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- 1 Democracy on the foreign policy agenda or a traditional sphere of influence
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ARTICLE

DEMOCRACY ON THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA OR A TRADITIONAL SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the role of two world powers, namely United States and Russia, in the Republic of Armenia through a comparative analysis methodology from 1991 to 2011. The presence of both countries in Armenia is considered by mainly looking at the two sectors of operation: promotion of democracy and good governance, and promotion of peace and security. The sources for analysis are bilateral agreements and programs implemented in the fields mentioned to highlight the level of involvement as well as interests of the United States and Russia in their cooperation with Armenia. The research was conducted in chronological order to help define the gradual development of the cooperative frameworks of the two major powers since Armenia's independence. It shows that US main interest is the promotion of democratic form of governance, whereas Russia's interest is characterized as promotion of military cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION

With an aggressive Azerbaijan to the east, unfriendly Turkey to the west, and, most of the times unpredictable Georgia to the north, Armenia has had to struggle to establish itself as a new state after being under Soviet rule for nearly a century. The historical chain of events in Armenia has created conditions for collaborative activities to be promoted by the relevant interested powers: the major ones among those being Russia and the United States (US). This article aims at looking at the US and Russian foreign assistance to and cooperation with Armenia from a comparative perspective. Its aim is to highlight the interest both countries have in providing assistance to a former Soviet country, and the way they exercise influence in it.

Armenia became independent in 1991. Since then numerous agreements in different spheres, memorandums and protocols have been signed between the US and Armenian governments. Within the same period multiple bilateral agreements were signed between Russia and Armenia on cooperation in diverse spheres of operation. A huge amount of financial assistance was provided to Armenia by both countries during the twenty years of its independence.

The neoclassical realist approach advocates that countries compete in the international context based on their interests and to expand their influence. Competition for influence has become an essential concept in the context of cooperation among states. With a purpose to define the reasons for cooperation among states the neo-functionalists Robert Keohane proposes the explanations based on rational choice and sequence of historical interactions. The first choice implies states' determination based on rational decisions, whereas the next one pursues an undeniable existence of the past ties leading to cooperative frameworks in present. Considering cooperation from a broader perspective the author indicates that the confusing nature of it can be understood if we take a closer look at the impact of international regimes on the ability of states with shared interests to cooperate. Human choices are introduced to play a decisive role in the classification of the international regimes, which the cooperative frameworks of countries depend on.

THE CASE OF THE US: DEMOCRACY ON A FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

The US recognized the independence of Armenia in 1991. The scope of partnership between the US - world's leading advocate of democracy, and Armenia - desirous of taking its share of responsibilities on the international stage, is multifaceted. The US has played an important role in the political and economic life of Armenia since its independence. It has provided support through humanitarian means which have gradually evolved into broader sectors of involvement. These, in turn, have become prospects for the current bilateral cooperation. Since 1992, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has targeted several sectors assisting the fundamental needs of Armenian people, such as agricultural and medical assistance. However, the main focus of the US sponsored programs has gradually reoriented toward the promotion of a better, democratic form of governance. Support for the civil society in Armenia started in the 1996 and has been continuing up to date, at the moment representing the major dimension of the USAID investment in Armenia. The policy implementation often becomes possible with the assistance of international NGOs inserting bricks into the blocks aiming at the democratization of the country. A program supporting local governments was launched in 2001 by USAID and has remained an area of extensive involvement since then, in all the regions of the republic. Support for local government units and rule of law initiatives are the priority areas indicated in the USAID's Democracy and Governance Assessment of Armenia in 2002. In 2005, Armenia was selected to take part in the Challenges of the Millennium Campaign designed for those countries that demonstrate support for democracy and economic reform. Billions of dollars have been requested from the Congress by the US government to fund the campaign to be implemented in different countries. One of the main features characterizing current global political affairs is the opportunity, if not inevitability, for the countries to cooperate with each other on multiple levels: starting from minor issues and developing into a broader framework such as security cooperation. Although several bilateral provisions were signed in the security sector between Armenia and the US, intense defense cooperation was implemented on multilateral basis through international security organizations. Defense reforms, democratization of armed forces through military education and provision of technical assistance have been the main spheres of US bilateral cooperation with Armenia in the field of

security. Whether due to a non-involvement strategy, geopolitical incapability to be intensely involved in other areas, or a simple unwillingness, the main role of the US today in Armenia is to promote democratic values and invest resources in the development of projects aimed at raising the level of awareness on good governance among the population as well as to initiate reforms. Despite the fact that several US administrations have followed each other during the twenty years of Armenia's statehood, the policies toward it have remained the same. The significance of the US presence in Armenia is well demonstrated by the establishment of the largest embassy in the region, as well as by the amounts of investments highlighting bilateral relations of two countries. During the twenty years of Armenia's independence the government of the US has provided almost two billion dollars of humanitarian aid and development assistance for Armenia's economic, social and governance sectors.

THE CASE OF RUSSIA: COOPERATION OR A TRADITIONAL SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The diplomatic relations between Armenia and Russia were established in April 1992. Russia's presence in Armenia is far more powerful than that of any other foreign state. The Russian – Armenian bilateral relationship can be distinguished from among various spheres of cooperation and investments. The high level of bilateral relations between Armenia and Russia was strengthened by the treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual aid signed once in both decades of the country's existence. Certainly, the signing of a treaty of friendship is a political act, but the fact itself may be far less significant politically than the entire range of perceptions and events which led up to it. The cooperative ties that have led to the current extensive partnership between Armenia and Russia were multifaceted. They included close cooperation in the sectors of energy, transport and telecommunications. From 1994 to 1996 there was a large scale transfer of Russian arms to Armenia and in 1995 a Russian military base was established in the country, thereby granting the Russian troops already stationed in Armenia official legal status. The establishment of the Russian military base indicates the priority the two countries attach to their cooperation. The prolongations of this cooperation indicate willingness of both parties to continue the bilateral security partnership.

Notwithstanding the fact of Russia's involvement in other industries, Russian forces are seen as guarantors of Armenian security considering the country's current geopolitical situation. In 2010 the Russian President visited Armenia with the main objective of signing the prolongation treaty of the military presence in Armenia, thus confirming the significant role of the cooperation within the military framework. The prevalence of bilateral agreements on strengthening ties and cooperation in various spheres was a primary goal for the countries' cooperation since 1991. The two countries maintain regular contacts at governmental, departmental and regional levels. A common framework which both countries are actively engaged is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group process aimed at the peaceful settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This can be considered to represent a policy priority for Armenia where both countries, namely the US and Russia, together with France, act as co-chairmen to encourage a peaceful resolution to the number one issue of Armenian foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

The foundations for political involvement in the region may range from the inevitable historical aspects to tastes, interests raised by the current world order and enormous opportunities. Interests do orient states toward a better strategy, and introduce new policies such as establishing relationships by exploring new areas of cooperation. US policies were prioritized according to a strategy of non-involvement in Russia's affairs, whereas Russia's policies toward Armenia were prioritized according to its traditional ambitions with their roots hidden in historical and geographical reasons. It is difficult for the US to play a role in Armenia because of the depth of Russian involvement there. But, on the other hand, the policies of the two countries do silently co-exist with each other, with no actor interfering in the area of another. While the US is promoting its programs on better governance, Russia is reestablishing its traditional role of leadership in one of the representative countries of the South Caucasus. The nature of ties that exist between weak and powerful states has been an object of extensive research since the beginning of the twentieth century as have been grounds for cooperation among countries. The factors affecting foreign policies of countries may differ to a great extent. Geopolitical interest, strategic profitability, ideological victory and also a rare, but a true commitment may represent several among other options justifying

certain policy implementations between states having common history or inevitable grounds and opportunities for cooperation. The case of Armenia considered in the light of cooperative frameworks with two major players indicates Russia's 'conquering' foreign policy in its near abroad, as well as points to the foreign policy of prudence initiated in the country by the US.

Bilateral cooperation between countries based on agreements and implementation of programs have confirmed the seriousness of interests and proved the importance of the countries' involvement in Armenia. The research of the chronological development of the US and Russia's cooperative ties with Armenia has shown that the main interest of the US is the promotion of democratic form of governance, whereas Russia's interest is characterized as promotion of military cooperation. Russian-Armenian current alliance is mainly based on the inevitable historical ties, whereas the US involvement shows more of the option of beneficial cooperation, based on the rational choice theory discussed in the outset: as a new player, willing to have its share in one of the representative countries of the South Caucasus. Foreign aid, assistance, investments and other types of cooperation between nations are the blood vessels of the economies across the world. All of the factors are of vital importance especially for a small and developing state. Most certainly, detecting the strategies for dealing with all the factors by balancing relations with major actors constitutes an obvious challenge and difficulty especially for a young state. However, the case of Armenia with two major actors in place can represent an example of a successfully managed foreign policy of a newly established state. The cooperative prospects with both countries were balanced as no clash of interest was observed in the history of influential partnerships, with Armenia on the one hand and the US and Russia on the other, that would challenge the security of the republic.

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