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REGIONAL POLICY

VELVET REVOLUTION IN ARMENIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON STATE POLICY: SELECTED ASPECTS

Agnieszka MIARKA

*Ph.D. Candidate (Political Science),
Master's degree in political science.
Research assistant at the Institute of Political Science,
University of Silesia
(Katowice, Poland)*

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to analyze and characterize the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia and to present its influence on the politics of this country. The first part of the article is devoted to pointing out the most important factors that led to the mass protests in Armenia, such as the weakness and corruption of political elites, monopolization of power structures by one party, inefficiency of foreign policy or the constitutional amendment of 2015. The em-

phasis was placed on the political determinants of the state political crisis. The course of events during the revolution is subsequently presented, emphasizing the priority role held by the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan. The paper concludes with the enumeration of the most important transformations in Armenia's politics, which were initiated after the My Step bloc came to power, and Pashinyan took over the position of Prime Minister.

KEYWORDS: *revolution, Armenia's politics, Nikol Pashinyan.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of a revolution is an important area of research initiated by political science, sociology, and history experts.¹ The events that took place in Armenia in 2018 have similar characteristics to the Velvet Revolutions that led to political transformations in other post-Soviet countries. It should be stressed that this type of revolution differs from its classical form in that it does not use force to launch systemic changes; on the contrary, concessions are often achieved by renouncing violence and intensively mobilizing the society, as was the case in Georgia (2003). Moreover, the actions are very dynamic and not necessarily associated with breaking the law in a given country. The paper intends to answer the following research questions:

- What were the reasons for the Velvet Revolution in Armenia?
- What was the course of events in the course of the revolution?
- How did the revolution affect Armenia's politics?

The answers to these questions are necessary to analyze and elaborate a complete characterization of the revolution in Armenia, including its determinants, course and effects. It is important to verify the hypothesis that the revolution was an important event influencing the country's domestic and foreign policy. In the course of the research, methods and techniques characteristic of political science were used, among others: analysis of documents and official statements of politicians, secondary analysis of quantitative research, deduction. Due to the formal limitations of this paper, we have selected the initiated political changes and presented the most important ones as subjectively perceived.

The Causes of the Revolution

It should be stressed that the causes of the mass protests in Armenia in April 2018 are very complex and reflect the citizens' weariness of corrupt politicians who are only concerned with securing access to power for themselves, and also their hope for profound systemic changes, guaranteed by a person who is not connected with the elite, namely, Nikol Pashinyan. Also important was the extremely low popularity of the former Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan among Armenians. Sargsyan won the 2008 presidential election with 862,369 votes, which allowed him to win in the first round of the election.² The second place was taken by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of sovereign Armenia in 1991-1998, who was the favorite in the elections. Petrosyan's supporters did not recognize the election results, while at the same time organizing support rallies and protests in Erevan, demanding that a new round of elections be held, while Petrosyan himself stressed the need to appeal to the Constitutional Court over rigged elections.³ The outgoing President Robert Kocharyan declared a state of emergency and the security forces used firearms to pacify a rally on 1 March, 2008 to demand the release of Petrosyan from house arrest, resulting in the deaths of 8 people.⁴ Sargsyan, after his inauguration as president, did not boost the efforts to punish those responsible for the Erevan massacre, which had shocked the public.

¹ See: Ch. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, New York, 1978; C. Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, New York, 1952.

² See: "2008 Presidential Elections", available at [<https://www.elections.am/presidential/election-22052/>].

³ See: *Ter-Petrosyan oprotestuyet itogi vyborov prezidenta Armenii v sude*, Vesti.Ru, available at [<https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=165529&tid=54373>], 12 May, 2019.

⁴ See: "At Least Eight Killed in Armenian Post-Election Unrest," available at [<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/1593576.html>]; N. Borisov, "Potentials and Limits of Political Competition: Institutional Transformations in Georgia and Armenia in the 2000s," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 16, Issue 3-4, 2015, pp. 17-22.

Citizens also criticized the President for being too submissive about the final settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh's status. It is important to emphasize that no satisfactory progress was made under Sargsyan's presidency, and the negotiations reached a strategic stalemate. In addition, in 2016, a so-called four-day war took place, which is a symptom of the conflict's occasional defrosting. The fights lasted from 2 to 4 April. According to data from the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense, 31 Azeri soldiers and 56 Armenians died. The head of the operational department of the Defense Army of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Viktor Arustamyan, pointed out that 29 people died and 100 were injured as a result of the clashes, while Azerbaijan's losses may have numbered as many as 2,000 people.⁵ According to independent sources, the total number of victims was about 200.⁶ What is important is that Azerbaijan obtained territorial gains, including the village of T'alish, but as Thomas de Waal rightly points out, the essential thing was to create a psychological effect in the form of breaking the humiliation and showing the Azerbaijani citizens that Baku is capable of taking effective action to regain control of Karabakh.⁷ From Armenia's perspective, the unfreezing of the conflict and the losses incurred may be treated as a Sargsyan's failure in the form of ineffectiveness of the military reforms carried out and the unpreparedness of soldiers for military operations.

The one of the key determinants of the revolution was Armenia's difficult economic predicament, which had reached the effects of the global economic crisis of 2008, causing the country's long-term economic stagnation, which began to gradually eliminate only in 2017.⁸ This situation implied a rise in unemployment, a fall in wages and forced thousands of citizens to seek work abroad, mainly in Russia. In this context, it is worth stressing the importance of the 2015 population protests. Peaceful demonstrations, which began on 19 June, were a reaction to the government's decision to increase electricity prices by 16% starting in August 2015. The demonstrations were organized by the Stop the Looting civil movement.⁹ It is worth emphasizing that they were an expression of the frustration of society connected with the inefficiency of the political elites to create and implement the necessary internal reforms. Moreover, it was a symptom of the Armenians' growing dissatisfaction with social welfare. The social disposition was confirmed by the results of research by The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), in which as many as 29% of respondents indicated that Armenia's domestic policy was definitely heading in the wrong direction. It is worth noting that as many as 32% of the respondents did not see an opportunity for change.¹⁰ These figures confirmed the apathy and frustration of the society resulting from the political vector that Sargsyan and the dominant Republican Party of Armenia adhered to.

The main origin of the above-mentioned phenomena is the previously mentioned permanent crisis of Armenia's political structures. The party system has been monopolized by the Republican Party since 1999, which dominated the revolution at the highest levels of government, often accompanied by favoritism. The corruption of the ruling center, the ineffectiveness of the concept of improving the political system, the façade of the reforms being implemented, the lack of effective solutions for reviving the economy all contributed to the gradual loss of public support by the Republicans and the President, who came from this milieu. In 2015, as many as 45% of those surveyed by the

⁵ See: "Aprel'-2016: O chem govoriat itogi boyev na linii fronta v Nagornom Karabakhe?" news.az, available at [<https://1news.az/news/aprel--2016-o-chem-govoryat-itogi-boev-na-linii-fronta-v-nagornom-karabakhe>]; "Karabakh Army: We Suffered 29 Casualties," news.am, available at [<https://news.am/rus/news/320751.html>].

⁶ See: L. Broers, "The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: Defaulting to War," July 2016, p. 14, available at [<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/NK%20paper%2024082016%20WEB.pdf>].

⁷ See: Th. de Waal, "Karabakh-2017: budet li vojna," available at [<https://carnegie.ru/2017/02/06/ru-pub-67915>].

⁸ See: A. Iskandaryan, "The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: How to Lose Power in Two Weeks", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Fall 2018, p. 468.

⁹ See: "Protesty v Armenii," *Interfax*, available at [https://www.interfax.ru/story/166/page_1].

¹⁰ See: "Caucasus Barometer 2015 Regional Dataset (Armenia and Georgia)," available at [<https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015/POLDIRN/>].

CRRC declared a total lack of trust in the President, while 41% of respondents did not trust political parties.¹¹ It is not by accident that we refer to 2015 data, treating these variables as a priority in the context of the roots of the revolution. In that year, a very important amendment to Armenia's Constitution took place, which changed the country's political system from a presidential-parliamentary to a parliamentary republic. The changes approved the constitutional referendum that was held on December 2015 and the amendments to the Constitution were supported by 63.37% of voters, which made it possible to implement these changes.¹²

When analyzing the contents of the amended Constitution, it is worth pointing out a few important changes. First of all, the term of office of the President has been extended from 5 to 7 years (one term), he is elected through indirect elections by the National Assembly (NA), and his powers have been limited mainly to ceremonial functions. In turn, the political positions of the Prime Minister (PM) and the government have been strengthened. It is the PM who chairs the meetings of the Security Council and is the supreme commander of the armed forces during the war. The armed forces shall be subordinate to the government, which is also responsible for the development and implementation of Armenia's internal and external policies.¹³ It should be noted that the role of the NA has not been strengthened, as in the classic form of parliamentarianism; rather, the executive body in the form of a government led by the PM has been fortified.

The motivation for these systemic transformations should be sought in Sargsyan's particular aspirations to remain in power. Sargsyan was unable to participate in the presidential elections planned for 2018 due to the fact that he had held office for two terms. The constitutional changes implemented in 2015, which strengthened the PM's position, were supposed to allow Sargsyan to retain a dominant influence on Armenia's politics in the future by holding a key office and filling the cabinet with politicians from the former ruling camp. Such insinuations appeared during work on constitution amendment proposals and were firmly rejected by the former president. During an official meeting with the members of the Commission for Constitutional Reform (2014), the President clearly stressed that he would never be nominated as PM of Armenia, and that future reforms are an appropriate response to the challenges facing the state.¹⁴

Despite these assurances, further political transformations in Armenia have led to a repetition of the legitimacy of the existing oligarchic-political contract. The parliamentary elections that took place on April 2017 were won by the Republican Party of Armenia, which obtained 58 seats in the 105-member NA, which allowed it to form an independent government. Both the results of the 2015 referendum and the 2017 parliamentary elections may seem surprising due to the social mood, but they are the result of very specific phenomena in Armenian political life up until 2018—the absence of strong opposition groups and the electoral apathy of the citizens, as well as the feeling of being unable to change. These frustrations of the Armenian society culminated in the 2018 events. As Sargsyan's term of office expired on 9 April 2018, the NA elected a new President (March 2018). As expected, representatives of the Republican Party indicated on 11 April that the Parliament was designating the outgoing President as PM.¹⁵ These announcements gave a direct impetus to the launch of social demonstrations against the current political agreement in Armenia.

¹¹ See: "Caucasus Barometer 2015 Regional Dataset (Armenia and Georgia)," available at [<https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015/TRUPRES/>]; [<https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015/TRUPPS/>].

¹² See: *Sunday, 6 December, 2015 Referendum*, available at [<https://www.elections.am/referendum/election-26015/>].

¹³ See: Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, available at [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Armenia_2015.pdf?lang=en].

¹⁴ See: "Draft of Concept Paper on RA Constitutional Amendments was Presented to RA President," available at [<https://www.president.am/ru/press-release/item/2014/04/10/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-Commission-on-Constitutional-reforms/>].

¹⁵ See: L. Harutyunyan, "Nedelya v Armenii: Serzh Sargsyan stanet novym prem'yer-ministrom strany", *RFI*, available at [<http://ru.rfi.fr/kavkaz/20180412-nedelya-v-armenii-serzh-sargsyan-stanet-novym-premer-ministrom-strany>].

The Course of the Revolution

The rallies against the Republican plans to appoint Sargsyan as new PM by the NA began on 13 April, 2018 in Erevan. The protesters accused the former president of contributing to the worsening of the country's economic situation. It is worth noting, however, that much earlier, on 31 March, the leader of the anti-regime opposition, Nikol Pashinyan, together with his collaborators, initiated a two-week march in the northern and central regions of Armenia against the activities of Sargsyan and the Republican Party in the country,¹⁶ mobilizing the public to express dissatisfaction. The My Step initiative was established in April and the activities of opposition supporters and revolutionary activists were conducted under the slogan "reject Serzh." The intensity of the protests escalated very quickly. Passengers called on citizens to block bridges without resorting to violence and start marching to the seat of the NA.¹⁷ Notably, the protest movements were characterized by a high degree of decentralization. Many facilities and roads were blocked at the same time, which made it very difficult to disperse the demonstrators. Pashinyan indicated that the goal of this social mobilization was to block the appointment of Sargsyan as PM on 17 April. There were several dozen wounded both among the protesters and police officers, including Pashinyan, who injured during the clashes.¹⁸ The security forces often stressed the fact that the opposition leader may be responsible for the initiated activity.

Despite the described actions of civil disobedience, on 17 April the NA unanimously approved the election of Sargsyan as the new PM of Armenia. In response to these actions, Pashinyan announced the beginning of the Velvet Revolution on the same day. In his view, a revolutionary situation arose in the country.

In many cities, such as Gumri and Metsamor, people were still blocking the roads, declaring disobedience to the existing authorities and beginning mass strikes. At the same time, he signaled that the revolution would be peaceful.¹⁹ The security services remained at permanent readiness, separating the protesters from the government buildings.

The expected breakthrough and restoration of order in the country were to take place during the meeting between Pashinyan and Sargsyan, which took place on 22 April at the initiative of the former president. Negotiations only lasted a few minutes and did not bring the expected results—Pashinyan was uncompromising in putting forward his demand for Sargsyan to resign as PM of Armenia, which the latter interpreted as blackmail. Subsequently, dozens of military units left their home bases and joined the protesters in Erevan.

Pashinyan was detained and arrested by police officers and other security personnel in Erebuni (the southern district of Erevan) as he led the march and called for massive disobedience. The police dispersed the demonstrators and arrested some of them together with the leaders of the demonstration.²⁰ These events did not pacify the demonstrations; on the contrary, they intensified revolutionary

¹⁶ See: "Barkhatnaia revoliutsiia v Armenii: tsentr Erevana otseplen politseyey," available at [https://ee.sputniknews.ru/world_news/20180422/10321279/armenija-erevan-revoljucija-policija-stolknovenija.html]; L. Arutyunyan, "Nedelia v Armenii: oppozitsiia nachala marsh protesta protiv praviashchey partii," available at [<http://ru.rfi.fr/kavkaz/20180405-nedelya-v-armenii-oppozitsiya-nachala-marsh-protesta-protiv-pravyashchei-partii>].

¹⁷ See: "Besporiadki v Erevane: lider protesta gospitalizirovan," *BBC*, available at [<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-43783471>].

¹⁸ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ See: "V Armenii ob'iaвили 'barkhatnuiu revoliutsiu'," *Lenta*, available at [<https://lenta.ru/news/2018/04/17/revolution/>].

²⁰ See: "V Erevane zaderzhan lider protestnogo dvizheniia Nikol Pashinyan," *Radio Svoboda*, available at [<https://www.svoboda.org/a/29185030.html>]; "V Erevane desiatki voyennykh prisoyedinilis k protestuiushchim," *RIA*, available at [<https://ria.ru/20190815/1557520121.html>].

moods, especially in the younger stratum of the society. The intensity of the protests increased and people from many Armenian towns joined the protesters in demanding Pashinyan's release.

The breakthrough moment of the revolution was Sargsyan's decision on 23 April. The former president issued an official statement in which he resigned from the position of PM of Armenia. As he pointed out, "Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was wrong (...)." ²¹ Also important is the date of Sargsyan's resignation itself—the day before the national holiday, which is the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, celebrated annually in Armenia and by the Armenian diaspora in many countries of the world. A potential commemoration of the genocide could have exacerbated the protests, intensifying the chaos on the streets, thus risking a military response from the security forces, which brings to mind the events of 2008.

After Sargsyan's resignation, it was clear to Armenian public opinion that the leader of the revolution would be appointed by parliament as PM, but that the political forces that followed the revolution failed for the first time. During the 1 May vote on Pashinyan's candidacy, he did not receive the required support and was not elected the new PM of Armenia. ²² This legislative decision caused renewed anxiety and opposition among the public. The next vote on Pashinyan's candidacy took place on 8 May during a special parliamentary session. With 59 votes in favor and 42 against, the leader of the revolution was elected PM. In thanking the MPs for their appointment, he stressed that the page of hatred should be closed in the Republic of Armenia. ²³ It should be stressed that Pashinyan's appointment as PM, a symbolic complement to the revolution, is not the end of the revolution in Armenia, but rather the beginning of changes, both in domestic and foreign policy, initiated by post-revolutionary political forces. What is important, when Pashinyan took up a priority position, it was the end of an era in Armenia's politics—that of the total domination of the Karabakh elite in power structures.

The Influence of the Revolution on Armenia's Politics

As mentioned above, the events during the revolution led to a complete rotation of the political elite.

Despite the appointment of Pashinyan as PM of Armenia, the opposition parties could not provide effective support for the leader due to the fact that the NA was dominated by MPs from the Republican Party of Armenia, which was an obstacle to the implementation of reforms aimed at creating a post-revolutionary political vector for the state. In view of this, Pashinyan announced his resignation from the post of PM on October. This was not a sign of surrender of the new political forces, but a desire to complete Armenia's political transformation and cleanse the NA structures of people linked to the former elites. As Pashinyan pointed out in an official press release published by the PM's press office, his resignation was intended to help finalize the revolution, that is to say, the transfer of power to the people. ²⁴ According to Armenian legislation, the NA has 14 days to appoint

²¹ "Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan's Statement," available at [<https://www.primeminister.am/ru/press-release/item/2018/04/23/Prime-Minister-Serzh-Sargsyans-statement/>].

²² See: K. Fedorowicz, "Where is Armenia Heading—The Way to the Unknown?" *Bulletin of the Institute of Armenian Studies*, No. 2, May-July 2018, p. 6 (in Polish).

²³ See: "At Special Sitting of RA National Assembly Nikol Pashinyan Elected RA Prime Minister," available at [http://www.parliament.am/news.php?cat_id=2&NewsID=10270&year=2018&month=05&day=08&lang=rus].

²⁴ See: "Nikol Pashinyan ob'yavil o svoyey otstavke s posta prem'yer-ministra," available at [<https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/29547027.html>].

a new PM, otherwise the parliament is dissolved and the president announces early elections. Indeed, MPs were unable to elect a new PM, and early parliamentary elections took place on 9 December. The opposition bloc My Step achieved unquestionable success (My Step Parties Alliance with 70.42% of the vote, which translated into 88 of 132 seats in the NA). Significantly, the Republican Party of Armenia won only 4.7% of the vote, and its representatives did not become a part of the newly elected parliament.²⁵ The results of the elections reflect the great public trust enjoyed by the Pashinyan group, which is the only party in the perception of the people capable of carrying out the necessary reforms that can raise the standard of living in the country.

The PM initiated a very important organizational change in the government. The project assumed a reduction in the number of ministries from 17 to 12. The Ministry of Agriculture was supposed to be merged with the Ministry of Economic Development and Investment.

In addition, the post of the first deputy prime minister was abolished, and two deputy prime ministers were proposed in place of three. The NA passed the draft in its second reading on 8 May, 2019, when 79 MPs voted in favor of the draft, 41 against and 1 abstained. It is worth noting that the two parties with the largest number of representatives in the parliament after the Pashinyan's party voted against the proposed changes. In the case of the Bright Armenia Party, the objections resulted from the fact that the Security Service and the Police were not given the status of ministries, so that they would not be directly subordinate to the PM, indicating that this strengthens the "super-premier" system. On the other hand, MPs representing the Prosperous Armenia Party expressed their disapproval of the plans to merge the ministries.²⁶ The changes were voted through due to the fact that the My Step had a constitutional majority. Such an organizational form of government is intended to reduce the unnecessary growth of the administration and to improve the management of government administration, making it more effective.

An extremely important change in Armenia's internal policy is the initiation by the new PM and ruling camp of the campaign against corruption at the highest levels of government, as well as accounting for the mistakes made by the predecessors. This goal was clearly stated during the Address delivered by the PM on 7 June, 2018 during the NA sitting. The key tasks of the new government included public rejection of corruption as a means of building a corruption-free society, as well as separating politics and business.²⁷

Pashinyan considered it crucial to punish those responsible for the events of 1 March, 2008, which became a symbol of the deepening authoritarianism in the state. The arrest of former President Kocharyan on 28 July, 2018 was an absolutely unprecedented event. The Special Investigation Service accused the former President, under Article 300.1 of the Criminal Code, of breaching the constitutional order in Armenia, threatening to imprison him for 10 to 15 years.²⁸

In addition, the President was accused of accepting large bribes. A month later, the President was released for immunity, and then arrested again on New Year's Day. In May 2019, Kocharyan was released again by the court on bail, the current President of the Republic of Artsakh being among

²⁵ See: "Sunday, 9 December, 2018 Parliamentary Elections," available at [<https://www.elections.am/parliamentary/>] (in Armenian).

²⁶ See: *Zakon Respubliki Armenia ot 16 maia 2019 goda No. ZR-31 O vnesenii izmeneniy i dopolneniy v Zakon „O strukture i deiatelnosti Pravitelstva*," available at [http://base.spinform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=116107]; "Natsionalnoe sobranie prinialo proekt izmeneniy v strukture pravitelstva," *Radio Azatutyun*, available at [<https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/29928441.html>]; *Structure*, available at [<https://www.gov.am/en/structure/>].

²⁷ See: "Speech Delivered by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan While Introducing the Government Program to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia," available at [<https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/06/07/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech-National-Assembly/>].

²⁸ See: "2nd President Kocharyan's Attorneys to Submit Appeal to Court of Cassation on 30 or 31 August," *Armenpress*, available at [<https://armenpress.am/eng/news/945490.html>].

bail bondsmen, but at the end of June he was arrested for the third time.²⁹ Despite appeals by Kocharyan's defenders to the PM to intervene in order to allow a free response, he did not intervene in this case. On the one hand, bringing about Kocharyan's conviction is to be undeniable proof of the implementation of the slogan of destroying old systems based on oligarchic connotations and authoritarian governing style. There can be no denying the strong personal motivation of Pashinyan due to the repressions he experienced in connection with the 2008 events.

An example of the fight against corruption and the criminal past of high-ranking officials is the case of General Manvel Grigoryan. He was arrested in June 2018 and charged with illegal acquisition, sale and transport of weapons, ammunition and explosives and the misappropriation of property³⁰. Grigoryan was repeatedly awarded for his service, including the title of the Hero of Artsakh. This should be treated as the end of the glorification of those who fought in the Nagorno-Karabakh War and the consequent lustration of public space in order to vet those connected with the old system. What is noteworthy is that Pashinyan was taking steps to obtain support from EU structures for the effective implementation of the anti-corruption program, including the construction of an independent judiciary system in Armenia, free from political pressure, as he had mentioned during his speech to the PACE (April 2019).³¹

The leading EU decision-makers declare their support for Armenia's striving for democracy and implementing necessary reforms. During his meeting with the PM of Armenia, Donald Tusk stressed the readiness of EU structures to increase financial and technical assistance to Erevan, as well as support for the fight against corruption and the implementation of the rule of law reform throughout the country (July 2019).³² The approval of the West is extremely important for the success of the post-revolutionary political changes, because without financial support and foreign specialists Armenia will not be able to effectively implement the new development program due to its economic weakness.

The economic strengthening of the country has also become a matter of concern for the new government. At the beginning of February 2019, the PM announced a program of economic revolution—one of the priority objectives of the government's activities over the next five years was to create a competitive and exclusive export-oriented economy, meeting the highest international standards.³³

It is worth noting that economic innovations are not only important for building up the welfare of society, but also for the ultimate elimination of corruption. Transparency and lack of system gaps will remove the possibility of corrupt activities. As an example of mechanisms intended to help Armenia's economic recovery, we should point to the agricultural reform currently being prepared. Its most important objective is to bring the country closer to the status of an industrial state.³⁴

The package of reforms initiated by Pashinyan concerning areas important for the economy, such as tax and pension policy, combating corruption, strengthening competitiveness and the labor

²⁹ See: "Zashchita Kocharyana poprosila sud osvobodit yego pod zalog," *RIA*, available at [<https://ria.ru/20190708/1556317400.html>].

³⁰ See: "General Manvel Grigoryan ostanetsya pod strazhey—resheniye suda," *NewsArmenia*, available at [<https://newsarmenia.am/news/armenia/general-manvel-grigoryan-ostanetsya-pod-strazhey-reshenie-suda-/>].

³¹ See: *Report Sixteenth Sitting Thursday 11 April, 2019 at 10 a.m.*, available at [<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/Records/2019/E/1904111000E.pdf>].

³² See: "Remarks by President Donald Tusk after His Meeting with Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan," available at [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2019/07/10/remarks-by-president-donald-tusk-after-his-meeting-with-prime-minister-of-armenia-nikol-pashinyan/>].

³³ See: "Nikol Pashinyan: 'The Program of the Government of the Republic of Armenia Ushers in the Launch of the Economic Revolution'," available at [<https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/02/08/Cabinet-meeting/>].

³⁴ See: "Government Discusses Land Reform-related Issues," available at [<https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/07/14/Meeting/>].

market, was positively evaluated by the International Monetary Fund's experts. According to their forecasts, the full implementation of economic reforms could result in Armenia's GDP growth of up to 7%.³⁵ Undoubtedly, the economic package is intended primarily to stabilize the economy, as economic growth in 2018 was 2.3% lower than in 2017.³⁶ The economy is expected to accelerate in 2019 and the growth may amount to 4.8%. Comparing data from other South Caucasian countries, it should be noted that Armenia's economic growth is slightly higher than that of Georgia (expected growth in 2019—4.7%), where reforms have been implemented for many years, and much higher than in Azerbaijan (expected growth in 2019: 2.6%).³⁷

In view of the above, it can undoubtedly be said that the economic changes initiated by the post-revolutionary political forces should be seen as a positive direction of Armenia's economic transformation.

The impact of the revolution on the Armenian authorities' approach to the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh is also worth analyzing. As for the issue of regulating the status of Nagorno-Karabakh—a region inhabited by more than 90% Armenians, which is *de jure* part of Azerbaijan, but which has functioned *de facto* as an independent entity since 1994,³⁸ the position of the new authorities was of interest not only to the national, but also to the international public opinion. This is due to the fact that the PM was not linked to the region, which could have implied, for example, a decrease in the Armenian authorities' desire to determine the final legal status of these lands during negotiations with Azerbaijan alone.

In this context, the direction of Pashinyan's first foreign visit should be interpreted as an extremely symbolic decision. Pashinyan did not follow the tradition of going to Russia, but went to Artsakh instead. On 9 May, 2018, he met the President of the unrecognized republic in Stepanakert. This event is extremely important because during his speech he presented the position of the post-revolutionary political forces on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. The PM expressed his support for the para-state, while emphasizing the readiness to conduct negotiations with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, under the OSCE Minsk Group format; as he pointed out, the Azerbaijani side should respect the right to self-determination of the Nagorno-Karabakh population. It is worth noting that the PM said that Nagorno-Karabakh should be recognized as a party to the conflict and that representatives of the region should take part in negotiations.³⁹

This is a view that is completely different from the international perception of the conflict, which perceives it as an interstate conflict, so the talks were held at the level of Armenia-Azerbaijan, considered parties to the conflict, without the voice of the separatist authorities. A strong emphasis on the leading role of Stepanakert as an independent entity indicates that Erevan will no longer act as an intermediary for the region's interests in the international arena, although it will still be considered a guarantor of its security and survival. This is the result of the general shape of government policy according to the "Armenia first" principle, i.e. the focus on the internal transformation of the country and the willingness to be a force supporting, rather than creating, the peace process. This

³⁵ See: IMF Staff Country Reports, "Republic of Armenia: Selected Issues," p. 9, available at [<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2019/06/05/Republic-of-Armenia-Selected-Issues-46969>, available 2019-09-02].

³⁶ See: "Economic Growth to Speed Up in 2019 with the Revival of Investment Activity," available at [<https://eabr.org/en/press/news/armenia-economic-growth-to-speed-up-in-2019-with-the-revival-of-investment-activity/>].

³⁷ See: "Comparative Economic Forecasts for Central Asian Countries," available at [<https://www.adb.org/countries/armenia/economy>].

³⁸ For more details, see: Th. de Waal, *Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York and London 2003; M. Mooradian, D. Druckman, "Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh 1990-95," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 36, Issue 6, 1999; S.E. Cornell, "Undeclared War: The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict Reconsidered," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XX, No. 4, Summer 1997.

³⁹ See: "PM Attends Triple Holiday-Dedicated Events in Artsakh," available at [<https://www.primeminister.am/en/Artsakh-visits/item/2018/05/09/Prime-Minister-Nikol-Pashinyan-visited-Artsakh/>].

could also be a way of peaceful absorption of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia, as argued by the voice of the people of this region. As Eduard Abrahamyan rightly pointed out, during the revolution Pashinyan called for the revitalization of the Miacum!, the idea of unifying Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁰

It is also noteworthy that Pashinyan met with Aliyev several times. One could mention the meeting of the two decision-makers in Vienna (March 2019), under the auspices of the Minsk Group. The PM stressed the need for further efforts to stabilize the situation in areas close to the front line. Politicians had already agreed on the need to strengthen the ceasefire mechanisms.⁴¹ The revival of contacts is important in order to create the right conditions for negotiations, although key decisions cannot be expected within a few months. The peace process will have a positive impact if there is the political will to make concessions on both sides. However, it should be stressed that, given the stagnation in the negotiations, such steps should be interpreted as positive steps by the post-revolutionary authorities.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the revolution was the beginning of important changes in Armenia's domestic and foreign policy. The ruling center, headed by Nikol Pashinyan, began a ruthless fight against corruption at the highest levels of government, as well as accounting for the mistakes made by its predecessors.

Moreover, since the revolution, large-scale economic reforms have been implemented to stimulate Armenia's economy and make it more attractive to investors. The position of Yerevan on the final regulation of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh was also transformed and talks on this subject between representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan were intensified. In this respect, it should be pointed out that the research hypothesis proved to be true. The work on this paper inspired the author to conduct further research on the creation of vectors in Armenia's politics, as it may change the balance of power in the South Caucasian region.

⁴⁰ See: E. Abrahamyan, "Pashinyan Stiffens Armenia's Posture Toward Karabakh," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 15, Issue 72, available at [<https://jamestown.org/program/pashinyan-stiffens-armenias-posture-toward-karabakh/>].

⁴¹ See: "Vstrecha Pashinyana i Aliyeva vyzvala sderzhanny optimizm v Armenii," *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, available at [<https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/333634/>].