

Caucasus Institute Policy Brief. Yerevan, January 2015

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The Ukrainian crisis has created a drastically new political situation, reflecting not only the history of the last decades of the former Soviet Union, but possibly the whole path of global politics since the Cold War on a global scale. Not a single political process, no corner of the former Soviet Union has managed to evade the effect of the Ukrainian events and precedents. This policy brief analyses implications of the Ukrainian crisis for the rest of the Post-Soviet space.

ARMENIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS: A NEW FINLANDIZATION?

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The Ukrainian crisis has created a drastically new political situation, reflecting not only the history of the last decades of the former Soviet Union, but possibly the whole path of global politics since the Cold War on a global scale. Not a single political process, no corner of the former Soviet Union has managed to evade the effect of the Ukrainian events and precedents.

The breathtaking dynamics of the political processes called for both operative solutions and wide, long-term approaches to the post-Soviet countries foreign policy mode. Both Armenia and other post-Soviet countries were forced to reshape their relations with leading geopolitical actors, both regional and global. While geopolitics return to the former Soviet Union, it is not impossible that some new foreign policy concepts, or old forgotten ones, and classic approaches of the Cold War Realpolitik era will also become more in demand by some of the post-Soviet countries.

The Crimean precedent and Armenia: a choice without a choice

Just like its former Soviet Union neighbors, Armenia was absolutely unprepared for the unexpected and rapid development of events around Ukraine, especially after Russia's involvement in Crimea. It primarily manifested in Armenia's official position on the ongoing events, more accurately, in its absence for almost a month. Armenians reside on both sides of the conflict. According to official statistics, more than 100 thousand ethnic Armenians and Armenian citizens resided in various regions of Ukraine. According to unofficial estimations, their number is much larger now. An Armenian community of more than 10 thousand people has traditionally resided in Crimea for centuries; at least 25 thousand Armenians live in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast. There is a huge Armenian Diaspora in Russia – more than a million people. Thus, a premature expression of Armenia's position could have endangered ethnic Armenians and Armenian citizens on both sides of the conflict in Ukraine and around it. This is why it was as late as March 19, 2014, a month after the toppling of president Yanukovich, that Armenia's President Sargsyan expressed support to the Crimean referendum, thus stating Yerevan's official position.

On March 27, during the General Assembly of the UN, Armenia voted against the resolution supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and ruling the Crimean referendum to be illegal. Armenia was one of 11 countries to vote against the resolution that included North

Korea, Sudan, Cuba, Columbia, Zimbabwe, Syria, Venezuela, Belarus and Nicaragua. 100 countries voted for the resolution, against the Crimean referendum, another 58 countries abstained. Yet another 24 countries were absent at the voting, thus not supporting the resolution against Russia.

The pro-Western part of the Armenian society, primarily the student community and non-governmental sector, was outraged by Armenia's stand on Russia's side, against Western countries. A popular statement ran "Armenia got in the same boat with North Korea".

However, most Armenian political parties, including opposition ones, supported Yerevan's official position in the UN. The consolidation of the Armenian authorities and opposition with regard to the UN resolution did not concern the relationship with Ukraine per se. It has been mentioned in this context that for over two decades since the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the early 1990s, Ukraine has been one of the key weapon suppliers to Azerbaijan, Armenia's opponent in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. More importantly, official Kiev, as a member of GUAM and a factual ally of Azerbaijan, actively supported the pro-Azerbaijan resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh in 2008 and 2012. However, Yerevan's position on Kiev was by no means defined by old grudges.

According to the Armenian authorities, the issue was not in the choice between Russia and the West. The issue was different: the text of the resolution on Ukraine contained conditions contradicting Armenia's position with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Particularly, one of the points of the resolutions stated that the Crimean referendum was not legitimate and "was not sanctioned in Ukraine". Agreement with this statement would contradict the Madrid Principles, the main negotiation document on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict developed by the countries co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group (USA, France and Russia). According to the Madrid Principles, the referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh is a key mechanism of conflict resolution and international legitimization of Nagorno-Karabakh's final status.

Accordingly, Yerevan's vote on the Crimean resolution emanated from Yerevan's own political priorities, which served as basis for the political decision: to participate in the vote and not abstain, but vote against. Otherwise, Armenia's positions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would have become more vulnerable.

The Crimean referendum deprived the idea of the inviolability of the former Soviet borders of its sanctity. In a manner of speaking, the Crimean precedent was the last nail in

the coffin of the inviolability of administrative borders in the former USSR. The deep crisis of contemporary international law became both the reason and the result of the recognition of Kosovo by the West in February 2008, made final by the basically one-sided recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia in August 2008. It can also be assumed that Turkey's recognition of Cyprus back in 1983 played its role.

The current international law is mostly a consequence and atavism of the Cold War which still provides its momentum. The late 20th century collapse of the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and the disappearance of socialist Germany, another signatory of the 1975 CSCE Final Act (which codified the contemporary international law based on the Cold War status quo), demonstrated that international law was still unable to adapt to the new global policy. The erosion of international law has continued for almost 25 years and will go on until it is brought in line with the new reality, including Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh and many other such cases.

Despite the officials' reassurance, Armenia's position was not only defined by the possible precedent for Nagorno-Karabakh in Crimea, but by a self-preservation instinct against the backdrop of Russia's growing military power, which has reached its peak in the last 25 years. The Armenian authorities were probably hoping that by openly acting as Russia's military-strategic partner during the vote on the Crimean referendum in the UN and the subsequent vote in the PACE in April 2014, Armenia can expect Moscow to reciprocate with support in the Karabakh conflict and other issues.

As for the attitude of the West to Armenia's position, the Armenian authorities clearly expect that sooner or later the Western partners will forgive and forget. More importantly, there is an impression that following the results of the Ukrainian crisis a certain rethinking of the approach towards Armenia and other participants of the EU Eastern Partnership program is already happening in a range of European capitals, in the light of way that Russia is now breathing down the necks of post-Soviet countries.

Moreover, while Ukrainian events triggered a deterioration of Russian-Western relations, the West and Russia still need to keep in touch on global political issues of common interest, such as the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, the Syrian crisis etc. This means that Russia and the West will be interested in maintaining the existing interaction formats. They are not many, and one of them is the OSCE Minsk Group that works on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia is also interested in the active work of the Minsk group, allowing Armenia not to lower the level of the political dialogue with key Western countries including the USA and France.

Complementarism in a new context

In the new conditions it will be harder for Armenia to maintain its balance between the West and Russia without arousing jealousy on both sides, thus conducting the balanced complementarism policy that has become post-Soviet Armenia's foreign policy trademark of sorts. At the same time, some circles in Armenia and other post-Soviet countries earnestly believe that further strengthening of Russia and toughening of its rivalry with the West threatens their countries' sovereignty and can lead to the loss of independence. A politicized climate and emotional fears were especially apparent from autumn 2013 to autumn 2014, when Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan was being made official.

Up to October 10, 2014, part of Armenia's political gamut, not only oppositional, but also pro-governmental, perceived this process with caution in the context of possible losses of sovereignty and even independence within the new economic and ultimately geopolitical project under Moscow's aegis. Despite the realism of such fears, it is clear that Armenia is in the need of maintaining a compensating involvement of the EU and the USA but not to the extent of encountering the threat of a geopolitical and thus unsafe choice between the West and Russia.

In that sense, a lot depends on the preparedness of the West itself, particularly the EU, for a genuine institutional engagement with Armenia. It is unlikely that in the nearest future the EU can guarantee Armenia realistic security comparable to Russia in the direction of both Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkey. Until now Brussels has been even hypothetically incapable of offering Armenia anything to make it so much as consider the option. However, it is hard to say what kind of security insurance the EU was able propose to its other former Soviet Union partners that appear to have made a geopolitical choice in its favor. Nonetheless, if future relations between Yerevan and the EU move away from attempts at embracing some of the aspects of the geopolitical confrontation, and gravitate towards technical steps towards a deeper economic and political cooperation, Armenia will probably be able combine European integration with a military-strategic partnership with Russia.

In any case, Armenia will refuse to be turned into a platform of a geopolitical confrontation the way it has happened to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and, partially, Azerbaijan. In contrast to other countries participating in the Eastern Partnership program, the price that Armenia will have to pay for such a choice will not be limited to the loss of its

territories, but will also include a geopolitical and humanitarian catastrophe and even the risk of losing statehood. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, Armenia remains the only member country of the Eastern Partnership apart from Belarus to be fully in control of its territory (i.e. what its political elite believes is its territory). After the Crimean events, Ukraine has joined Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova in an almost similar status. It is unlikely that Armenia wishes to repeat that experience.

In August 2008 Armenia succeeded in maintaining neutrality in a somewhat similar situation during the Five-day War between Russia, its key military-political ally, and Georgia, its historically close neighbor and important communication partner. However, during the current Ukrainian crisis, Armenia has much less room for maneuver, all the more so because the Ukrainian crisis is incomparable to the Russian-Georgian August 2008 war in terms of its scale and possible consequences for relations between Russia and the West. Many commentators and politicians have even called the Ukrainian crisis a return to the Cold War. The future will show if it is true; at any rate, the process is sure to have long-term consequences, and Russia and the West will certainly whip up the struggle for spheres of influence in the former Soviet Union, including the South Caucasus.

In terms of a possible return to something vaguely similar to the Cold War (at least in the former Soviet Union and adjacent regions), the external actors and the post-Soviet countries will be forced to react in kind by applying the political approaches and concepts that proved themselves effective in the classic period of the bipolar standoff in the Cold War era. One of these approaches is a kind of Finlandization of the foreign policy of some post-Soviet countries, currently most strongly manifesting itself in Armenia.

Armenia's Finlandization: an example or an exception for the former Soviet Union?

Metaphorically speaking, as a consequence of the Ukrainian events, by spring 2014 Armenia was in one boat not with North Korea, but with Finland: not the modern one but the Finland of the Cold War. However, in Armenia this foreign policy concept was born right after independence in 1991. Back then, post-Soviet Armenia, unlike many of its former Soviet Union neighbors, maintained a balance between Russia and the West. While some post-soviet countries have for the last 25 years built their foreign policy on a confrontation with Russia with the support of Western countries (some Baltic countries, Ukraine during

Yuschenko's term, Georgia during Saakashvili's presidency), Armenia has chosen a different path of combining the mutually incompatible interests of the West, Russia and even Iran.

The term "complementarism" was introduced to the foreign political vocabulary by the 1998-2008 Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vardan Oskanyan, but in reality this concept has been implemented since much earlier, from the first days of independence. The first years of independence are the indicative stage of Armenian complementarism. In the midst of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, by means of exploiting its unique foreign policy environment, Yerevan received weapons and military equipment from Russia, resources for economic development from the U.S., food and humanitarian aid from Europe (transported via Turkish territory until March 1993) and fuel for its army from Iran.

Afterwards, Armenia gradually honed its complementarism technique. In some cases complementarism even gave Yerevan the chance to both balance Moscow's excess influence in the region and the opposite, to suppress that of the U.S. or Europe, e.g. at various stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In this framework the Armenian foreign policy, aspiring to combine Russian and Western interests, depending on the specific situation in the specific period during a simultaneous highly specific equilibrium with Iran, conceptually had a lot in common with Finland's foreign policy during the Cold War years.

The Finnish foreign policy concept, also known as the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line, was effectively used by official Helsinki from the late 1950s up to the collapse of the communist bloc and the USSR, thus allowing it to maintain independence and sovereignty while also receiving vast economic dividends by balancing between the NATO and Warsaw Treaty Organization. At the same time, Finland, which avoided both acceding the Soviet Union and being dragged into the global confrontation, managed to play a special role in European politics thanks to its strong trust-based relations with the USSR/WTO and at the same time, with the NATO countries. These are the reasons why two sessions of the CSCE were held in Helsinki in 1973-1975, and it was there that the Final Act was signed, a symbol of de-escalation between USSR and the West, codifying the main principles of modern international law.

At the same time, it is important to underline that 'Finlandization' as a concrete foreign policy strategy does not imply maintaining a perfect balance between political partners. On the contrary, in one period or another, depending on political practicability, it implies the

possibility of demonstrating political bias and, in fact, alternating between support for either of the poles.

This is exactly what Armenia did in spring 2013 in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis. Meanwhile, nothing conceptually new happened in Armenia's foreign policy. It was due to the current military-political dominance of one of the system's elements, in this case Russia, that a corresponding tilt became noticeable in Armenia's foreign policy, but nothing more than that.

Finlandization is nowhere near a universal method of foreign policy positioning, but right now it is the safest one for Armenia. Just the way Finland during the Cold War was forced by the USSR to refuse to participate in the Marshall Plan, the modern Armenia will sometimes have to consider Moscow's opinion in its economical and military-political relations with Western countries and the opposite, during further development of its cooperation with Russia, it will sometimes have to consider the reactions of the U.S. and the EU.

Many countries conducted single-vector policies at various stages of post-Soviet history. For example, a pro-Western single-vector policy was implemented by the Baltic countries from the moment of their independence, by Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, by Georgia during Saakashvili's term, by Ukraine under Yushchenko and after Yanukovich, and by current Moldova. Up to the early 2000s, a pro-Russian single-vector policy was typical for Central Asian countries and Belarus. But currently a purely single-vector policy is only conducted by three out of four de-facto countries of the former Soviet Union (with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh) and by Belarus, as a result of the West's total rejection of Lukashenko's regime. Most post-Soviet countries now practice a multi-vector policy, strongly similar to Armenia's complementarism and containing some elements of Finlandization. From the late 1990s such a policy was conducted by Ukraine (apart from Yushchenko's term), Azerbaijan and a range of Central Asian countries.

Over the years of independence, Armenian foreign policy has been rather consistent especially in terms of its complementarism. Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan changed its foreign policy. For a long time, during Abulfaz Elchibey's presidency and the initial period of Heydar Aliyev's presidency, up to the mid-1990s, Azerbaijan had a single-vector pro-Western political orientation with an emphasis on Turkey as its medium. It was Azerbaijan's attempt at membership in the CSTO in 1994-1999 and the simultaneous launch of oil projects with the participation of Western companies that forced Baku to equalize that trend.

It may sound strange at the moment, but up to the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, amongst all the post-Soviet countries, it was Ukraine that maintained a balanced Finnish-model foreign policy that was most similar to the Armenian one (taking into account the natural difference in size and geographical location). In this context, it is important that one of the components of the Armenian complementarism is the presence of influential Armenian Diasporas in Russia, in the U.S., European countries, Iran and a range of Middle Eastern countries. Via the Diaspora channels, Armenia can influence the policy of these countries towards Armenia and the region, while they are able to influence Yerevan's foreign policy.

In a similar way, the presence of traditional Ukrainian communities in a range of Eastern European countries, in the USA and Canada, on one side, and a multi-layered sub-ethnic and familial integration between the populations of Russia and Ukraine, on the other, had for many years supported the equilibrium of Ukrainian foreign policy. The fact that Ukraine was regionally torn apart between its west, center and south-east, also contributed to the multi-vector nature of its foreign policy. Finally, the Finland-type policy has had its historical roots in Ukraine from approximately the 17th century and in Armenia, from the 19th century. It can be argued that the historical precedents strengthen the practice of a political behavior, and so does a tradition of its positive reception by the society and political elites.

An essential difference between the foreign political behavior of Armenia and Ukraine emerged in the period between autumn 2013 to spring 2014 in connection with the similar reactions of the two countries to the signing of the Associative Agreement (AA) with the EU, which by then stopped being a technical issue and became an issue of geopolitical choice. Armenia refused to initial the economic part of the AA in September 2013, expressing its intention to join the Russia-led Customs Union¹, but stated its willingness to sign the political part of the Associative Agreement, to which Brussels replied in the negative. Yanukovich's government also refused to sign the AA during the EU summit in Vilnius in November 2013. The ensuing domestic political crisis in Ukraine brought about many changes, including in the realm of foreign policy.

¹ In reality, a little more than a year later, on October 10, 2014, Armenia entered the Eurasian Economic Union that continued the idea of the Customs Union.

Conclusions

The Ukrainian crisis surprised all post-Soviet countries, forcing them to urgently redefine the format of their foreign political behavior. The capability of the post-Soviet countries to react to new geopolitical challenges will mainly depend on whether Russia's military-political and economical influence on the former Soviet Union will continue to build up, and on what kind of opposition from the EU and the U.S. Moscow will run into. Eventually, for the post-Soviet countries to maintain the balance between the geopolitical poles, these poles must be at least in the same weight category, if not equal.

The Armenian Finlandization policy, so obviously manifested as a reaction to the Ukrainian events in 2014, became possible as a result of decades' experience. Armenia's complementary foreign policy, similar to Finlandization by many parameters, may not be the best but remains the safest model, ensuring minimization of risks and losses in the post-Soviet period.

Whether Armenia's Finlandization model can serve an example for other post-Soviet countries (even for those which, like Ukraine, have successfully conducted a similar policy for almost two decades), depends not only on their own choice. The most important factor will be the potential of the two poles involved in the regional geopolitical game and their ability to maintain their role as elements of the foreign policy balance of the former Soviet Union.

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Caucasus Institute (CI) – is one of the leading think-tanks and educational centers in Armenia and the entire region. It implements research in the areas of political science, social sciences and media studies with regard to the Southern and Northern Caucasus. The CI also engages in regional studies on a wider scope.

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