

PEACE AND SECURITY

# ARMENIA'S INTERNATIONAL STATUS ASPIRATIONS IN 2008-2020

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For small states, international status also constitutes a key means to alleviate their structural constraints and vulnerabilities. To achieve this, they adopt unique national roles.



The analysis found out what international status aspirations the ruling elites of Armenia had in 2008-2020, as well as how and by what means they tried to gain those statuses.



The research reveals what national roles were adopted by the ruling elites led by Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan and what international statuses in line with them did they aspire to?



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# INTRODUCTION

All states strive to achieve statuses in the international system that correspond to their national interests. For small states, international status also constitutes a key means to alleviate their structural constraints and vulnerabilities. To achieve this, they adopt unique national roles.

The main purpose of this analysis is to find out what international status aspirations the ruling elites of Armenia had in 2008-2020, as well as how and by what means they tried to gain those statuses. In order to reach this goal the following research objectives - questions were defined:

- What national roles were adopted by the ruling elites led by Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan and what international statuses in line with them did they aspire to?
- How and by what means did they try to run those roles and obtain those statuses?
- How did those roles-statuses develop? Have they remained unchanged or have they evolved? Have the adopted roles-statuses transformed substantially?

We have sought the answers to these questions in the statements of the ruling elites, in their guiding documents, and in practical policy.

These answers will give a new meaning to Armenia's foreign policy in the defined period, as well as will help to identify the reasons behind the foreign policy actions and the geopolitical perceptions of the decision-makers.

Analyzing the data through the lens of the Role Theory and the concept of small states, it was possible to identify that during this period the ruling elites of Armenia adopted several national roles and aspired for different international statuses.

While some of them remained consistent throughout the study period, the others underwent significant changes over time, whereas others have emerged relatively recently. We have classified these roles into three groups: stable, transformed, and emerging.

# 1

## STABLE NATIONAL ROLES

The only stable national role that has remained unchanged among all the ruling elites of independent Armenia is the one of “faithful ally”, as defined by Holsti<sup>1</sup>. Small states often seek to emphasize their loyalty to great powers, the proper fulfillment of allied responsibilities, and the willingness to strengthen the alliance to gain a reputation of a good ally in comparison to other members of the alliance. The motive may be, for example, the reaffirmation of guarantees of protection by the great power allies<sup>2</sup>.

Armenia has tried to assume such a role in relation to Russia, especially emphasizing bilateral and multilateral allied relations with the latter. Serzh Sargsyan’s administration described Armenian-Russian relations as “the most effective and successful example of bilateral cooperation in the post-Soviet space.”<sup>3</sup>

During the meeting with the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, Serzh Sargsyan stated that during 2008-2010 officials of the two countries had had about 30 meetings, probably thus emphasizing the intensity of interstate contacts<sup>4</sup>. To show the uniqueness of the allied relations, the Armenian authorities regularly mentioned the historical foundations of the alliance, noting that Armenians and Russians have never been “on different sides of the barricades”<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, the opening of a monument to Russian servicemen killed in the Russian-Turkish wars in Gyumri in 2010 is noteworthy, which, as Sargsyan stressed<sup>5</sup>, was the first case of

restoration of monuments erected in honor of the Russian military in the entire post-Soviet space.

Serzh Sargsyan’s statement of September 3, 2013, on joining the Belarus-Kazakhstan-Russia Customs Union and involvement in the formation procedures of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was another obvious manifestation of faithful ally’s status perception and the corresponding national role.

The reasoning of that statement was that “being in a single system of military security, it is impossible and inefficient to isolate from the relevant geo-economic area”, and that “this is a rational decision, this decision is in the national interests of Armenia”<sup>6</sup>.

During 2013-2018 the perceptions about the faithful ally have been revealed also at the level of the Armenian-Russian bilateral relations through emphasizing - on all occasions - the exceptional importance of these relations for Armenia, their strategic and allied nature<sup>7</sup>, as well as, for example, declaring “further deepening and expansion of allied cooperation with Russia” to be Armenia’s foreign policy priority<sup>8</sup>.

As a result of the “Velvet Revolution” in 2018, the formation of a new political elite in Armenia led by Nikol Pashinyan led to a reassessment of the status of “faithful ally” and the introduction of new components. In July of the same year, during a meeting with the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Pashinyan stated that Armenia and Russia

1 K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 233-309, 1970.

2 A. Banka, “Reclaiming a good ally status: Baltic coping strategies in the America First world,” *European Security*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2020.

3 RA MFA, “Armenian Foreign Minister Edvard Nalbandyan’s interview to “Rossiya 24” TV channel”, 10/08/2010. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mfa.am/hy/interviews-articles-and-comments/2010/08/18/russia24/1777>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

4 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Joint press-conference of the Presidents of Armenia and Russia in the framework of the state visit of the President of RF to RA,” 20/08/2010. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2010/08/20/news-54/>. [Accessed 19/06/2021].

5 Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Speech by President Serzh Sargsyan at Moscow State University”, 24/10/2011. [Online]. Available: [www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2011/10/24/news-114/](http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2011/10/24/news-114/) [Accessed 19/06/2021].

6 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “The RA President Serzh Sargsyan’s remarks at the press conference on the results of the negotiations with the RF President Vladimir Putin”, 03/09/2013. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-working-visit-to-Russian-Federation/>. [Accessed 19/06/2021].

7 Лента.Ру, “Возобновление войны станет серьезнейшей угрозой”, 21/12/2016. [Online]. Available: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/12/21/sargsyan/>. [Eng.: Lenta.ru, “Resumption of war will become a most serious threat”]

8 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan was hosted at the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations”, 14/03/2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/03/14/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-visited-MSIIR/> [Accessed 19/06/2021].

have “special relations” and that they would soon “become even more special”<sup>9</sup>.

Months later, after a regular meeting between the Armenian and Russian leaders, Nikol Pashinyan announced the launch of a joint humanitarian mission with Russia in Syria<sup>10</sup>.

The latter is an example of a new manifestation of the status of “faithful ally”. As a new component, it is noteworthy, as Armenia was, in fact, the only Russian ally that responded positively to the Kremlin’s call to its CSTO allies to support Russia’s efforts in Syria, whereas the Kyrgyz, Belarusian and Kazakh sides considered the existence of a corresponding UN mandate as an important precondition<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to the established structural motives, the Pashinyan-led political elite had two perceptual motives for proving its loyalty to the status of “faithful ally” and “being completely transparent to its Russian counterparts”<sup>12</sup>.

The first referred to the predominance of the tendency in the Russian media and expert community to view the “Velvet Revolution” through the prism of color revolutions and the assumption that the new Armenian authorities would change Armenia’s de facto univector strategic direction to the detriment of Russia and in favor of rapprochement with the West.

With this respect, Pashinyan mentioned in an interview with one of the Russian state media outlets:

“...Unfortunately, many in Russia’s expert community try to interpret the events in Armenia as something referring to so-called colour revolutions. But it is very important for us that our Russian friends and colleagues realize that what happened [in Armenia] had no geopolitical context and no foreign power was involved in the processes.

... And, of course, to be a reliable partner [for Russia] is of paramount importance for us”<sup>13</sup>.

Pashinyan’s second motive referred to the involvement of CSTO Secretary General Yuri Khachaturov in the investigation of the events of March 1, 2008, in July 2018, which caused concerns about the CSTO international reputation, feeding, in fact, the reasons for the above-mentioned first motive.

9 Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, “Kremlin hosts meeting between Nikol Pashinyan and Vladimir Putin”, 13/06/2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2018/06/13/Prime-Minister-Nikol-Pashinyan-had-a-meeting-with-Vladimir-Putin/>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

10 Sputnik-Armenia, “Pashinian disclosed details about Armenia’s mission in Syria: what mission will Armenia carry out in Syria?”, 09/09/2018. [Online]. Available: <https://armeniasputnik.am/armenia/20180909/14336252/armenia-rusastan-nikol-pashinyan-siria.html>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

11 В. Мухин, “Союзники Москвы по ОДКБ не желают воевать в Сирии”, 26/06/2017. [Online]. Available: [https://www.ng.ru/world/2017-06-26/1\\_7015\\_syria.html](https://www.ng.ru/world/2017-06-26/1_7015_syria.html). [Accessed 21/06/2021]. [Eng.: V. Mukhin, “Moscow’s allies in the CSTO do not want to fight in Syria”]

12 Россия 24, “Мнение”: Никол Пашинян об отношениях России и Армении”, 12/05/2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcTAXDkfh-M>. [Accessed 21/06/2021]. [Eng.: Rossiya 24, “Attitude: Nikol Pashinyan on relations between Russia and Armenia”]

13 А. Арутюнян, “Никол Пашинян: Армения абсолютно прозрачна для российских партнеров”, 06/03/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://tass.ru/interviews/6188975>. [Accessed 21/06/2021]. [Eng.: A. Arutyunyan, “Nikol Pashinyan: Armenia is absolutely transparent for Russian partners”]

## 2

# TRANSFORMED NATIONAL ROLES

Due to its geographical location and the peculiarities of the security environment in the South Caucasus, it has always been important for Armenia to develop a model of interaction with the West, Russia, as well as regional organizations headed by them, so that the development of relations with one party does not harm the cooperation with the other. The beginning of Serzh Sargsyan's first presidential term (2008-2013) coincided with serious structural changes in the security environment of the Republic of Armenia: the five-day Russian-Georgian war in 2008 worsened the relations between some of Armenia's key partners at once - between Georgia and the West on the one hand and its ally Russia on the other.

The deepening of the dividing lines became a challenge for Armenia's foreign policy, as there was a risk of appearing on one side or the other of those lines. In order to rule out such a scenario and neutralize or at least mitigate the effects of the growing tensions, Armenia decided to obtain a status that Holsti<sup>14</sup> defines as the national role of "bridge".

If we examine this issue from the point of view of international status-seeking policy, Armenia wanted to become a successful example of a state that, being a member of an alliance, was able not only to harmonize the Western and Russian vectors of its foreign policy but also to promote dialogue between opposing parties. This issue is especially important for the post-Soviet republics, which have faced a dilemma since 2008 amid growing tensions and a declining cooperative environment between the West and Russia.

The Sargsyan administration decried the deepening of the dividing lines in the region and urged to settle the conflicts between the great powers. He promoted the thesis<sup>14</sup> that in the presence of contradictions it is possible to establish effective mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation. In his view, "in our extremely sensitive region, small states should do everything to mitigate possible

conflicts between superpowers, not to escalate them."

To this end, the Armenian leadership wanted, according to the Minister of Defense (2008-2016) Seyran Ohanyan, to create a "field of interaction" for the conflicting states and military-political alliances<sup>15</sup>.

During Sargsyan's second presidential term (2013-2018) the international status of "bridge" was the most conceptualized and widely circulated idea at the discourse level, but the least implemented one in terms of execution.

This concept was based on several basic principles: combining security systems (in particular, the cooperation with Russia and CSTO on the one hand and the interaction with the US, NATO, and EU on the other), adopting neutrality in case of conflicts between them, while refusing to mediate between them<sup>16,17</sup>, exclusion of dividing lines and elimination of the blockade of Armenia<sup>18</sup>, participation in various integration processes with a priority of the commitments conditioned by the EAEU membership<sup>19</sup>, combining the interests of partners, and

14 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Interview of President Serzh Sargsyan to the Austrian, Der Standart" daily, 23/08/2008. [Online]. Available: [www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2008/08/23/news-11/](http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2008/08/23/news-11/). [Accessed 18/06/2021].

15 Aysor.am, "Оганян: ОДКБ не мешает Армении развивать сотрудничество с НАТО", 20 07 2010. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aysor.am/ru/news/2010/07/20/seyrans-ohanyan/176018>. [Accessed 18/06/2021]. [Eng.: Aysor.am, "Ohanyan: CSTO does not hinder Armenia to develop cooperation with NATO."]

16 Panorama.am, "The right to self-determination is a fundamental principle for us." Interview of the President of the Republic of Armenia to the Italian "Corriere della sera", 22/09/2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.panorama.am/am/news/2014/09/22/president-corriere-de-la-sera/203256>.

17 RA MFA, "MF Edvard Nalbandyan's interview to Slovenian "Delo" daily, 10/03/2015. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mfa.am/hy/interviews-articles-and-comments/2015/03/10/min-sl-delo/4889>.

18 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Interview of President Serzh Sargsyan to the Czech "Lidové Noviny" (National News) daily," 30/01/2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/Interview-of-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-durin-state-visit-to-Czech-Republic/>. [Accessed 06/06/2021].

19 BBC News, "Эдвард Налбандян: в мире есть 100 маленьких и больших Армений," 14/09/2015. [Online]. Available: [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/09/150914\\_edward\\_nalbandyan\\_interview](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/09/150914_edward_nalbandyan_interview). [Eng.: BBC News, "Edvard Nalbandyan: there are 100 big and small Armenias in the world"]

not opposing<sup>20</sup>.

It also envisaged several dimensions-directions:

1. separate bilateral interaction with integration groups (primarily the EAEU and EU) to “extend the economic integration from the Atlantic to the Pacific”<sup>21</sup> with the prospect of becoming a hub for them toward the markets of Iran and the Gulf, as well to the EAEU common market<sup>22</sup> for European producers;
2. promotion of interregional cooperation between integration groups (in particular, BRICS-EAEU-SCO, EAEU-EU) with the prospect of developing a common market<sup>2324</sup>;
3. diversification of EAEU’s external links via institutionalization of economic relations with other states (first of all with China, India, and Iran);
4. Armenia’s position as a hub via the North-South highway, Iran-Armenia railway, Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Russia energy corridor, Gulf-Black Sea international transport and transit corridor<sup>2526</sup>.

To date, of these directions, only the first one has been

20 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan’s Interview with Armenia TV Channel”, 14/12/2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2017/12/14/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-gave-an-interview-to-ArmeniaTV-channel/> [Accessed 06/06/2021].

21 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia at the Third Eastern Partnership Summit”, 29/11/2013. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/11/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-at-the-third-Eastern-Partnership-summit-speech/>. [Accessed 18/06/2021].

22 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at opening ceremony of Armenian-French economic forum” 12/05/2014. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/05/12/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-and-President-of-France-economic-forum-speech/>. [Accessed: 08/06/2021].

23 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan delivers a statement at Ufa summit,” 09/07/2015. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/07/09/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-visit-Russian-Federation/>. [Accessed 10/06/2021].

24 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the session of the Supreme Council of the Eurasian Economic Union”, 31/05/2016. [Online]. Available: [https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2016/05/31/President\\_Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Astana-May-31/](https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2016/05/31/President_Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Astana-May-31/). [Accessed 05/06/2021].

25 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Boao International Economic Forum”, 28/03/2015. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/03/28/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participation-in-Boao-forum-speech/> [Accessed 08/06/2021].

26 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Presidents of Armenia and Iran recapped the results of the meeting”, 21/12/2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2016/12/21/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Iran-President-Hassan-Rouain-announcements-for-Mass-Media/>. [Accessed 19/06/2021].

implemented (in addition to full membership in the EAEU, the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was signed in 2017 and entered into force in 2021, but without the possibility of any level of economic integration with the EU) . With regards to the second direction, the EAEU-SCO connection is still in the stage of formalization, and there is no progress in the EAEU-EU interconnection.

There are some achievements in the third direction (free trade zone agreements with Iran, Singapore, Serbia, free trade negotiations with India and China), whereas the fourth direction is only at the level of official discussions.

Moreover, already during the years of Nikol Pashinyan’s rule, the role of “bridge” was merged with the role of “faithful ally”, formulating a qualitatively different concept, which is missing in Holsti’s theoretical list of roles.

Since 2019, as perceived by the Armenian elite, Armenia directed its diplomatic resources to the realization of the national role-status of the main negotiator for the EAEU or, as we define it, the “recruiting agent”. We assume that this event was significantly influenced by two factors:

- complex-systemic, that is, from January 1, 2019, Armenia assumed the chairmanship of the EAEU bodies for one year;
- worldview-psychological, that is, the legitimation of Pashinyan’s political team in the eyes of the Russian political elite, consequently, the aspiration to fulfill the promise to make the Armenia-Russia relations even more unique, assuming a certain role for Russia in the international arena.

In this case, the national role of “bridge” - the most conceptualized one - was, in fact, subjected to situational adaptation: Armenia began to position itself not as a bridge between the West and the East or the EAEU and the EU, but as an agent that “recruits” countries wishing to interact with the EAEU in order to “expand the geography of cooperation” of that organization<sup>27</sup>, using this status also for the goals of the role of “faithful ally.”

In August 2019, at a meeting with the heads of diplomatic missions and the central office of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan stated that Armenia’s post-revolutionary, transformed, and proactive foreign policy is based on three principles:

27 Hetq, “Nikol Pashinyan, “The agreement signed with Serbia became another step in enlarging EEU cooperation geography”, 25/10/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://hetq.am/hy/article/109090>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].



sovereignty, pan-Armenianism, and cooperation<sup>28</sup>.

Cooperation was interpreted as a principle that presupposes Armenia's active involvement in relations with new partners, outside the traditional geographical framework of Armenian diplomacy, beyond the scope of bilateral relations. It is noteworthy that months ago this principle was reflected in the priorities of Armenia's presidency in the EAEU that were presented by Pashinyan.

Accordingly, the expansion of the EAEU geography through the establishment of trade and economic institutional relations between the third countries outside traditional small Eurasia and the Eurasian Union was declared a tactical priority, focused on the EAEU's strengthening and external geopolitical positioning. In order to achieve this goal and make the association with the EAEU attractive, Armenia introduced the EAEU Free Trade and Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements as a component of its foreign policy agenda in bilateral relations<sup>29</sup>.

As a second but more long-term strategic priority, Pashinyan mentioned directing the diplomatic efforts of the EAEU countries, jointly advancing the priority of the EAEU institutional cooperation with other international integration structures, including the systematic synthesis with global projects (e.g. the project "One Belt, One Road")<sup>30</sup>. In addition to that, he emphasized the EAEU-EU relations, considering them not only "realistic, but also inevitable"<sup>31</sup>. The October 2019 session of the Supreme Council of the Eurasian Economic Union held in Yerevan, which was also attended by the leaders of Iran, Singapore, and Moldova, became an indicator of the effectiveness of Armenia's "recruiting agent" role.

During the event, Armenia's special negotiating role was emphasized in the context of Iran, Serbia, Vietnam, Egypt, and Jordan's association with the EAEU.

28 RA MFA, "Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan's briefing with journalists after the meeting of the participants of the Annual Conference of MFA Apparatus and Heads of Diplomatic Service Abroad in the National Assembly", 29/08/2019. [Online]. Available: [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2019/08/29/fm\\_briefing/9791](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2019/08/29/fm_briefing/9791). [Accessed 21/06/2021].

29 Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan Presents Priorities of Armenia's Presidency in EAEU", 25/01/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/01/25/Nikol-Pashinyan-EEU/>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

30 Sputnik-Armenia, "ЕАЭС должен подготовить общие рынки электроэнергии и газа к 2025 году — Путин в Ереване", 01/10/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/economy/20191001/20609612/EAES-dolzhen-podgotovit-obshchie-rynki-elektroenergii-i-gaza-k-2025-godu--Putin-v-Erevane.html>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

[Eng.: Sputnik-Armenia, "Putin in Yerevan: 'EEU must prepare common markets of electricity and natural gas by 2025.'"]

31 Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "We intend to make Armenia heaven on earth for talented people" - Nikol Pashinyan attends plenary session at St. Petersburg International Economic Forum", 07/06/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/06/07/Plenary-Session/>. [Accessed: 21/06/2021].

Within the framework of the signing of the EAEU-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Free Trade Agreements in Yerevan, when highlighting that "Armenia is Singapore's ally and key partner in the EAEU"<sup>32</sup>, the Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong noted that the Armenia-Singapore link is a bridging factor between the EAEU and the ASEAN, so "we can work together in our regions to deepen the ties between them"<sup>33</sup>.

This new line of Armenia's foreign policy was highly praised by Moscow. In particular, the Russian Foreign Minister described the Yerevan meeting of the EAEU Supreme Council as "exceptional" and "historic". During the bilateral meeting with Pashinyan after the session, the Russian president Putin stressed that "[the results] were really good both in terms of third party countries and more importantly, did not cause any problems, on the contrary, all agreements have been reached within the organization between the participating states. You are the person who made the maximum effort for such effective work. For that, I want to not only congratulate you but also thank you"<sup>34</sup>.

During the transfer of the EAEU presidency to Belarus in 2020, Pashinyan stressed that the expansion of the circle of potential partners with the EAEU will remain on Armenia's foreign policy agenda.

This was particularly highlighted during the visit of King Abdullah II of Jordan to Armenia in February 2020, within the framework of Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan's visit to Egypt in September, when the issue of the possible association of those countries with the EAEU was discussed.

It is worth mentioning that while presenting the results of his visit to Cairo, Mnatsakanyan hinted that the role-status of "recruiting agent" remains one of the key diplomatic identities of the Republic of Armenia. When presenting the dynamics of bilateral talks the minister stressed that Yerevan is continuing negotiations with Cairo on "signing a free trade agreement [with the EAEU]. Armenia is interested in the successful completion of the process so that the agreement can be signed"<sup>35</sup>.

32 Azatutyun (RFE/RL's Armenian service), "Lee Hsien Loong: Armenia is Singapore's key partner in the EEU", 29/09/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdjS-zGQyxE>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

33 CIVILNET, "Lee Hsien Loong: Singapore and Armenia have deep interests", 29/09/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/3nyK1ey> [Accessed 21/06/2021]

34 Mediamax, "Armenian PM has two meetings with Vladimir Putin", 02/10/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreign-policy/35098/>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

35 Armenpress, "Armenia, Egypt discuss development of cooperation, regional security," 14 09 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1027543.html>. [Accessed 21/06/2021].

## 3

## EMERGING NATIONAL ROLES

In 2013-2018, the Armenian authorities tried to develop the role of defender of the rights and interests of all Armenians, which had already been partly formulated in previous years, very much in line with Holsti's concept of "defender of the faith". The status of the defender of Armenians presupposes protection of the interests of a separate ethnocultural group (regardless of citizenship and place of residence) and using the potential of that group for the purpose of strengthening the kin state.

The concept of this status includes, on the one hand, the idea of pan-Armenian solidarity and consolidation based on the Armenia-Artsakh-Diaspora trinity, national issues (for example, international recognition of the Genocide and restoration of historical justice, international recognition of Artsakh, support for the development of the two Armenian states<sup>363738</sup>) and, on the other hand, the idea of protecting the rights and interests of the endangered communities of the Diaspora (in this period, the Syrian-Armenians)<sup>39</sup>.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning Sargsyan's assertion that the presence of Armenian communities in the Middle East makes Armenia more sensitive towards conflicts in those territories<sup>15</sup> and that this is the main reason for supporting international coalitions, as well as the

reassurance that, as he put it, "the motherland does its best to support Syrian-Armenians"<sup>40</sup>.

After the change of power in 2018, the role and status of the defender of the rights and interests of all Armenians underwent a conceptual transformation. This was reflected in one of the three cornerstones of the renewed foreign policy of Armenia, announced in August 2019, namely pan-Armenianism. Considered both as a principle and a means, the concept of pan-Armenianism underlines "the need to view Armenia, Artsakh, and the Armenians around the world as a single entity," the imperative to formulate and serve the resulting national agenda, being exercised by the Armenian diplomacy as Armenia's "global umbrella, which naturally includes the protection of pan-national interests."<sup>41</sup> Thus, the role of the defender of the rights and interests of all Armenians was supposed to be transformed, making it a tool for implementing a conceptual foreign policy within the framework of the foreign policy principle of pan-Armenianism. In other words, to try to instrumentalize the collective diaspora as a "soft power" that promotes Armenia's interests in other countries, thereby "helping increase Armenia's subjectivity."<sup>42</sup>

Speaking about the principle of pan-Armenianism in the foreign policy sphere, Nikol Pashinyan pointed out: "The key difficulty and complex of our foreign policy is the perception of a small nation, a small state. Moreover, this complex often finds expression in all levels of our

36 RA National Assembly, "RA NA President Hovik Abrahamyan Takes Part in the Third Congress of the Armenians of Europe in Brussels", 14/10/2013. [Online]. Available: [http://parliament.am/news.php?cat\\_id=2&NewsID=6160&year=2013&month=10&day=14&lang=eng](http://parliament.am/news.php?cat_id=2&NewsID=6160&year=2013&month=10&day=14&lang=eng).

37 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Summary Report by Serzh Sargsyan at the 16th Convention of the Republican Party of Armenia", 26/11/2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2016/11/26/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-statement-at-RPA-16th-Convention/>.

38 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan delivered at the first plenary session of the sixth Pan-Armenian Armenia-Diaspora conference", 18/09/2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2017/09/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-diaspora-armenia-conference/>. [Accessed 20/06/2021].

39 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 5th Armenia-Diaspora Conference", 20/09/2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/09/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Armenia-Diaspora-conference/>.

40 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Official visit of President Serzh Sargsyan to French Republic", 07/03/2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2017/03/07/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-official-visit-to-French-Republic/> [Accessed 10/06/2021].

41 RA MFA, "Opening remarks by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan at the annual conference of the MFA apparatus and heads of diplomatic service abroad", 27/08/2019. [Online]. Available: [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm\\_opening\\_remarks/9782](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm_opening_remarks/9782) [Accessed 21/06/2021].

42 Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Democracy should be the number one visiting card of Armenia's foreign policy" - PM attends meeting with heads of Foreign Ministry's central apparatus and diplomatic missions", 27/08/2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2019/08/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-ambassadors/> [Accessed 21/06/2021].

public-state life, from everyday life to foreign policy.” Therefore, “overcoming the complex of being small is vital for us, ... Armenian ambassadors must present themselves in their accredited countries ... not as a representative of a small state, but as a pan-Armenian representative, a representative of all Armenians.”<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the role of the defender of Armenians, despite the wide circulation and conceptualization in the Armenian social-political discourse, was not fully applied.

The Armenian authorities tried to use the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 2015 to conceptualize the role of the flagman of genocide prevention which is logically and conceptually intertwined with the status of the defender of Armenians. In this regard, the ruling elite started taking steps in 2013, during Armenia’s presidency in the Council of Europe. For instance, during a visit to the Majdanek concentration camp, Serzh Sargsyan mentioned: “Armenia ought to draw the international community’s attention to the issues of genocide prevention and punishment, and one of the priorities of its presidency in the Council of Europe is the fight against intolerance, hatred, and discrimination”<sup>44</sup>. Besides, since 2015, the international prevention of genocides has been declared a foreign policy priority,<sup>45</sup> to make Armenia a platform for combating genocides so that Armenia is “heard in all corners of the world” and “so that no one denies the genocides that have been committed.”<sup>46</sup>

Armenia has taken steps to achieve this international status at both national (the 2015 statement of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia “On the condemnation of the Greek and Assyrian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Turkey in 1915-1923”, designating December 9 as the Day of Prevention and Condemnation of Genocides in the RA state calendar of holidays and remembrance days, hosting various regular international conferences) and international levels (due to Armenia’s efforts, December 9 is established as the “International Day for the Commemo-

ration and Dignity of Victims of Genocide and the Prevention of This Crime”, and, according to Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian<sup>47</sup>, Armenia participates in UN-mandated peacekeeping operations to assist in the prevention of genocides).

43 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “In Poland the President made a speech at the Conference Center of the former Majdanek concentration camp,” 26/06 2013. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2013/06/26/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-visit-Majdanek-Poland-speech/>. [Accessed 10/06/2021].

44 Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “State Commission on Coordination of events for commemoration of 100th anniversary of Armenian Genocide holds its fifth session,” 29/01/2015. [Online]. Available: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/01/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participation-100th-anniversary-of-the-Armenian-Genocide-session/>.

45 Общественное Радио Армении, “Эксклюзивное интервью президента Армении телеканалу «МИР»,” 10/04/2015. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/2XfaD9l>. [Eng.: Public Radio of Armenia, “Exclusive interview of the president of Armenia to “MIR” TV channel.”]

46 RA MFA, “Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, at the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly General Debate,” 23/09/2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2016/09/23/unga71/6491>.

47 RA MFA, “Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia at the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament,” 21/02/2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2018/02/21/fm-afet-speech/7958>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research allows us to conclude that Armenia's foreign policy aimed at gaining an international status due to which Armenia would stand out positively from other countries and would have its place in the system of international relations. Armenia has tried to achieve this by assuming several national roles at once, which we have divided into three groups: stable, transformed, and emerging.

all Armenians and the flagman of genocide prevention: these are based on ideas that, due to the peculiarities of its historical legacy, Armenia decided to defend in the international arena.

- The role of “faithful ally” has remained unchanged over the period under review (and, generally, since the declaration of independence). Both during Serzh Sargsyan's presidency and after the change of government in 2018 (despite the disagreements in the Armenian-Russian relations over a number of issues), Armenia sought to show its uniqueness among Russia's partners and allies. Moreover, over the years there has been a tendency to deepen that role.
- We have placed the role of “bridge” in the second group of roles, as it has undergone significant changes over the past 10 years. If under Sargsyan's first presidential term Armenia wanted to show - by its own example - the possibility of synthesizing the interests of, and cooperation with, the West and Russia and the security systems led by them, during his second term the geography of “bridging” expanded significantly. To the security component of that role was added the economic one, in the form of a “bridge” between the EAEU and the EU. Besides, Armenia began to position itself as a link between the Persian Gulf on the one hand and Europe and the EAEU on the other. After the change of power in 2018 the role of “bridge” was transformed again. Pashinyan's administration began to fulfill that role by acting as a “recruiting agent”, in this case, a mediator-negotiator between the EAEU and the states interested in cooperating with it. Moreover, in this period the roles of “faithful ally” and “bridge” merged, as the policy pursued in the direction of the latter fully served the implementation of the former.
- We classify the role of “defender of the faith” into the third group of roles, as it is relatively newly conceptualized. As an integral part of this role, we have studied the sub-roles of the defender of the interests of

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis and our observations show that Armenia (at least in the observed period) did not have a clearly formulated, conceptualized, institutionalized foreign policy. Instead, the subjective perceptions, authority, experience, and personal connections of the ruling elites and their leaders were decisive. That is why most of the national roles we have brought up have been short-term, episodic, and not stable or long-term. This, in turn, did not allow to fully and effectively implement the majority of the national roles aimed at serving the core national interests of Armenia.

We are convinced that this problem and, consequently, the components of its solution are institutional-cultural and are not limited only to the state institutions and officials responsible for the development and implementation of Armenia's foreign policy. They are part of the whole process of state-building and public administration. More specifically, this issue is the manifestation of the Armenian political culture in the field of foreign policy.

However, narrowing down to the specific foreign policy issue, that of national roles aimed at gaining international status, we believe that the following steps can contribute to resolving this issue:

1. Armenia needs a full conceptualization of national roles directed at achieving specific international statuses, with the purpose of making Armenia's foreign policy more efficient, targeted, systematic, and continuous.
2. Those responsible for developing Armenia's foreign policy should pay special attention to the information support of that policy (both at the level of conceptual documents and public speeches), conceptualizing the assumed national roles, making them comprehensible both at the national and international levels.
3. The targeting of international statuses and national roles should be realistic, based on a comprehensive and multi-component "inventory" of the necessary resources. The assessment of Armenia's foreign policy potential should be carried out with the involvement of

local and foreign specialists and experts.

4. To institutionalize the relations of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with successful small states, to create permanent platforms for experience exchange in order to study first-hand their experience in foreign policy-making. This should be implemented with the financial and technical support of foreign partners and the involvement of specialists in the field.

5. Those responsible for Armenia's foreign policy should institutionalize and target the relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Armenian universities. This should include, for example, announcing short-term research grants for university lecturers and students on international status-seeking as a foreign policy goal, and ordering doctoral positions in this field of study.



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## ARMENIA'S INTERNATIONAL STATUS ASPIRATIONS IN 2008-2020



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