

## Pragmatism of the Ideological State: Main Aspects of Armenian Policy of Iran

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### **Abstract**

*The South Caucasus region has become one of the important directions of Iran's foreign policy since 1991. Iran is closely interested in the processes taking place in the region. Because Iran is connected with the countries of the region by historical ties, neighborly relations and many common security interests. In the first years after the countries of the region regained their independence, analysts predicted that Iran would be able to establish closer ties with Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus. Such predictions were based on the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a Muslim state and prefers an ideological approach to foreign policy. However, it soon became clear that Iran's foreign policy is undergoing a transformation. There are elements of the transition from idealism to pragmatism in the country's foreign policy. Contrary to expectations, Iran's relations with Christian Armenia began to develop better than Muslim Azerbaijan.*

*The article examines the place of pragmatism in the foreign policy of Iran in the context relations with Armenia. At the same time, an analysis was made of the effectiveness of the idealist approach in the foreign policy of Armenia, as a secular state. The article proposes that, although the conceptual foundations of Iran's foreign policy are defined by the principles of idealism, they are pragmatic in their relations with Armenia.*

**Keywords:** *idealism, ideological state, Iran, Armenia, South Caucasus, policy, pragmatism*

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## İdeolojik Devletin Pragmatizmi: İran'ın Ermenistan Politikasının Ana Hatları

### Özet

*Güney Kafkasya 1991 yılından bu yana İran'ın dış politikasında önemli bölgelerden biri haline geldi. İran bölge ülkeleriyle tarihi bağlarla, komşuluk ilişkileri ve birçok ortak güvenlik çıkarıyla bağlantılı olduğundan bölgede yaşanan süreçlerle yakından ilgilenmeye başladı. Bölge ülkeleri bağımsızlıklarını kazandıktan sonraki ilk yıllarda, analistler İran'ın Güney Kafkasya'da Azerbaycan ile daha yakın ilişkiler kurabileceğini tahmin ediyorlardı. Bu tahminler İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin Müslüman bir devlet olduğu ve dış politikada ideolojik bir yaklaşımı tercih edeceği olgusuna dayanıyordu. Ancak kısa süre sonra İran'ın dış politikası bir dönüşüm geçirdi ve ülkenin dış politikasında idealizmden pragmatizme geçişin unsurları görüldü. Beklenenin aksine, İran'ın Hristiyan Ermenistan ile ilişkileri Müslüman Azerbaycan'dan daha iyi gelişmeye başladı.*

*Makale, Ermenistan ile ilişkiler bağlamında İran'ın dış politikasında pragmatizmin yerini incelemektedir. Aynı zamanda laik bir devlet olarak Ermenistan'ın dış politikasında idealist yaklaşımın etkinliğinin analizi yapılmıştır. Makale, İran'ın dış politikasının kavramsal temellerinin idealizm ilkeleriyle tanımlanmasına rağmen Ermenistan ile ilişkilerinde pragmatik olduğunu öne sürmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** idealizm, ideolojik devlet, İran, Ermenistan, Güney Kafkasya, politika, pragmatizm

### Introduction

Iran, one of the powerful regional actors of Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia geopolitics is known for its strong state traditions, rich culture, vast and mountainous territory, rich natural resources, as well as deep historical memory in foreign policy. Armenia, one of its northern neighbors, is a small South Caucasus republic with a completely different political, social and economic structure. The approach of the two states to religion is quite different from each other. The population of Iran are mainly Shiite Muslims. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the country's political system was governed by the legal concept of Shiite clerics and the Shiite sect of Islam. The people of Armenia believe in Gregorian Christianity , a special national sect of the Oriental Orthodoxy. Iran, which became an ideological state after the 1979

Islamic Revolution, also emphasized ideological principles in its foreign policy and enshrined them in various official legislative documents. Iran's foreign policy towards the Muslim countries of the Middle East is quite ideological.

The main purpose of the study is to identify the main principles of Iran's policy in the South Caucasus, including relations with Armenia. It should be noted that there are differences of opinion among researchers on the ideological and pragmatic nature of this policy. The article presents a dualistic approach to the issue. The ideological or pragmatic nature of Iran's foreign policy has been assessed in the context of specific events and processes. At the same time, the role of religion in the political life of Armenia, a secular state according to the constitution, was investigated.

### **Concept and methodology**

The theoretical approach to the study of the problem is pragmatism. As is well known, the study of international relations on the basis of pragmatism has intensified since the 1990s. (Adler 328-330; Puchala 7-16; Smith 23-25). The pragmatists' approach to international relations is generally based on the basic principles of the philosophy of pragmatism. For pragmatists, epistemology—the question of how we know—is grounded in practice, in experience—or, in short, in what we do. Knowing is acting, and the quality of knowledge lies in its consequences (Franke, U. Hellmann, G.). From this point of view, the pragmatic approach to interstate relations focuses more on the practical results of their foreign policy mechanisms than on the ideologies and political challenges of states. In order to answer the above questions, the content of foreign policy concepts and foreign policy documents of Iran and Armenia were analyzed. Then, the results of the content analysis were checked at the practical level of interstate relations.

### **The main foreign policy institutions of Iran**

In order to perceive the extent of the influence of ideological principles in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, realize when the idealist approach is replaced by pragmatic principles, it is necessary to clarify the mechanisms that define and

implement its foreign policy. It is known that Iran has peculiar and unique management system. In a country governed by political and religious structures, clerical circles have an advantage over political governance (Həmidov 55).

The highest authority in the country is the Supreme Religious Leader. Article 5 of the Iranian constitution states that:

*During the absence (ghayba) of his holiness, the Lord of the Age, May God all mighty hasten his appearance, the sovereignty of the command [of God] and religious leadership of the community [of believers] in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the responsibility of the faqih who is just, pious, knowledgeable about his era, courageous, and a capable and efficient administrator... (Ganun-e Esasi-ye Comhuri-ye Eslami).*

Article 57 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that the state authorities of the country (Legislative, Executive and Judicial) are under the control of the Supreme Leader (Supreme Religious Leader). Thus, the Valiyyi-faqih is the final decision-maker, confirming the legitimacy of other institutions in the Islamic Republic (Koç 1-20). The Supreme Religious Leader, elected by the Majlis-e-Hubirgan, heads the country's Supreme Religious Council and is considered commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Supreme Leader controls the special services, has the right to declare war, appoint the heads of the judiciary, and the heads of the state radio and television. Such a mechanism of control over the state apparatus and strategic areas also gives the Supreme Religious Leader the right to have a key and decisive say in matters of foreign policy. According to Iran's constitution, the president elected directly and by universal suffrage has less power and authority than the Supreme Leader.

Although the President has the right to appoint the head of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), which is responsible for the basic principles of foreign affairs and foreign policy, the Council is subordinate to the Supreme Religious Leader. The Supreme

Leader has the right to veto decisions made by the Council or to propose alternative decisions. In addition to the SNSC, other state and power structures are also involved in the implementation of Iran's foreign policy.

Parliament, which ratifies (or does not ratify) international treaties and agreements, plays an important role in foreign policy. The decisions of the Assembly may be challenged by the Council of Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, which consists of six Conservative MPs and six religious leaders (appointed by the Supreme Leader). The council has the right to veto laws and other parliamentary decisions. Another authority, the Consultative Council, plays a leading role in disputes between Parliament and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In recent years, the powers of the Consultative Council have expanded significantly.

Another important structure in this area is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The corps is active in business, manufacturing, and arms trafficking, intelligence, and liaising with foreign structures that many countries consider terrorists, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and radical Shiite organizations in Iraq. The corps is led by people far removed from liberal views - they are religious conservatives, appointed to their duties on two main criteria - personal loyalty to the Supreme Leader and organizational skills. In such a situation, Iran's foreign policy often seems contradictory, because the organizers can not come to a common denominator at some points (Semedov 169)

### **Basic principles of Iranian foreign policy and mechanisms for their implementation**

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, foreign policy is based on four main principles:

- rejection of all forms of foreign domination;
- protection of independence and territorial integrity;
- protection of the rights of all Muslims without alliance with the hegemonic powers;
- maintaining peaceful relations with all non-warring states.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's foreign policy was described in the official concept as "neither East nor West, only

the Islamic Republic." The spread of the revolution based on the Islamic-Shiite ideology, especially in Muslim countries, was identified as one of the main foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic. The leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, said in one of his statements about the export of the Islamic revolution:

*Islam was sent to unite and integrate all nations, regardless of whether they are Turks, Arabs, Ajam, or Persians, and to create common Muslim community in the world under the name of the Islamic Ummah. Because Muslims are a large community, the superpowers and their dependents try to separate the Muslim brothers and make them enemies with their plots in Islamic countries (Erdoğan 245).*

The preamble of the Iranian constitution defines the export of the revolution as the basic doctrine of the state, and ensures the sustainability of the Islamic revolution at home and abroad and the support of Islamic movements in international relations. The preamble of the Constitution states:

*Based on the Islamic content of the Iranian Revolution, which is a movement aimed at the victory of all the oppressed over the oppressors, the Constitution provides the necessary basis for the continuation of the revolution at home and abroad. In particular, in the development of international relations, the Constitution, together with other Islamic and popular movements, seeks to pave the way for the establishment of the common world community, to maintain the continuity of the struggle for the liberation of all deprived and oppressed nations (Ganun-e Esasi-ye Comhuri-ye Eslami).*

Of course, such challenges are ideological and utopian in nature, and given the 43-year history of the Islamic Republic, it is impossible to realize them, at least in the near and medium term.

Some Iranian researchers have also written that a number of goals in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy are utopian. Abulfazl Bozchelloyi writes that due to the contradictory nature of his country's foreign policy and utopian goals, it can achieve short-term successes in the short period, but always fails strategically (Bozcelloui 20).

The export of the Islamic revolution here meant a revolution based on the basic principles of the Shiism. Iranian author Kayhan Barzegar writes that the revolution was a turning point in strengthening the role of the Shiite factor in Iran's foreign policy, encouraging Shiites to express their true identities and show their existence to other groups. He wrote: *'The locomotive of Iran's new initiative was Shiite groups that have long been excluded from the politics of their countries by Sunni ruling elites, who see the Islamic revolution as more of a Shiite revolution'* (Barzegar).

Turkish researchers Serkan Taflioglu and Hikmet Erdogan, referring to religion in Iran's foreign policy, say that *'in fact, Iran does not serve religion, but, religion serves Iran'* (Erdoğdu 268). He wrote:

*The social and economic ties it has established with India despite the Kashmir issue, with Armenia despite the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, and with the Soviet Union despite the occupation of Afghanistan are proof that Iran's foreign policy is more profit-oriented than religious* (Erdoğdu 268).

Indeed, Iran's approach to the 27-year-old Karabakh conflict as a result of Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory was quite contradictory. At the official level, the country supported the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, during the period of active military operations, Iran took the same approach to the aggressor state and the state whose territories were occupied, and simply called for peace. This could be observed in 2020 during the 44-day war between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Barish Doster, writes that Iran makes ideological calls in foreign policy and brings religion to the forefront, but this is just an image.

In fact, Iranian diplomacy is pragmatic and is able to take advantage of the current situation (Doster 46).

### **Iranian foreign policy: realism, idealism, pragmatism and reformism**

In the post-1979 period, there were four theoretical approaches to foreign policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran: realist, ideological, pragmatic and reformist (Soltani 199). The realist approach was initiated by Mehdi Bazargan, the prime minister of the interim government, immediately after the revolution and lasted until the capture of the United States embassy in Tehran. During this period, national interests were the main priority for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while religious interests were relatively secondary. Such an approach has led to disagreements between Bazargan and religious leader Ruhollah Khomeini. The Bazargan government sought to respect international law and refrain from interfering in policies to improve relations with other countries, especially the United States. The interim government did not have a clear foreign policy strategy, and this line did not adopt Ruhollah Khomeini's slogan '*Neither East nor West*'. The interim government opposed the capture of the US embassy by Iranian university students, but was forced to resign after Ruhollah Khomeini supported the students. Iran's first president, Abolhassan Banisadr, also took a conciliatory liberal stance and advocated a more moderate foreign policy. He was more eager to establish good relations with the United States than Mehdi Bazargan. This led to him being accused of betraying the revolution and fleeing Iran. In 1981-1989, the ideological (religious) approach prevailed in foreign policy. Proponents of this theory believed that foreign policy should be based on Islamic principles and the concept of Shiism.

In other words, proponents of this approach thought that all decision-makers and politicians should act in accordance with ideological values. Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to ignore the established rules of the international system and replace the norms adopted in the international system with '*Islamic norms*'. Proponents of the idealist approach hoped that Iran would be able

to spread the idea of the Islamic Revolution to other neighboring countries in the region, and that the spread of the idea of the Islamic Revolution would lead to similar revolutions in other countries. In other words, the supporters of the ideological approach were in favor of a religiously interventionist approach to other countries in the region. Such a policy has led to the highest level of hostility between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Persian Gulf countries. In fact, this period was marked by a period of serious political confrontations (both in bilateral relations and in international organizations) and armed conflicts between the countries of the Persian Gulf region. In the 1980s, the Gulf region was politically divided into two fronts. Iran stood on one side and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on the other. During this period, the leaders of the Muslim states in the region were openly accused by Iran of being "sold" to the West, and Iran supported the opposition movements in the Muslim states. In those years, Iran preferred to cooperate with international organizations rather than establish bilateral relations with countries. Iran had troubled relations not only with West, but also with the Muslim countries in the region. In particular, the characterization of Israel as an illegal state and the issuance of religious fatwas against citizens of different countries exacerbated these problems.

This has led some European countries to recall their ambassadors and diplomats from Iran. However, the administration of the Islamic Republic believed that isolation was useful and necessary for full independence. Iran, which initially responded negatively to UN calls for a ceasefire to end the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, finally signed a ceasefire in August 1988, which Khomeini described as a "drink of poison".

This agreement could be considered as one of the first signs that Iran will start to establish more good relations with international organizations and states. About a year after the ceasefire, Khomeini died in June 1989. A new era has begun in Iran's foreign policy. Ali Khamenei became the supreme leader, and former parliamentary speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president (Keddie 263).

Thus began a new era in Iranian foreign policy, covering the years 1989-1997 - the era of pragmatic foreign policy. H. Rafsanjani and supporters of the pragmatic policy line were well aware that the economic conditions created after the war necessitated the implementation of economic reforms. It was accepted that the main condition for this was the adaptation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to international realities. Thus, Iran has stated that it will respect international law and organizations. During Hashemi Rafsanjani's eight-year presidency, Iran's foreign policy was based on geopolitical needs and little attention was paid to ideological approaches.

During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) there was a transition from pragmatism to more advanced reformist pragmatism. Although Khatami pursued a pragmatic policy, he introduced a number of reforms in domestic affairs. A number of reforms and changes have been made to a number of issues used by the international system as a means of pressure on Iran, such as civil society building, freedom of speech, the rule of law and pluralism. Iran has begun to increase its prestige in the international arena and expand its line of dialogue and peaceful coexistence with other countries. Khatami promoted the dialogue of civilizations, and this factor was influential in foreign policy (Ehteshami and Zweiri 61). The phenomenon of dialogue of civilizations included new assessments of politics. In this case, such changes required new approaches in Iran, which for many years pursued an anti-globalization policy. It was also met with some resistance by conservative groups.

In the post-2005 period, Iran returned to an ideological approach to foreign policy. However, unlike the stage of 1981-1989, at this stage, not the religious-ideological approach, but the national and in some cases even ultra-nationalist ideological approach came to the fore. It is the sharp ideological line in foreign policy that has once again plunged the Islamic Republic of Iran into economic turmoil.

For this reason, Hassan Rouhani, who came to power in 2013, preferred a pragmatic line in foreign policy. Incumbent President Ibrahim Raisi is a conservative. However, the processes in the post-

COVID-19 world, economic and social upheavals raise a number of questions about the effectiveness of the conservative approach.

Today, there are supporters of all four theories in the Iranian political system. However, it should be noted that despite the changes in theoretical approaches and tactics in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, strategic and conceptual changes can occur very rarely. Because the strategic and conceptual foundations of foreign policy are determined and controlled by the Supreme Religious Leader of the country, theoretical approaches and tactical moves directly depend on the views of the President, as well as the ongoing processes in the international arena.

### **Inconsistencies in idealistic state and practical policy**

Based on the model of revolution announced by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the conceptual foundations of the foreign policy of this state must be determined in accordance with Islamic rules and the Holy Quran. In this case, relations with Muslim countries should be a clear priority, and in all cases, preference should be given to Muslim countries. The view of Christian states should be based on the "People of the Book" approach of the Holy Quran. The same approach should be taken in relations with the Jewish state - Israel. Countries that have identified atheism as their official ideology or are dominated by polytheistic religions should be at the bottom of the list. What is the approach of the four theories to Christian states in the foreign policy listed above?

Based on the views of the proponents of a realistic and pragmatic approach, in such an approach, the interests of the Iranian state should come to the fore, and the issues of adaptation to the conditions of the international system should prevail, rather than any religious concept. Proponents of this approach view Christian states, as well as Armenia, as countries where cooperation is possible and necessary. Since the ideology of Shiite Islam and its export are the main ones for the followers of the religious ideological approach, the view of Christian states is somewhat different. Christian states that openly and secretly oppose the spread of Islam (in many cases the Shiite sect) are

considered enemies. Certain cooperation is possible with countries that do not have such activities.

### **Pragmatism in Iran's South Caucasus policy and Armenia**

At the present stage, the goals of Iran's foreign policy in the Caucasus can be summarized as follows:

- border security,
- protecting territorial integrity;
- Preventing threats to national unity and internal stability;
- Achieving the development of economic relations with countries in the region.

Relations with post-soviet countries, especially Caucasian republics became a special direction of Iranian foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR. The collapse of the USSR has created a new sphere of diplomatic activity for the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, Iran's loss of influence in this region could pose new security threats to him. Iran was one of the major regional powers that bordered Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Armenia, the new states of the Caucasus. The new independent states of the Caucasus were chance to open up to the world for Iran, which had limited foreign policy after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

A study Caucasus policy of IRI since the 1990s suggests that this policy was largely realistic and pragmatic, rather than ideological. In fact, the years when the Caucasus states, including Armenia, regained their independence coincided with Iran's withdrawal from an ideological approach to foreign policy. At that time, Iran's new regional foreign policy was based solely on national interests due to the ongoing geopolitical processes, and the expansion of the revolution was no longer a full priority. Jirayr Libardian, an adviser one of Armenia's former presidents about evaluating Iran's regional foreign policy said, *'Azerbaijan and Turkey expected Iran to support Azerbaijan because the majority of the population is Muslim and Shiite.'* However, *Iran acted on the basis of its regional interests'* (Naimi).

Iran's only Christian neighbor is Armenia. In this regard, the study of the views of Christian countries in the foreign policy

concept of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the comparison of relations with Armenia allow to better clarify the nature of relations between the two countries.

The analysis shows that the Islamic Republic of Iran is distinguished by its ideological and religious challenges, but in reality, the country's foreign policy is pragmatic and adapts quickly to the situation (Doster 46). The Islamic Republic of Iran calls the United States, the vast majority of Protestant Christians, the "Great Satan" (Hersberg 26) and has high-level ties with the Russian Federation, a major representative of Orthodox Christianity. The political establishments of both countries continue to demonstrate an interest in developing bilateral relations and to reaffirm their shared geopolitical interests (Dunaeva 443). The relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran with Russia naturally affect the relations of this country with Armenia. It is no coincidence that Russia's influence on the Islamic Republic plays an important role in providing much assistance to Armenia. Or Iran's relations with Muslim Saudi Arabia are lower than those of China, which supports atheism at the state level.

### **The main institutions determining the foreign policy of Armenia and the influencing factors**

In Armenia, which has been governed by a secular presidential system for many years, the main decisions on foreign policy are legally made by the president, prime minister and foreign minister. Since 2018, some reforms have been carried out in the state structure. The process of transition to a parliamentary republic has begun in the country. The role of the prime minister in determining foreign policy has come to the fore. In practice, there are pressure groups that play an important role in determining foreign policy. The Armenian Gregorian Church, the Armenian Diaspora and diaspora organizations operating in different countries influence the determination of the country's foreign policy. As it is known, Armenia is considered to be one of the republics with the largest and strongest diaspora among the countries that declared its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The country's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan,

Robert Kocharian, Serzh Sargsyan and current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan have been under constant pressure from the diaspora on a number of controversial issues.

There are a number of other factors influencing Armenia's foreign policy. The first factor is its geography. Armenia is a neighbor of two strong regional actors - Iran and Turkey, two similar countries in terms of scale - Georgia and Azerbaijan. Although Russia does not share a border with Armenia, it has played a key role in determining the country's foreign policy since independence. The main point in foreign policy is that Armenia's foreign policy has to adapt to changes in neighboring countries.

The National Security Concept of the Republic of Armenia, adopted in 2007, described the country's foreign policy as complementarism. It was written that Armenia supports the establishment of relations in the international arena on the basis of partnership and is developing relations with all forces operating in the region. The partnership is aimed at maintaining balance in the region (Strategiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Respubliki Armeniya 11).

### **Armenia: the idealism of a secular state**

In order to clarify the essence of the view of Muslim countries in the concept of foreign policy of Armenia, it is necessary to pay attention to history. Armenians are trying to introduce themselves as the first nation in history to adopt Christianity as a state religion (Şixəliyev 119). Naturally, by incorporating this hypothesis into the concept of official history, the Armenian state tried to form for itself a "Christian front" against Turkey and Azerbaijan, where the majority of the population is Muslim. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the establishment of a state in the Caucasus for Armenians was part of the plan of a number of Christian states against Muslim states and empires. It is no coincidence that the state called Armenia was established in 1918 in the territories between the two Muslim empires (Ottoman Empire and Gajar Iran). Armenia has always tried to use this factor. At the present stage, Armenia's relations with Iran are relatively exceptional compared to other neighboring muslim countries.

Armenia, which has been at war with the predominantly Muslim Republic of Azerbaijan for many years, has used its relations with Iran to show that its problem is not with the Islamic world. The aim was to prevent the propaganda that the Republic of Azerbaijan could carry out in the context of Muslim solidarity (Haydari 114). Given these and other features, Armenian-origin professor Alla Mirzoyan, who lives in the United States, assesses the Islamic Republic of Iran as a "permanent alternative" for Armenia's foreign policy (Mirzoyan 173-174).

It is possible to see differences in the theoretical approach of different political forces to Iran, but in the practical approach, this difference is not often confirmed. For example, the National Security Strategy adopted by the Republic of Armenia in 2007 provided for mutually beneficial cooperation with both antagonistic states, the United States and Iran (Strategiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Respubliki Armeniya 12). In the National Security Strategy adopted in 2020, relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran were mentioned as the fifth priority in foreign policy after Russia, the United States, the European Union and even Georgia. This was due to the cold attitude of the Nicole Pashinyan regime towards Iran. Both geopolitical processes, events in Armenia, silence in irreconcilable rapprochement in Iran-Armenia relations will allow us to differentiate the post-April 2018 phase as a new phase. Compared to its predecessors, it demonstrates that in this period, Armenia has paid more attention to relations with the Western countries than with the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the key factors affecting relations with Iran is the fact that Nikol Pashinyan, who became prime minister as a result of "Velvet Revolution" at this stage, seeks to win support from Western countries, including the USA. However, the geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions were different, and it soon became clear to Nikol Pashinyan's government that it had to take into account Iran's position. The importance of Iran as an "economic breath" for Armenia discouraged Armenia from opposing him. The "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia - 2020" clearly states this:

*Stability in neighboring Georgia and Iran is of great importance for Armenia. Based on mutually beneficial and special good-neighborly relations with Georgia and Iran, Armenia shall advance its effective cooperation with them in various dimensions, while taking care to shield these relationships from extraneous geopolitical influence (Strategiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Respubliki Armeniya. Ustoichivaya Armeniya v meniaiuschiemsia mire. 12).*

### **Conclusion**

The assessment of political relations between Armenia and Iran on various indicators suggests that the development and decline of these relations are directly related to geopolitical processes and security interests. Political relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran are influenced by geographical, historical, demographic, geopolitical, security and economic factors. The proximity of the two countries and the existence of physical borders determine the establishment and existence of relations. The geographical and geopolitical position and economic opportunities of the Islamic Republic of Iran make it one of the most important countries for Armenia. Although Iran is trying to turn Armenia into a corridor for access to Europe, it is not possible due to these geopolitical factors. Iran sees Armenia as one of the means to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus.

The historical factor increases Iran's ability to influence Armenia, but at the same time causes it to be cautious about some issues that have left their mark on the memory of statehood. The demographic factor causes Iran to use Armenians as a balancing tool in solving some ethnic problems. Iran seeks to improve its image in the international arena, gain economic dividends, and take advantage of the power of the Armenian lobby in the United States and Europe. Armenia, on the other hand, uses the demographic factor more for the purpose of aggression and economic interests.

Although geopolitical processes have often brought relations between the two countries closer, they have sometimes led to situational crises. The security factor also brings the political

relations of the two countries closer. Iran, which unequivocally rejects the growing influence of non-regional forces in the Caucasus, is trying to keep Armenia under control and influence. Any change in the South Caucasus, including Armenia, which Iran considers a close security link, could pose a threat to the country's security. Iran is a guarantor of security for Armenia, especially from the economic point of view. Iran's attempts to export its hydrocarbon resources to Europe in alternative ways, to look for markets for its products, and Armenia's attempts to free itself from the geo-economic impasse are economic factors affecting bilateral political relations.

The years of Armenia's declaration of independence coincided with Iran's withdrawal from the ideological approach in foreign policy. At that time, Iran's new regional foreign policy was based solely on national interests due to the ongoing geopolitical processes, and the expansion of the revolution was no longer a full priority. At the present stage, Iran's policy in the Caucasus is often not ideological, but realistic and pragmatic.

An analysis of Armenia's foreign policy concepts suggests that, despite being a secular state, there have been attempts to use ideological tools in some cases. In towards to Iran, Armenia is more realistic and pragmatic than ideological. This allows us to conclude that Armenia's foreign policy is dualistic.

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