negotiations is impossible with Azerbaijan's persistently militant rhetoric. Pashinyan stated that he was ready to negotiate with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliev on behalf of Armenia, but Artsakh's leadership must participate in negotiations to represent their own interests (Aslanyan 2018). While Armenia's previous political leadership had the unexpressed belief and desire that Karabakh must be represented at the negotiating table, Armenia's current political leadership explicitly wants to include Artsakh in the negotiation process. According to Masis Mailyan, this would allow Armenia to reject discussing with Azerbaijan and the mediators the key issues that pertain exclusively to Artsakh authorities (NewsArmenia.am 2018).

The government program presented in June by Pashinyan and adopted by the National Assembly also focuses exclusively on a peaceful resolution negotiated through the co-chaired OSCE Minsk Group process and based on the principles of international law, including the nation's self-determination principle as a base for conflict resolution. For Armenia, the security and status of Artsakh are seen as the top priority. The program also emphasized that Artsakh, as the main component of the conflict, must have a voice and involvement in the resolution process. In his speech, Pashinyan again addressed the need for Karabakh representation in the negotiations, saying that without their participation, negotiations could not be effective (ArmeniaSputnik 2018a). Such an approach has not been acceptable so far for Azerbaijan, while the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, stated that Moscow would respect any decision on Karabakh's participation in negotiations agreed to by Yerevan and Baku (ArmeniaSputnik 2018b). It should be noted that Karabakh was represented in various negotiation formats until 1997.

With the increased tension at the border and growing disagreements in the negotiations there is a danger that all that may result in the resumption of hostilities at different levels, which would certainly have very negative effect on the security of the entire region. Currently, Armenia continues to seek progress in the negotiation process led by the OSCE Minsk Group, whose mediation is seen as fundamental and instrumental for introducing and implementing effective conflict resolution mechanisms. Negotiations with Azerbaijan under the new Armenian premiership have not taken place, even though during Pashnyan's June 2018 visit to Moscow, President Putin introduced him to Azerbaijani President Aliev. So far, no talks have taken place and the visit by the Minsk Group co-chairs to Yerevan in June was more of a fact-finding, introductory meeting aimed at learning the new Armenian leadership's positions. During these meetings, Armenia once again expressed its support for the work of the OSCE Minsk Group and its willingness to continue under its auspices.

Regional Relations: Keeping Russia and the EU Close

In addition to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, two other major foreign policy priorities for Armenia include cooperation with Russia and the EU. This cooperation is not seen as mutually exclusive but rather as synergetic for Armenia's development. According to the governmental program cooperation with Russia is prioritized being considered as strategic. The military and security aspects of this alliance, as well as Russia's role in the Artsakh negotiations, will most certainly continue to be an important determinant of bilateral relations. In addition, the large Armenian community in Russia is also an important factor, especially considering that the current government emphasizes the role of the diaspora and its potential for channeling investment to the Armenian economy. No less important is Russia's role as one of Armenia's principal trading partners and as a major investor in the Armenian economy. Those investments extend to a wide variety of sectors including energy and energy infrastructure, where Armenia is deeply dependent on Russian supplies. Armenia is dependent on Russia's gas as well as nuclear fuel deliveries for the Metsamor plant. Russia has provided USD 250 million in credit and USD 30 million in a grant for the modernization of this nuclear power plant. Natural gas imports and distribution are also monopolized by Gazprom-Armenia, owned by Russia since 2014. Energy dependence on Russia also poses security issues for transportation routes through Georgia's north–south gas pipeline. Disruptions of this pipeline, as those which occurred in August 2008, might raise serious concerns.

In addition to the economic aspects of Armenian–Russian relations, there is a robust military collaboration based on both bilateral and multilateral agreements, namely the CSTO. In 2010, Armenia extended for another 49 years

the presence of a Russian military base as well as the geographical scope and defensive functions of the base located in the country since 1995. As a CSTO member, Armenia also cooperates in the arms industry and is able to purchase weapons from Russia at low prices. This military cooperation with Russia is considered to be one of the important elements of Armenia's national security as confirmed by the governmental program (Government of Armenia 2018). In 2015–2016, Armenia received 200 million USD in a soft loan and another 100 million USD soft loan was provided the next year for military/technical cooperation.

The government program adopted by the Armenian parliament states that the development of strategic relations with Russia in various spheres is among the country's main priorities and constitutes an important part of the Armenian security system (Government of Armenia 2018). In his interview with RT, Pashinyan stated that there will be no reversals in bilateral relations with Russia and he expects a new phase that could be characterized as "more positive, more constructive, more productive, and more direct" (Petrenko 2018).

Considering Russia to be an important ally, Armenia will continue to closely cooperate with other members of the Eurasian Union and the CSTO on both bilateral and multilateral tracks, and remains ready to address and discuss problems in those relationships. They include various issues such as arms sales to Azerbaijan by Russia and Belarus, and vague or unvoiced positions by CSTO member states on the escalation of tensions at the Armenia–Azerbaijani border. Armenia's complex and strategic dependence on Russia sometimes conflicts with its complementarity approach, and maintaining equilibrium with other actors seems to be a difficult foreign policy task for the Armenian authorities. However, Yerevan still seeks out more meaningful partnerships beyond its strategic alliance with Russia, and Armenia continues to develop relationships with the collective West—the US and the EU. The government program presented by Prime Minister Pashinyan and approved by Armenia's National Assembly in June 2018 adheres to the foreign policy priorities of previous administrations. Armenia considers Russia to be a strategic partner and as the Prime Minister stated, the relationship of the two countries must be based on friendship, equality and readiness to solve problems through dialog.

Nevertheless, Armenia also intends to pursue closer relations with the EU, following the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in November 2017, which was ratified unanimously by the Armenian Parliament and is now being provisionally applied. Cooperation with the EU is sought in at least three major areas. The first area is cooperation with the EU to promote democracy, civil society, rule of law, good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The second area is close economic cooperation and expanding trade with EU countries. It should be noted that in terms of investment, the EU is among the largest investors in the Armenian economy. Finally Armenia supports EU regional initiatives aimed at establishing an environment of lasting stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus region (National Security Strategy 2007).

A recent statement issued after the June 21 Partnership Council meeting between the European Union and Armenia under the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), reaffirmed the willingness of both parties to expand and strengthen cooperation within the new legal framework of the Eastern Partnership and the revised European Neighborhood Policy. It also clearly reconfirmed the EU's promised support for democratic reforms, its readiness to assist in the organization and monitoring of new elections along with important amendments to the electoral code, for enhancing "the rule of law and respect of human rights, as well as to increase prosperity and socioeconomic resilience in Armenia" (MFA (2018b). Thus, Armenia continues to consider its cooperation with the EU and participation in the Eastern Partnership as an important platform for dialog and collaboration, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, mentioned in an interview while reiterating that this should not be achieved at somebody else's expense (Kommersant 2018).

Conclusion

Armenia's foreign policy is heavily influenced by the regional geopolitical environment and its apparent permanent security threats arising in part from the unresolved Nagorno Karabakh conflict and the broad and complex historical-political relationship with Turkey. Those security threats will persist for the current Armenian government. The country's extensive and multifaceted relationship with Russia in various strategic areas in some ways limits Armenia's ability to maneuver. However, Armenia tries to balance the interests of various regional players in areas where they have a common interests. For now, no major changes are seen in the foreign policy priorities of Armenia's new government, but regional complexities and challenges remain and addressing them will still be a challenging task.

About the Author

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Armenia's Velvet Revolution in the Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite

By Farid Guliyev, Baku

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Abstract

This article examines the discourse of the Azerbaijani elite surrounding Armenia's "velvet revolution" in the spring of 2018, focusing on the implications of its potential emulation in Azerbaijan as well as on the management of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The article shows that the Armenian revolution has had no impact on protest activity in Azerbaijan due to structural constraints on collective action and the lack of a common frame of reference. In addition, the events in Armenia were mainly viewed in Azerbaijan through the prism of Karabakh. Even though this event revealed an initial moderate softening of the Azerbaijani government's stance, the unexpectedly hardline position taken by the new Armenian leader prompted Azerbaijan to adopt a more hawkish position. This, in turn, has led both sides to revert to the usual cycle of the discursive zero-sum game. While this suggests that ethnic discourses are not completely immutable, if a peaceful resolution is valued, it will require a more fundamental change in the ideologies of the current political actors and in their underlying nationalist master frames. Given the present setup of political forces in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, where exclusionary versions of nationalist ideologies prevail, this does not seem to be a possibility in the near future.

Introduction

What has been the reaction of Azerbaijani government officials and public figures to the protests in Armenia? The springtime protests in Armenia (April 13–May 8, 2018) and their interpretation by Azerbaijani government and opposition leaders present an interesting opportunity to look at the construction and reproduction of perceptions of Armenia in Azerbaijan by key government officials, opposition leaders, and public figures.[1] In the analysis that follows, I examine two aspects of the Azerbaijani elite's discourse concerning Armenia's "velvet revolution": the possibility of its emulation in Azerbaijan (a contagion effect) and its influence on the Karabakh discourse.

Regarding the failure of the protest to spread, Armenia's protests had no effect on political mobilization in Azerbaijan for two reasons: structural obstacles to collective action mobilization (e.g., closed political opportunity structures, the weakness of civil society, and the marginalization of opposition parties) and lack of appeal. Empowered by oil wealth, Azerbaijani state elites established tough institutional barriers for civil society activities. For opposition political groups and independent NGOs, operating under such restrictive conditions has become a daunting challenge. Survey results reveal extremely low rates of membership in civic associations, trade unions and political parties in Azerbaijan (Guliyev 2018).

Second, the Armenian velvet revolution lacked the cognitive frame of reference that is crucial to "making events in another country seem relevant to events in one's own country" (Hale 2013, 345). Despite sharing slogans criticizing corruption and the reign of oligarchs, the opposition leaders in Azerbaijan chose to forgo appeals to common problems. Instead, their narratives tended to emphasize the topic of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) and geopolitical power games. On the issue of Karabakh, both Azerbaijan and Armenia were actively engaged in framing.[2] During the initial stage of the protest cycle, while still within the nationalist frame of reference, Azerbaijani government elites and pro-government media seemingly relaxed their traditionally hardline posture, avoided characterizing Nikol Pashinyan in negative terms, and devoted a great deal of attention to the deposed former president, Serzh Sargsyan. However, as soon as the newly elected Prime Minister Pashinyan revealed his extremely nationalistic views regarding Karabakh that revived the "Miatsum" [unification of NK with Armenia] agenda (Abrahamyan 2018), Azerbaijan hardened its stance as well. This suggests that both sides failed to escape the trap of symbolic politics, since neither side has demonstrated the capacity to moderate their policy positions toward the opposite side.

1 The actors whose views are included here represent a fairly diverse spectrum of Azerbaijani elite (government officials, key opposition leaders, opinion-shapers, and various media sources). The extent to which these views are representative (or not) of the broader Azerbaijani "public" remains an empirical question.

2 Framing can be defined as "the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" by various actors (Snow and Benford 1992, 136).

Armenia's "Velvet Revolution": No Contagion in Sight

Although the peaceful revolt in Armenia caught Azerbaijanis by surprise, it was clear from the onset that it would have no effect on neighboring Azerbaijan. In the popular "color revolutions" model, mass protests tend to cluster across time and space in "regime change cascades" (Hale 2013). The Arab uprisings provide ample evidence that protest spreads through demonstration or contagion effects. The velvet revolution in Armenia, however, was not contagious and did not spread beyond the borders of Armenia. One obvious reason for the lack of appeal is the image of Armenia in Azerbaijan as an enemy state and the lack of a common frame of reference despite the occasional lament that some Azerbaijanis were watching the protests in Armenia "with jealousy and hope" (Adilgizi 2018). Because of the low appeal of the "Armenian revolutionary model" and the weak organizational capacities of pro-democracy forces, the Azerbaijani elite's discourse has largely been concerned with the implications of the events in Armenia for the fate of Karabakh.

As will be discussed further, NK has been the common frame of reference for both government and opposition reactions to the events in Armenia. "Whatever happens in Armenia in terms of who comes to power does not bother me, what does bother me however is the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh in the background of political developments there", commented prominent public figure Aslan Ismayilov (April 23, 2018).

Not expecting any imminent change in leadership, Azerbaijani opposition leaders, who have found themselves having to operate in an environment of increasingly unfavorable political opportunity structures, refrained from attempts to mobilize party members and sympathizers for similar protests in Baku. The democratizing potential of the Armenian protests for Azerbaijan was mentioned by only two notable public figures. Amid the protests in Yerevan, Ali Karimli, the chairman of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (PFPA) commented that the Armenian protests are a step toward democratization that will pull Armenia out of the Russian orbit of influence (Karimli, April 22, 2018). While Armenia's democratization gives it an advantage over Azerbaijan in improving its international image, it nevertheless is compatible with Azerbaijan's long-term strategic interests since Armenia's democratic progress will motivate Azerbaijan to democratize as well, the PFPA leader speculated. In his vision, the eventual transition to democracy in both countries is presented as a historical victory of both peoples over Russian imperialism. On the other hand, Western integration is expected to lead to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict without armed conflict (Karimli, April 22, 2018). However, such a resolution must still fit "within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan". At the same time, Karimli calls Sargsyan the "Khojaly criminal" ["Xocalı canisi"] who "has blood on his hands—and it is a pity we could not punish him" (Karimli, April 22, 2018). On May 8, when Pashinyan was voted in as Prime Minister, Karimli remarked that on this day that symbolically coincides with the capture of Shusha by Armenian forces, "Armenians scored another success by electing a people's candidate as their new prime minister and improving their country's democratic image" (Karimli, May 8, 2018). It should be evident that the democratic image gained by Armenia, "the invader/aggressor state" ["işğalçı dövlət"], is a much stronger weapon against Azerbaijanis than any Iskander ballistic missiles [referring to Russia's supply of missiles to Armenia] (Karimli, May 8, 2018).

Similar to Karimli, Ismayilov links the Karabakh resolution to the values of Western liberal democracy—the rule of law in this case. The dismissal of Sargsyan shows the world that unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia is governed by rules that give it an advantage, he claimed (Ismayilov, April 23, 2018). If Armenia manages to break out of its dependence on Russia and succeeds in implementing reforms, Azerbaijan may end up losing Karabakh since the whole world will be on Armenia's side in recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state. Armenia's integration with the West is also positive, as it will help democratize Azerbaijan as well (Ismayilov, April 26, 2018; Ismayilov, May 8, 2018).

Another opposition leader, Arif Hajili, the chairman of the Musavat Party, took a more hardline position noting that while Armenia's change in government was a positive step, much depends on the nature of a newly elected government. If Armenia's new government complies with liberal-democratic norms and international law, this will benefit both Armenia and the region as a whole. However, "if one Russian puppet ["Rusiya vassalı"] is replaced by another Russian puppet" this, of course, will perpetuate the existing status quo (Hajili, April 24, 2018). This sentiment was followed later by an even more negative outlook:

> "Pashinyan's statement to continue Armenia's occupation policy and seeking protection from Putin…shows that Armenia will remain as a 'slave' country [of Russia] ['kölə olaraq qalacaq'] …By continuing to pursue the miserable ['miskin'] 'Great Armenia' and 'genocide' ideology it will lag behind and will be an obstacle to the development of the region, and first and foremost, Azerbaijan" (Hajili, May 14, 2018).

Most political actors and commentators in Azerbaijan view regime change in the post-Soviet space as an out-

come of a kind of geopolitical maneuvering in which Russia plays a key role. Simplistically, it is assumed that countries are moving along some sort of unidimensional geopolitical continuum where the democratic West and authoritarian Russia are perceived to be polar opposites. This type of discourse is fraught with flaws and simplistic assumptions. For example, the causal logic in Karimli's geopolitical schemata [More democracy ▸ Pro-Western Orientation/Exit Russian Sphere of Influence ▸ More peace] is built on a geopolitical script that does not lend itself easily to empirical testing. "Geopolitics", as Hans Morgenthau (1948, 116) once noted, is "a pseudoscience erecting the factor of geography into an absolute that is supposed to determine the power, and hence the fate of nations".

The Azerbaijan–Armenia Relationship as a Symbolic Politics Trap

Azerbaijan and Armenia view each other with mutual suspicion, distrust and hatred rooted in extremely nationalist ideologies (Kaufman 1998). Some scholars (e.g., Gamaghelyan 2010) argue that the protracted ethnic conflict and nationalist propaganda on both sides have normalized mutual animosity and ethnic stereotypes in the collective memories of the Azerbaijani and Armenian people at a deep psychological level. According to Gamaghelyan (2010, 39–40), the proliferation of radical nationalist rhetoric on both sides is a major obstacle to reconciliation:

> "The current Armenian and Azerbaijani governments have risen to power on radical nationalistic slogans with mutually exclusive claims to deliver Nagorno-Karabakh to their respective constituencies. Every politician who takes a moderate stand and tries to improve relations is inevitably stamped as a traitor…This war of rhetoric, produced mostly for internal consumption, forces the leaders on both sides to adopt an increasingly radical stance vis-à-vis the other side. It widens the gap between the positions of the two parties and leaves little room for a solution. Even worse, the rhetoric penetrates the media and educational institutions, gradually transforming them into propaganda machines. Entire generations have been raised on this propaganda during the 20 years of conflict. It has intensified the feeling of mutual mistrust and hatred, while elevating the mutually exclusive myths of Nagorno-Karabakh to such a level that no politician can suggest any concession without producing public outrage."

The April War in 2016 served as a catalyst for the intensification of nationalist rhetoric in both countries (Kucera 2017). This perpetuates the situation in which both sides view the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a zero-sum game. Since each side "perceive[s] possessing Nagorno-Karabakh as a cornerstone of their national identity" (Gahramanova 2010, 142), the prevailing conception of national identity in both countries is largely ethnicized and exclusionary. In this conception, outgroups are seen as a threat to the existence or coherence of their respective communities.

Ethnic symbols and myths become critical components of the sense of national identity that becomes an obstacle to peace. According to symbolic politics theory (Kaufman 2006, 202), ethnic hostility propagated by political actors can create a "symbolic politics trap" in which "once a leader has aroused chauvinist emotions to gain or keep power, he and his successors may be unable to calm those emotions later". Based on interviews with Azerbaijani elite, one scholar notes a similar dynamic in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

> "As long as there is mutual distrust and hatred between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will continue to remain as a clash not only between two states, but also between two nations" (Tokluoglu 2011, 1241).

When the protests in Armenia began, Pashinyan, the leader of the anti-Sargsyan movement, refrained from invoking the Karabakh debate. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani government discourse was targeting Sargsyan by pointing to the thin support for his regime (using negative terms such as "clan" or "mafia") and to his "misguided" policies toward the Karabakh conflict. For the first several weeks, the Azerbaijani elite's discourse generally avoided commenting on Pashinyan and was rather positive about the changes in Armenia ["The ouster of Sargsyan was in itself a positive step no matter who comes to replace him"]. However, just weeks after Pashinyan assumed office (May 8) and started incorporating nationalist elements in his public statements, his hardline stance radicalized the Azerbaijani elite's discourse that reverted to its regular framing of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a zero-sum game.

Although the Armenian protests were fueled by the long-standing popular discontent with President Serzh Sargsyan's plans to stay in power as prime minister and the cronyism of the oligarchic system he created, they were also partly a reaction to the so-called Four-Day War in April 2016. Ending with serious casualties and the Azerbaijani army's recapture of Jojug Marjanli village in the Armenian-occupied Jabrayil region, the April war has been celebrated in Azerbaijan as a "great victory" that embellished the "glorious history" of Azerbaijan (Azertac, April 18, 2018). In Armenia, the loss

of territory to Azerbaijan was associated with the inadequacy of the existing economic structure and leakage of public funds to corruption. According to a *New York Times* reporter:

> "Many protesters [in Armenia] mentioned a watershed moment from two years ago, after a four-day war started by neighboring Azerbaijan…The oligarchs had sold the population on the idea that poverty and poor roads were among the sacrifices necessary to build a strong army. Then Armenia lost territory in the 2016 war, and there were reports that soldiers lacked basic items like bullets and medical kits" (MacFarquhar, May 19, 2018).

The Karabakh Discourse

At the onset of the mass protests, Nikol Pashinyan's stance on Nagorno-Karabakh was unclear and remained so until his remarks during his campaign in the first week of May and leading up to his election as prime minister on May 8. His avoidance of nationalist rhetoric was perceived in Baku as a sign that with the new leader in Yerevan Armenia might soften its position on Karabakh.

On May 2, Pashinyan made his first public statement on NK saying: "Long live the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which should become an inseparable part of the Republic of Armenia!" (as quoted in De Waal 2018a; also see Tonoyan, May 2, 2018; Abrahamyan 2018). Pashinyan's remarks as prime minister indicated continuity in the Armenian stance on Karabakh. He asserted Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination and international recognition and proclaimed that "mutual concessions would be possible only after recognition of the right of the Nagorno-Karabakh people to self-determination" (BBC Monitoring, May 1, 2018; Reuters, May 9, 2018).

The dramatic outcome of the Armenian protests caught Azerbaijani elites by surprise. Amid mass protests in Yerevan on April 13, the official state newspaper *"Azərbaycan Qəzeti"* [hereafter AQ] was still busy covering the electoral victory of the incumbent president Ilham Aliyev, with only a few lines mentioning the start of protests in Yerevan (AQ, April 13, 2018). One of the first reactions that appeared in media reports was an article published on April 17 with the telling title "Armenian People Do Not Want to See the Sargsyan Clan in Power" (AQ, April 17, 2018a). This was followed by another article warning about the possibility of a civil war in Armenia (AQ, April 17, 2018b).

Much of Azerbaijani media reporting on pro-government websites such as *Trend.az* and *1News.az* portrayed Sargsyan's rule as the regime of the "Karabakh clan", whose government ruined the Armenian economy. Sargsyan is also implicated in his direct role in military actions in Karabakh and was therefore viewed by Azerbaijani elites as a particularly tough negotiator and uncompromising figure. In the wake of Sargsyan's resignation (April 23), some Azerbaijani officials suggested that the former president of Armenia should be brought to justice at an international tribunal for his personal criminal responsibility in the mass killings of Azerbaijani civilians in the town of Khojaly (Trend.az, April 25, 2018). Another Russian-language web news site 1News.az ran an article with the title "The End of the Karabakh mafia clan" and later publishing an interview with an expert who opined that Armenia faces an "existential problem": it is landlocked and has closed borders to the east and west, and it cannot develop if excluded from the regional transportation-logistic networks (1News.az, April 23, 2018). Armenia's only viable alternative, the expert suggests, is to come to terms with Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (1News.az, April 27, 2018).

After Sargsyan's resignation on April 23, the Azerbaijani government continued to carefully craft its public response. The foreign ministry issued a statement expressing their readiness to work with "sensible forces" ["sağlam quvvələr"] within Armenia (AQ, April 24, 2018). Again after Pashinyan's election as prime minister, the ministry restated its hope that the new Armenian government "will not repeat the mistakes of the previous government" (AQ, May 9, 2018). This view persisted through mid-May, as there was still uncertainty regarding Armenia's internal power play (AQ, May 16, 2018). The first sign of a return to the usual opinions was an article published on May 17 that referred to Pashinyan's May 14 meeting with Putin in Sochi, in which Armenia's new leader emphasized "the allied strategic relations between Armenia and Russia" (Kremlin.ru, May 14, 2018; also see Asbarez, May 14, 2018). By the time Pashinyan got elected as prime minister and his Karabakh statements became widely reported in the news media, Azerbaijan's cautious, conciliatory position was replaced by a more negative outlook in which Pashinyan is depicted as a populist and a demagogue (1News.az, May 11, 2018). If in the initial stages, the Azerbaijani press portrayed Pashinyan as "the leader of opposition forces", now he is referred to as "a street minister" ["kücə naziri"], his political program was dubbed "populist", and Pashinyan's Karabakh policy was said to be no different from Sargsyan's policy (AQ, May 17, 2018; Kaspi.az, June 7, 2018). More importantly, Armenia was still considered an "outpost-satellite of Russia" ["Ermənistan əvvəlki kimi Rusiyanın forpost-vassalıdır"] (AQ, May 17, 2018).

This was in part a reaction to Pashinyan's change in position, reviving the idea that Nagorno-Karabakh

should be incorporated into Armenia or recognized as an independent state (Abrahamyan 2018). One expert noted that as Pashinyan's rhetoric got tougher, "the initial optimism faded" (Shiriyev 2018).

Conclusion

This case suggests that while leadership changes may temper the bellicose rhetoric, it is very hard to change the underpinnings of symbolic nationalism as a dominant master frame. As De Waal (2018b) pointed out, Pashinyan is being forced to play the nationalist card: "Pashinian and his comrades will not want to sound conciliatory on this issue for fear of having their patriotic credentials questioned." Pashinyan's nationalistic rhetoric regarding Karabakh undermined his appeal and only served to incite a reciprocal flurry of nationalistic rhetoric by Azerbaijani politicians, government and opposition alike. While ethnic conflict is generally viewed as a symbolic trap with immutable identities, this event suggests that in times of crisis, ideological scripts can be manipulated at least on the margins. On the other hand, it is clear that escaping from the symbolic politics trap would require that political forces on both sides discard extreme nationalism as the master framework for ideological discourse. For example, despite minor differences, all major political leaders in Azerbaijan were virtually unanimous in supporting the government's military campaign during the April 2016 war (Aslanov and Samedzade 2017). A 2017 study shows that Armenian political forces pronounced vague designs for NK resolution (e.g., the readiness for "mutual concessions with a reservation"), and opposition parties tended to maintain "a tougher stance" than the then ruling Republican Party (HKK) (Galstyan 2017). As has become clear, Pashinyan's rhetoric does not seem to be a radical departure from previous governments. Given the current setup of political forces in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, where nationalist ideologies prevail and alternative narratives are marginalized in the ruling and opposition parties, this does not seem to be plausible in the near future.

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What Georgians think about the Armenian Revolution

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Abstract

Armenia's "velvet revolution" will hardly have any direct impact on Georgia or on the state of Georgian–Armenian relations. However, the events that unfolded in their neighboring country fascinated and amazed the Georgians, even though they did not yet understand the significance of the events. The two countries share important similarities, and both use the other as a point of reference. Many Georgians compared the unfolding events in Armenia with their own "Rose Revolution" in 2003, as well as the two Ukrainian revolutions—the "Orange" and Euromaidan, in 2004 and 2014, respectively. Those revolutions mark critical points in the histories of these countries, albeit in different respects. How can Armenia change, and if it does, how will Georgians view those changes? I will discuss those questions from two perspectives: that of regional balance of power and that of the development of democratic institutions.

"What's the Point of a Revolution if the Geopolitical Orientation Doesn't Change?"

Georgians instinctually examine the unfolding events in their region through a geopolitical lens. Armenia is a pro-Russian country, and it is a member of the Russia-led Eurasian Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This contrasts with Georgia, which aspires to EU and NATO membership. When Georgians began to discuss Armenian events, the first question was: Will the Armenian Revolution change the country's external orientation? Aren't true democratic revolutionaries supposed to be pro-Western? If not, what is the point of replacing Serzh Sargsyan with someone else?

It took time to eliminate that misunderstanding. Indeed, the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine was triggered by opposition to Russian domination, but not all similar events are about geopolitics. Georgia's Rose Revolution was not about foreign policy, although it propelled a group of strongly pro-Western reformers to power. Their predecessor, Eduard Shevardnadze, was pro-Western as well; indeed, he was the man who made a formal bid for Georgia to join NATO. (Peuch 2002)

Geopolitical alignments are rooted in fundamental choices made by societies, and such alignments tend to survive even the most dramatic political changes. The Georgians and Armenians made such fateful choices in the twilight of the Soviet Union when broad protest movements in both countries picked quite different priorities. Georgians invested everything into the idea of independence, which made Russia their adversary and made the West an imagined or real ally. This

situation remains at present. In contrast, Armenia mobilized around an irredentist agenda of unification with Nagorny Karabakh, which made "the Turks" (implying Azerbaijan as well as Turkey) its arch-enemy and Russia—its chief ally (even if not always reliable). Guarding the results of the victory in the Karabakh war became the chief objective of the Armenian state, and it still is, but there is a price to pay. Many Armenians would prefer their country form an alliance with the European rather than Eurasian Union, and Nikol Pashinyan, the leader of the Armenian Revolution and the new interim Prime Minister, is likely one of them. Because such an alliance would be detrimental to Karabakh, it cannot even be discussed.

This does not mean that relations between Georgia and Armenia must be poor. After becoming the prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan said that "inter-state relations between the two countries must not be founded on geopolitical factors or influence". (JAM news 2018) This displays how Georgian–Armenian relations have developed since independence. Both countries understood that they need each other regardless of their relations with larger powers.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Armenian Revolution has no foreign political dimension. The competition between Russia and the West is central for regional politics of the South Caucasus. It is not only about countries' involvement with military and economic blocs, it is also—if not primarily—about the clash between values, norms, and models of development; it is about soft power as well as hard power.

From this perspective, the Armenian revolution is a grave defeat for Russia. While the latter's political leadership remained nonchalant, as though nothing of import occurred, (see the contribution by Pavel Baev in this issue) the Russian commentariat does not hide its anger and frustration. (Shevchenko 2018, Leontyev 2018, Solovyov 2018)

Georgia's Rose Revolution was not intended to be anti-Russian, but it profoundly changed the country in ways that brought it closer to the West. Mikheil Saakashvili's government failed to turn Georgia into a European-style liberal democracy, partly because this was not its real priority and because such democracies cannot be created with a top-down approach. However, it turned a failing state into a fairly efficacious one, replaced rampant corruption with a government that was amazingly clean by regional standards, strengthened meritocracy at the expense of clientelism, and tried to embed an inclusive concept of citizenship. The very fact of the Rose Revolution and subsequent reforms pushed the West to take Georgia's claims to be part of the Western world more seriously, even if fundamental reluctance persists. Georgia's turn might have influenced the EU's reversal of its earlier decision not to include the South Caucasus in the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was created in 2003, but the South Caucasus was added in 2004. Later, in its Bucharest summit in 2008, NATO promised eventual membership to Georgia, despite deep divisions within the alliance on when (if ever) and how this promise may be fulfilled. In 2009, following the 2008 Georgian–Russian war, the EU created a new European Partnership instrument which made it possible for Georgia to sign the Association Agreement with the EU.

Russian leadership considers the "color revolutions" as the most deadly weapon the West can wield against it. Its allegations that such upheavals are financed and masterminded by the West are, of course, absurd, though it is true that the very spirit of such revolutions undermines Russian influence in these countries. It was wise of the Russian leadership not to equate the Armenian revolution with Ukraine's Euromaidan, and it is clear that the Russian grip on Armenia may be strong enough for it to continue wielding strong influence over the country. However, considering the precedent of a Russian ally's government departing simply because people in the street demanded it may be very dangerous. In fact, it may have a demonstration effect for the Russian people as well: why not try something similar in their own country. As a result of the Armenian Revolution, the balance of soft power in the region shifted away from Russia. After this, a lot depends on the final outcome of the revolution: While it will certainly replace the power elite, we do not yet know whether it will also change the model of development and fundamentally transform Armenia's institutions.

If it does, the change will also be meaningful for Georgia. While the latter has never been a full democracy,[1] it has been considered a stable regional leader of democratic freedoms. Moreover, during the last decade, all of Georgia's neighbors tended toward increased autocracy. This implied that Western governments exerted less pressure on it for violating democratic norms, as it is difficult to be tough on the regional beacon of democracy. However, being surrounded by autocratic regimes does not bode well for the prospects of genuine democracy in Georgia. If the velvet revolution succeeds in making Armenia's political regime truly democratic, Georgia may lose its position as the regional leader of

1 In Freedom House ratings of the last twenty years, Georgia has routinely scored between 3 and 4 points out of 7—this makes it a "partly free country", or a hybrid regime which is relatively close to a democracy (the score of 2.5 would make Georgia one). Armenia usually scored between 4.5 and 5—a hybrid country, but closer to being an autocracy. See *Freedom in the World* ratings on freedomhouse.org.

democratic freedom, but it may also receive a new stimulus to become a freer country.

Revolution and Democratic Legitimacy

However, do "color" or "velvet" revolutions actually make countries more democratic? The record of such is mixed. First, they occur in so-called "hybrid" regimes rather than outright dictatorships; such regimes allow for open political contestation, and their claim to being democracies is not purely formal. However, there is no level playing field, and incumbents manipulate available resources to skew results in their favor. There are structural reasons for countries having such regimes, and democratic openings such as "velvet revolutions", while exciting, do not always help.

Distrust of electoral institutions is endemic in such countries. This distrust tends to persist when new revolutionary leaders organize elections themselves. How do we know they are fair? Verdicts of foreign or domestic observers are often inconclusive. If people are not used to trusting electoral procedures, they will always be prone to question the results. Hence a fundamental question emerges now and again: in a democracy, what is an authentic representation of the "will of the people"—elections, or a huge rally in the streets?

Democratic theory, as well as the practice of established democracies, suggests an unequivocal answer: street rallies have their function, but the final verdict should come through elections. This does not occur in countries such as Georgia or Armenia. Instead, "direct democracy"—defined as people expressing their will taking the process to the street—claims moral superiority over an electoral process that is presumed corrupt and unfair. However, this attitude may eventually work against the new revolutionary regime as well.

The success of the 2003 'Rose Revolution' made it a model for the opposition of Saakashvili's government, and their strategy was to emulate the Rose Revolution, not to contest government through elections. They failed, but the political process was far from healthy. Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire turned politician, changed that by bringing his Georgian Dream party to an electoral victory in October 2012. Has this precedent created a new normal in Georgia? Not everyone is convinced. Arguably, Ivanishvili's enormous personal wealth, by Georgian standards, makes him an exceptional case. The 2016 parliamentary elections increased Ivanishvili's "Georgian Dream" party to more than 75 percent majority in Parliament, and he consolidated his control over all branches of power. The idea that elections are irrelevant is gaining traction in parts of Georgia because no one can match Ivanishvili's resources. It was because of this issue that the United National Movement (UNM), the chief opposition party, split in January 2017: loyalists of Mikheil Saakashvili, former president and now émigré opposition leader, believe that they should prepare for another (hopefully "velvet") revolution; those who still believe in elections, broke away and created a new party, European Georgia. Armenia's example may be used by Saakashvili and his followers to prove their point that change will come through people rallying in the streets, not elections. At the moment, there is no visible sign that Georgian people are in the mood to change the government through street protests,[2] but the Armenian revolution may influence the strategy of the Georgian opposition.

How to break the vicious cycle? Will Nikol Pashinyan's new government succeed in persuading Armenians that they should rely on ballot box from now on when they decide to change their government? Or will the success of the 2018 velvet revolution legitimize efforts of future opposition movements to force the next government to capitulate to the people in the streets? This has been a truly important question for the Georgian democracy, and it will be one for Armenia as well.

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2 Protests against closure of two Georgian nightclubs in the context of the government's anti-narcotics crusade on May 12 and 13 as well even larger rallies caused by perceived injustice in the law enforcement system in early June demonstrated that Georgians are losing patience with the Georgian Dream government; but attempts of the UNM to politicize the movement by raising the demand for early elections failed.

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Political Changes in Armenia: a Litmus Test for the European Union

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Abstract

Although they were essentially driven by domestic factors, the political events that unfolded in Armenia in April–May 2018 bear strong implications for external actors, particularly for the European Union (EU). This is because the EU regards itself as a promoter of human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide, especially in its neighbourhood. As part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2004, the partner countries' effective commitment to 'shared values' (i.e., democracy, human rights and the rule of law) is a prerequisite to closer relations with the EU. Therefore, whether and how the European Union can diffuse its democratic values are crucial questions to gauge its influence in its vicinity.

Introduction

This article argues that Armenia's 'Velvet Revolution' represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the EU. In essence, while it is strongly backed by a broad constituency deeply dissatisfied with the incumbent elite and political regime, the change of leadership in Armenia opens an era of uncertainty, both domestically and regionally. Domestically, the new Prime Minister faces both strong pressure and potentially major obstructions to come to terms with the 'old' system of governance and deliver on reforms (Giragosian in World Politics Review, 2018). Regionally, political upheavals in Armenia (and the uncertainty associated with them) may heighten the tensions with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh (Vartanyan, 2018), among other tensions, by stiffening Armenia's position (Abramyan, 2018). As a multi-layer system of governance whose foreign policy involves multiple players, the EU is not well equipped to react promptly or decisively to unexpected and/or large-scale changes, even when such changes are framed as aspirations to the values supported by the EU. This was made abundantly clear on a number of occasions, including in the EU's own neighbourhood with the so-called 'Arab Spring' and the 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015a). Nevertheless, the 'Velvet Revolution' in Armenia has also emerged as an opportunity for the EU (in line with the conclusions of the 2015 ENP review) to tailor its policy to the aspirations expressed by Armenian society and accompany home-grown reforms. In fact, it is also a chance for the EU to make up for its past shortcomings in supporting domestic change in Armenia.

The EU's Policy in Armenia: a Low Prioritisation of Political Reforms

Over the past decade, the EU's engagement in favour of Armenia's democratisation has indeed been inconspicuous. It has mainly taken the form of declarations and assistance and has thus lacked the EU's key leverage in terms of support for democratisation—political conditionality. For instance, the EU criticised the use of violence by the Armenian authorities in response to demonstrations, especially in the wake of the 2008 presidential election. Additionally, the EU has consistently allocated part of its assistance to support human rights and the rule of law (for instance, by providing aid for the development of civil society and the reform of the judiciary). However, the EU did not make political change a precondition for closer ties with Armenia,

even though there were concerns over the respect for human rights and the rule of law. Admittedly, Armenia was no exception to the EU's policy; in other ENP countries, the EU similarly abstained from requiring far-reaching political reforms that would threaten the survival of their incumbent elites, and with the exception of Belarus and Ukraine in late 2012, it did not use political conditionality (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015a).

This occurred because the EU has prioritised security and stability over democratisation in its neighbourhood policy (Ghazaryan, 2014). The EU's hierarchy of objectives became apparent with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) launched in 2009. With the EaP, the EU has prioritised regulatory approximation with its own corpus of rules—the *acquis communautaire*—especially in trade-related sectors. It has also made extensive use of sector-specific conditionality, among other rules, as a prerequisite to launch negotiations for Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA). This is not to say that EU functional cooperation is disconnected from democratic principles. Admittedly, EU sectoral policies include strongly codified provisions for democratic governance (Freyburg et al., 2009). In other words, the EU may indirectly promote democracy by embedding democratic principles (transparency, accountability, participation) into sectoral cooperation. However, the effects of these provisions on partner countries' practices may be visible only in the medium to long term.

In fact, during negotiations for an Association Agreement (AA, 2010–13) and a DCFTA (2012–13) with Armenia, the EU prioritised legal approximation with those standards protecting its market from low-quality and unsafe products. Therefore, not only did the EU accept the political *status quo* in Armenia when launching the Eastern Partnership, but also, by placing emphasis on regulatory approximation and negotiations for an AA/DCFTA, it added legitimacy to Armenia's incumbent authorities, who emerged as the EU's main (if not sole) counterpart during the negotiations. The government was able to effectively implement the EU-demanded trade-related reforms, as these did not entail loosening the elites' control over the political system (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015b: 502). In addition, negotiations were conducted with small groups of experts, which left aside both Armenian civil society and the general public.

Arguably, President Sargysan's sudden decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in September 2013 (thereby backtracking from the AA/DCFTA) did little to increase the EU's leverage over the country's political reforms. While the Armenian authorities have demonstrated continuous interest in closer links with the EU, accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EUEA) and Russia's increasing influence in the country have constrained the EU's capacity to shape (even if modestly) the political developments.

This is primarily because Armenia's integration choice deprived the EU of what had been its major leverage in the form of AA/DCFTA. The 1996 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (which still serves as the contractual framework of relations, for the time being) offers only limited possibilities for influence. The PCA includes basic political conditionality in the form of a so-called suspension clause, but this provision has never been used and therefore has little credibility. In principle, the EU can still exert human rights-related conditionality through its trade instrument GSP+. However, until recently, the EU's support for democratisation has remained limited, even when bilateral relations shifted away from emphasising trade-related issues.

Admittedly, the EU has reacted to breaches of democracy and the rule of law. For instance, it criticised the parliamentary elections conducted in April 2017[1] and called for an 'impartial, credible and effective investigation' of all human right violations (including misconduct by the police) during the 2016 Erebuni Crisis (EU-Armenia Cooperation Council, 2017). However, the EU's assistance priorities for 2014–2017 highlighted a decrease in support for democratisation, the rule of law and respect for human rights compared to other sectors.[2] Therefore, Armenia's integration choice seemingly reinforced the EU's 'profile as a donor, with limited capacity for political influence' in the country (Simão, 2018: 318). This is also because accession to the EAEU buttressed the incumbent authorities' attempts to ensure their political survival by proposing a set of constitutional amendments (adopted by referendum in December 2015) that turned the country into a parliamentary regime and therefore fuelled the Armenian public's frustration with the lack of deep political reform (Alieva et al. 2017).

An Opportunity for the EU to Step Up Its Role in the Democratisation Process

The events that unfolded in April–May 2018 may offer an opportunity for the EU to step up its role in Armenia's

1 In the wake of the April 2017 elections, the EU Ambassador to Armenia questioned the credibility of the government-controlled Central Electoral Commission. This situation triggered criticism from the government for meddling in Armenian internal affairs (Sahakian and Bedevian, 2017).

2 In 2011–2013, support for democratic structures and good governance was identified as the first EU assistance priority and accounted for approximately one-third of the EU's support to Armenia (European Commission 2010). In 2014–2017, the EU focused on private sector development and public administration reform; the reform of the justice sector was identified as the third priority, but support for other democratic institutions and civil society development was inconspicuous (EEAS/European Commission 2013).

reform process. Clearly, as was the case in other neighbouring countries (e.g., Ukraine in late 2013), the EU did not emerge as a major actor during the crisis, especially as the Armenian protests were, in essence, a homegrown process. Nevertheless, the EU (at all levels) issued a number of declarations, and the High Representative called both then-President Sarkissian and the newly appointed Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Importantly, the statements issued at the highest levels after Pashinyan was elected[3] identified the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights as key objectives (alongside with economic and social development) in EU–Armenian relations.

In fact, the recent change of power came at a crucial moment in bilateral relations. Though Armenia has not signed an AA, it has consistently sought to retain close links with the EU. This situation provides the Union with some leverage over the country, whether through the forthcoming dialogue on visa liberalisation or through the new EU–Armenian agreement signed in March 2017. The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is expected to enter into force once it is ratified by all sides. Democratic values, good governance, respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law are defined as essential elements of the CEPA, and the agreement may be suspended if breaches of these principles are observed. Crucially, the CEPA is also expected to empower civil society, as an independent civil society platform composed of Armenian and EU organisations will be set up to monitor the implementation of the agreement. The assistance priorities identified for 2018–20 also cover a wider swath in democracy-related activities than was the case in 2014–17, with the improvement of electoral legislation and the fight against corruption being identified as key priorities, along with support for the reform of justice in the 'stronger governance pillar' of the partnership (EEAS, 2018).

Therefore, Armenia's 'Velvet Revolution' has taken place at a time when the EU seems prepared to support democratisation and political reform more actively. The launch of a visa dialogue with Armenia (if it is not further delayed because of the sensitive context of immigration in the EU) may also play an important role in fostering key reforms in the country (not least in the fight against corruption). This is because the dialogue will pave the way for increased conditionality as part of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (the next step under the visa liberalisation process, Alieva et al., 2017). More broadly, the EU's support for societal links with Armenia (for instance, through the funding of student exchanges) is expected to contribute (even if indirectly and in the longer term) to changing the political environment in the country.

With the CEPA, the EU has demonstrated that it can adjust its offer according to the partner countries' circumstances (in this case, Armenia's membership in the EAEU), in line with the approach introduced by the 2015 ENP review. The current situation in Armenia is yet another test of the EU's capacity to influence domestic developments in those Eastern Partnership countries that have not signed an Association Agreement but are prone to engaging in reforms. Ultimately, the EU's influence in Armenia will hinge on both the EU's engagement and ability to adjust to the local context and on the regional environment (be it the degree of tension with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh or Russia's continuous low-profile position vis-à-vis political developments in the country).

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What Made Russia Indifferent to the Revolution in Armenia

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Abstract

Russia's reaction to the dramatic collapse of the firmly entrenched regime in Armenia, which is one of its few formal and real allies, was subtle and demonstratively neutral. Contact with the opposition was minimal, but the idiosyncratic counter-revolutionary stance was abandoned. This unusual self-restraint may be the result of Russia's entrapment in Syria, and it may also be due to a mistake caused by the overload of rigidly centralized leadership.

Introduction

The April revolution in Armenia greatly surprised Russian leadership, as it did most stakeholders in the multiple conflicts in the Caucasus. However, one would expect that Moscow should have been more informed and better prepared. Experts had warned about brewing discontent in this impoverished South Caucasian state (Minchenko, Markedonov & Petrov, 2015), but policymakers in the Kremlin are resolutely uninterested in any form of independent expertise. President Vladimir Putin called and "warmly congratulated" Serzh Sargsyan on his appointment to Prime Minister, though protocol did not dictate him do so (Putin, 2018). From that moment on, the mainstream media strictly ignored the

street protests in Yerevan. That silence stimulated fierce debates on the escalating turmoil within social networks that connect millions of Russian users with thousands of eye-witnesses. Furthermore, the mainstream media silence reinforced the self-deception in the proverbial Kremlin corridors that nothing of import was occurring (Petrovskaya, 2018).

Consequently, Sargsyan's resignation on April 23 came as a shock, and while the propaganda machine scrambled to explain it, Putin was politically paralyzed—as had occurred on several occasions throughout his long administration. Though military intervention was certainly out of the question, Moscow had an arsenal of "hybrid" tactics at its disposal, all of which could have been rapidly deployed. In the crucial weeks when Nikol Pashinyan advanced his claim for the position of prime minister, Moscow remained indifferent and uncharacteristically aloof, marking potential consequences for Russian–Armenian relations and, more importantly, damaging Russia's "principled" stance against revolutions. This lack of response on events of high importance has, therefore, negatively impacted Russia's profile on the international stage.

Abandoning the Counter-Revolutionary Crusade

The dominant discourse in Russia on the subject of contemporary revolutions has been strongly negative, contrasting heavily with the Soviet ideological glorification of this phenomenon as an "engine of progress". The proposition that a forceful overthrow of legitimate order, even those of a dictatorial nature, brings only chaos and violence is accepted as a political axiom, thereby reducing discussions on such politically incorrect issues as the "right for rebellion" to the margins of the blogosphere (Volkov, 2014). This fierce condemnation goes beyond the rational stance of an authoritarian regime, which firmly controls elections and finds a grave threat in street protests. Vladimir Putin tends to take such issues personally, hiding but never overcoming the shock of watching angry crowds protest, as he did from the windows of KGB headquarters in Dresden in November 1989 (Hill & Gaddy, 2013). That trauma was reinforced with the shocking images of the gruesome death of Libyan dictator Muamar al-Qaddafi, which Putin attributed to US malicious manipulation of the violent chaos (Sestanovich, 2018).

What makes this natural aversion to popular uprisings particularly aggressive is the assertion that the so-called "color revolutions" in Russia's neighborhood, as well as the hopeful "Arab spring" in the Middle East, are instigated and sponsored by the USA and the EU. As conspiracy theories are elevated to the level of state policy, Russia's struggle against various attempts at forceful "regime change" fuel a key part of its rapidly evolving confrontation with the West. President Putin portrays himself as a champion of the counter-revolutionary cause and makes a claim for Russian leadership in global resistance against the US policy of preserving its eroding "hegemony". The "color revolutions" were even defined as a new form of warfare, despite scant enthusiasm among the top brass for elaboration on this theoretical innovation (Bouchet, 2016).

The lack of response in Moscow to the explosion of street protests in Yerevan marks a stark contrast with Russia's ideological stance against revolutions. It was certainly of great importance for Russian leadership that no anti-Russian or pro-EU slogans were displayed in the peaceful rallies across Armenia. Furthermore, as Pashinyan asserted that the alliance with Russia would remain strong, some opinion-makers in Moscow ventured the point that the unfolding crisis was different from other "color revolutions" (Markedonov, 2018a). In the previous series of street protests in Armenia during the summer of 2015, the friendship with Russia was also never in question, but this did not stop Moscow from inventing Western interference (Andreasyan & Derluguian, 2015). An explanation of the new Russian passivity is hard to find, but Syria is likely a factor.

The Long Shadow of the Syrian Debacle

Many overlapping ambitions influenced Putin's risky decision to launch a military intervention into the Syrian civil war in September 2015, and a prominent incentive was the perceived need to stop and push back the wave of revolutions. The explosion of social anger in the Arab world and the uprising in Ukraine were caused by vastly different factors, but according to the perspective of Moscow, the Tahrir and the Maidan were parts of the same Western conspiracy. By early 2018, however, the "Arab spring" had abated, leaving behind two collapsed states (Libya and Yemen), two forcefully suppressed upheavals (Bahrain and Egypt) and only one success story (Tunisia), while the Ukrainian breakthrough had deteriorated into political squabbles in Kiev and a military deadlock in Donbass. Syria is no longer a key battlefield in the struggle against revolutions but is instead a permanently mutating violent disaster. Putin declared a "victory" in the war against the rebels and terrorists, only to find the Russian expeditionary forces entrapped in new spasms of fighting (Baev, 2018).

Moscow is stuck with an ostracized dictator in Damascus, who can only sustain his grasp on power with large-scale military support from Russia and Iran, but the "brotherhood-in-arms" between them involves all sorts of troubles (Grove & Abdulrahim, 2018). The

Russian forces stay clear from the escalating conflict between Iran and Israel in Syria, as well as from the fighting between the Turkish army and the Kurdish forces. The Russian command also tries to preserve the "de-conflicting" mode with the US forces, despite the heavy resonance from the direct clash in February (Gibbons-Neff, 2018). This complicated maneuvering means that Putin's order on reducing the Russian grouping in Syria cannot be executed because without numerous "boots on the ground", Russia can neither influence this new post-ISIS phase of the Syrian war nor can it ensure the security of its two bases (Khmeimin and Tartus). This imperative to sustain the intervention signifies a protracted stress for the Russian Navy and Air-Space forces—and undercuts Russia's ability to launch new military interventions.

Mistakes Caused by a bad Overload

The engagement in Syria impacted on the Russian reaction to the Armenian revolution in several ways, as it demanded more resources from Moscow (e.g., rebuilding the Syrian air defense system) and perhaps most importantly, as it prioritized Russian attention to the fast-transforming war. This war management added anxiety to the already precarious relationship between Russia and the U.S., which deteriorated badly after the U.S. Treasury enforced new, heavy-hitting sanctions. Trump's increased toughness and braggadocios statements about the hundreds of Russians killed in Syria compelled some mainstream Moscow experts to question whether Washington really aimed to undermine elite support for Putin's regime (Kortunov, 2018). The need to monitor the developments on the Korean peninsula, where Russia's exposure is high but its ability to effect change is low, was another stressor that heavily overloaded the Kremlin system of political decision-making, thus resulting in miscalculations, procrastinations and blunders.

Though the proposal that the lack of Russian response to the Armenian crisis was a mistake may appear dubious, it builds on the fact that Russia's political system is extremely centralized and that the attention span of the "decider" is invariably limited. Since the start of the Ukraine crisis, Putin displayed little interest in the conflict transformations in the Caucasus and has actually never developed a particular "chemistry" with Sargsyan. Moscow took the quick termination of fighting in Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 as proof of Russia's capacity to control the status-quo (de Waal, 2018). The Kremlin administration was also quite preoccupied with the peaceful execution of Putin's presidential inauguration on May 7. It is quite possible that Putin's courtiers dismissed Pashinyan's Gandhi-style march across Armenia in early April as a show of little importance by a marginal trouble-maker (Antonova, 2018).

The Russian military base in Armenia is too isolated to serve as a springboard for a military intervention, which would have required prohibitively heavy effort and risk. However, Moscow has mastered the art of applying a wide range of "hybrid" means, many of which could have been effectively deployed in support of the friendly dictator-in-distress in Yerevan. Corruption, which is the main irritant for Armenian society, has produced many profitable links between Moscow and Yerevan that are ideally suited to manipulate elites and crowds, and yet, they remained idle. The infamous Russian "troll factories" did not attack Pashinyan's high-impact posts on *Facebook*. The inattentive Kremlin clearly missed the ripe moment to attempt an indirect power projection. That Sargsyan said, "I was wrong", rather than ask Moscow for emergency support is a testimony to the strength of a very particular war-forged Armenian political culture that remains profoundly incomprehensible to Russian elites. That astounding resignation might have triggered an overreaction from Russia, but Putin could not find a counterpart to connect with and was disinclined to grace the intrigues of the beleaguered Republican party with his attention.

Conclusions

The following may be reasonably concluded: if Moscow had attempted a "hybrid" intervention in the Armenian crisis and failed, then the damage to its international positions would have been significantly greater. Nevertheless, it was just as possible for the Kremlin to demand a forceful suppression in the early stages of the protests in Yerevan as it was to order a brutal dispersion of peaceful rallies in Moscow on May 5. Though Putin's court assumes the stance of "non-interference in internal affairs" regarding the Armenian revolution, the rationale behind this pose is highly unconvincing and remains subject to interpretation (Markedonov, 2018b). This analysis suggests that the unsatisfactory experiences from Syria informed the self-restraint shown by Moscow, where resources for proactive foreign policy moves are now assessed with greater care. A further suggestion is to apply the ever-useful "Occam's razor" method, which dictates that Putin and his court made the mistake of ignoring the beginning of the explosive crisis, but avoided the more serious blunder of attempting a belated "hybrid" intervention. Russia's ability to provide assurances of security to post-Soviet autocrats is now seriously compromised, but a reproduction in Moscow of a joyful triumph of street democracy in Yerevan still remains rather improbable.

See overleaf for information about the author and references.

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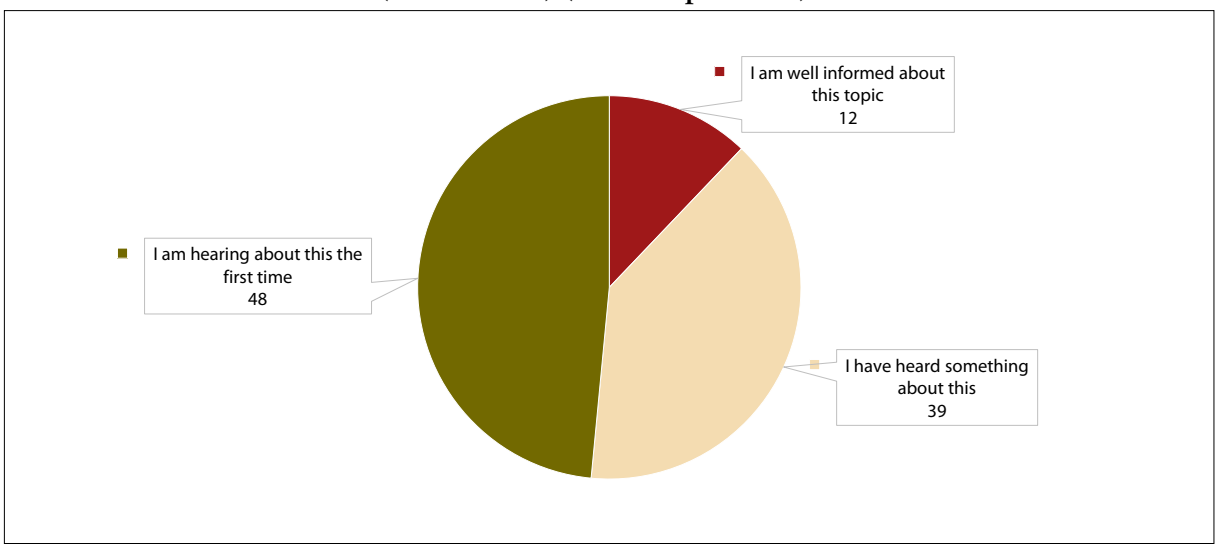
OPINION POLL

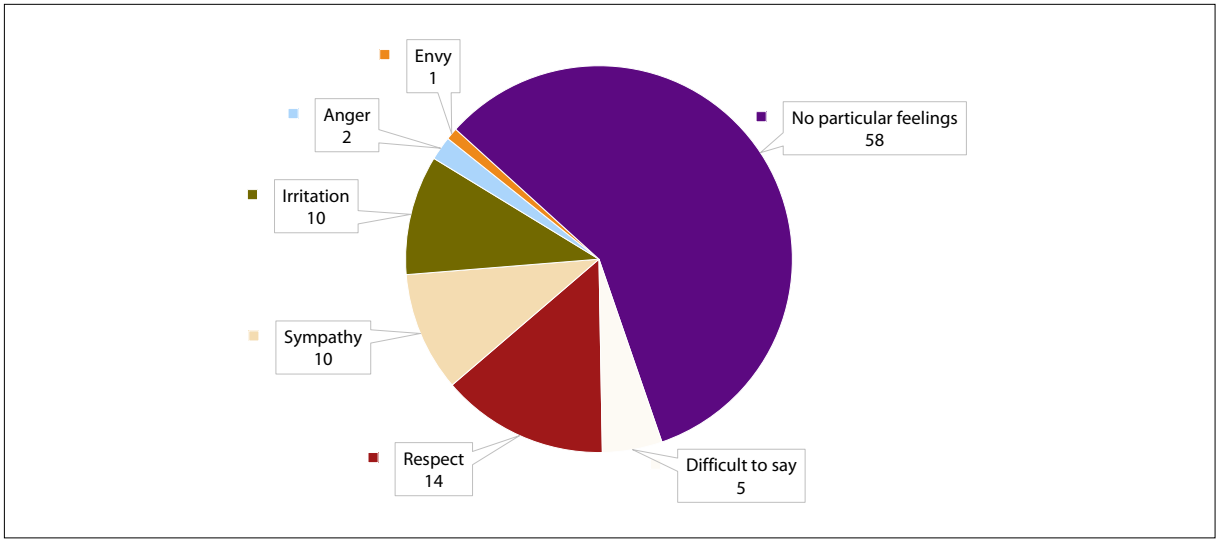
Russian Public Opinion on the Protests in Armenia (as of Late May 2018)

Figure 1: Have You Heard About the Mass Protests in Late April and Early May in Armenia Against the Election of the Former President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan to the Office of Prime Minister? (One Answer) (% of Respondents)



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 24–30 May 2018, N = 1600, <https://www.levada.ru/2018/06/06/protesty-v-armenii/>, published on 6 June 2018

Figure 2: What Are Your Feelings About the Protesters in Armenia? (in % of Respondents Who Had Heard About the Protests; Respondents Were Shown a Card; One Answer)



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 24–30 May 2018, N = 1600, <https://www.levada.ru/2018/06/06/protesty-v-armenii/>, published on 6 June 2018

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