

**“Victimization discourse in Armenia: The history and its  
impact on the Armenian foreign policy”**

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## Abstract

There is a growing interest in linkage between identity and foreign policy outcomes through the notion of collective memory within the IR. Most studies on collective memory focus on how special representations of particular chronological and historical settings shape identity which, in turn, induces particular policy choices. This assumption can be best fit in the field of IR through the Constructivist approaches stating that ideas are socially constructed in the identity of a state and influence state's policy choices. At the same time, the advocates of poststructuralist approaches highlight the importance of discourse and contend that identity cannot exist independently of the discursive practices mobilized by a state in articulating and implementing foreign policy. Moreover, they argue that not only identities shape foreign policy, but also foreign policy produces and reproduces identities through particular discursive practices which, in turn, articulate and intertwine ideas and material factors in a way they became indivisible. Drawing on the poststructuralist assumptions about the interaction between identity and foreign policy, this research seeks to analyze how victimization discourse in Armenia based on memory and historical representations of systematic massacres and atrocities of Armenian population perpetrated by Ottoman Empire and culminated in the Armenian Genocide in 1915, not only has defined and influenced the country's foreign policy implementations, but also has been produced and reproduced by foreign policy of Armenia over the last 20 years. To illustrate this argument, I will employ the victimization discourse in analyzing Armenia's external relations with its neighbour Turkey and strategically important Russia which are of crucial importance for Armenia.

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## Introduction

It is often claimed that we are living through a “memory boom”, a time in which the past plays an unprecedented role in shaping the present. Identity and identity formation are significantly embedded in history and memory. Anthony Smith puts the point succinctly: “one might almost say: no memory, no identity; no identity, no nation”.<sup>1</sup> However, this orientation to the past is a recent phenomenon. It started only in the late 1980s and developed fully in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, after the world witnessed many dark pages of human history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the scholarship began to focus on the notion of traumatic collective memory which eventually became a category of social analysis.<sup>3</sup> In particular, these collective memories of a traumatic event appeared to play a crucial role in national identity and influenced the process of identity formation during and in the aftermath of war or catastrophe.<sup>4</sup>

One can argue that the recent interest around memory is concentrated on the discursive construction of the memory which is inevitably social. The focus on memory in the fields of sociology, cultural studies, history and politics is largely aimed at analyzing how memory manifests itself in contemporary societies. From this perspective, much work has been done on memory preoccupies with remembrance, commemoration on the one hand, and testimony, witness and survivor literature on the other, all of which highlight memory as a social practice.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, A. D. *National Identity*, (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Halbwach M, Coser A.L. *On Collective Memory*, (University of Chicago press, 1992) p. 22

<sup>4</sup> Weedon C. and Jordan G. ‘Collective memory: theory and politics’ *Social Semiotics* Vol.22, Issue 2, 2012, p. 144

<sup>5</sup> Edkins J. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Nora P. ‘between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire’ *University of Colombia Press*, No. 26, Spring 1989, pp7-24

In this context, it is argued that remembering is intensely political as much as struggle for memory is a part of the fight for political change.<sup>6</sup>

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, its former constituent republics faced a challenge of building independent statehood. In doing so, it was important for newly independent countries to develop and accommodate their foreign policy dimensions within the notions of national interests and state-building.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, among others Armenia began to reassess its national identity through the construction and reconstruction of the historical representations. In this respect, Armenia, which deprived of its last independent statehood in 1375 and managed to build its first republic on Eastern Armenia in 1918, had no experience with statehood and saw the new era as a decisive moment to reclaim what was lost grounded on the historical narrative of victimhood and national struggle. The Armenian massacres in Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century known as the Armenian Genocide of 1915 became what Libaridian calls an “equaliser of identity.”<sup>8</sup> In 1915 the world witnessed the first genocide of the century, the mass murder of Armenians in Ottoman Empire. In few months, almost one-and-a-half million Armenians were killed and the rest of the population was forcibly expelled, most of them southward towards Syria. It caused mass displacement and the loss of a huge part of the homeland and instantly became the most significant factor in Armenian identity in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> The memory of these dramatic events combined with Armenians’ continuous struggle for recognition, as well as Turkish consistent denial came to construct Armenian identity which has been the core of Armenian foreign policy over the last 20 years.

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<sup>6</sup> Edkins 2003, p. 16

<sup>7</sup> Libaridian G.J, *The Challenge of Statehood : Armenian Political Thinking since Independence*, 1st ed., *Human Rights & Democracy* (Watertown, Mass.: Blue Crane Books, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Libaridian (1981) cited in Panossian R. ‘The past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian identity’ *Geopolitics*, (2002) p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> Panossian R. ‘The past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian identity’ *Geopolitics*, (2002) p. 136.

## Context to the victimization discourse in Armenian foreign policy

Armenia is a small landlocked country situated in South Caucasus. Since ancient times it has been on the “crossroads” of East and West, North and South and thus continuously posed serious challenges to its security. By the end of the fourteenth century, the last Armenian kingdom had collapsed, and the Armenia had fallen under foreign subjugation. Since the seventeenth century most of the country came under the Turkish rule, and Eastern Armenia, which came first under Persian and then in 1828 under Russian dominion.

In the last days of the Ottoman Empire and during the Bolshevik revolution Armenia could regain its statehood in the small part of Eastern Armenia in 1918.<sup>10</sup> However, the revived Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk used the disunity of Allied and re-established Turkish control of Anatolia and re-started the offense against the Armenian state in 1920. While Bolsheviks left Armenians to bleed alone, Turks soon took advantage over the ill-prepared Armenian army and grasped the lion share of the republic reducing it to the barren, landlocked lands of the current Armenia. As a result of Bolshevik-Kemalist concert and subsequent Bolshevik pressure Armenia was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1921.

Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union Armenia re-established its independent state in 1991. The economic needs and security concerns came to dominate the country’s foreign policy agenda. As a small landlocked country Armenia declared its path towards the strong statehood while not having clear perception on its national interests and subsequent foreign policy. On the one hand being engaged in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the neighboring Azerbaijan, and on the other hand possessing complicated historical legacies with regards to its

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<sup>10</sup> Bloxhem Donald *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford University Press 2005) p.7.

external relations, put the country in a serious foreign policy dilemma. While the first ruling elite of Armenia affirmed its willingness to establish relations with Turkey “without preconditions” which turned to be nothing else than compromising everything in favor of economic benefits, starting from the issue of the genocide, the second and incumbent government brought the genocide recognition on the foreign policy priority and adopted so-called policy of “complementary”, including attempt to establishing relations with Turkey, in order to compromise the lack of policy choices imposed by the memory of the genocide and the imperative of security preservation embed in the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the first elite, considering Russia as a threat to the Armenian sovereignty within the frameworks of its old-fashioned policy of Imperialism, which could be eliminated only through the normalization of relations with Turkey, the successor governments perceived relations with Russia as the imperative of the time deriving from vital security needs of the Armenian Republic. While, as it would be argued later, in both cases the Armenian-Turkish relation were directly or indirectly conditioned on Armenia’s foreign policy towards Russia.

### **The research purpose**

Many victimized people are looking for apologies. Acknowledgement, compensation, reconciliation-these are but some of the goals persecuted groups seek as they grapple with their histories.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the last three decades have witnessed a vast and global increase in attention devoted to such concerns by world leaders, international institutions, scholars, and

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<sup>11</sup> Assmann A. ‘Memory, Individual and collective’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, edited by Robert E. Goodin, Charles Tilly (OUP Oxford, 2008), p. 217.



practitioners.<sup>12</sup> These actors have engaged in debates and have initiated policies that surfaced the significant influence of collective memory. However the impact of collective memory in international politics has not received the systematic attention in either the academy or the policy arena. Despite the fact that it is difficult to find a country or region where working through a traumatic past and bringing perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice have not come to the fore.

At the same time, while the majority of work done on collective memory of victimhood is focused on the relationship between a victim and a perpetrator in the context of pursuing justice and recovery, there is less attention on the impact of collective traumatic memory on the polarization of foreign policy choices deriving from the vital need to articulate and rearticulate national identity. To ignore the role of historical narratives in the formation and maintenance of national identity is to ignore an important component of collective identity. The processes of national redefinition through reinterpretation, rediscovery or creation of historical narratives are inherently political.<sup>13</sup>

The primary goal of this research is aimed at giving an inward look at the foreign policy choices of Armenia in such crucial external dimensions as Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Russian relations. There are several reasons for this. First, little attention has been given to the examination of Armenian foreign policy independent on its engagement in regional geopolitics. Second, there is a prevailing approach to analyze the Armenian foreign policy based on its security concerns and geopolitical consideration. In turn this leads to the gap in analyzing the foreign policy of Armenian based on its interconnection with a particular national identity within discursive practices.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid p. 210.

<sup>13</sup>Edkins 2003, p. 15.

The present research examines the foreign policy of Armenia since its independence from the Soviet Union focusing on the key events that have recently taken place in the external political dimensions of the country. In turn, it is assumed that these events appeared to have a decisive role in the future external orientation of Armenia. In this respect, foreign policy is considered as a complex set of the state's external relations aimed at safeguarding what is perceived to be its national interest. It is argued that the re-articulation of historical narratives based on the commemoration of the Armenian genocide has played a critical role in processes of national redefinition in Armenia which brings the national interest and national survival at the core of Armenia's relation with the outside world.

It is not new that the issue of the Armenian Genocide is a crucial element of Armenian-Turkish relations, and that Armenian security concerns and geopolitical situation push Armenia towards Russia. However, there is a blurred understanding of what place the memory of the genocide has in the Armenian consciousness overall, and in its security concerns, in particular. This study is aimed not only presenting the discursive connection between the past and present within Armenia, but, what is more important, the role of the victimhood identity in the current Armenian perceptions about national security and foreign policy.

## **Limitations**

First, this research is limited by analyzing Armenian foreign policy driven by solely domestic consideration over its relations with Turkey and Russia. While accepting the importance of the external factors and the policy intentions of Turkey and Russia itself, it is not our aim to include mutual perceptions. Second, although it gives an overview of the previous

and, in particular, first president's discursive practices of policy articulation to show the variation, it sticks around the recent key events occurred in Armenia's external life which are believed to be of crucial importance and illustrate the overall performance of victimization discourse in this respect.

At the same time, while considering the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, first and foremost, as a vital security concern for Armenia which cannot be abstracted from any analysis concerning Armenia, it is not the intention of this work to study the conflict itself. Instead the conflict is examined within the context of its discursive implications on Armenia's foreign policy and internal collective self.

## **Chapter outline**

This work consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 lays out a theoretical framework of collective memory and is aimed to situate the notion of collective traumatic memory into the post-1915 Armenian identity. This chapter is intended to illustrate how the identity of trauma caused by the genocide and initially emerged in Diaspora and further spilled over in Soviet Armenia became actively engaged in a process of national redefinition through the recovery and reproduction of historical narratives. This theoretical outline is aimed at providing a context of the subsequent political importance ascribed to past events. It is argued that memory in Armenia was of the crucial importance, given previous attempts to conduct ethnic cleansing of Armenians in the Ottoman empire and eradicate the Armenian nation from its homeland. The chapter concludes that memories of the genocide combined with sensitivity towards Turkish denial come

to reinforce the Armenian victimhood identity searching for truth-recovery and protection of national interests.

Second chapter is examining the Armenian-Turkish protocols signed in 2009 but never ratified. This chapter analyzes the failed attempts by the current Armenian government to establish relations with Turkey at the cost of sidelining the genocide issue in favor of economic development. The chapter employs discourse analysis of the official governmental and oppositional (which also represents the Armenian Diaspora) discursive practices, which although operate in the frames of victimization discourse, actively reshape its elements through ascribing particular meaning in a way it fits within their foreign policy choices.

Furthermore, the third chapter is devoted to the examination of Armenian-Russian relations under the light of the Armenian-Turkish deadlock and Armenia's search for security. It seeks to show that apart from Armenia's geopolitical and security concerns conditioning the Armenian-Russian relations, the victimization discourse indirectly affects Armenia's inclination towards Russia. This chapter examines Armenia's decision to enter Customs Union from the perspective of Armenian "Turkaphobia".

## Chapter 1 Literature review and methodology

### 1.1 Literature review

As a former constituent republic of the Soviet Union, much of the work done on Armenia is occupied with a variety of domestic issues, such as democratic transformation, elections, as well as social and economic issues. At the same time, it seems that scholars analyzing Armenian foreign policy assessing its behavior as a post-soviet country and from the viewpoint of the country's position in the regional and global construction of power. This labels Armenia and its subsequent foreign policy as a “post-Soviet” country that is engaged in bigger game between the West and Russia. In this respect, some scholars even argue that rather having a foreign policy, these states are simply engaged in external relations.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, due to the fact that Armenia is a small and weak country surviving under the blockade imposed by the neighbors, one can argue that the geopolitical position and security concerns are the main determinants of Armenia's foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> This assumption will best fit within the Realist approaches arguing that states are primary actors in the anarchic world pursuing a self-help behavior and are concerned about survival. Realists focus on material factors and argue that a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the country's relative capabilities. Moreover, as much as Armenia is engaged in the complicated conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Realism would see the country's strategic relations with Russia as

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<sup>14</sup> Bertsch G.K., Cassady B. C., Scott A. Jones, Michael D.B Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia, (Routledge, 2013), Jeanne A. K. Hey, *Small States in World Politics : Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003)

<sup>15</sup> Giragosian R. ‘Toward a New Concept of Armenian National Security’ (Armenian International Policy Research) No 05/07, 2005

straightforward, driven by the assumptions that small states that do not have material capabilities to provide their security bandwagon and rely on others at the expense of their sovereignty.

However, this approach to large extent ignores the impact of beliefs, collective norms and identities on state behavior. This, in turn, may be accommodated within the constructivist theoretical frameworks that emphasize the impact of ideas and offer a nuanced view on the nature of interaction between the ideal and the material.<sup>16</sup> Constructivists consider the identities and interest of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes. They pay increased attention to the dominant discourse(s) in society since discourse reflects and shapes beliefs and interest, and constructs accepted norms of behavior.

In this terms, several publications that have been produced in the recent years namely Levon Abrahamian's *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*, Razmik Panossian's "the Past as Nation: Three Dimentions of Armenian identity" and "*The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, as well as Ronald Suny's "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia" can be accommodated within the Constructivist perspective as far as they address an important issue of the identity transformation in changing historical conditions and the fluidity of historical narratives.<sup>17</sup> However, they either examine a one-way process of identity construction and its implications in the state's perceptions of the outside world, or emphasize the believe system of the policy makers and its interaction with national identity.

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<sup>16</sup> Walt S. M. 'international Relations: One World, Many Theories' (Foreign Policy, 1998), No. 110

<sup>17</sup> Suny R.G. 'Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia' International Security Vol.24 No.3(1999/2000), Abrahamian L., *Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Armenian Studies Series ; No. 8* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006), Panossian R. 'the Past as Nation: Three Dimentions of Armenian identity' Geopolitics, (2002), Panossian R. *The Armenians : From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)

Abrahamian provides insights into the anthropological aspects of the Armenian national movement, and identity dynamics in the post-Soviet period. He is analyzing the internal workings of “particularity” in Armenia’s post-independence context and outlines the main characteristics of the Armenian identity.<sup>18</sup> In turn, Suny analyzes the fluidity and multiplicity of identities as they function within national formation and the practice of internal and foreign policy. He argues that political actors are capable to employ various identities, formed by both historical events and by elites that shape their attitudes and actions in domestic and international arenas.<sup>19</sup> Panossian, a diasporan Armenian, in both of his works focuses on the modern Armenian history and emphasizes the process of identity creation or reformulation. He analyzes the evolution of the Armenian nationalism within various socio-political, geographical and historical contexts.

While considering these works as a starting point for my research, I extensively follow the discursive approach presented by the post-structuralism allowing to trap into the interconnection between socio-political processes, political agents and the dominant discursive concepts of national identity in a particular society. Following discourse analysis theory of Lene Hansen, I argue that the Armenian identity of victimhood is not only constructed and reconstructed through the particular discursive practices of foreign policy implementation, but also the foreign policy itself operates within a certain discursive construction of national identity.

For this reason, the research is looking at how the members of society remember and interpret the events that are directly or indirectly linked to the understanding of national interests and security, how the meaning of the past is articulated and rearticulated through the discursive practices in foreign policy. In doing so, it is analyzing the continued evolution of the

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<sup>18</sup> Abrahamian L (2006)

<sup>19</sup> Suny, RG. “The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, (International Security, Vol. 24, No. 3, Winter 1999/2000)

victimization discourse through shaping and reshaping its various constituents in a way it opens and at the same time constrains certain policy choices giving importance perhaps to the most controversial implications that collective memory of the genocide has had, namely the Armenian-Turkish protocols of 2009. It is argued that alongside the ongoing discussions that have taking place in the country for several decades about the implications of the genocide issue, the discourse remains present in the majority of these policy and cultural debates, but its impact has changes over the years.

While the discourse is now being used to both enable and empower a more capacious sense of genocide in the foreign policy agenda of Armenia and it is no longer simply a struggle for recognition, the genocide memory has also constrained certain aspects of state policy. Meanwhile, it is my aim here to show that historically and psychologically complicated relations with Turkey that also affect the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, have directly and indirectly led Armenia to seek security and incline towards Russia.

It is important to mention that one of the key factors determining today's national identity of Armenians is the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>20</sup> Although most research dealing with this issue is focused on explaining the conflict through the lenses of Armenia's security dilemma and how it influences Armenian foreign affairs with regards to it physical security considerations, we approach the question from the perspective of the collective memory of the genocide and how it shapes perceptions of the current situation. The conflict is so consequential for Armenia's foreign policy that it is almost impossible to detect a policy from Armenia's position on the conflict. However, it is not the intention of this work to study the conflict. It instead preoccupies itself with the issue within the context of its discursive implications on Armenia's foreign policy and internal collective self.

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<sup>20</sup> Suny, RG. (1999/2000), p. 157.



This inevitable leads to the question of identity and the importance of the emphasis on foreign policy as a continuous practice of self-definition and necessity to answer the question of who we are.

Therefore, it is argued that the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, apart from being directly caused by a choice of the Armenians of Karabakh to pursue the path of self-determination, appears to be the reservation point of victimhood identity and Litmus test for all important foreign policy decisions. This, in turn, forces Armenia's government to continuously re-answer and redefine the question of identity.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The main methodological tool employed in this project is the discourse analysis developed by Lene Hansen. It is based on the assumption that foreign policy is aimed to link representations of identity and proposed policy through the language construction that gives meaning to objects, subject, living, being, and material structures. It employs the model of juxtaposition through which language gives meaning to a "thing". Although it is assumed that juxtaposition means that one element is valued over its opposite, in this research juxtaposition is seen to create value through relating the elements to one other and, thus, produce meaning.

As suggested by poststructuralist methodology, the discourse of victimization is analyzed through situating the foreign policy decision-makers within a larger political and public sphere whose representations, as a result, are draw upon and are found by the representations articulated by larger number of individuals, institutions, and media outlets. For this reason, the discourse analysis is based on the examination of most frequently quoted media texts on Armenian-Turkish protocols and Armenia's decision to enter Customs Union. This includes

official speeches, press statements, parliamentary debates and published interviews of the Armenian ruling elite, the opposition parties and intellectuals preoccupied with Armenian-Turkish relations. In this respect, the textual evidence is provided by the media outlets reporting in Armenian, Russian and English, namely Aravot.am, A1+, news.am, Armenpress.com, PanArmenian.am, and Lexis-Nexis database, from 2008 to 2015. Different policy texts were examined by accessing the official web-pages of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and the government. In addition the analysis is supported by personal interviews with governmental and oppositional senior representatives, as well as political scholars engaged in the debate, conducted online.

Further, the research is supplemented by historical sources in order to provide historical background and trace genealogy of the dominant representations such as Armenian mass atrocities and deportations under the Ottoman Empire, culminated in the Armenian Genocide of 1915. In addition, most significant works produced on Armenian foreign policy analyzing the events related to the issue before the Armenian-Turkish protocols are included to show the difference between the discursive performances of the governmental elites in the process of decision-making.

The chapter 3 on Armenian-Russian relations also includes discourse analysis of the same sources, however it largely consists of an interpretative analysis of Armenian-Russian relations since it is argued that the Armenian foreign policy towards Russia is dependent on indirect implications of victimized identity. In this respect, Armenia's decision to enter Russian-led Customs Union in 2013, is analyzed as the key event.

## Chapter 2 The identity of victimhood in Armenian consciousness

### 2.1. Theoretical framework

The twentieth century manifested itself not only as a century of genocide but also as a century of forgetting genocide. However, it is argued that identity and identity formation are largely based on history and memory. Within different societies, historical events serve as the key elements for the reproduction of collective representations which shape the contemporary understanding of their own identity and the relationship to the past.<sup>21</sup> But, in what ways historical memories influence the self-perceptions of people as a collectivity? The notion of collective memory came to answer these question. This chapter is aimed at laying out the grounds for Armenian identity of victimhood based on the historical narratives of the Armenian genocide in 1915. In doing so, it is focused on memory construction through the production and reproduction of traumatic events exercised by a community. While analyzing the case of Armenian genocide, this chapter argues that the memory of the genocide shapes the national identity of Armenians, the discursive construction of which gives a new meaning to remembering the genocide and is aimed at finding its place in the social order.

The concept of collective memory was employed and discussed by Maurice Halbwachs who was the first to consider memory as a social fact.<sup>22</sup> According to Halbwachs, isolated individuals could not establish any memory. Therefore, all memories are built up, developed, and

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<sup>21</sup> Roudometof V. *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), p. 5

<sup>22</sup> Nora (1984), p. 7, Assmann J. and Czaplicka J. 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity No. 65 (1995), p.127.

maintained within a collective contexts via the social exchange and passes from generation to generation. In this process the reproduction of the memory became crucial since the grandchildren share some memories with their grandparents if they are talked about in the family. At the same time, if the memory is not rearticulated and reconstructed in the environment where we live, it remained vulnerable to change and fading away.<sup>23</sup> Memories for events, objects, or facts are usually remembered if they are unique, provoke emotional reactions, are actively rehearsed and are associated with subsequent changes in behavior or beliefs e.g. Craik and Lockhart, 1986).

Collective memory which derives from social memory and is institutionalized through the notion of political or national memory occurs in presence of several factors. While embracing selective historical representations, collective memory is transformed into the forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, collective memory is much more homogenous and it is reconstructed by historians and represented by public narratives. This involved verbal and visual signs such as monuments and commemorative rites that systematically reactivate the memory and maintain collective participation.<sup>25</sup> In other words, collective memory is shaped and maintain through the periodical reconstruction of collective historical narratives which have affected the lives of a large segment of the population and signaled important historical changes. At the same time, as much as collective memory recalls specific element from the archive of “historical memory”, it contributes to the subjective discursive construction of national identity, especially concerning the question of what “national

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<sup>23</sup>Assmann A. ‘Memory, individual and collective’ in the Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis edited by Robert E. Goodin, Charles Tilly in. (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2008) p. 213

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 214

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

history” a nation’s citizens tell, what and how they recollect, and between which events they make linkage in their subjective historical narrative.

While addressing the question of discursive construction of national identity, it is important to mention that collective memory and identity are not stable but fluid, until fixed by the social context.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, collective memory needs to be transformed into long-term and stabilized memory that can be transmitted from generation to generation. This is what Assmann calls collective political memory which is a mediated form of memory established on the more durable carriers of external symbols and material representations; they rely on the libraries, museums, and monuments, as well as on various modes of education and repeated occasions for collective participation. The crucial constituent of political memory, according to Assmann, is its transgenerational nature.<sup>27</sup> The latter is realized through the shift from embodied, implicit, heterogeneous, and fuzzy bottom-up memory into an explicit, homogeneous, and institutionalized top-down memory.

As a form of political memory, researchers emphasize the role of collective memory and identity in the constructions or reconstruction of nation states.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, often memorialization involves only positive historical referents such as victories and heroic pages of the past in order to strengthen a positive self-image of a state and lay the ground for certain political goals in the future. Meanwhile, performances of defeat or catastrophe are commemorated with great pathos by nations founded their identity on the perception of victims who are seeking to keep awake the memory of a suffered iniquity in order to require apology and restitution.<sup>29</sup> In this context, traumatic experiences that are embodied in a martyrological

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<sup>26</sup> Edkins (2003), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Assmann A (2008). p.215.

<sup>28</sup> Edkins J.(2003) p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Assmann A (2008), p.217.

narrative and manifest shame and guilt of the perpetrator usually refer to the victims of history, such as the genocide of Armenians in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire.

## 2.2. Framing Armenian identity of victimhood

The victimized identity of Armenians living under the Ottoman Empire was found and gradually rose during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> As it has been already shown throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Christian Armenians were subjects to a variety of discriminative policies and insecurity. “The relationship was not one of equals, but one of tolerance and forbearance.”<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the persecution and pogrom of Armenians that began in the 1890s caused deaths of more than 200,000 Armenians. Although there is no straight line connecting the massacres of the 1890s with the genocide of 1915, as the guiding ideologies of the perpetrators were different, and the earlier killings were not conducted under the same sort of close centralized authority as their later counterparts, the very fact of the 1890s and 1909 killings was a precedent, shaping the mindset of state and victims alike.<sup>32</sup>

However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century atrocities and, in particular, the annihilated up to 1.5 million Armenian citizens, starting on 24 April 1915 with the arrest of intellectuals in Constantinople and continuing with a centralized programme of deportations and murder until 1922 was the very event which marked a turning point in Armenian identity.<sup>33</sup> As long as identity is not stable, but blurred, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenian identity based on the traumatic collective memory of killings,

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<sup>30</sup> Rafter N. and Walklate S. ‘Genocide and the dynamics of victimization: Some observations on Armenia’, (European journal of Criminology, 2012), p. 136

<sup>31</sup> Akcam, T. *From Empire to republic: Turkish Nationalism and The Armenian Genocide*, (London: Zed books, 2004), p. 23

<sup>32</sup> Bloxham D.(2005) p. 1912.

<sup>33</sup> Panossian R. (2002),p. 136.

torture and complete destruction of the homeland (Western Armenia) is essential and need to be placed at the core of modern Armenian national identity.<sup>34</sup> In this context, Panossian distinguishes an Armenian identity of “A Nation in Exile: Post-Genocide Diaspora” which is inexorably tied to the 1915 Genocide. “It is impossible to understand 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenian identity without situating the Genocide at its very core.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, “The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the defining moment—the founding symbol—of contemporary Armenian identity”. Armenians, and, particularly, in diaspora, found themselves as “the first victims of genocide in the twentieth century”.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3 Explaining trauma

It is argues that in many instances, as in the Armenian case, collective memory as a defining factor derives from a traumatic event.<sup>37</sup> Trauma can be understood as a result from particular disturbing or shocking event proving difficult to narrate collectively. Meanwhile, traumatic events or symptoms of trauma are more than just a situation of utter powerlessness.<sup>38</sup> More importantly it entails something else and includes a betrayal of trust. Therefore, it is crucial to understand where the threat of violence comes from, and what matters is the social order where we exist. Edkins puts the point succinctly: “Who we think we are is sifting and fluid until

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 137

<sup>36</sup> Panossian R. “The past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian identity”, (2002), *Geopolitics*, 7:2, 121-146, p. 137

<sup>37</sup> Edkins (2003) p.16 .

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.4.

fixed in the social context which gives meaning and dignity to our existence. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive physically but the meaning of our existence is changed.”<sup>39</sup>

In this respect, Armenians felt betrayed by the whole system of values they believed in when the Armenian Question as a part of larger Eastern Question became a bargaining point between the triangle of the Ottomans, European powers and Russia. While other Christian nations, namely the Balkans, were granted independence and autonomy by the treaty of San Stefano in 1878, all the attempt of Armenian delegation to include provisions for their protection were ignored.<sup>40</sup> The head of the Armenian delegation, Armenian religious leader gave the striking description of the point: “Everybody was given a normal scoop to taste the dinner, but our scoop was made of paper, whenever we tried to use it, it would melt”. The sense of weakness and helplessness accompanied with the loss of majority of the homeland, came to dominate in Armenian consciousness and had extensively been exacerbated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, in particular, from 1915-1917. They can no longer be who they were and the social order is not what they assumed. In turn, the feeling of being betrayed causes oppression and anxiety in society based on the loss of trust towards the world.

As a result, in a post-genocide period, a survivor of such traumatic events lives in a constant fear of its return. Therefore, rather than viewing the world as a good place with a sense of order, victims feel mistrust, fear and a danger of what may come from the world it may take years before memory manifests publically or before there is a willingness to listen to survivors’ testimony. As Edkins puts it “what survivors has witnessed has long been recognized as

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>40</sup> Hovhannisian R.G. The Armenian Genocide in Perspective, (Transaction Publishers,2009) p. 23



“unimaginable” and “unspeakable”, although these descriptions often serve as an excuse for neither imagining it nor speaking about it.”<sup>41</sup>

However, after a while, usually when there is a change in the political arena, a narrative takes shape. Events are named, memorials and museums set up, and the identity of at least some of the victims established.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, the sacredness of the ancient homeland and of the mountain Ararat<sup>43</sup> together with the idea of liberation of Western Armenia<sup>44</sup> appeared to become the main constituents of post-Genocide Armenian identity.

In this way, the memory of being a victim attached a new meaning to the existence of Armenians, which became aimed at ensuring that historical injustices would not vanish into the oblivion of forgetting” and are focused on political recognition, restitution and responsibility.(Booth). In this context, the political process connected with the division of the Armenian territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries aimed at reunion of the ancient Armenia, and the recognition and compensation of the Genocide through the international negotiations and resolutions, came to define the Armenian Question and subsequent Armenian Trial as a struggle for “justice”. This became incorporated into the discursive frameworks and ascribed with strong symbolism.

At the same time, with the emergence of Armenian diaspora all over the world, and because of the incorporation of Eastern Armenia into the Soviet Union, Armenians themselves and the discourse on Armenian nationalism developed in two direction-Diasporan, based on retrieving the homeland and thus associated with a “lost homeland” and the need to regain it-or at least to have access it, and Soviet Armenian, driven by and conditioned on more inclusive

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<sup>41</sup> Edkins (2003) p. 2

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.

<sup>43</sup> where according to the Bible, Noah’s Ark came to rest and which plays a significant role in Armenian culture

<sup>44</sup> Eastern Anatolia in Turkey

discourse of Diaspora's identity which was further narrowed down and incorporated into the notion of statehood.<sup>45</sup> In spite of this divergence, all these elements were immediately incorporated into the discursive frameworks and ascribed with unbelievable symbolic strength.

One needs to highlight an important distinction: the Armenian nation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the genocide and further the integration of Eastern Armenia in the Soviet Union appeared to be consisted of two "poles": the Diaspora and the homeland.<sup>46</sup> In this regards, and due to the fact that in the Soviet Union, expressions of national consciousness were suppressed by the soviet authorities and the relative inaccessibility of Soviet Armenia, the Armenian national identity was being constructed mostly in diaspora.

However, it is not to say that in Soviet Armenia the construction of national identity was not influenced by the memory of the genocide at least given by the immense amount of the refugees fled from the Western regions. Although the memory of 1915 was a political taboo in the early Soviet past, with the new wave of Armenian nationalism raising in Diaspora, and the 1970s the Armenian nationalistic movement exploded in Soviet Armenia, the mentality of being victims as a crucial component of Armenian collective consciousness came to appear in the Armenian national identity.<sup>47</sup>

Almost half a century the issue of the genocide was efficiently silenced and often accompanied with the difficulty to collect evidence. Meanwhile, it took Armenians three generations to process the events of 1915.<sup>48</sup> The phenomenon of "the third generation" appears to be the case for Armenians when the immediate survivors, traumatized by the genocide were unwilling to talk about the atrocities, the raping and deportations. The second generation avoided

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<sup>45</sup>petakanutyun

<sup>46</sup> Safran , W 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', (*Diaspora*. 1991.), pp. 83–99

<sup>47</sup> ibid

<sup>48</sup> Avedian, V. 'Recognition, Responsibility and Reconciliation: The Trinity of the Armenian Genocide', (201, *Europa Ethnica*) 70(3/4). p.77-86

to ask their parents about their traumatic experiences. However, the third generation had the distance and was dare to learn and speak about those events. Together with the lack of Armenian independence and statehood this was the main reason why Armenian genocide was quite unspoken until 1965 when, as an unprecedented event in the Soviet Union, about 100.000 demonstrators went to the streets demanding from the Soviet government to recognize the genocide.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the construction of the Genocide museum-memorial (Tzitzernakaberd in Yerevan) in 1967 which became the main symbol of memorizing the martyrs of the Genocide remarked not only the political frameworks for memorialization of the genocide, but also characterized the inscription of Armenian loss and trauma into everyday life and the public sphere in Soviet Yerevan.

Another, probably more important event with regard to the conversion of social memory into the political memory was embedded in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its “grand narrative”.<sup>50</sup> As a result, Armenians, among others, who were deprived of their national indigenous history began to recover their own narratives and memories of the Genocide. Together with the possibility to gather oral and visual testimonies and documents confirming the mass atrocities and deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire marked the transformation of collective memory of the Armenian genocide into political and, in particular, national memory.

As a result, and in particular, after 1995, yeghern (the big catastrophe) became a crucial moral code of national representation in the Armenian Republic, producing different sets of ritualized practices of public commemoration. Every 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the population marches to the genocide memorial, and the diaspora holds remembrance ceremonies in community centers,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Abrahamian, p. 74.

churches and local Genocide monuments. The cultivation of memory appears to be presented as a national duty.<sup>51</sup> The parallel can be drawn with Israel, where the commemoration of the Holocaust is a part of the state's *raison d'être*. Like Jerusalem's Yad Vashem, the Genocide memorial in Yerevan is the visiting foreign VIPs first stop. This "duty" is manifested in literature, films, museum exhibitions, and various monuments. The striking example is the new interactive exhibits being installed in the museum of Genocide so that Armenian children of today can connect to one his or her own age in those times. As much as the memory of traumatic events, such as genocide, becomes abstract and distant, it is now being replaced by translating this memory in externalized and mediated forms through the particular installation of other languages of remembrance.

At the same time, it is argued that the "duty of remembrance" truly represents an unavoidable social and moral imperative of the time.<sup>52</sup> In this context, there is a worldwide shift in the forms of collective memories which are now centered around the notion of shared remembering rather than mutual forgetting between victims and perpetrators. Therefore, in the aftermath of traumatic events, the claim of shared remembering is chosen as a viable foundation for mutual relationship in the future. At the same time, the notion of remembrance appears to be presented as a "duty" of the international society that has to remember. Moreover, although one can assume this notion of remembrance is focused largely on the past and its memory, the origins of the concept of memory does not only imply remembering the past but rather it is an injunction to the future. "The memory of the past which will shape future and, if the past is forgotten, the

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<sup>51</sup> Guardian, 'A small country but a big nation: how genocide shaped the Armenia of today,' 1 April 2015. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/22/turkish-silence-fans-century-of-armenian-grief-over-genocide>

<sup>52</sup> Fournet C. *The Crime of Destruction and the Law of genocide: Their impact on Collective Memory*, (Ashgate Publishing, 2007)

future is bound to witness the repetition of past mistakes. If past genocides fail to be remembered, they are bound to happen again.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, it now entails actions and prevention.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3 Situating Armenian-Turkish relations in the victimization discourse

### 3.1 Armenian-Turkish relations before 2009

As much as foreign policy is seen to be conditioned by particular issues it seeks to address, it needs to attach meaning to the situation and to construct the object within it. For this reason, policies articulate and rely on particular identities of other states, peoples, as well as on the identity of a national, regional, or institutional Self.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, relying on the critical role of language in providing discursive understanding of the identity and, in turn, foreign policy, it is assumed that while policy discourse is dependent on particular constructions of problems and subjectivities, it is also due to a particular discourse through which these problems and subjectivities are constructed. Policy and identity are therefore conceptualized as ontologically interlinked.

Drawing on the assumption about the discursive and political nature of identities, and through the employment of post-structuralist theoretical framework, arguing that representations of the identity place foreign policy issues within a specific interpretative optic, which can also result in formulating foreign policy as an adequate response, this chapter is aimed to answer how the traumatic events of 1915, combined with challenges to its legitimacy, regained possibility to be played out in particular discursive practices and serve to keep up the memory in the forefront of Armenian-Turkish relations.

As soon as Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union, the key aspect of Armenia's foreign policy became its relations with Turkey. Relations between Armenia and

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<sup>54</sup> Hansen L. *Security As Practice*, (The new international relations, 2006) p. 17.

Turkey were re-established when Turkey recognized the independence of Armenia in 1991. Although there were no diplomatic ties, the period from 1991 to 1993 appeared to have carried the possibilities of new start. For this time, they were facing each other as legitimate members of the international community. After the Cold War, Turkey became one of the major regional powers with pragmatic security dimensions. With the emergence of a new Armenian state on its border, the relations between the two countries took new dimensions. Post-Soviet Armenia, which found itself economically destroyed and in search for security, took the path of improving its relations with Turkey which was of crucial importance. Combined with the aftermath of the 2008 Georgian-Russian War, the regional atmosphere prompted an increase in necessity to stabilize the region. Most importantly, the Armenian-Turkish dialogue appeared to be the place where the interests of Russia, the United States and European Union overlapped, providing important international backing for these attempts.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, the Genocide debate was already an issue in international relations, and came to determine relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia.<sup>56</sup> However, the discursive practices of victimization based on the historical narrative of the Genocide has significantly differed in the articulation of policy towards Turkey of all three Armenian presidents since the independence. As much as the historical narrative of the genocide involves complicated and intertwined political, legal and psychological implications in the present, the discourse of victimization was articulated and re-articulated in a way it would overlap with the different policy performances of the decision-makers. In this respect, the role of

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<sup>55</sup> Minasyan S. and Iskandaryan A. 'Pragmatic Policies vs. Historical Constraints: Analyzing Armenian-Turkish Relations', *Yerevan: Caucasus Institute*,(2010) p. 18.

Minasyan, S. 'Prospects for Normalization between Armenia and Turkey: A View from Yerevan' *insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2010), p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Libardian (2004), p. 192.

national identity and its incorporation into the idea of state-building seems to be at the center of discursive practices.

Yet the first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian declared the establishment of relations with Turkey as a main policy dimension of that time.<sup>57</sup> In doing so, the president narrowed down the concept of national identity of Armenia and accommodated it with the necessity of building a state. In this context, Ter-Petrosian promoted the dialogue with Turkey “without preconditions” which meant to sideline the issue of the Genocide in favor of economic and political development that would only complicate the process of Armenian state-building. For this reason, Ter-Petrosian legitimized itself by developing a concept known as “new thinking”.<sup>58</sup> In this respect, the Armenian genocide was considered to be a moral issue which cannot be situated in the foreign policy agenda of Armenia. Although this rhetoric made him a flexible partner for Turkey and facilitated the establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations in the first years of Armenia’s independence, it provoked the resistance of Diaspora and some nationalistic forces of Armenia.<sup>59</sup> Although Petrossian continued to implement his policy of Armenian-Turkish reconciliation, these endeavors were hindered by Turkey’s expectations that Armenia would undoubtedly recognize the current borders of Turkey and further destroyed with the intensification of armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p 190

<sup>58</sup> In this new thinking the history was perceived as an obstacle to the successful realization of the ultimate aspiration of the Armenian nation, statehood (petakanutyun). This was seen as an integral part of national identity and defined as an inalienable right of the Armenian nation. The reproduction of the past was not considered to secure the state’s survival and “reliving” of the past tragedies seemed to hold the national spirit hostage and dramatically narrowed Armenia’s policy choices. In this way, strategic thinking was placed in controversies with the collective memory, pragmatism to emotion and national ambition. This “new thinking” challenged the whole conceptual and mythical system of the hegemonic post-genocide project of national identity, reformulated and narrowed down the meaning of the nation and national, questioned the centrality of concepts of homeland, genocide, and associated with them Armenian Question.<sup>58</sup> In particular, the notion of new independent statehood was contrasted with the central discursive narrative of the Armenian genocide of 1915 in which genocide was defined as “historical and moral issue but not political”. (Libardian 1999, 111). Moreover, the attachment of the genocide issue in the Declaration of independence of Armenia the leading elite considered as opposing to the notion of pragmatic state and “a simplistic and emotional element prevailing over rationality” (Ishkhanian 1991, 136)

<sup>59</sup> Libardian (1991)



With the eruption of large-scale war fighting in 1992, Turkey joined Azerbaijan in blockading the Armenian border on 3 April 1993, in response to the successful Armenian offensive in the Kelbajar district.<sup>60</sup> Ankara announced that in solidarity with Azerbaijan it bans the transit of humanitarian and other aid to Armenia. In addition to its diplomatic pressure on Armenia, Turkey ordered the positioning of its troops along the Turkish-Armenian border.

Although the establishment of diplomatic relations appeared to be impossible, the Armenian president continued to seek for ways towards improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations. Eventually, in 1998 the first elite of independent Armenia was removed from the power and completely de-legitimized.<sup>61</sup> One can argue, that among other causes, the latter happened due to the fact that the “new thinking” exalted the state, but at that time the state was not the thing to be exalted. The only important success the elite had, the Karabakh war, was a very victory of the rejected discursive framework and, obviously, as “Petrosyan had nothing to show for his revolutionary thinking” (Libaridian, cited in Sarafian 1998).

After Ter-Petrosyan resigned, the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Robert Khocharyan, came to power and immediately announced that the international recognition of the genocide is a foreign policy priority for Armenia. Meanwhile Khocharyan brought the preservation of Nagorno-Karabakh independence at the center of the Armenian foreign policy as a safeguard of the country’s physical existence. One can argue that in this way the borders of identity re-involved the social antagonism of Pan-Turkism defined as the

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<sup>60</sup> de Waal, ‘Remaking the Nagorno-Kharabah Peace Process,’ *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 52:4 (2010), p.3.

<sup>61</sup> The pressure on the administration to succumb its positions was mounting. In September of 1997, Gerard Libaridian resigned citing personal reasons. On October 4, 1997 Levon Ter-Petrosyan gave his famous press conference in support of the OSCE’s most recent peace plan based on the step-by-step approach. The overriding majority of the administration, including the prime-minister, the defense ministry and ministry of the interior, the opposition, and the diaspora rejected the deal, calling it “blackmail” and demanded president’s resignation. "Armenia: Armenian Opposition Leader Demands President's Resignation," (FBIS-SOV-98-029, February 4 1998). "Armenia: Armenian Parliament Accepts Ter-Petrosyan Resignation.", (FBIS-SOV-98-035, February 7 1998).

ideological and political cause of Genocide and the permanent threat to Armenian national identity. This assertive position had two important implications, on the domestic level, it allowed the president to bring Dashnaktsutyun party back into the politics and restore relations with Diaspora encouraging the latter's investments in Armenia.<sup>62</sup> On the external level, the government proclaimed so-called policy of “complementarity” driven by the sense of regional isolation and necessity to get engaged in the alliances with different regional powers. This was seen as a way out from further isolation of Armenia and its exclusion from different regional projects.

This chapter is aimed at examining the diplomatic deadlock of Armenian-Turkish relations. It is argued that apart from the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, the normalization of relations with Turkey is the most normative, sensitive and complicated issue of the Armenia's foreign policy agenda. How one can find ways of constructing a dialogue with a country that is the political successor of a regime responsible for the Armenian Genocide and that consistently denies to undertake any commitment for its history? How should a possibility of such a relationship be conceptualized and performed within the discourse of victimization considering Turkey's willingness to eliminate any memory regarding the genocide and, moreover, to connect the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations with the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh which emphasized historical grievances and brought to the forefront of the relations the issue of the 1915 genocide? For this reason, this chapter analyzes the most important attempt towards the establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations, namely the “Armenian-Turkish protocols.”<sup>63</sup> These protocols illustrate how the victimization discourse was actively shaped and reshaped in

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<sup>62</sup> Barseghyan K. 'Rethinking Nationhood: Post-Independence Discourse on National Identity in Armenia.' Polish Sociological Review, No 144 p. 408

<sup>63</sup> Armenia, Turkey to sign protocols on developing ties in mid-October (17 September, 2009) Mediamax news agency, Yerevan, in English 0937, Retrieved 17 Sep 09, from LexisNexis Academic database

order to correspond with certain policy preferences, which not only enabled to start a dialogue with Turkey but also constrained certain actions and finally closed the normalization process.

### 3.2 New start

The first statement on the normalization of relations was signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2009. Armenian-Turkish protocols on the establishment of diplomatic ties and bilateral relations were signed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October in Zurich. The fact that the negotiations largely took place at high level and behind closed doors speaks to the uncertainty both sides faced with regard to how the protocols would be received at home. While this research is not interested in case of Turkey, it is important to mention that the magnitude and reflections of victimization discourse within the policy performances of the Armenian government to great extent were conditioned upon the reactions towards Turkey's official statements affecting the normalization process.

While following the political direction of his predecessor on key issues (Karabakh, Genocide recognition), the current president of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan, also subscribed to the policy without preconditions towards Turkey.<sup>64</sup> During his statement commemorating Genocide Memorial Day, Sargsyan announces “While keeping the memory of innocent victims alive, presently we are ready to establish normal relations with Turkey without any preconditions.”<sup>65</sup> However, in contrast to the first president of the republic whose overemphasise on the importance of statehood at the cost of the genocide recognition eventually led to his resignation,

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<sup>64</sup> Serzh Sargsyan's pre-election campaign program, available at <http://www.president.am/hy/election-program/> (accessed on 5, May, 2015)

<sup>65</sup> Serzh Sargsyan. ‘Adress by President Serzh Sargsyan on the Day of Remembrance of Victims of the Armenian Genocide’, press release 24 April (online) available at <http://www.president.am/ru/pressrelease/item/2008/04/24/news-22/> (Accessed 25 April, 2015)

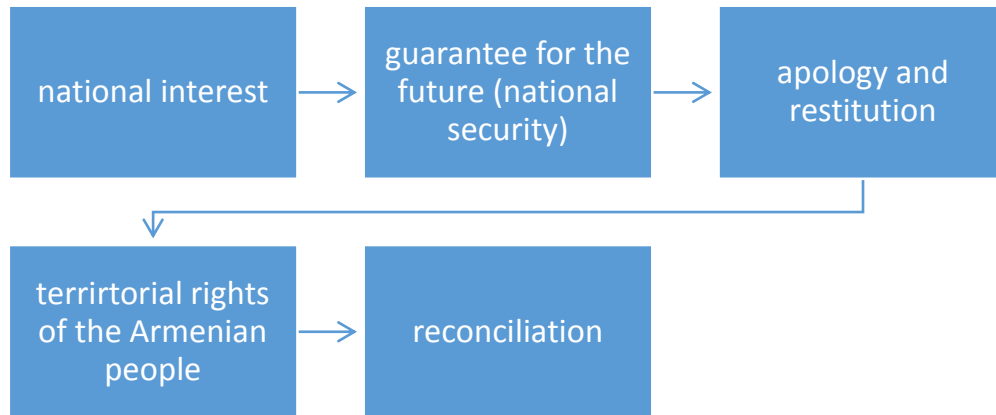
Sargsyan incorporated the idea of statehood into a wider national identity by attaching a new meaning to remembering the genocide. Moreover, one can assume that in this way the governmental elite operated within the frameworks of the victimhood discourse but reshaped the elements of the discourse in a way it enabled and legitimized its policy choices towards Armenian-Turkish relations.

The main mechanism that came to serve this purpose was linking the normalization of relations with Turkey to the construction of a strong statehood, which, in turn, seemed to be the best way to commemorate the victims of the Genocide. In his speech addressed to the Armenian people after the signature of the protocols, Sargsyan stated that “The memory of our victims and the future of our generations require to have a strong and stable statehood, a powerful and prosperous country. We consider the normalization of relations with our neighbors including Turkey to be one of the important steps in this process.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, nothing else but a strong statehood that can guarantee a prosperous future for its generations was perceived as a necessary and sufficient condition to solemnize the memory of the victims. **(See Figure 1)**

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<sup>66</sup> Serzh Sargsyan’s address to Armenian people ‘on the decision to sign Armenian-Turkish protocols’, Iragir. am, (10 October, 2009) available at <http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/view/29689>, (accessed on 5 March, 2015)

**Figure 1. The main elements of governmental discursive practice**



In this context, the collective memory of the victimhood received a new meaning. It is not to say that Armenia has to forget about the genocide and it needs to get beyond it, this is the past, and we do not care about this past any longer, we are living in the present and we need to prepare the future. Neither it is to say that the past is very important and yes, having been the victim of genocide is crucial to who we are, but let us never associate that with weakness. Moreover, it actually orders us to live up the duty that the past imposes on us, a duty to become stronger. And once we become stronger, we can fulfill our obligations towards the dead, towards the victims of those dramatic events. Moreover, in contrast to the first president, whose discourse of a strong statehood was based simply on pragmatic calculations, the notion of “duty before the dead” came to fill the emotional and normative gap for initiating the dialogue and thus legitimizing it.

President’s efforts at accelerating the establishment of relations with Turkey were presented as an issue of national interest of Armenia, politically isolated and economically

harmed by the closed border. “If at a particular stage the interests of Armenia and Turkey coincide, we are obliged to take steps, because our state, our citizens will benefit.”<sup>67</sup>

However, right after the signature of the protocols, a heated debate spilled over the domestic political sphere of Armenia including scholars, public figures and political analysts. The reactions were immediate and controversial. In Armenia Dashnaksutyun withdrew from the ruling coalition in protest. Most of the controversy arose over the agreement to establish a commission to implement a dialogue on the historical dimension to define existing problems and formulate recommendations.<sup>68</sup> This was interpreted by many as a direct reference to the issue of genocide and as validating Turkish denial by compromising what is a critical aspect of Armenian identity—the genocide recognition.

Another concern was about the provision of mutually recognizing the existing border between the two countries as defined by the relevant treaties of international law. This position was partly triggered by the debates in the Armenian parliament challenging the validity of the infamous Moscow and Kars Treaties, which drew the present Turkish-Armenian border. “It is clear from the protocols that Turkey expects from Armenia to de jure recognize the existing border.”<sup>69</sup> Although the treaties were not formally abrogated, the borders between the two countries were not reaffirmed. Yerevan, nonetheless, insisted that the issue of borders between the two countries would be determined in accordance with the international law and demonstrated lack of any preconditions.

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<sup>67</sup> ‘Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan on Armenian-Turkish protocols’. 7 or (Yerevan), (20 November, 2009), available at <http://www.7or.am/am/news/view/3360/>, (accessed on 5 May, 2015)

<sup>68</sup> Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Armenia and The Swiss federal Department of Foreign Affairs, ‘Protocols on Development of relations between the Republic of Turkey and The Republic of Armenia’, press release (31 August, 2009) Ankara, Yerevan, Berne

At the same time, the governmental officials made it a point to emphasize that Armenia has no territorial claims to Turkey. This did not seem to be the opinion generally shared in Armenian society. Moreover, Armenians continue to ground their territorial rights on "Woodrow Wilson's Arbitral Award", as a necessary constituents of the Armenian Question.<sup>70</sup> The borders, defined by the arbitral award, gave Armenia access to the Black Sea and enshrined Armenia's rights on four Armenian regions in Eastern Turkey without which Armenians would face a number of vital issues, regarding the development in general.

### ***3.2.1 Domestic contradiction***

As a result, the opposition, namely Dashnaksutyun party having a more radical approach towards the issue of Genocide recognition and Armenia's territorial demands whose base of support was in the Diaspora, managed to mobilize thousands of Armenians (also in the Armenian communities in the US, France, Lebanon, etc.) and organize demonstrations and marches to the memorial of the Genocide.<sup>71</sup> In doing so, Dashnaks brought up new elements of the victimization discourse into surface emphasizing the rights of Armenians and Armenia's national interests which had been badly violated by those protocols. "No one, no president, no government is entitled to draw the fate of the Armenian people without its consent". "By signing the documents, we will refuse rights of our future generations, our achievements, efforts of Armenian people".<sup>72</sup> (see Figure 2)

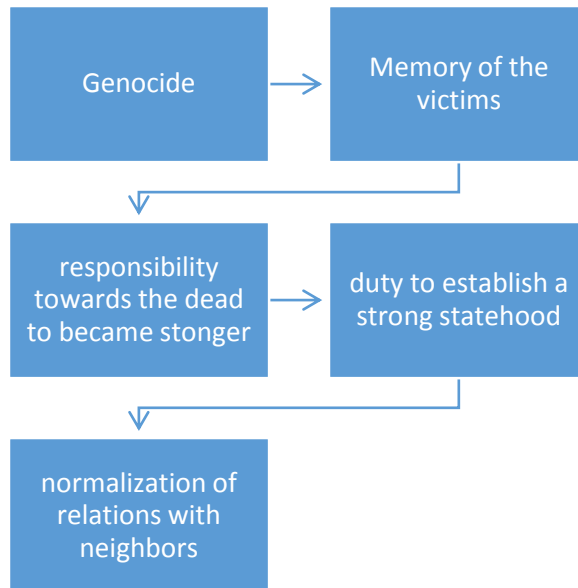
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<sup>70</sup> Notoprotocols "Dasnaksutyun denounces the Armenian-Turkish protocols", available at <http://notoprotocols.net/> (accessed May 5, 2015)

<sup>71</sup> Iskandaryan, Minasyan (2010), p. 12

<sup>72</sup> Hrant Margaryan, a representative of the Bureau of the [opposition] Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun

**Figure 2. Main components of opposition discursive practice**



It can be argued that the idea behind this was embedded in historical practice of mistrust and disillusionment. Moreover, historical mistrust not only towards Turkey, but also the centrifugal powers whose “mediation efforts” throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the 21<sup>th</sup> century caused Armenian loss and which are still considered to utilize the Armenian-Turkish relations for their own gains. The fact that the deal of 2009 was negotiated by the US, Russia, and France appeared to support these concerns regarding the process itself. Was it actually Armenia’s choice or once again we acted in a way we were forced to act? Therefore, once we compromised our rights and our struggle for the genocide recognition, we would repeat the old mistakes and eventually give up on everything. If Turkey really wants to re-establish mutual trust, first of all it should recognize the horrible crime it has committed against our nation and has no right to speak the language of preconditions.

This perception about the protocols was reflected not only by the opposition but also by different political figures and intellectuals occupied with Armenian-Turkish relations. In a more



radical way it was argued that “if Armenian government does not refer to the Genocide recognition as a precondition to normalize the relations with Turkey, the ruling elite fails to fulfill its main Constitutional obligation- to protect Armenian people’s rights and security.”<sup>73</sup> In this context, the national security and genocide recognition directly conditioned each other. This linkage was conceptualized within the frameworks of international scholarly defining a denial as a last stage of genocide on the one hand, and the consistent Pan-Turkism threat posed against non-Turkic and Christian Armenians on the other hand. Therefore, only the genocide recognition by Turkey would guarantee that it will not happen again and thus would secure the physical existence of Armenians.

### ***3.2.2 Further deliberations***

It is important to notice that Dashnaksutyun also agreed on the need to establish relations with Turkey “only if they were not any condition to compromise what is a matter of our national interest and security.”<sup>74</sup> Among others, the leaders of Dashnaksutyun among others criticized the idea of connecting state-building and strong statehood to the normalization of relations with neighbors. Manoyan noticed that “building a strong statehood first and foremost is a bottom-up process: if you have corruption, monopoly and non-democratic government within the country, opening the border with Turkey will never contribute to the state-building. Under such circumstances it even may have the opposite effect.”<sup>75</sup> This is to say that when you have an over-monopolized and uncompetitive market of Armenia on the one side, and dynamic economic

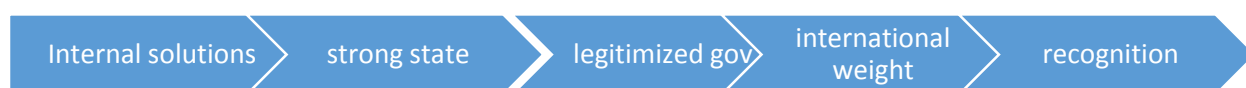
<sup>73</sup> Youtube, ‘Ջահերով էրթ Միծեռնակաբերդ’ [march towards Tsitsernakaberd], 23 April, 2010, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcVcPn1jkXU> (accessed on April 20, 2015)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Giro Manoyan, one of the leaders of ARF Dashnaksutyun and the head of its *Armenian Cause* Office (online), May 2, 2015

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

system of Turkey on the other side, Armenia would significantly suffer from the open border. At best, Armenia first needs to develop mechanism to protect its local production before opening the border. Moreover, the existing enormous domestic issues which extensively de-legitimize the current government was considered as a main obstacle towards the state-building, which, in turn, was linked to the international image of the state. Only if the government is elected through the free and fair elections enjoying support from its citizens, can be perceived as a real representative of its nation's interest by the international community. And in this case its actions would lead to the desired results (see Figure 3)

**Figure 3 (Sub-elements of opposition discourse)**



Another striking element of the opposing discourse was to signal the emerging gap between Armenia and the diaspora. In particular, the Armenians communities in France and the United States extensively criticized the policy of the president. On the one hand, the Diaspora has an extremely antagonistic perception of Turkey as the historical enemy whom one can never trust with more existential, relentless, and passionate rhetoric. On the other hand, the Diaspora is the main and strong force lobbying for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide which led 22 states to recognize it. Thus, Turkey was considered to pursue the aim of driving a wedge between Armenia and the diaspora and slow down the process of the international recognition of the genocide respectively.

The debate surrounding the question of establishing a historical sub-commission was followed by the statement of the government that “Any relations with Turkey cannot call into

question the Armenian genocide or deprive the Armenian people of the motherland”<sup>76</sup> In this respect, the genocide recognition appeared to be the ultimate goal of the official policy and the normalization of relations would have only advantaged the process of the recognition. Many Armenians acknowledge the changes that have taken place in Turkey, where liberal intellectuals, civil society and many Kurdish groups accept the fact of the genocide. Therefore, and especially after thousands Turks signed the “We Apologize” petition in 2007 in the spirit of the Armenian-Turkish prominent journalist Hrant Dink killed by the Turkish nationalists, Armenian intellectuals and politicians had periodically emphasized the need to communicate with the Turkish society.” Today Turks are not the perpetrators of the genocide, they are simply unaware of the real historical events occurred between our nations due to the state-level agitation against the genocide recognition as long as the memory of perpetrators is always under the pressure of “vital forgetfulness.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the open border would enable Armenians to have access to the Turkish audience and help them to find out the “truth” (see figure 2.)

**Figure 2. Sub-elements of the governmental discourse**



### 3.3 Unacceptable circumstances

<sup>76</sup> "No alternative" to establishing ties with Turkey - Armenian leader -Mediamax news agency, Yerevan, October 10, 2009, Lexisnexis database web 20 march, 2015

<sup>77</sup> Dolf Sternberger cited by Assmann (2008), p. 219

Short after the protocols were signed, Turkey brought a new issue on the negotiation table, the resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. This signaled a point where the negotiations became doomed to failure. Moreover, Turkey's reactions over the decision made by the Armenia's constitutional court stating that the Protocols could not be applied in a way which would contradict the obligation of the government to seek international recognition of the Armenian Genocide further undermined Armenian confidence in the process, and faith in Turkey as a negotiation partner. Turkish Prime and Foreign Ministers interpreted the court's decision as a precondition on the process of normalization and hinted at territorial claims.<sup>78</sup> In response, Sargsyan denounced the willingness of Turkey to tie the normalization process to the issue of Karabakh and pushed for the ratification of the protocols by the Turkish Parliament in reasonable timeframes. "The Armenian side rules out the possibility of conditioning the ratification [of the protocols] by extraneous issues,-said Sargsyan. Moreover, Sargsyan stated that "We have never rejected the international recognition of the Armenian genocide and we are ready to bear responsibility for what is written in the protocols."<sup>79</sup>

Under continuous and strong pressure from below Armenia continued to proceed with the normalization of relations while expecting the same from Turkey. However, lack of public support for the Protocols, as well as extensive campaigns against them in diaspora, made it difficult to find the political support to push forward the ratification. The public perception of Turkey continued to be rooted in mistrust. The dominant attitude was that Turkey did not intend to establish relations with Armenia, and Sargsyan's efforts to prove otherwise were humiliating and anathema to the spirit of everything Armenian.

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<sup>78</sup> "Minister warns of breakdown of Armenia-Turkey reconciliation talks"- Novosti-Armenia news agency, 22 January, 2010, transcript, Lexisnexis database web. 20 April, 2015

<sup>79</sup> "Armenian president on Turkey ties, Karabakh conflict", RIA Novosti news agency, Moscow, April 26, 2010, Lexisnexis database web. 20 April, 2015

At the same time, the ruling elite started to intensify the discourse of the genocide in order to enforce Turkey to abandon its preconditions and legitimize its further steps bearing in mind that the dialogue was in a deadlock. Sargsyan emphasized that “the recognition of the Armenian genocide is not only an issue of restoration of justice, but is also an important condition for security of Armenia and the Armenian people. It is a necessity.”<sup>80</sup> In this way, the president referred to the internationally accepted concept of the “duty to remember” a genocide as the only way to prevent it from repeating. Moreover, Sargsyan stressed that the shortest way for Turkey to re-establish relations with Armenia is its recognition of the Genocide. One can see another logic of shared remembering in victim-perpetrator relations based on the idea that their further relations are fundamentally conditioned on the vital need to remember and bear the responsibility of what had been done. One can argue that if the reference to the international community and values through the basic discourse of victimhood provided the ideological and normative basics for Sargsyan to stick around the notion of “relations without preconditions” regarding the exclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the Armenian-Turkish relations, it also constrained his policy of sidelining the genocide in favor of economic gains.

### ***3.3.1 Deadlock***

For years the protocols remained in the Armenian, as well as in Turkish parliaments without ratification. If for Armenia it was to show its willingness to sign the documents whenever Turkey did, the fact that Turkey also kept the protocols for the ratification was

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*

considered in Armenia as a way to further use them to prevent international recognition of the genocide. Eventually, in 2015 towards the events dedicated the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, Sargsyan revoked Armenia's signature under the protocols. In doing so, Sargsyan announced: "If some circles in Turkey attempt to use our candour to our detriment, to manipulate the process to avoid the reality of the 24th of April, they should know all too well that the 24th of April is the day that symbolizes the Armenian genocide, but in no way shall it mark the time boundary of its international recognition."<sup>81</sup>

One can argue that while putting the victimization discourse as a core of Armenian-Turkish relation, president of Armenia, who also took into consideration the decisive mistakes of the first president Levon Ter-Petrossian to abandon the victimization discourse, did not give up on the discourse but rather actively shaped it not rejecting the key elements. He stayed within the discourse of victimhood but reshaped the sense of what it means and what it should imply. In this context, the notion of remembering was given the sense of obligation to become stronger. But what is more important, commemoration appeared to be conditioned on the logic of being the key constituent for reconciliation as the ultimate goal and implemented through the process of trust-building. Despite the best efforts of governmental politicians to sell the Protocols to their own public as well as the Diaspora, there were objections based on the fear that Turkey would attempt to dispute the fact of the Genocide via the suggested historical commission. Interestingly, the opposition shared this concept of remembering, but due to complexity of Armenian national identity of victimization, the disagreement emerged on the means of commemoration. If the government prioritized the idea of becoming stronger and, thus, had to sideline the issue of genocide in favor of economic benefits and trust-building at least at the first

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<sup>81</sup> "Armenian leader says ratification of protocols on ties with Turkey suspended" - Mediamax news agency, Yerevan, 22 April, 2010 Lexisnexis database web 25 March, 2015

stage, the opposition and many others believed that the best way to build trust was not the recognition of the genocide by Turkey itself, but the restoration of the Armenians rights deriving from Armenia's national security concerns: "International recognition is fine but, if Turkey doesn't do it, then we won't have the security we need," said Tevan Poghosyan, an MP for the nationalist Heritage party. "It is a security issue because the genocide happened to us. It is our nation that lost its homeland and was scattered around the world. It is not just a historical issue."<sup>82</sup>

At the same time, Turkey brought the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh in the process that identified more radical national identity based on the combination of past and present victimhood, the normalization of the relations became doomed to failure. Armenian government acknowledged that Turkey was demanding too much. In fact, official Yerevan had made a concession to Ankara with regard to the second demand - one that earned it criticism from political opposition, public figures and Armenian diaspora all over the world. One can argue that this was partly because of the fact that shortly after Turkey conditioned the ratification of the protocols on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenians became very suspicious towards the feasibility of further negotiations. The transformation of Armenian-Turkish dialogue into a pre-condition in the Karabakh settlement became the killer of the normalization process.

The reason for this is that the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of physical existence for Armenians and is not an issue that is unrelated for Armenia to the Genocide. The linkage between Karabakh conflict and the discourse of historical representations were embedded in the employment of the past in the present. Historical continuity and the sense of victimhood was reinforced through the discursive linkage between the beginning and the end of

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<sup>82</sup> Guardian, 'A small country but a big nation: how genocide shaped the Armenia of today,' 1 April 2015. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/22/turkish-silence-fans-century-of-armenian-grief-over-genocide>

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely between Genocide of 1915 and Azerbaijani atrocities against Armenians in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990). The mass killings of Armenians were perceived as a new act of genocide against Armenian people, planned and organized by the Azerbaijani state and party leaders. “Even as the Armenian government tried to improve the relations with Turkey and modulate the genocide issue, ordinary Armenian, particularly in Karabakh, transposed the image of mass murders to the Azerbaijanis, who for them became “Turks.”<sup>83</sup>

Historical continuity was established through the discourse between the beginning and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely between Genocide of 1915 and the Sumgait events of February 23, 1988 where the mass killing of Armenians was perceived as a new act of “genocide” against Armenian people, planned and organized by the Azerbaijani state and Party leaders. The extreme fears, deprivation for physical existence accompanied the Karabakh war and intensified the sense of enemy and insecurity. Suny makes the following point: “the power and coherence of the Armenian national identity, the popular projection of the images of genocide onto the Karabakh conflict,” alongside Turkey’s identification with Azerbaijan. In this way, collective memory of the genocide was transferred into the need for struggle and survival. It received the meaning of preventing a new genocide.

Therefore, for Armenians it is too much. To put the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh as a precondition is considered by Armenians not only to deny the old Genocide, but also to deny the possibility of genocide of them now, of their families, of their children. How one could justify this, yes, one could justify the sidelining of the old genocide, but this is simply too much, this is simply too high price to pay for. Moreover, one can argue that in this way, whenever there is a chance for the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, even if the issue of the genocide was explicitly or implicitly sidelined in order to “re-define mutual trust” the Karabakh issue

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<sup>83</sup> Suny, (1999/2000 ) p. 157



appeared to consolidate the nation and re-articulated the former concept of national identity with a new strength.

## **Chapter 4 Armenian-Turkish relations**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses Armenian-Russian relations from the perspective of the current president's foreign policy implementation. In particular, it examines the Armenian President's decision taken on the 3. September 2013, to join the Customs Unions founded by Russia, Belarus and Khazakstan. It asks the question whether the Armenian famous U-turn was actually a U-turn but something natural driven by Armenia's vital need to preserve its security vis-à-vis its perceptions about consistent Pan-Turkic threat hanging over Armenia for centuries. What does it mean for Armenia to be a pro-Russian taking into account the arguments already made on Armenia's perceptions about its national security and, in particular, Nagorno-Karabakh. Yes, one can argue that Armenia's "Rusaphilia" as referred to by the West is conditioned simply on its geostrategic location and security concerns, but this would be an oversimplified conclusion. To answer this question in depth, one should regard the discursive performativity of Russia and its role in Armenian consciousness conditioned on the interplay of historical narratives and security demands. In this respect, it is argued that both these components of Armenian-Russian relations are used by the government to define the strategic ties with Russia as the only realistic security guarantee for Armenia.

## 4.2 The dual discourse portraying Russia

While a part of Soviet Union, Armenia and Armenian identity, among others, were subordinated to the ideological needs of the Communist party through the manipulation and political mobilization of history. Together with Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, as it has been mentioned, Armenians began to reassess their past and abandon the prevailing "grand narrative" of Soviet constructed Armenian history in which Russia played the role of liberator and savior of the Armenian people.<sup>84</sup> This historical narrative of Armenian history remained uncontested until the mentioned policy of glasnost, which enabled historians, dissidents and nationalists to write and talk about the Armenian history (mainly preoccupied with Genocide). Suny argues that this was done in accordance with the post-Soviet foreign policy towards Turkey which re-opened the question of the restoration of the "historical Armenian dichotomic lands" embedded in Armenian Question, as well as the issue of the Genocide for the same purposes.<sup>85</sup> Since then, Armenians could to large extent produce and reproduce the symbolic meaning of the Genocide and partly the dream of greater homeland. The culmination of national re-definition erupted in the beginning of 1988 and the advent of the Karabagh movement in Armenia.

At the same time, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first president and his administration declared about the necessity to transcend the historical dependence and

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<sup>84</sup> Panossian R *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 143

<sup>85</sup> Suny (1999/2000), p. 156

stereotypes of Armenia, or what he called “false ideology”.<sup>86</sup> This referred not only to the issue of the genocide in Armenian-Turkish relation, but also to the Armenian reliance on Russia, which according to the first president Ter-Petrosian, was possible to overcome only through the normalization of relations with Turkey. Russia was re-defined as a constrain, a blockage to strong Armenian state while neglecting the idea that in practice Sovietization of Armenia preserved its security from the further Turkish threat. In this way, Russia lost its importance as a defender. Moreover, it was defined to be responsible for lost Armenian historical lands, or as a force that was not at all interested in ensuring the security of Armenia.<sup>87</sup> In this context, Armenia’s dependence on Russia was directly conditioned upon the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations.

However, as it was already mentioned, these attempts failed because of Turkish assertive demands on Armenia to abandon Karabakh. Moreover, Turkish one-sided position and blockade of the Armenian border not only further reinforced the sense of threat posed by the Turks and historical mistrust towards Turkey, but also “pushed Armenia into Russia’s arms”<sup>88</sup> Consequently, as much as Turkey failed to regard the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh apart from Turkish-Armenian relations resulted in Armenia’s double blockade, Russia came to be seen as the main ally of Armenia by the government. Meanwhile, this approach was not shared by the Diaspora and other nationalist forces due to the dual political perceptions towards Russia and its reliability as a “strategic partner”. In order to incorporate Diaspora’s visions on Armenian

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<sup>86</sup> (Libardian 1999, 111)

<sup>87</sup>For example It was argued that the Russian army could easily have conquered the whole of western Armenia after defeating the Ottoman army at the battle of Sarikamish, December 1914 but deliberately waited for the massacres to be completed and for western Armenia to be emptied of its Armenia population before conquering the region (Ishkhanian 1991: 45–46), Ter-Petrosian declared that Baku pogroms of Armenians in January 1990 had destroyed the illusion that Russia is interested in the security of Armenians (Astourian 2000).

<sup>88</sup> Astourian Stephan H., *From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia* cited in (*University of California, Berkeley*, p.33 review

security, the elite presented the so-called “policy of complementarity” enabling the country to get involved in various political and economic structures based on the state’s interest.<sup>89</sup>

### 4.3 “And, and” or “one end”

After the incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan came to power, he also proclaimed the policy of “complementarity” or “And, and” as the main rationale for Armenian foreign policy. At the same time, Armenia’s strategic alliance with Russia continued to be presented as the essential condition of Armenia’s security. In other words, the role of Russia as a guarantor of the nation’s physical survival was reaffirmed. “Our relations have been developed historically and are based on mutual trust and interest”. In this context, the president’s decision to negotiate its membership in the Customs Union on September 3, 2013, resulted in Armenia’s failure to sign the Association and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU was perceived by the majority of politicians as a strategic step. “It is a rational decision stemming from the national interests of Armenia.”<sup>90</sup> In this way, the reasoning for the decision was embed in the fact that once you are a member of one system of military security, it would be futile to avoid a corresponding economic space.

This “unexpected” announcement sparked off a heated debate in Armenia. The public discourse mainly focused on two major aspects stemming from the country’s integration policies. First and foremost, it was about the country’s security concerns. On the one hand, given the weight of an un-resolved conflict, surrounded by “less-than-friendly” neighbours, landlocked and

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<sup>89</sup> Oskanian V Speech by his Excellency Vartan Oskanian Minister Of Foreign Affairs Republic Of Armenia At The International Conference On “Prospects For Regional And Transregional Cooperation And The Resolution Of Conflicts. Yerevan, September 28, 2000, available on April 4, 2004 at [http://www.armeniaforeignministry.am/htms/speeches/speech\\_index.html](http://www.armeniaforeignministry.am/htms/speeches/speech_index.html)

<sup>90</sup> Radio Free Europe, ‘Armenia to Join Russia-Led Customs Union,’ 3. September 2013 Available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-customs-union/25094560.html> (Accessed 5. January 2015)

impoverished, Armenia could not but give priority to the military co-operation factors. The Russian bases located on its territory protecting the border with Turkey and its long-standing participation in the CSTO, which formally defends its members in case of a military attack, gave the most explicit answer to the question of future orientation.

On the other hand, some opposition politicians brought up the concerns about Russian arms sales to Azerbaijan worth up to \$1bn. While some analysts considered it as the main rational behind Sargsyan's decision, the opposition referred to the unreliability of Russia. "It is reasonable to consider Russia as a strategic partner after this deal?" The latter caused not only resurfaced skepticism towards Russia referring to its continuous imperial policy in the region, but also reinforced the discourse of being the victims of Bolshevik conspiracy with Turks against Armenians. The transformation of the narrative, from presenting Russia as the main guarantor of Armenia's security into its most serious obstacle, was internalized through the notion of "unreliable partner". It was paralleled with the myth of "unjust treatment" emerged during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in which the "unjust" attitudes towards Armenians by the Azerbaijanis was blamed on wider Soviet policy. "Russia showed that its military presence in Armenia does not mean it would protect the country in case of offensive from our "good" neighbors or may be late for three hours". Moreover, this issue was raised by the president himself conditioned on its potential to cause his de-legitimization. "The worst thing is that our soldiers realize that the enemy is trying to kill them from the Russian guns."<sup>91</sup> Although these concerns were mitigated following the statements made by the Secretary of CSTO and Russian high-level officials, as well as the Armenian political elite referring to the fact that Armenia receives the

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<sup>91</sup> Youtube, "The president Sargsyan's answer to the question of the Russian journalist" 15 March, 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwk8OJuDEss>

same weapons as an ally, extreme suspicion towards Russia's overall image of a strategic partner came to occupy the minds of many Armenians.

Another concern was about economic aspects of the integration. While we are not interested in analyzing this issue, it is important to state that although there was a lack of explanation regarding the economic profitability of this Union, this did not contribute to the disqualification of the process bearing the weight of security concerns.

The situation became complicated during the Eurasian Union's summit in Astana, where the membership of Armenia in the CU was discussed. All of a sudden (for the Armenian side), the president of Kazakhstan read the letter from Azeri president Aliyev expressing concerns about Armenia's participation in the Union. Nazarbayev asked Sargsyan to stick to the UN principles concerning the officially fixed boundaries while joining the Customs Union which was a direct reference to the exclusion of Karabakh from the process.<sup>92</sup> Sargsyan in turn offered to sign a treaty on Armenia's joining to the EEU by June 15, 2014.

Although it appeared to be logical that Nazarbayev, as a representative of Turkic nation who possesses strong ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan could bring the issue on the table, it was seen as an obstacle towards Armenia's further integration. One can argue that the presence of Kazakhstan and its preconditions imposed on Armenia was perceived among Armenians as the reinforcement of Pan-Turkic threat against Armenia which is always there. "The signature of the agreement will danger our national interest of vital importance", Deputy Chairman of the Heritage Party Armen Martirosyan said.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> In Armenia this claim was denounced simply because there is no such thing that the UN recognizes a state according to some border criteria.

<sup>93</sup> BBC Monitoring quotes from Armenian press, Quotes package from BBC Monitoring, October 12, 2013, lexisnexis database web 13 May, 2015

In response the Armenian government stated that Armenia would “always be guided by its national interest and will never abandon it”. Meanwhile, the announcement of Kazakh president was largely interpreted as a message addressed to Azerbaijan but something that would have any further implications. Moreover, the politicians saw it as an opportunity to re-affirm Armenia’s positions on the conflict and, why not, bring the issue to the discussion also within these frameworks stating that “no one could question the truth of our struggle”.

After the deadlines had been postponed several times, Armenia signed the agreement on 29 May 2014. Here an objective analysis was complicated by the complexity of this issue as well as the lack of information and transparency in the deals that were reached between the Armenian authorities and its partners. However, one can make the following conclusion. Although the Armenian perceptions towards Russia have a dual character including a large part of history of mistrust in Armenian expectations of Russia and containing some elements of victimization towards the Soviet nationalists, the dominant discourse of victimization against Pan-Turkism and subsequent over-lasting threats imposed on Armenia by its geopolitical location constitute the core of Armenian-Russian strategic alliance. Therefore, the clear absence of alternatives comes to prevail and determine the Armenian foreign policy in regards to its relations with Russia. In this context, the most striking point of Armenia’s foreign policy is that the language is replaced by circumstances and day-to-day political needs through the incorporation of perceptions on Russia into the notion of natural ally due to the security demands. This, in turn, is used by the ruling elite to avoid the necessity to reflect Armenia’s multilateral dependence on Russia even if its ideological basis and legitimacy is crumbled.

## Conclusion

This research on the Armenian foreign policy emphasized the role of the discursive construction of the memory on Armenian genocide in the foreign policy of the country. While drawing on the discursive interconnection of past and present in the Armenian identity, it was stated that the victimization discourse is a critical constituent of Armenia's foreign policy and its perceptions about national security.

While choosing Turkey as a case study and subsequent key event on Armenian-Turkish protocols, the aim was to demonstrate the change in the discursive practices of victimization which appeared to both enable and constrain Armenia's policy choices towards Turkey. The examination of the governmental, as well as opposition discursive performances helped us to illustrate the whole complexity and importance of the legacies driven by the memory of Genocide. Given the vital necessity to remembering, which came to determine the ultimate need for genocide recognition by Turkey, there is no single understanding of how it operates and what it entails.

The second case dealing with Armenia's relations with Russia came to determine how the memory on the genocide affects the vital need to preserve the physical existence in the present. Although there was a lack of direct discursive implications of victimization, the circumstantial evidence showed that Armenia's military dependence on Russia is linked to the perception of



threat posed by Turkey and the broader ideology of Pan-Turkism in this context, the victimization discourse of the opposition is in tension with its discourse on Russia and CU, thus making them more legitimate and persuasive.

At the same time, there are certain similarities and differences in the implications of the victimization discourse in both cases. First and foremost, victimization discourse in both cases operates as a prerogative for national security. In this respect, the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh appears to be the decisive point of the discourse. In contrast, if in the Turkish case, the memory of the genocide has been sidelined in favor of economic gains in which Nagorno-Karabakh issue came to strengthen the discourse and delegitimize the official policy, in case of CU, the economic benefits seemed to be sidelined in favor of the discourse embedded in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. However, as it was noticed, in both cases the notion of economic gains appeared to be problematic.

Meanwhile, what was most important, in both cases the victimization discourse was linked to the concept of national interest and statehood. As much as foreign policy is considered to reflect a country's domestic situation and given the absence of clear perception of national interest within the political, as well as public realm of Armenia, the victimization discourse would always be constrained within the frames of national security which, in turn, slows down the ultimate goal of the discourse-the recognition and commemoration of the genocide by Turkey.

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### **Interview**

Interview with Giro Manoyan, one of the leaders of ARF Dashnaktsutyun and the head of its *Armenian Cause* Office (online), May 2, 2015.

Interview with Giro Manoyan, one of the leaders of ARF Dashnaktsutyun and the head of its *Armenian Cause* Office (online), May 2, 2015.