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Emil ORDUKHANYAN – PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor. Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law, National Academy of Sciences, Armenia
Phone: +37411530571
Email: ipsl@sci.am, emil.ordukhanyan@gmail.com

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POLITICAL STUDIES,
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY,
LEGAL STUDIES

THE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA: GAMBIT OR POLITICAL TRICK?

Katerina Altunyan, PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor at the Chair of Public Administration, Yerevan State University
ORCID iD: 0009-0000-4506-6300
(email: katya.altunyan@ysu.am)

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Abstract

The article represents a comprehensive comparative research on administrative reforms in the local self-government system in the Republic of Armenia (RA), European model countries and Georgia. Research shows that reforms remake the logic of local public administration and political system to serve the needs of good governance, to develop better administration.

*The **aim** of current research is to clarify the outcomes of local administrative reforms held in the RA. The **research purpose** is the following: reforms are often debated as either strategic steps towards improved governance and citizen participation (a gambit) or manipulative maneuvers to consolidate power (a political trick). Due to the creation of new communities and merging the previous smaller ones, the research study analyzes possible policy options in the area of local self-governance of RA. An **important aspect** of research here is the analysis of political impacts based on the municipal reforms and decentralization.*

***Another aspect of the research purpose** refers to the study on the problem of institutional mechanisms for good governance and administration outside of and within the local public administration system. A number of cases and regulations have been studied, including European and regional, to reveal the functional mechanism and its effectiveness. As a result, the Armenian case study showed that joining international conventions hasn't guaranteed changes to the local public administration system comprehensively. It is assumed that real reforms will likely have to be within a system.*

Findings suggest that "gambit" in the local public administration system, in the case of the RA, should refer to strategic actions and calculations that bridging the gap between state and municipal subsystems.

Keywords: Local autonomy index, municipality, local democracy, public administration reform, decentralization, community, gambit, political trick, enlargement.

Introduction

Within the framework of democratic decentralization, administrative reforms are part of the everyday life of modern countries, which are looking for new ways to manage the public sector under the influence of various factors. In order to obtain the high place, governments and political elites rethink their role and design country development strategies. Their successful experience is especially urgent for "running democracies" that want to establish modern local public administration systems. The implementation of administrative reforms is a long-term process, which is due to the object of reform being unchanged throughout the period, while the ways of reform change according to the state of public administration.

Across Europe, there are **three main paradigms of reform**. ***The first paradigm*** concerns the introduction of Neo-Weberian style structures and processes, transforming systems into modern and innovative administrations that are guided by the rule of law, operate transparently within a reasonable timeframe. ***The second reform paradigm***, often referred to as "New Public Administration", mainly concerns the introduction of a market type mechanism. ***The third paradigm*** of reform combines elements of "Weberianism" with aspects of "New Public Administration" (Zlyvko et al., 2021, p. 816; Hammerschmid et al., 2018, pp. 2-3)

Due to research, it becomes clear that the main administrative reforms were aimed at: relations between the central, regional, and local levels of government; organization of public services; principles of financial management; development of state policy and evaluation of management results. The basis of administrative reform is the relationship between the state and society or between local self-government and citizens (Zlyvko et al., 2021, p. 816). However, one of the specific objects of current research method emphasizes also the importance of administrative/territorial and organizational aspects within the framework of local public administration reforms.

Research Methodology

As the **fundamentals of research** frame serve decentralization theory, as well as new public governance theory. The article examined the theoretical implementation of practical issues addressed in the local self-government system in the RA. Research methodology involves a comparative approach, a case study, and indexes, with the aim of understanding the impact of reforms on local governance.

The **hypothetical-deductive method** was conducive in determining the direction of the research that is determining the impact of the decentralization reforms on the local self-government system in the RA.

A **systematic approach** was chosen to consider the processes of restoration or formation of self-government bodies of different levels as components of the decentralized system in their interaction and development.

The factors are especially important for understanding the results of reforms that include: the administrative system and culture of the country or region, which is determined by its history, the initial status of the territory before the reform, especially the size, number of participating municipalities, type of amalgamation and reforms that have taken place in the past; new reform process, implementation strategy; local government and the dynamics of consensus; political incentives and political leadership in the reform process.

The selection of RA and Georgia indicates the need to introduce a **local government index**. It was introduced the self-rule index held by European Commission (European Commission, 2022, pp. 60-68). The research paid attention to **three variables** of assessment: **central and regional access, interactive rule and local autonomy**.

Central or regional access looks at the extent to which local authorities have regular opportunities to influence policy-making of higher levels of government. According to that ranking: (1) local authorities have access to higher-level decision-making through formal consultation procedures and mechanisms; (2) local authorities have access to higher-level decision-making through formal representation structures; (3) local authorities have access to higher-level decision-making through more informal channels (e.g. through trade unions that try to set the legislative agenda, party political networks, dual mandate holding, etc.) (min. 1, max. 3).

Interactive rule points to ways and means of mutual influence between local and central government, and highlights opportunities for local government as an active player vis-a-vis central government. The range of values for this variable is between 0 and 9.

Local Autonomy sums up all the variables presented so far. It is thus the aggregation of all 11 variables or, alternatively, the sum of self-rule (8 variables) and interactive rule (3 variables). The lowest value measured is 12.11, the highest 32.35. Armenia's indicators are presented, e.g., in ***Table 1***.

Table 1. *Local Government in Armenia 2015-2020*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Central or regional access	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Interactive rule	3.86	3.86	3.86	3.86	5.37	5.37
Local autonomy	16.55	16.56	16.57	16.58	17.45	17.50

Source: European Commission. (2022). Self-Rule Index for Local Authorities in the EU, Council of Europe and OECD Countries, 1990-2020.

By adapting the international experience to local government setup in RA, CFOA and CRRC-Armenia foundation developed a unique assessment methodology in 2017 and published it in a book "Local Governance Annual Index, Armenia" (LGAI), e.g., ***Table 2***. This initiative was completed within the framework of the USAID-funded "Civic Engagement in Local Governance" (CELoG) program implemented since 2014 by a consortium of 6 local organizations led by CFOA. The sectors include local governance reforms, municipal assets, development programs, finances, local democracy, municipal service delivery, etc. Unfortunately, this index has not been calculated since 2020, which explains the absence of an indicator for the last five years.

Table 2. *Local Governance Annual Index, Armenia*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Armenia	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.8	4.7	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Shahbazyan, V. (2021). Local Governance Annual Index, Armenia 2019.

In order to make the study credible, e.g., in ***Table 3***, the results of the monitoring were shown, conducted by the same European Commission, in particular, the local index with seven criteria for two countries: Armenia and Georgia (Shahbazyan, 2021, pp. 5-7).

Table 3. *Seven dimensions of local autonomy, Armenia and Georgia from 2015 to 2020*

	Legal autonomy	Policy scope	Political discretion	Financial autonomy	Organiz. autonomy	Non Interference	Access
Armenia	66,67	45,71	48,28	28,79	46,02	63,88	33,33
Georgia	50,00	59,31	58,58	23,21	93,75	66,67	66,67

Theoretical framework of research is the theory of **democratic decentralization**. Democratic decentralization is the development of reciprocal relationships between central and local governments and between local governments and citizens (Barnett et al., 1997, p. 2).

Local Public Administration Reforms. Implementation of European Model

The approaches and practices in the different developed states offer a broad basis for studying the functioning of a well-established local self-government and its relationship to state authorities (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p. 123; Siur et al., 2023, pp. 6-9). Among them, **the best case of the first paradigm** is **Germany**.

Primarily for understanding the structure of the local self-government system of Germany, the distinction between counties and municipalities is fundamental. The **counties** are entities whose origins can be found in the early history of German administration. On the one hand, a county is an association of municipalities, which are therefore also referred to as "municipalities belonging to a county". On the other hand, counties – like the municipalities – are also considered local authorities with the constitutional right of self-government. While counties have a comparatively higher degree of homogeneity regarding population (and size of their territory), the population of (county-free) cities and municipalities (belonging to a county) differ vastly (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, pp. 125-127).

In addition, there are some municipalities with less than 100, while others have 100,000 inhabitants. In some states, attempts have been made to address this disparity by merging the small and very small communes into more powerful municipalities. Especially in Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland regional reforms in the 1970s led to the creation of larger, more powerful municipalities. Here, and also in particular in Baden-Württemberg,

Bavaria, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia, together with a few united municipalities, a considerably high number of small and very small municipalities continue to exist, which have been combined into municipal associations acting below the county level to compensate for their lack of capacity (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, pp. 127-128).

These associations, established as a result of enlargement, are described as administrative partnerships (Verwaltungsgemeinschaften), municipal associations (Ämter), or 'double-decker' municipalities (Verbandsgemeinde). They are essentially distinguished by the fact that they perform most of the administrative tasks of their member municipalities in a quasi-managing capacity and are thus able to provide the necessary administrative structures. The member municipalities of such associations also have their own mayor and a municipal representative body (municipal council) (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p.128).

Besides, all local authorities in Germany have a chief administrative officer. In the counties, the officer is called the commissioner of the county (Landrat). In the municipalities, the chief administrative officer is referred to as the mayor (Bürgermeister) in the cities, and, in accordance with the relevant state law, in larger municipalities he/she is referred to as the lord mayor (Oberbürgermeister). Except for smaller municipalities, the chief administrative officials are employed full-time and are salaried. Mayors employed full-time are directly elected by the people. It is only in the case of voluntary mayors of smaller municipalities that an election by the representative body is foreseen according to the local constitutional law of some states (e.g., in Brandenburg) (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p.137).

Local self-government in Germany is constitutionally guaranteed and operates under the principle of the municipalities and counties (associations of municipalities) managing their own local affairs within the limits of the law. Moreover, the Constitution requires that representative bodies (municipal, city or county council) are directly elected by the people in the local authorities. This special form of the right to self-government of the local authorities has a long tradition in Germany and is closely linked to the principle of subsidiarity (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p.131). In every state, there are municipal and county codes which primarily contain regulations on the organizational rights of municipalities and counties ("local constitutional law"). These municipal and county codes, which in some federal states have also been incorporated into a single law, are supplemented by laws that regulate the local right to vote ('local electoral law'), the right to levy local taxes ('local taxation law') and the cooperation between local authorities (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p.134).

The state has no authority to issue instructions on the primary tasks of local self-government bodies. The state can only monitor and verify that the local self-government body complies with the law in the performance of its tasks. Its control is limited only to legal supervision. Such distancing of the state is also due to the financial independence and resource self-sufficiency of local self-government bodies. Accordingly, local authorities implement the major share of the public investments (Ruge & Ritgen, 2021, p.125).

Germany's local governance system is not static. Under the pressure of and in response to multiple international and domestic challenges, Germany's multi-level system has experienced a "centralizing" trend as the federal government has assumed new competences and tasks "top-down" affecting the subnational levels. On the other hand, the expansion of upper (federal and EU) level policy initiatives and interventions have upgraded and strengthened the position and task profile of the local authorities in their pivotal local level implementation function (Wollmann, 2024a).

In the wake of EU-driven marketization and New Public Administration-inspired "outsourcing" of the public functions, the organizationally integrated local government sector has been organizationally fragmented and frayed while at the same time the non-public and societal actors and organizations have multiplied and extended. As a result (local) governance-type actor constellations typically made up of public/municipal as well non-public actors have further expanded. In assembling around and focusing on specific policy issues they form "policy networks". In coping with the recent upsurge of challenges the local authorities have increasingly turned to and set on local level governance-type actor constellations and networks as a key action potential and strategy* (Wollmann, 2024a).

For the illustration of the **second paradigm case of Ukraine** has been considered. Decentralization of public administration has been number one reform on the country's agenda since independence. The model of decentralization was based on essential aspects related to identifying a new territorial basis of the local self-government, e.g. in the administrative-territorial division, and a transfer of powers and resources to the local level. The first attempt to address the decentralization issue comprehensively and to conduct the reform of the administrative territorial structure took place in the period of 2000-2010. In 2009 the respective reform concept was adopted, but due to the lack of necessary political support, institutional capacity and integral and untied vision of the end result, the reform was finished without even being started (EaP CSF, 2017, pp. 15-16).

* See more in detail in Wollmann, H. (2024b). 71–82.

In 2014 yet another reform was declared. The government adopted the respective Concept for reforming local self-government and territorial division of powers in Ukraine. The Concept for reforming local self-government and territorial structure of public authorities in Ukraine had the following *key priorities*: a) creation of an effective public administration that envisages a three-tier administrative-territorial structure, in particular, oblast/region-rayon/district-community and a clear-cut division of powers between local self-government bodies and public authorities and between local self-government bodies themselves where the most important powers are transferred to the level of public administration, which is the closest level to the general public; b) creation of proper physical and organizational conditions to enable adequate performance of local self-government bodies and allocation of relevant resources for them; c) ensuring openness, transparency and citizen's participation in addressing local issues (EaP CSF, 2017, pp. 15-17). However, gaps and shortcomings of the Constitution of Ukraine have to be eliminated in order to ensure the successful ending of the reform.

However, to clarify the nature of suggesting reforms, it is important to underline that in 2014 already basic laws on local communities were adopted and since then the work on creation of local communities, fiscal and financial independence of local budgets has started. Competences of local authorities have been divided into *three categories*: 1) own powers of local self-government bodies (self-governed); 2) delegated powers, in other words, certain powers of the executive authorities delegated by the state in compliance with the law; 3) powers delegated on the contract basis. As for the own powers of the local self-government bodies, they are designed, first and foremost, to ensure implementation of rights and freedoms of local citizens and to contribute to the social-economic development of the local community (EaP CSF, 2017, p 16).

The natural continuation of the reforms was the introduction of **a new system of intergovernmental fiscal relations**. This system was based on a completely new mechanism for the horizontal equalization of the tax-paying power of territories. The elements of this mechanism were the main and reverse subsidies (Romanova & Umland, 2019).

The *main subsidy* was a transfer from the state budget to the local budget to ensure the horizontal equalization of the tax-paying power of the territory. The *reverse subsidy* meant the funds transferred from the local budget to the state, again, to ensure the horizontal equalization of the tax-paying power of the territories. The aforementioned equalization was applied, for example, in the case of personal income tax. The remaining payments remained at the disposal of local governments.

Local self-government bodies and officials are liable for violating the Constitution of Ukraine or the laws of country. Local public administrations ensure monitoring and control over implementation of delegated executive powers by the local self-government bodies. Control and supervision, local self-government bodies and officials are accountable, controlled and responsible to the local communities. And vice versa, local self-government bodies are accountable to the respective executive bodies, since the performance and implementation of powers delegated from the executive authorities.

The scope of the supervisory powers of the state and especially the executive bodies included financial control over the execution of local budgets, as well as the quality of public services provided, the compliance of local decisions with the constitution and laws of the country through modernized mechanisms (presumably by European standards). Finally, it was expected that the control would be ensured through the institution of governors, who would represent the interests of the state at the regional and local levels (Shveda et al., 2024).

As the follower of the third paradigm, **Latvia** has been considered. Latvia, a post-Soviet state that has managed to implement a successful territorial and local governance policy, has gone through a rather interesting path. In Latvian legislation, the Constitution does not contain a direct provision on the protection of local self-government, although it specifies that councils are elected by Latvian citizens and EU citizens permanently residing in Latvia. Instead, the Law on Local Latvian Self-Government of 1994 has been given a detailed definition of the powers and functions of local self-government bodies and allows them to implement voluntary initiatives in the interests of residents.

First, in late 2000 and early 2001, the draft "On Administrative Division of Local Self-Government" was developed, which proposed dividing the state territory into 102 local self-government bodies. The policy of administrative-territorial reforms envisaged two methods: unification of communities by force of law and voluntary unification. And since the administrative-territorial reforms were implemented with a rather complex structure, many public (state) figures preferred the method of voluntary unification of local communities. The thing is that at that time the government was not able to provide practical convincing answers to citizens about the need to unify communities. It is true that there was a political will to implement a decentralized and democratic local self-government system in accordance with European standards, but the resources, including in the form of policy, were not sufficient at that time. The latter caused the formation of a negative attitude towards enlargement among the population (Vanags, 2005). And although in 2009, 110 self-government units were created from more than 500

self-government bodies, approximately 35 administrative-territorial units refused to merge. The state provided an additional 5% subsidy to the general budget of the merged volosts, which was supposed to interest the unmerged communities. The latter was not effective in practice, since the state was forced to unify the unmerged communities by force of law (Karvatska et al., 2023, p. 16).

As a result of the territorial reform, a local government system was eventually formed, consisting of 110 municipalities (novadi) and 9 cities (pilsētas). It is noteworthy that despite the reforms, according to various assessments, the municipalities still failed to provide quality services at rational costs. In order to stimulate the economy, as well as expand social initiative programs, in 2020, the Latvian Parliament adopted a new package of reform policies. Accordingly, after the local government elections held in 2021, 42 local government bodies were established in Latvia, including 7 cities (valstspilsētas) and 35 district municipalities. The goal of the reform was to create economically self-sufficient territories, whose communities could perform the functions defined by law and provide quality services to the population, while spending money rationally (Reinholde, 2025).

However, the government's administrative reforms faced criticism, first of all from local authorities' association, which applied with an official complaint to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. After a working visit, the Congress spokespersons were critical of the lack of timely and proper consultations with the municipalities affected by the changes, their residents and associations, and called on the government to postpone the reform.

At the regional level, during the Latvian local government reform, 26 districts were abolished and five 'planned regions' were created operating under government control, but having decision-making councils made up of elected municipal representatives. The main functions of regions include spatial planning, public transport and management of investment programs.

Decentralization Policy of Two Regional Countries: Georgia and Armenia

Who should be the initiator of the reforms? A number of authors have emphasized the role of local governments as actors in public reforms (Bastianen & Keuffer, 2024; Bouckaert & Kuhlmann, 2016; Schwab et al., 2017). If the initiator is the elite, then the success of the reforms depends on politicians and bureaucracy, who are the dominant forces making strategic efforts (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 10-12). Then, if the initiative comes from society, the success of the reformsdepends also on local governments. The bottom-up reform can also be through revolution, when ordinary citizens

fight for their rights, but thereby non-systemic method of reform.

Countries of geopolitical territory known as South Caucasus have Soviet legacy. With establishing the post-Soviet rule, they built public administration system on some Soviet centralization principles (Soviet inertion). Joshua Toulmin Smith (1851) described centralization as a system of government under which the smallest number of minds, and those knowing the least, and having the fewest opportunities of knowing it, about the special matter in hand, and having the smallest interest in its well-working, have the management of it, or control over it (p. 20). And since the Soviet system of public administration was formed on the principle of centralization, its institutions did not emphasize fundamental ideas such as the protection of the individual, property, and the system. Based on those perceptions, the most difficult part of implementing public administration reforms in post-Soviet countries refers to the review of the relationship between the state (state institutions) and citizens. However, along with their common heritage, these countries differ in their strategic and tactical capabilities for reforming their public administration systems. Here, **Georgia** ***(Table 4)*** is noted as a leading regional country in local public administration reforms (Liebert et al., 2013, p. 2).

Table 4. *Municipal Statistical Data of Georgia*

Region	municipalities	settlements	cities	towns
1) Guria	4	189	2	5
2) RachaLechkumi and Kvemo Svanetti	5	258	3	3
3) Samtskhe - Javakheti	7	353	5	7
4) Mtsketha - Mtianeti	5	490	2	7
5) Samegrelo-ZemoSvaneti	10	497	9	2
6) Kvemo Kartli	7	347	7	8
7) ShidaKartli	5	373	5	2
8) Imereti	12	559	10	3
9) Kakheti	9	285	9	0
10) Adjara Autonomous Republic	6	342	2	7
11) Tbilisi	1	10		3

Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure: GeoState

Competences of municipalities and division of competences of central and local administrations are defined by the Constitution of Georgia and the Code of Local Self-Governance. The local matters and services are competence of municipalities. According to the constitution: powers of local self-government

shall be delimited from those of state bodies, municipalities shall have its own, exclusive and delegated powers. On the other hand, the municipalities are implementing competences, which are in the mandate of central government or autonomous republic's authority (EaP CSF, 2017, p. 5).

The Local Self-Governance Code determines the following types of State supervision over the municipal administration: legislative supervision and field supervision of implementing the delegated authorities. The legislative supervision is competence of the Prime Minister of Georgia and the field supervision is competence of ministry which delegates own competences to the municipalities. Legislative supervision is concerned on the normative acts issued by the municipal assemblies. Field supervision is concerned on the acts and decisions in the area of delegated competences and it covers both of the municipal assemblies and the mayors (gamgebelis). When performing the supervisory function, the authorized organ or state official has the ability and competence to watch the process that was underway before issuing the normative act, as well as to influence and request to halt or terminate the normative acts that are not in line with the legislation (EaP CSF, 2017, p. 8).

To understand how Georgia managed to gain the reputation of a leading reformer in the South Caucasus, let's take a brief look at the formation and reform of the country's public administration system.

Thus, after the adoption of the Law on Local Self-Government Bodies, administrative-territorial changes were implemented in Georgia. In particular, one thousand communities were united into sixty-nine local units, which resulted in sixty-four communities and five self-governing cities. Local self-government bodies are formed through popular elections, which result in the creation of a local representative body – the Sakrebulo. The latter, at a meeting of the council of elders, approves the structure of the executive body and its head – the gamgebeli, in districts – the gamgeoban, and in cities – the mayor.

The formation of the public administration system in Georgia began during the reign of the first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The ties of the second president of the Republic, Eduard Shevardnadze, with the Soviet nomenklatura greatly influenced the country's administrative culture and system-building process. Large-scale public administration reforms began in Georgia after the Rose Revolution, starting in 2004. First, a push was given to nationwide tax reforms, then to liberalizing the economy, issuing licenses, improving the investment climate, and so on.

Decentralization, according to the Charter on the Local Self-Governance, strengthening of the self-governance and democracy, as well as implementation of the decentralization strategy, were the challenges which, if successfully resolved, would lead to the creation of a real self-governance system, increased democratic involvement in decision making processes,

deepening of Georgia's integration with the EU. Forming the self-governance by passing the new Code on the Local Self-Governance, creation of new municipalities, formation of all municipal institutions by direct elections, as well as, handing a part of the revenues generated in the state budget by the income tax to the municipalities – these were those important steps that have been taken to move forward in the self-governance reform implementation and to advance on the path of establishing a real self-governance.

In December 2004 it has been organized the first National Congress of Local Authorities of Georgia. 900 delegates from all local government units attended the Congress and made decision to establish the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG). It signed a memorandum of cooperation with the ministry on regional development and infrastructure, which stipulates that any legal decisions which have effect on local government has to be consulted with NALAG. Then, it owns National Training strategy for local officials, which was adopted by executive board and it cooperated with national government and international cooperation organizations for its implementation (ALDA, 2011, pp. 45-47).

Along with the progress, some drawbacks and issues were also revealed during this short period of time that might have a negative impact on the financial abilities of the self-governments and their level of independence. Furthermore, the competences on the municipal property management are dominated by the central bodies of administration: Parliament and Government. Just a few procedural competences were assigned to the municipal organs. Some piece of budgetary incomes was assigned/transferred to the municipalities, namely, about 15% of total finances generated from the income tax was transferred to the municipalities/municipal budgets. Nevertheless, of this progress, still absolute majority of municipal finances were managed and dominated by the Central Government: transfers to the municipalities (equalizing, targeted, special, capital), budgetary fund for the regional projects, and reserve fund of Government and municipal development fund are in the exclusive competence of Government. Despite the readiness to pass some of the budget revenues generated by the income tax to the municipalities, the central government is still maintaining its dominating influence over the municipal finances. The large portion of the municipal finances is managed by the central authorities. This is done through transfers (targeted, special, capital transfers).

For understanding the process of reforms in the public administration system of **Armenia**, and comparing it with Georgia, especially in the LSG, we need to evaluate the whole system *(see more detailed map of the administrative-territorial division in Armenia in Table 5)*. Armenian expert D. Tumanyan (2001) divided the process of LSG development into three periods:

a) the constitutional, institutional and structural design of newly established public administration system of the RA (since 1995), *b) creation of LSG system and enlargement of legislative framework and competencies (since 2000)* and *c) since 2002 introduction of new competencies to LSG bodies* (pp. 327-329). As our research shows, the periods are short that underlined by Tumanyan, while we offer another one, which is based on the logic of politics and political programs of elites. The results of administrative reforms are analyzed together with the consequences of the political situation.

Like in many other post-communist countries, the slow development of local self-government and weakness of local self-government institutions are the result of a weak understanding of the meaning of local governance in civil society, hindered efforts to provide solutions for the problems, which is typical also for Armenia.

The territorial administrative reforms in Armenia began in late 1995 after the adoption of the Constitution. It became the legal foundation for the territorial administrative reforms. This was followed by new laws and legislative acts which led to the organization of new systems, territorial administration and local self-government in a short space of time. After adoption of the Constitution in 1995 decentralization and local self-government reform has started. New local self-government system has been established, political, fiscal and administrative decentralization have been implemented, and new territorial administrative division of Armenia is established. These are happened till 2000. Then decentralization reform takes place slowly. At the beginning of decentralization and creation of a new local self-government fiscal decentralization also took place but the process was stopped and there was no any development related to the fiscal decentralization. The same is related to the competences of local governments. Only minor administrative competences have been transferred to local governments but not delivery of public services (EaP CSF, 2017, p 20).

The Armenian Government initiated the Territorial and Administrative Reform of Armenia (TARA) in 2014, led by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI). The "Concept of Community Consolidation and Formation of Intercommunity Unions" adopted by the RA Government on November 10, 2011, summarized the provisions aimed at improving the efficiency of the local self-government system through administrative-territorial reforms, including the principles and criteria for community consolidation. The first phase of administrative-territorial reforms was launched on November 24, 2015, with the adoption of the RA Law on "Amendments and Additions to the RA Law on the Administrative-Territorial Division of the Republic of Armenia", which included the concept of multi-settlement communities and its definition, the principles and criteria for the

consolidation or division of communities, the list of settlements included in the newly formed Tumanyan, Dilijan, and Tatev multi-settlement communities, and the description of their administrative boundaries. In various stages of this process, there was also a "re-consolidation" of already consolidated multi-settlement communities, meaning that previously consolidated communities were included in new community clusters and further expanded. Administrative territorial reforms gained significant momentum in 2017 and later in 2021-2022, resulting in the "restoration" of a significant portion of the former Soviet districts during the sixth and final phase of the reforms. As of January 1, 2024, instead of the previous 915 communities, there are now 71 communities (including Yerevan), encompassing 1,002 settlements. Of these 71 communities, 64 are consolidated multi-settlement communities. The consolidation process did not include Yerevan, Gyumri, and 5 communities predominantly populated by national minorities (ACG, 2024, pp. 8-10) *(see administrative – territorial division of the RA in* ***Table 5)*****.**

Table 5. *Statistical Data of the RA on administrative-territorial division /as of beginning 2024/*

Marz (Province)	**Communities/ districts**	**towns**	**villages**
1) Tavush	4	5	60
2) Syunik	7	7	132
3) Vayots Dzor	5	3	52
4) Shirak	6	3	127
5) Kotayk	11	7	61
6) Lori	11	8	120
7) Gegharkunik	5	5	93
8) Armavir	8	3	95
9) Aragatsotn	8	3	118
10) Ararat	5	3	95
11) Yerevan	12	-	-

During the parliamentary elections of 2012 and presidential elections of 2013*, they were turned into the implementers of orders from the incumbent authorities. This means that none of the public administration bodies have a right to interfere with the powers that are transferred to the local self-government. Besides, powers must be precisely specified without possibility of equivocal interpretation. In reality, the state authorities do not only often interfere and guide, but also sometimes impose certain actions (that are of the

* See more in detail in OSCE/ODIHR. (2012; 2013).

interest of the state authorities) on the local self-government bodies (EaP CSF, 2017, p. 21).

The Armenian authorities did not take measures to enhance the financial independence of municipalities. The share of expenditure of municipal budgets remains very small in the expenses of the consolidated budget and GDP. Parts of municipal revenues are official grants. No steps were taken to foster municipalities' entrance to the loan capital market. Significant shortcomings of the existing mechanism of financial equalization is that the number of population of municipality and, to some extent, financial capacities, are its main indicators, however, the needs of the municipalities are completely neglected. Besides, the equalization subsidy is provided to all municipalities, not only those that are in greater need. As noted above, the Government approved the new draft on financial equalization and submitted to the National Assembly. According to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the administrative supervision over the activities of local self-government bodies should only include the legal domain, i.e., the correspondence of the adopted decisions by LSGs to the Constitution and laws. The scope of supervision can be more only over the delegated powers. Yet, in practice, the supervision over local self-government is far beyond the legal frames and is implemented by different high-level representatives of the government (EaP CSF, 2017, pp. 21-22)

The RA Prime Minister's Decision No. 1111-A of November 7, 2023, on approving the Concept of Decentralization of Authorities in the Republic of Armenia was also adopted in the Republic of Armenia. The Concept of Decentralization of Authorities in the Republic of Armenia emphasizes the initiation of the process of decentralization of authorities and its practical implementation in the context of the administrative-territorial reforms implemented and considers it a prerequisite for the sustainable development of local government (Decision of the PM of the RA, 2023). Demand for hearing municipalities is seen as part of the principles of good governance.

Conclusion

It is difficult to justify the reforms carried out in the Armenian local government as strategic steps. However, if we consider the experience of local government systems established under the three paradigms discussed in the article, we can assume that Armenia has officially moved along the same logic, but the results have been different due to the influence of many factors. The weak perception of decentralization and local self-government has been the reason why the public perception of local public administration reforms has been distorted for objective and subjective reasons. According to this perception, reforms in the local public administration system were

implemented following the example of successful countries, but served narrow social or group interests. The value axis of local self-government, which is formed by trust, civic and political education and literacy, as well as being a legitimizing tool, does not have a conceptual formulation in the Armenian local self-government system, and therefore also no deep understanding and use in practice.

Using the combination of three variables – impact of decentralization reforms, factors that impact on the results of reforms, theory of democratic decentralization, and thereby assessment of local self-government indexes, research methodology revealed a new correlation in the evaluation of local public administration reforms held in the Republic of Armenia. The study of these indices, which are based on various variables, once again confirms that the local government system had low, and in some places even average, indicators, which, in turn, proves that local public governance reforms in Armenian communities had gaps.

For reforms to be targeted and effective, first of all, the paradigm for their implementation must be correct. For obvious reasons, it could not be neo-Weberian, since this paradigm is possible in societies with historical traditions and a political culture of local self-government. The paradigm based on the concept of new public management, adopted by some post-Soviet states, is also not unambiguous for Armenia. The goals and results of the reforms have been different, including those determined by internal and external factors of the local public management system. That is why we consider it important not to look at the external similarity of the reforms in terms of legislative and institutional compliance, but to have a high awareness of the intra-systemic necessity of conducting decentralized reforms and to create an appropriate set of tools.

The comparative study of the experience of Georgia and Armenia has confirmed the thesis that local public administration reforms and the political situation are closely interconnected. In both countries, the implementation of local public administration reforms has been associated with administrative-territorial decentralization. Both Georgia and Armenia are divided into 11 administrative-territorial units (including the capitals). The low effectiveness of administrative reforms, the research showed, is due to shortcomings in administrative-territorial organization. From the data presented in the article, it can be clearly seen that they are quite unevenly distributed.

Nevertheless, Georgia is a leading country in the region in terms of implementing local public administration reforms, as it was guided by the logic of the gambit. Since 2020, local public administration reforms in Armenia have focused on the enlargement process (amalgamation), and less

on improving tax policy, deepening representation, and transparency, which are so important for democratic decentralization.

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THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN THE DEFENSE SPHERE*

Hayk Nazaryan, PhD in History, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of NAS RA
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2540-6424
(email: nazaryanhayk8@gmail.com)

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Abstract

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America were established on 7 January, 1992.

Since the political-economic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the USA have grown rapidly, and these relations have their contribution to the development of cooperation between the two states in the defense sphere, including military education, military medicine, cybersecurity directions, as well as international peacekeeping missions. All these also create the basis for military-technical cooperation. At the same time, the United States is actively participating in the reforms being implemented in the Armenian Armed Forces, including the introduction of a professional sergeant system.

The cooperation between Armenia and the United States in the defense sphere, especially military-technical cooperation, creates a possibility for Armenia to get access to new western advanced military technologies and to diversify the cooperation in the defense sphere.

Keywords: Defense sphere, military education, international peacekeeping mission, Armenia, USA.

Introduction

Armenia and the United States have centuries-old historical relations. Particularly, a strong Armenian community was formed in the United States. The community actively participated in World War I and World War II. There

* In this research paper we continue researching the diversification policy pursued by the Republic of Armenia in the defense sphere. In the previous three papers, we have already touched upon the Armenian-Indian, Armenian-French and Armenian-Greek cooperation in the defense sphere (Nazaryan, 2023, 2024, 2025).

were also active military-political ties between the First Republic of Armenia and the United States in 1918-1920.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America were established on 7 January, 1992 (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2025a). During the last years, political-economic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the USA have grown fast, which is also contributing to the development of the cooperation between the two states in the defense sphere.

The First Steps of Cooperation between Armenia and the USA in the Defense Sphere

Since the 1990s, political-economic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States have been developing. In order to promote the introduction of a post-Soviet democratic governance model and the formation of a liberalized economy, on 12 August 1992 the United States Congress passed Freedom Support Act. Taking into account the war provoked against Nagorno-Karabakh with the help of the Armenian Community and lobbyists 907 Section was included in the text of the Freedom Support Act. The 907 Section banned the U.S. Government to provide any assistance to Azerbaijan "until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh" (Armenian Center for American Studies, n.d.). Later, in 1997, the United States became one of the members of the tripartite Co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russia, France, and the USA) and was engaged in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict regulation process.

In 1994, during his visit to the United States, State Minister on Defense, Security and Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Vazgen Sargsyan had a high-level meeting with his American counterpart Secretary of Defense William Perry. They signed a memorandum on military cooperation in the Pentagon, which was of fundamental importance for U.S.-Armenian defense relations. Some years later, on July 24, 2000, Defense Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, met with U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen in Washington. During their meeting, Sargsyan and Cohen signed an agreement on ending the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which included a provision of $300,000 of equipment and training for Armenia (Sargsyan, 2025).

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, changed the foreign policy priorities of the United States. U.S. President George W. Bush declared a global war on terrorism and international coalition forces led by the United States invaded Afghanistan. In order to support the counterterrorism efforts,

the United States began to provide separate assistance to Afghanistan's immediate neighbors and neighboring countries. In this context, since 2002, security assistance provided to Armenia amounts to approximately 218 million U.S. dollars. At the same time, the United States provided to Azerbaijan (bypassing Resolution 907) about $395 million. Approximately 2,680 Armenian military personnel received training or education in the United States from 2002 to 2019 under two major programs: "International Security Education and Training" and "Counterterrorism Scholarship Program" at leading U.S. military educational institutions. Meanwhile, approximately 5,100 Azerbaijani military personnel received training in the United States during the same period (Luys Foundation, 2022, pp. 2-4).

In 2001, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made a visit to Armenia. That was the first and till now the only visit in history by a U.S. Secretary of Defense to Armenia. Next year, on March 20, 2002, Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan made his second visit to the U.S. capital and met with Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon. Serzh Sargsyan also met with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. These negotiations led to significant outcomes such as the establishment of the Humanitarian Demining Center of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia in 2002. Moreover, in 2003, Kansas State and the Republic of Armenia were linked under the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program facilitating cooperation between the Kansas National Guard and the Ministry of Defense (Sargsyan, 2025).

The United States provided Armenia more than $4 million in 2002, as well as $3.5 million in 2003, for continuing the program to modernize communication systems of the Armenian Army. The Harris company provided equipment for the modernization of the communication systems of the Armenian Armed Forces as part of the U.S. military assistance. On April 26, 2004, the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and the U.S. European Command signed an agreement on the purchase and supply of weapons and military equipment, as well as logistical support during the various operations and exercises. In 2005, the United States allocated $62 million to Armenia, including a small support of $2 million under the Foreign Military Assistance program ("CAWAT", 2022, p. 5).

From October 31 to November 5, 2004, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia and Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Mikael Harutyunyan (who became Minister of Defense 2007-2008) was in the United States and visited the Central Command in Florida, the Kansas National Guard, and held meeting with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wagner in Washington. A year later, in October 2005, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan held separate meetings

with Stephen Hadley, national security advisor of the United States, and U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (Sargsyan, 2025).

Since February 2004, the Armenian Armed Forces have been conducting an international peacekeeping mission (Official website of the MoD of the RA, n.d.). As a result, Armenia and the United States started to cooperate also within the framework of an international peacekeeping mission. On March 19, 2012, a delegation led by the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, Seyran Ohanyan, left for the United States on a working visit, during which he met with his counterpart Leon Panetta, who expressed gratitude for Armenia's participation in NATO missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan (Sargsyan, 2025). Seyran Ohanyan also had meetings with David Petraeus, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Lee Tafanelli, Adjutant General of Kansas ("RAZM.info", 2012).

After some years, on October 31, 2017, the opening ceremony of the RA Ministry of Defense "ZAR" training center took place with the participation of RA Minister of Defense Vigen Sargsyan, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in the Republic of Armenia Rafik Mansour, and Deputy Director of the Planning and Policy Directorate of the U.S. European Command, Brigadier General Dawne Deskins. The construction work of the training center was carried out with the co-financing of the American side (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2017). The "ZAR" training center became the main training unit of the peacekeeping brigade of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, where exercises and trainings of peacekeeping forces are carried out.

Activation of Cooperation between Armenia and the USA in the Defense Sphere after the 44 Day War

After the 44-Day War of 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh and especially, since 2022, the cooperation between the two states in the defense sphere has entered a qualitatively new phase. It was due to some reasons:

- Firstly, the Azerbaijani aggression on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia in 2021-2022.
- Secondly, after the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Armed Forces, the Russian Federation cannot fulfill the military contracts of supplying armament to Armenia.
- Thirdly, Armenia is trying to find other sources of supplement military equipment and diversify international cooperation in the field of defense.
- Finally, the weakening of the Russia Federation geostrategic position in the South Caucasus, allowed the United States to strengthen its economic and military-political influence in the region.

On January 19, 2022, a delegation led by U.S. European Command deputy director for partnership, security cooperation and space opportunities, Brigadier General Edward Vaughan, arrived in Armenia on a two-day working visit. The delegation also visited the Central Clinical Military Hospital of the Ministry of Defense, where the ceremony of handing over the technical equipment of the field hospital acquired with the support of the USA took place (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2022a).

Some months later, on September 8, 2022, Defense Minister of the Republic of Armenia Suren Papikyan, within the framework of a working visit, met with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy Affairs Colin Kahl at the Pentagon. During the meeting, the entire agenda of the Armenian-American defense cooperation was discussed, and agreements were reached on deepening cooperation in the peacekeeping mission, military education, military medicine and other spheres (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2022b). On November 17, 2022, the reopening ceremony of the "Zar" educational center, renovated with U.S. assistance, took place. RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Major General Daniel Lasica, Director of Strategy, Planning and Policy of the U.S. European Command, and other officials participated in the event. The participants of the event toured the reconstructed educational buildings, got acquainted with the work performed, the material and technical base, the conditions created for organizing the educational process of military personnel and conducting tactical and professional training events, as well as followed the demonstration exercise of overcoming the new tactical barrier (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2022c).

Next year, cooperation between the two states became more active. On June 23, 2023, Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan received Laura Kelly, Governor of the State of Kansas and Brigadier General Michael T. Venerdi, the Adjutant General, Commander of Kansas National Guard, who had visited Armenia within the framework of activities dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Armenia-Kansas partnership. During the meeting, the parties stated the progress of the planned cooperation in the fields of mutual interest, including professional non-commissioned officers (NCO) system, peacekeeping, military medicine, cybersecurity (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023a).

On July 17, the First Deputy Minister of Defense-Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, Lieutenant General Edward Asryan, within the framework of a working visit to the United States, participated in the conference dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the U.S. National Guard State Cooperation Program in the capital, Washington. During the event, he met with the Chief of the U.S. National Guard Bureau, General Daniel Hokanson, the U.S. European Command’s director of plans, policy,

strategy and capabilities directorate, Major General Daniel Lasika, and the Adjutant General of Kansas National Guard, Brigadier General Michael Venerdi ("Verelq", 2023a). The next day, Edward Asryan held meetings with the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces, Admiral Christopher Grady, and the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, General Charles Brown. During the meetings, the current course of the Armenian-American defense partnership and upcoming programs, including the introduction of the professional NCOs system were discussed ("Verelq", 2023b). In fact the establishment of the professional NCO system in the Armenian Army is implementing with the help of the American side and becomes new direction of cooperation between two states in defense field. At the same time, establishment and development of a professional NCO system is a crucial step and stems from Concept of the Transformation of the Armenian Army. Particularly, a professional NCO system aims to improve unit discipline, and small-unit effectiveness while fostering expertise at all levels (Dermoyan, 2025).

From August 28 to September 23, the personnel of the mobile field hospital of the Military Medical Department of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia participated in the "Fused Sword-2023" multinational military exercise, which was held at the military base located in the city of Hohenfels, Federal Republic of Germany. The medical personnel of the Armenian field hospital with the American side, carried out the evacuation of the wounded in difficult conditions, get acquainted with the special air medical evacuation vehicles of the U.S. Army Medical Service, as well as the capabilities and equipment of the ground armored vehicles for medical evacuation (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023b).

In September, 2023 Armenia-U.S. exercise "EAGLE PARTNER 2023" in "Zar" Training Center took place. On September 15, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Suren Papikyan together with United States Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Armenia Kristina A. Kvien, First Deputy Minister of Defense-Chief of the General Staff of the RA Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Edward Asryan, the Deputy Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army in Europe and Africa Command, Brigadier General Patrick Ellis and the Commander of the 10th Mountain Division, Major General Gregory Anderson watched the final phase of the exercise (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023c).

On November 1-3, 2023 the Chief of the General Staff of the RA Armed Forces - First Deputy Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Edward Asryan visited the U.S. European Command Center located in Stuttgart. He held a meeting with the Deputy Commander for U.S. European Command, Lieutenant General Stephen Basham, who expressed the willingness of the

USA to continue supporting current cooperation programs in the following areas: professionalization of the Armenian Armed Forces, professional sergeant staff's strengthening, modernization of the management system, peacekeeping, military medicine, military education, combat readiness, trainings, etc. Edward Asryan also visited the Joint Multinational Readiness Centre of the U.S. Ground Forces in Europe and the NCO Academy located in Hohenfels (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023d).

Next year, from July 15 to 24, 2024 the Armenian-American military exercise "EAGLE PARTNER 2024" was held in Armenia. Military personnel from the peacekeeping brigade of the Armenian Armed Forces, the U.S. Army in Europe and Africa and the Kansas Army National Guard were involved in the exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to enhance the interoperability of units participating in international peacekeeping missions, exchange best practices in control and tactical communication, and improve the readiness of the Armenian unit (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024a). At the same time, the U.S. ambassador in Yerevan, Kristina Kvien, confirmed in the interview that the United States would appoint a resident adviser to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia as part of deepening ties between the two nations ("Radio Liberty", 2024).

At the end of the year, active visits continued. Particularly on October 16, 2024, on the sidelines of his working visit to the United States, the First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia-Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Edward Asryan held a meeting with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Armed Forces, General Charles Brown. The U.S. side reaffirmed its commitment to support the ongoing transformation and reforms of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024b).

On December 4, 2024, within the framework of his working visit to the United States, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Suren Papikyan met Mr. Bruce LaFlam, Vice President of the American "Milliken & Company", and Mr. Scott J. Grupp and Tommy Young, Directors of company's military and international programs, in the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the United States. The company is specialized in the design and development of military uniforms. The discussions focused on potential cooperation in the development of a new uniform for the Armenian Armed Forces (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024c). The next day, on December 5, 2024, Suren Papikyan held a meeting with the United States Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III in capital Washington. Suren Papikyan outlined the ongoing reforms within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia and highlighted the priority areas of cooperation, including military education, combat training, joint exercises in preparation for

participation in international peacekeeping missions, the development of professional NCO and instructor corps, and the establishment of educational and training capabilities for the RA Armed Forces (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024d). Welcoming Suren Papikyan, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III emphasized the historic significance of the RA Defense Minister's visit and noted that, over the past two years, the U.S. had provided Armenia with key security assistance, including armored ambulances, a cybersecurity operations center and a national training center (Clark, 2024). In this context, particularly the United States has provided the Armenian Ministry of Defense with approximately $18 million in Foreign Military Financing to support the purchase of armored ambulances, the development of a Cyber Defense Operations Center, and improving National Training Center capabilities. Armenia joined the International Counter Ransomware Initiative in December 2024 and the United States is also collaborating with Armenia as it develops its national cybersecurity strategy, including the establishment of a National Computer Incident Response Team (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

At the beginning of the next year, on January 14, 2025 the signing of the Strategic Partnership Charter between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America took place in the U.S. Department of State in Washington. On behalf of the Republic of Armenia, the document was signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan, and on behalf of the United States, by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In Section III (Defense and Security) of the Charter is written: "The United States supports an independent, sovereign, and democratic Armenia. A peaceful South Caucasus is foundational to Armenia's continued economic growth and democratic development, and that of the region. Defense and security cooperation between Armenia and the United States benefits both nations and the region.

1. Recognizing the persistence of threats to global peace and stability, Armenia and the United States intend to expand the scope of their defense and security cooperation programs, including through establishing bilateral defense consultations within the next year and assisting the Armenian military through professional military assistance training.
2. The United States recognizes Armenia's important contributions to peacekeeping efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Mali. Deepening Armenia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions is a mutual priority, and we plan to expand security cooperation and reform programs intended to increase Armenian interoperability and to strengthen Armenia's defense.

3. Acknowledging the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction[*], Armenia and the United States plan to explore means to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and dangerous technologies through adherence to international nonproliferation standards, effective enforcement of export controls, and strengthened enforcement of such controls. To this end, the United States intends to support the capacity building of the Armenian Border Guard Service[**] and State Revenue Committee.
4. Recognizing the persistent threat to government, business, and the public from malicious cyber actors, Armenia and the United States intend to work towards an innovative, secure, and rights-respecting digital future. Armenia and the United States plan to continue to hold regular consultations on existing and new cyber threats.
5. The United States intends to continue to foster rights-respecting institutions, including by supporting Armenia's efforts to reform and modernize its Ministry of Internal Affairs[***] and law enforcement agencies. Such support is expected to include police education and other measures to provide for public safety, to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for abuses, and to combat transnational crime and corruption" (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2025b).

In February 2025, within the framework of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, the field mobile hospital of the Military Medical Support Department of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia participated in the multinational military exercise "Combined Resolve-2025", which was held at the U.S. military base in Hohenfels, Federal Republic of Germany. Medical personnel of the Republic of Armenia's Ministry of

[*] Within the framework of the program to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Smuggling Detection and Deterrence, donated technical means and equipment with a total value of about 500 million drams to the National Security Service (NSS) of RA ("Factor TV", 2025).

[**] The United States has provided $27 million in funding to support Armenia's efforts to develop its border security capabilities, in collaboration with State's Export Control and Border Security program and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Department of State, 2025). In the framework of this aid, in 2025, the United States also supplied 10 Toyota Fortuners, Toyota Prados, and Toyota Hiace cars to the border guard troops of the NSS of RA, the total value of which exceeded 500,000 dollars (**"**Radio Liberty", 2025a).

[***] The U.S. has contributed more than $16 million to the development of the Patrol Police Service in Armenia, as announced by Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, during her visit to the new buildings of the Patrol Service and Operational Management ("ABC media", 2024). The U.S. is also providing support in the retraining process of the RA Ministry of Internal Affairs Police Guard personnel (Official website of the MIA of the RA, 2025).

Defense and the jointly formed groups of partners from the U.S. National Guard were involved in the military exercise (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2025a).

On August 12, 2025, the Armenia-U.S. joint exercise "EAGLE PARTNER 2025" started. Servicemembers from the peacekeeping brigade of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, U.S. Army Europe and Africa, and the Kansas National Guard participated in the exercise. The primary objectives of the exercise were to: enhance the interoperability of units participating in international peacekeeping missions, exchange best practices in control and tactical communication, and improve the readiness of the peacekeeping unit of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2025b).

On October 15, 2025, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia Suren Papikyan met with the U.S. Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the Pentagon. During the meeting, the parties discussed various issues related to the current state of the Armenia-U.S. defense cooperation, and the implementation of joint initiatives in the fields of military education and defense reforms (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2025c). The previous day, on October 14, Suren Papikyan once again met with the leadership of the American company "Milliken" in Washington. During the meeting, the sides discussed issues related to the current stage of the process of developing a new uniform for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2025d). As a result, in December, the company supplied the first trial batch of the new uniform for the Armenian Army ("Panorama", 2025).

On October 13, 2025, within the framework of his working visit to the USA, Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan also participated in the opening ceremony of the AUSA International Exposition in Washington. Suren Papikyan toured the pavilions, familiarized himself with the exhibits, and met with representatives of various participating organizations ("Radio Liberty", 2025b). This was a good opportunity to establish contacts with American military-industrial companies and for further cooperation. This was preceded by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Armenia regarding an AI and Semiconductor Innovation Partnership on August 8, 2025, in Washington (Official website of the Prime Minister of the RA, 2025). In this context, Firebird, a U.S.-based AI cloud and infrastructure company, has received authorization from the U.S. government to export NVIDIA graphics processors to Armenia. At the same time, both sides announced about the creation of the region's first large-scale artificial intelligence data center in Armenia, with a capacity of 100 megawatts, for

which an initial investment of $500 million will be made and will be used for artificial intelligence servers from Dell Technologies Inc and processors from Blackwell NVIDIA (“ARKA Telecom”, 2025). All these initiatives can promote the development of Armenian-American cooperation in the military-industrial sector as well. In particular, on February 9, 2026, during his visit to Armenia, after the meeting with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, U.S. Vice President JD Vance announced that the U.S. had approved the sale of $11 million worth of reconnaissance drone technology to Armenia, including V-BAT (MQ-35A) reconnaissance UAVs manufactured by the American company Shield AI (“Armenpress”, 2026).

Conclusion

Thus, during the last years, political-economic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the USA have grown rapidly, which is also contributing to the development of the cooperation between the two countries in the defense sphere. Particularly, the cooperation includes military education, military medicine, cybersecurity directions, as well as international peacekeeping missions.

At the same time, the United States is actively participating in the reforms being implemented in the Armenian Armed Forces, including the introduction of a professional sergeant system. The United States also appointed a resident adviser to the Defense Ministry of the Republic of Armenia. It is also noteworthy that the development and production of the new uniform of the Armenian Army has also been entrusted to an American company, which means a transition to NATO-standard uniforms.

A basis for military-technical cooperation is also being created, including in the military-industrial sector, which will create an opportunity for Armenia to gain access to new advanced American (Western) military technologies and to diversify the cooperation in defense sphere.

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THE "TRIPP" AS A STABILIZING FACTOR IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS? OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES*

Emil Ordukhanyan, PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor,
Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of NAS RA
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-6610-8220
(email: emil.ordukhanyan@gmail.com)

Gohar Ananyan, MA in Political Science,
Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of NAS RA
ORCID iD: 0009-0008-9422-3972
(email:ananyangohar5@gmail.com)

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Abstract

The "TRIPP" initiative, although not formally codified as a singular institutional framework, can be conceptualized as a set of coordinated transport and infrastructure development projects in the South Caucasus aimed at enhancing interregional connectivity between Europe and Asia. Emerging in the context of renewed diplomatic engagement – particularly under the mediation of the United State – and potential agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the initiative is increasingly associated with the strategic expansion of the Middle Corridor.

From a geopolitical and geo-economic perspective, TRIPP offers significant opportunities for regional stabilization. By fostering economic interdependence, infrastructure integration, and diversified transit routes, it may contribute to confidence-building and long-term peacebuilding in a region marked by over three decades of conflict and instability following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The emphasis on principles such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdictional control constitutes a normative foundation for sustainable cooperation.

However, the initiative also entails notable challenges. Persistent political tensions, unresolved aspects of the Armenia-Azerbaijan former conflict, and competing regional narratives – such as Azerbaijan's discourse on "Western Azerbaijan" and the concept of the "Zangezur Corridor" – introduce elements of strategic ambiguity and latent instability. These factors may

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undermine trust and complicate the implementation of cooperative infrastructure projects in the South Caucasus.

Furthermore, TRIPP must be situated within a broader geopolitical context involving regional and extra-regional actors, including Turkey, Iran, the European Union, and Russia, each pursuing distinct strategic and economic interests in the South Caucasus. The interplay of these actors shapes both the opportunities and constraints of this initiative where the principal role is played by the United States.

This study argues that while TRIPP holds the potential to function as a stabilizing factor by promoting regional connectivity and economic cooperation, its success will depend on the alignment of political will, the management of competing narratives, and the establishment of robust institutional mechanisms ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and respect for international norms.

Keywords: TRIPP, South Caucasus, opportunities, challenges, peacebuilding, interdependence, connectivity initiatives.

Introduction

The South Caucasus has a strategically significant position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, functioning historically as both a bridge and a fault line between competing civilizations, empires, political interests, and geopolitical systems as well. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the region – comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – has been characterized by persistent geopolitical fragmentation, unresolved territorial disputes, and the active involvement of external powers pursuing divergent strategic interests (Ordukhanyan et al., 2025, p. 206). These dynamics have produced a pattern of cyclical instability, where periods of fragile calm are interrupted by episodes of escalation and confrontation.

At the core of this instability lies the protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, which has shaped regional security architectures and constrained opportunities for cooperation for more than three decades. The persistence of closed borders, limited regional integration, and securitized political discourse has resulted in the economic isolation of certain actors and the underdevelopment of regional connectivity. Consequently, the South Caucasus has remained relatively marginalized within broader Eurasian economic networks, despite its geographic potential.

In recent years, however, there has been a gradual shift in both regional and international approaches toward the South Caucasus. Increasingly, policymakers and scholars have emphasized the role of connectivity-driven

peacebuilding, which prioritizes economic integration, infrastructure development, and the reopening of transport routes as mechanisms for reducing tensions and fostering cooperation primarily between regional states. This shift reflects a broader transformation in global geopolitics, where connectivity – through routes, supply chains, and logistical networks – has become a central instrument of both economic development and strategic influence.

Within this evolving context, the "TRIPP" initiative emerges as a particularly relevant framework. Although not formally institutionalized or codified in a single agreement, TRIPP can be understood as a composite set of initiatives aimed at reopening and developing transport routes, modernizing infrastructure, and facilitating cross-border trade across the South Caucasus. Its scope includes rail and road connectivity, customs coordination, and the integration of regional transit systems into wider Eurasian networks.

The significance of TRIPP is further amplified by its connection to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, commonly referred to as the Middle Corridor. As global supply chains undergo reconfiguration – driven by geopolitical tensions, economic diversification strategies, and the search for alternative transit routes – the Middle Corridor has gained increasing prominence as a viable link between East Asia, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Europe. In this context, the inclusion of the South Caucasus as a functional transit space enhances its strategic relevance, transforming it from a peripheral region into a potential hub of interregional connectivity.

At the same time, the emergence of TRIPP reflects the growing involvement of external actors, including the United States and the European Union, in promoting regional stability through economic and infrastructural engagement. These efforts intersect with the interests of neighboring regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, and Russia, thereby embedding TRIPP within a complex and often competitive geopolitical environment.

Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to address the central research question: ***Can TRIPP function as a stabilizing factor in the South Caucasus?*** This question is particularly relevant given the region's historical trajectory, where economic initiatives have often been subordinated to security concerns and political rivalries. The analysis proceeds from the hypothesis that while TRIPP possesses significant potential to foster stability through economic interdependence, infrastructure integration, and increased regional cooperation, its effectiveness remains fundamentally constrained by enduring geopolitical rivalries, unresolved conflicts, and the absence of robust institutional frameworks.

By examining TRIPP through multiple analytical lenses – geopolitical, geo-economic, and institutional – this study aims to contribute to the broader

debate on the role of connectivity in conflict transformation. It argues that TRIPP should not be understood as a standalone solution to regional instability, but rather as a conditional and complementary mechanism, whose success depends on its integration with political reconciliation processes, effective governance structures, and a balanced management of external influences.

In doing so, the paper situates the South Caucasus within the wider context of contemporary global transformations, where the interplay between infrastructure, power, and cooperation increasingly defines regional orders and shapes the prospects for peace and stability.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative, multi-method approach designed to analyze the potential of the TRIPP initiative as a stabilizing factor in the South Caucasus. Given the intersection of geopolitical, economic, and institutional dimensions, the methodology combines document analysis, case study evaluation, and theoretical application, allowing for both descriptive and analytical insights.

The study is structured as an exploratory, interpretive analysis. It examines TRIPP as a complex phenomenon embedded within the South Caucasus, considering both its material infrastructure components and its broader strategic and political implications. The design integrates three levels of analysis**:**

1. State-Level Analysis – Examining the interests, strategies, and constraints of primary regional actors in relation to TRIPP.
2. Regional System Analysis – Considering the South Caucasus as a strategic subsystem influenced by competing external powers, such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, the United States, and the European Union.
3. Global/Transnational Analysis – Evaluating TRIPP's role within wider transcontinental connectivity frameworks, including the Middle Corridor, Belt and Road Initiative, and global trade networks.

This multi-scalar approach allows the study to assess both internal dynamics and external influences, providing a holistic understanding of TRIPP's stabilizing potential.

The research data were collected from primary and secondary sources, including:

- Official documents and agreements: Statements, memoranda, and transport agreements involving regional and external actors.

- Policy reports and strategic analyses: Publications from think tanks, international organizations, and government agencies focused on regional infrastructure, connectivity, and geopolitics.
- Academic literature: Peer-reviewed journals and monographs on international relations theory, regional studies, and transport geopolitics.
- Media sources: Verified news reports providing updates on TRIPP-related developments and regional infrastructure projects.

Where possible, **t**riangulation was applied to validate findings by comparing multiple sources for consistency, reliability, and context.

The analysis applies a theoretical triangulation combining:

1. Realism – To understand the influence of power dynamics, security concerns, and regional rivalries on TRIPP implementation.
2. Liberal Institutionalism – To assess how economic interdependence, trade facilitation, and potential institutional mechanisms may promote stability.
3. Connectivity Geopolitics – To examine how infrastructure routes function as strategic tools shaping regional influence and global trade networks.

This framework allows the research to identify both the stabilizing and constraining factors affecting TRIPP while situating the initiative within broader regional and global processes.

The study also employs a comparative case perspective, focusing on key aspects of TRIPP's implementation:

- Armenia-Azerbaijan transit cooperation: Examining the feasibility and political implications of Armenia's integration into regional routes.
- Middle Corridor integration: Evaluating the strategic, economic, and geopolitical implications for South Caucasus states and external actors.

This case-oriented approach provides context-specific insights while allowing extrapolation to broader regional patterns.

Nevertheless, the study has some limitations which are related to:

- *Data availability:* Some internal planning documents remain inaccessible, limiting the analysis to publicly available sources.
- *Rapidly changing context:* Geopolitical and infrastructure developments in the South Caucasus are dynamic, potentially affecting TRIPP implementation.

Despite these limitations, the methodology enables a robust and systematic evaluation of TRIPP's potential to foster regional stability and connectivity.

Theoretical Framework

The analytical assessment of the "TRIPP" initiative requires a multi-theoretical approach that captures the complexity of the South Caucasus as both a geopolitical and geo-economic space. No single theoretical paradigm sufficiently explains the interplay between conflict, cooperation, and infrastructure development in the region. Therefore, this study employs a complementary framework drawing on *realism, liberal institutionalism*, and *connectivity geopolitics*, each of which highlights distinct but interrelated dimensions of TRIPP's potential and limitations.

From a *realist perspective*, international politics is fundamentally shaped by the pursuit of power, security, and survival within an anarchic system (Waltz, 1979). States prioritize relative gains and remain sensitive to shifts in the balance of power, particularly in strategically significant regions. The South Caucasus exemplifies such a context, where geographic location and historical legacies render it a persistent arena of geopolitical competition.

Within this framework, the region is not merely a space for cooperation but a *contested geopolitical frontier*. Russia has traditionally sought to preserve its influence as a dominant security actor, maintaining a presence through military, political, and economic instruments (Trenin, 2011). Its approach reflects a broader strategy of retaining leverage in its near abroad and preventing the emergence of alternative security architectures that could diminish its role.

Simultaneously, Turkey has expanded its regional footprint, particularly through its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan. This expansion combines economic integration, military cooperation, and infrastructural connectivity, aligning with Ankara's broader vision of regional influence and transcontinental linkage (Cornell, 2001). Iran, for its part, adopts a cautious posture toward emerging transit configurations, particularly those that may bypass its territory or alter established regional balances.

From a *neorealist standpoint*, infrastructure initiatives such as TRIPP cannot be understood as politically neutral. Instead, they are embedded within broader power competition dynamics, where transport routes and connectivity projects function as instruments of strategic positioning. As a result, TRIPP may simultaneously promote cooperation and intensify rivalry, depending on how it redistributes influence and access across the region.

In contrast to realism, *liberal institutionalism* emphasizes the potential for cooperation under anarchy through institutions, norms, and economic interdependence (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 1977). According to this perspective, states are not solely concerned with relative gains but can pursue absolute gains through mutually beneficial arrangements, particularly when institutional frameworks reduce uncertainty and facilitate coordination.

Infrastructure and connectivity projects play a central role in this logic. By increasing cross-border flows of goods, services, and capital, they create interdependence, which raises the economic costs of conflict and incentivizes peaceful interaction. Empirical studies have demonstrated that higher levels of trade and institutional engagement are associated with reduced likelihoods of conflict escalation (Oneal & Russett, 1999; Hover et al., 2025).

Within this framework, TRIPP can be interpreted as a mechanism for institutionalizing cooperation in the South Caucasus. The involvement of the European Union and the United States reflects efforts to promote a rules-based order grounded in transparency, legal norms, and multilateral engagement. Such involvement is consistent with broader liberal strategies aimed at stabilizing conflict-prone regions through economic integration and governance reforms.

However, liberal theory also acknowledges that institutions must be sufficiently robust to manage asymmetries and enforce commitments. In the absence of formalized mechanisms, interdependence may remain shallow and vulnerable to political disruption. Thus, while TRIPP aligns with liberal expectations of cooperation, its effectiveness depends on the degree to which it evolves into a structured and institutionalized framework.

Recent scholarship has introduced the concept of connectivity geopolitics, which bridges the gap between realist and liberal perspectives by emphasizing infrastructure as both an economic and strategic resource. Rather than viewing connectivity as inherently cooperative, this approach conceptualizes it as a form of power that shapes spatial relations, access, and influence (Khanna, 2016; Sidaway & Woon, 2017).

Connectivity geopolitics highlights that transport routes, energy networks, and digital infrastructure are not merely technical systems but political instruments that can include or exclude actors, redirect flows, and reconfigure regional hierarchies. In this sense, infrastructure becomes a means of exercising control over territory and economic interactions.

TRIPP fits squarely within this paradigm. As part of the broader Middle Corridor, it contributes to the reconfiguration of Eurasian connectivity by offering alternative routes that bypass traditional pathways. This reconfiguration has significant geopolitical implications, particularly in the context of efforts to diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on established transit routes.

Moreover, connectivity projects often generate asymmetric dependencies, where control over key nodes or routes confers strategic advantages. As a result, participation in TRIPP may enhance the influence of certain actors while constraining others, reinforcing the dual nature of connectivity as both a cooperative and competitive phenomenon.

Importantly, connectivity geopolitics also underscores the role of external actors in shaping regional infrastructure landscapes. Competing initiatives and overlapping route projects reflect broader struggles over influence, standards, and economic orientation. In the South Caucasus, this dynamic is evident in the interaction between regional powers and global actors, each seeking to embed their strategic preferences within emerging connectivity frameworks.

Taken together, these three perspectives provide a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding TRIPP:

- *Realism* highlights the constraints imposed by power competition and security concerns;
- *Liberal institutionalism* emphasizes the potential for cooperation through interdependence and institutions;
- *Connectivity geopolitics* integrates these dimensions by conceptualizing infrastructure as a strategic domain where cooperation and competition intersect.

This theoretical synthesis suggests that TRIPP should not be interpreted through a single paradigm. Rather, it represents a hybrid phenomenon, simultaneously enabling economic cooperation, reflecting geopolitical rivalry, and reshaping regional connectivity patterns.

Consequently, the stabilizing potential of TRIPP is inherently more conditional. It depends on the extent to which cooperative dynamics can be institutionalized, competitive pressures managed, and connectivity leveraged in a manner that aligns economic incentives with political stability.

Conceptualizing the TRIPP Initiative

First the "TRIPP" is officially announced in the Joint Declaration signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and the United States in Washington on August 8, 2025*. In the context of this document TRIPP appears as a key infrastructure and regional integration initiative. It stands for the *Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity* (as referenced in U.S.-Armenia communications and policy analyses**). Within this declaration, TRIPP's mentions are primarily in relation to:

1. *Regional Connectivity*

- Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to facilitate the development of cross-Caucasus transit routes.

* See more in detail in Joint Declaration (Aug 8, 2025).

** See more in detail in Official Website of the Prime Minister of the RA. (2025); Avdaliani, E. (2025).

- TRIPP was presented as a route project linking Armenia with Azerbaijan and wider regional networks, aiming to integrate it into the so-called Middle Corridor connecting Europe and Asia.

2. *Peace Dividend*

- TRIPP is framed as both an economic and political instrument:
  a) Economically: opening transport, trade, and investment routes.
  a) Politically: fostering trust and cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan post-conflict.
- The declaration notes that cooperation under TRIPP would be undertaken in partnership with U.S. and mutually designated third-party entities**.**

3. *Implementation Framework*

- While the 2025 declaration mentions TRIPP in principle, details on governance, funding, and operationalization were deferred to subsequent frameworks (such as the *TRIPP Implementation Framework*[*], January 2026). This includes forming a development company, defining shares and investments, and establishing oversight mechanisms.

4. *Symbolic Significance*

- TRIPP is positioned as a flagship initiative of U.S.-facilitated peace efforts, signaling that economic interconnectivity can reinforce political reconciliation.

The "TRIPP" initiative should be understood not merely as a set of infrastructure projects, but as a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming the South Caucasus into a functional hub of regional and transcontinental connectivity. Its multidimensional nature reflects both economic and strategic objectives, linking national development priorities with broader geopolitical and global trade considerations.

TRIPP can be conceptualized as a multi-layered initiative with several interrelated dimensions:

1. *Transport Route Development:*
Central to TRIPP is the expansion and modernization of physical transport infrastructure, including railways, highways, and multimodal terminals. By improving both internal connectivity within each state and cross-border transport links, TRIPP aims to reduce logistical bottlenecks, shorten transit times, and increase the reliability of supply chains. This includes upgrading existing Soviet-era infrastructure,

[*] See more in detail in Official Website of the United States Government. (2026).

constructing new high-capacity routes, and ensuring interoperability with international standards.

2. *Trade Facilitation Mechanisms:*
   Beyond physical infrastructure, TRIPP encompasses regulatory and procedural reforms designed to streamline cross-border trade. This involves harmonizing customs procedures, introducing digital tracking and monitoring systems, and reducing bureaucratic barriers that have historically slowed trade in the region. Efficient trade facilitation not only enhances economic performance but also fosters cooperation by creating tangible incentives for states to maintain open and predictable routes.
3. *Infrastructure Modernization:*
   Modernization under TRIPP extends to ports, logistics hubs, energy grids, and telecommunications networks. Integrated infrastructure networks enable the South Caucasus to function as a cohesive transit region rather than a series of disconnected national territories. Modernization also increases the resilience of transport and trade systems against environmental, technical, and political disruptions (Jenelius & Mattsson, 2021).
4. *Integration into the Middle Corridor:*
   TRIPP's strategic relevance is amplified by its alignment with the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), which links East Asia to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus (Rentschler et al., 2025). Integration into this corridor offers Armenia and Azerbaijan an opportunity to diversify trade routes, attract investment, and enhance their geopolitical relevance as transit states. By participating in a corridor that bypasses traditional routes through Russia or Iran, regional actors gain leverage in negotiating economic and political partnerships (Starr, 2026).

The emergence of TRIPP reflects a shift from conflict-centric to connectivity-centric regional policies. For decades, the South Caucasus was defined by contested borders, security dilemmas, and ethnopolitical tensions. TRIPP represents a conscious attempt to redirect attention toward shared economic opportunities, interdependence, and regional integration, signaling a potential reorientation of regional strategic thinking from zero-sum security dynamics to mutually beneficial connectivity.

The Middle Corridor, or the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, represents a critical strategic and economic framework for TRIPP (Halsey & Ali, 2026). This corridor connects China to Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus, offering an alternative to the northern route through Russia and the southern route through Iran and Turkey. Its

growth has been driven by global supply chain diversification, the expansion of Chinese trade under Belt and Road initiatives, and Europe's interest in secure, alternative logistics routes.

For Armenia, participation in the Middle Corridor is particularly significant. Historically, Armenia's landlocked geography, coupled with closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, constrained its ability to participate in regional transit systems (Zakaryan, 2021). TRIPP opens the possibility for Armenia to become a functional node within transcontinental trade networks, enhancing both its economic prospects and geopolitical relevance. The development of Armenia-inclusive routes would reduce the country's historical isolation and contribute to regional interconnectivity by linking Armenian infrastructure to Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Caspian transport systems.

From a regional perspective, integration into the Middle Corridor allows the South Caucasus to collectively benefit from transcontinental trade flows, attracting foreign investment, promoting economic diversification, and creating incentives for political cooperation (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). The route thus functions simultaneously as an economic enabler and a strategic instrument, providing a platform for collaboration while embedding the region within broader global connectivity networks.

Moreover, TRIPP's alignment with the Middle Corridor reflects the convergence of national interests with extra-regional economic strategies, particularly those promoted by the European Union, the United States, and Chinese-led infrastructure initiatives. By linking local infrastructure development to international transit frameworks, TRIPP amplifies both economic potential and geopolitical significance, positioning the South Caucasus as a critical junction between Europe and Asia.

Opportunities for Regional Stabilization

TRIPP opens new perspectives and opportunities for regional stabilization which relates to several factors playing an important role on the way of economic interdependence, post-conflict peacebuilding, and strategic diversification.

As for the economic interdependence, it constitutes one of the central mechanisms through which the "TRIPP" initiative may contribute to regional stabilization in the South Caucasus. Rooted in liberal international relations theory, interdependence refers to a condition in which states become mutually reliant on cross-border flows of goods, capital, services, and infrastructure, thereby increasing the costs of conflict and incentivizing cooperation (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Moravcsik, 1997).

The liberal argument posits that trade and economic integration reduce the likelihood of interstate conflict by altering state preferences and raising opportunity costs. Empirical studies demonstrate that higher levels of bilateral trade are associated with a lower probability of militarized disputes (Oneal & Russett, 1999). From this viewpoint, TRIPP can be understood as a structural mechanism embedding Armenia and Azerbaijan in a network of mutual economic dependence.

However, this relationship is not linear or universally pacifying. Barbieri (2002) challenges the liberal assumption by demonstrating that interdependence may, under certain conditions, increase conflict propensity - particularly when it is asymmetrical. In such cases, the less dependent actor can exploit economic ties as a source of political leverage. This nuance is highly relevant in the South Caucasus, where disparities in economic size, energy resources, and external partnerships shape the structure of interdependence.

A key economic dimension of TRIPP lies in its capacity to transform the region into a transit hub within the Trans-Caspian corridor. Infrastructure development (railways, highways, and logistics hubs) can generate substantial transit revenues and stimulate economic activity. According to the World Bank (2019), transport corridor integration can significantly increase trade volumes and contribute to GDP growth in participating countries, particularly in landlocked regions.

For Armenia, improved connectivity may mitigate the structural constraints of partial economic isolation, while for Azerbaijan, it aligns with broader strategies of economic diversification beyond hydrocarbons. These developments create shared economic incentives that can reinforce cooperative behavior.

Transport and infrastructure integration under TRIPP is expected to reduce transaction costs, a critical factor in international trade theory. Lower transportation costs and improved logistical efficiency enhance competitiveness and expand market access. The World Bank (2019) estimates that corridor-based infrastructure improvements can reduce trade costs by up to 15–20% in some regions, depending on implementation quality and institutional coordination.

In this regard, for Armenia, the reopening of transport links with Turkey and Azerbaijan would represent a structural shift in trade geography, potentially integrating the country into regional and global supply chains. As for Azerbaijan, an enhanced connectivity will strengthen its position as a logistical bridge between Central Asia and Europe.

Beyond direct trade gains, economic interdependence generates spillover effects across multiple sectors. Baldwin (2016) emphasizes that economic

networks often produce secondary benefits, including investment flows, technological diffusion, and institutional convergence.

In the context of TRIPP, these spillovers may include:

- *Energy cooperation*, facilitated by interconnected infrastructure.
- *Industrial development*, driven by improved logistics and foreign direct investment.
- *Agricultural and service sector expansion*, supported by better market access.

The engagement of the European Union through connectivity initiatives (European Commission, n.d. a) further enhances these prospects by promoting regulatory alignment and investment standards consistent with international norms.

Economic interdependence also plays a political role by fostering repeated interactions and institutionalized cooperation. Keohane and Nye (1977) argue that complex interdependence creates multiple channels of interaction, reducing the dominance of military considerations in interstate relations.

In post-conflict environments, such as the South Caucasus, TRIPP-related cooperation (joint infrastructure management, customs coordination, and trade facilitation) can function as confidence-building measures. These mechanisms contribute to trust formation and the gradual normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, complementing formal diplomatic processes.

Despite its stabilizing potential, economic interdependence also entails risks. Barbieri (2002) demonstrates that asymmetrical trade relationships can generate vulnerability and political dependence, potentially exacerbating tensions rather than mitigating them. In the context of TRIPP, disparities in economic capacity and control over infrastructure may lead to unequal distribution of benefits.

Moreover, external actors - including the United States and the European Union - play a significant role in financing and shaping infrastructure projects. While their involvement can enhance capacity and standards, it may also introduce forms of external dependency and geopolitical conditionality (Baldwin, 2016).

The stabilizing effect of economic interdependence under TRIPP is conditional and mediated by political and institutional factors. As Moravcsik (1997) argues, state preferences and domestic political structures shape how economic incentives translate into foreign policy behavior.

For TRIPP to function as a stabilizing mechanism, several conditions must be met:

1. *Balanced distribution of economic gains* – minimizing asymmetry.

2. *Institutionalization of cooperation* – including dispute-resolution mechanisms.
3. *Sustained political commitment* **–** opening and securing transit routes.
4. *Resilience to external shocks* **–** including geopolitical competition.

If these conditions are absent, interdependence alone is unlikely to prevent conflict and may even create new sources of tension.

Therefore, the economic interdependence is a central pillar of TRIPP's potential stabilizing role in the South Caucasus. By embedding regional actors in networks of trade, infrastructure, and shared economic interests, it can increase the opportunity costs of conflict and incentivize cooperation. However, as critical scholarship suggests, these effects are neither automatic nor uniform. The ultimate impact of interdependence depends on the symmetry of relationships, the strength of institutions, and the broader geopolitical environment. Consequently, TRIPP should be understood as a conditional stabilizing mechanism, whose success depends on both economic design and political will.

As for post-conflict peacebuilding, it constitutes a critical dimension through which the "TRIPP" initiative may contribute to long-term stabilization in the South Caucasus. In contrast to traditional security-centered approaches, contemporary peacebuilding frameworks emphasize the role of economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and institutional engagement in transforming conflict dynamics (Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2011). Within this paradigm, TRIPP can be conceptualized as a *connectivity-driven peacebuilding mechanism*, operating at the intersection of geo-economics and conflict transformation.

Peacebuilding theory distinguishes between *negative peace* (the absence of direct violence) and *positive peace* (the presence of cooperative and institutionalized relations) (Galtung, 1969). While the cessation of large-scale hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan represents a shift toward negative peace, TRIPP has the potential to facilitate a transition toward positive peace by including cooperation in material and institutional structures.

To this point, Paris (2004) argues that sustainable peace requires the construction of socio-economic foundations that reduce incentives for renewed conflict. In this respect, infrastructure connectivity and economic integration can serve as *peace-sustaining mechanisms*, particularly in post-conflict regions characterized by weak institutions and mutual distrust.

Infrastructure development has increasingly been recognized as a tool of peacebuilding. As Collier et al. (2003) demonstrate, post-conflict economies that invest in reconstruction and connectivity are less likely to relapse into violence. TRIPP-related projects (railways, roads, and customs systems) can contribute to *reconstruction of war-affected regions, reintegration of*

previously isolated territories, and restoration of economic normalcy and mobility.

In the South Caucasus context, the reopening of transport routes between Armenia and Azerbaijan carries both symbolic and practical significance. Symbolically, it reflects a departure from blockade and isolation; practically, it facilitates the movement of goods, people, and services.

Moreover, the involvement of external actors such as the United States and the European Union aligns with the broader trend of liberal peacebuilding, where international actors support reconstruction and institutionalization processes (Richmond, 2011).

The central mechanism linking TRIPP to peacebuilding is the concept of functional cooperation. Drawing on neo-functionalist theory (Haas, 1958), cooperation in technical and economic sectors can generate spillover effects into political domains. In this regard, joint management of infrastructure projects will requires *regular communication between state agencies, coordination of regulatory frameworks as well as establishment of dispute-resolution mechanisms.*

These interactions contribute to *confidence-building measures*, which are essential in post-conflict settings. As Lederach (1997) emphasizes, peacebuilding is a process that requires sustained engagement across multiple levels of society and governance.

In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, TRIPP may create institutionalized channels of interaction, reducing misperceptions and fostering incremental trust. Over time, such functional cooperation can help normalize relations and reduce the salience of conflict narratives.

It is important to note that post-conflict peacebuilding is not only limited to state-level dynamics; it also involves the reintegration of societies and the improvement of human security. According to the United Nations (2009), sustainable peace requires addressing economic marginalization, inequality, and lack of access to basic services.

In this context, TRIPP can contribute to:

- *Job creation* in construction, logistics, and services
- *Improved access to markets and resources* for local communities
- *Reduction of regional disparities*, particularly in border areas

Such socio-economic improvements are critical for reducing grievances that may otherwise fuel renewed tensions. In this sense, TRIPP aligns with the concept of economic peacebuilding, which links development to conflict prevention (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2013).

Despite its potential, the peacebuilding impact of TRIPP is inherently limited in the absence of a comprehensive political settlement. As Paris (2004)

cautions, economic liberalization without strong institutions may exacerbate instability rather than mitigate it.

Key unresolved issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan (including border delimitation, security guarantees) pose structural constraints on peacebuilding efforts. Without addressing these issues, infrastructure cooperation risks being:

- *Instrumentalized for political leverage*
- *Disrupted by renewed tensions or incidents*
- *Perceived as asymmetric or imposed*

Furthermore, competing narratives undermine the trust necessary for effective cooperation.

The involvement of external actors adds another layer of complexity. The United States and the European Union promote connectivity as part of a broader strategy of regional stabilization, while Russia, Turkey, and Iran pursue their own geopolitical interests.

Mac Ginty (2011) highlights that peacebuilding processes are often shaped by a *hybrid political order*, where local and external actors interact in complex ways. In the case of TRIPP, external funding and mediation can facilitate implementation but may also introduce geopolitical competition, potentially undermining the neutrality and inclusivity of peacebuilding efforts.

The contribution of TRIPP to post-conflict peacebuilding is therefore conditional upon several interrelated factors:

1. *Integration with political peace processes*, ensuring that economic cooperation complements diplomatic agreements.
2. *Inclusive governance mechanisms*, incorporating local communities and stakeholders.
3. *Transparency and accountability*, reducing perceptions of inequality or exclusion.
4. *Protection of sovereignty and legal norms*, addressing core concerns of regional actors.

Lederach (1997) emphasizes that sustainable peace requires a long-term, multi-level approach. TRIPP can serve as one component of this broader architecture but cannot substitute for political reconciliation.

Therefore, TRIPP represents a promising but limited instrument of post-conflict peacebuilding in the South Caucasus. By promoting infrastructure development, economic cooperation, and functional interaction, it can contribute to the transition from negative to positive peace. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon the resolution of underlying political conflicts, the management of competing narratives, and the alignment of external and local interests. In this sense, TRIPP should be understood as a complementary peacebuilding mechanism, capable of reinforcing but not replacing comprehensive political settlement processes.

As for the strategic diversification, it represents a critical dimension of the "TRIPP" initiative, reflecting both regional and global efforts to reduce dependency on single transit routes, dominant geopolitical actors, and concentrated economic structures. In the context of the South Caucasus, diversification is not merely an economic objective but a *geostrategic imperative,* shaped by shifting global trade patterns, energy security concerns, and evolving great-power competition.

Strategic diversification refers to the process by which states and regions expand the range of their economic partners, transit routes, and infrastructural linkages in order to minimize vulnerability and enhance resilience. In international political economy, diversification is closely linked to the concept of complex interdependence, where multiple channels of interaction reduce reliance on any single actor (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

In the case of TRIPP, diversification operates on three interconnected levels:

1. *Geographical diversification of transport routes.*
2. *Economic diversification of trade and revenue sources.*
3. *Geopolitical diversification of external partnerships.*

One of the primary strategic functions of TRIPP lies in its integration into the *Trans-Caspian International Transport Route*[*] (Middle Corridor), which connects East Asia to Europe via Central Asia and the South Caucasus. This route has gained increasing importance as an alternative to:

- *The Northern Corridor, traditionally dominated by Russia*
- *The Southern Corridor, involving transit through Iran*

Following geopolitical disruptions, particularly after 2022, European and global actors have sought to diversify supply chains and reduce exposure to geopolitical risks (André et al., 2024). In this context, the inclusion of Armenia and Azerbaijan in a functional transit network enhances the strategic relevance of the South Caucasus.

As noted by the World Bank (2019), corridor diversification improves trade resilience by providing alternative routes in times of crisis, thereby reducing systemic vulnerability.

For regional actors, TRIPP offers an opportunity to diversify domestic economies:

- Azerbaijan can reduce its dependence on hydrocarbon exports by expanding its role as a logistics and transit hub.
- Armenia can overcome structural constraints associated with limited market access and geographic isolation.

[*] See more in detail in Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. (n.d.).

Economic diversification is widely recognized as a key determinant of long-term stability and growth. According to Rodrik (2008), economies that diversify production and export structures are more resilient to external shocks and less prone to volatility.

In this sense, TRIPP aligns with broader development strategies aimed at:

- *Expanding non-resource sectors.*
- *Attracting foreign direct investment.*
- *Enhancing participation in global value chains.*

Strategic diversification also involves the recalibration of external partnerships. The South Caucasus has historically been influenced by a limited number of dominant actors, particularly Russia. However, recent developments indicate a shift toward a more multi-polar engagement framework, involving:

- *The European Union, promoting connectivity through initiatives such as the Global Gateway*[*].
- *The United States, supporting diplomatic normalization and infrastructure development.*
- *Turkey, advancing regional integration aligned with its economic and strategic interests.*

This diversification of partnerships enhances strategic autonomy for regional states by reducing overdependence on any single external actor. At the same time, it introduces new dynamics of competition and coordination.

An important aspect of TRIPP's strategic value lies in its potential contribution to energy diversification. The South Caucasus already plays a significant role in energy transit, particularly through pipelines connecting the Caspian region to Europe.

The expansion of transport infrastructure under TRIPP may complement existing energy corridors by:

- *Facilitating the transport of energy resources and equipment.*
- *Enhancing redundancy in supply routes.*
- *Supporting the integration of renewable energy networks.*

For the European Union, diversification of energy supply routes has become a strategic priority, particularly in the context of reducing dependence on Russia (European Commission, 2022). Thus, TRIPP contributes to broader energy security objectives.

Despite its advantages, strategic diversification is not without risks. As Waltz (1979) emphasizes in neorealist theory, the distribution of power in the

[*] See more in detail in European Commission. (n.d. b). Policies: Global Gateway; European Commission. (2021). Global Gateway.

international system constrains the autonomy of smaller states. In the South Caucasus, diversification efforts may be limited by:

- *Geopolitical pressure from competing great powers.*
- *Infrastructure bottlenecks and capacity constraints.*
- *Political instability and unresolved conflicts.*

Moreover, diversification can generate overlapping dependencies rather than eliminating them. For example, reliance on multiple external actors may increase exposure to competing political agendas, complicating decision-making processes.

Additionally, the coexistence of multiple corridor initiatives such as those promoted by Turkey, Iran, and other actors, may lead to fragmentation rather than integration if not properly coordinated.

In the context of TRIPP, diversification can:

- *Mitigate geopolitical risks by balancing external influences.*
- *Enhance economic resilience through multiple revenue streams.*
- *Strengthen regional integration by connecting diverse markets.*

However, these benefits are contingent upon effective governance and coordination. Without institutional mechanisms to manage competing interests, diversification may exacerbate fragmentation rather than promote stability.

Strategic diversification is one of central pillars of TRIPP's geopolitical and geo-economic significance. By expanding transport routes, economic structures, and external partnerships, the initiative enhances the resilience and strategic autonomy of the South Caucasus. It aligns with broader global trends toward supply chain diversification and multi-polar engagement.

Nevertheless, diversification is not inherently stabilizing. Its success depends on the ability of regional actors to manage geopolitical competition, coordinate infrastructure development, and align diversification strategies with long-term development goals. In this sense, TRIPP functions as a strategic enabler of resilience, whose stabilizing impact remains conditional on political, institutional, and economic factors.

Challenges and Constraints of TRIPP

While the "TRIPP" initiative presents significant opportunities for regional stabilization, its implementation is constrained by a complex set of political, geopolitical, and institutional challenges. These constraints are deeply rooted in the historical dynamics of the South Caucasus and reflect both unresolved bilateral issues and broader systemic pressures. This section of the research provides a detailed examination of the key limitations affecting TRIPP's viability as a stabilizing mechanism.

Despite periods of diplomatic engagement, fundamental issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan remain unresolved.

From the perspective of conflict theory, the absence of a final signature and ratification of the comprehensive peace agreement creates what Zartman (2001) defines as an "incomplete conflict resolution," where underlying incompatibilities persist despite the cessation of large-scale violence. In such contexts, economic initiatives risk becoming substitutes for political settlement, rather than complementary mechanisms.

Infrastructure projects under TRIPP are particularly vulnerable to politicization. As Mansfield and Snyder (2006) argue, in transitional or unstable political environments, economic cooperation can be disrupted by nationalist mobilization and security concerns. Transport routes due to their strategic and symbolic importance, may become focal points of contestation rather than cooperation.

Furthermore, the lack of clearly defined legal frameworks governing transit rights, sovereignty, and jurisdiction increases the risk of disputes. Without legally binding agreements, even minor incidents can escalate and disrupt infrastructure operations, undermining investor confidence and long-term sustainability.

A critical obstacle to TRIPP's implementation lies in the persistence of *destructive narratives* and the resulting strategic ambiguity. Narratives advanced by Azerbaijan, particularly those related to "Western Azerbaijan"*, "Zangezur Corridor"** and "Constitutional Amendments' Claims"***, introduce sensitivities regarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, and historical interpretation.

Constructivist approaches to international relations emphasize that narratives and identities shape state behavior and perceptions (Wendt, 1999). In the South Caucasus, mutually exclusive historical narratives reinforce mistrust and complicate efforts at normalization. These narratives from Azerbaijani side are not merely rhetorical; they influence policy decisions, public opinion, and negotiation dynamics.

The concept of the "Zangezur Corridor," in particular, illustrates the problem of strategic ambiguity. While it is often framed by Azerbaijan as a logistical and economic project, it is perceived by Armenia as potentially undermining sovereignty if interpreted as an extraterritorial corridor. This divergence in interpretation creates a discursive gap that complicates agreement on implementation modalities.

* See more in detail in Canbäck, R. (2025).

** See more in detail in Kopalyan, N. (2026).

*** See more in detail in Aktas, A. (2026).

As Hopf (2002) argues, identity-based conflicts are particularly resistant to resolution because they involve deeply embedded perceptions and symbolic meanings. In this context, infrastructure cooperation under TRIPP risks being interpreted through the lens of zero-sum competition, rather than mutual benefit.

The South Caucasus is situated at the intersection of multiple spheres of influence, making it a classic example of a geopolitically contested region. The implementation of TRIPP is therefore shaped by the strategic interests of external actors, including:

- Russia, which seeks to maintain its traditional role as a security provider and regional arbiter (Trenin, 2011).
- Turkey, which promotes regional integration aligned with its economic and geopolitical ambitions, particularly through its close partnership with Azerbaijan.
- Iran, which is wary of transit routes that may bypass its territory and alter regional balances.
- The European Union and the United States, which support connectivity initiatives as part of broader strategies of stabilization and diversification.

From a neorealist perspective, this environment reflects a multi-polar competition for influence, where infrastructure projects become instruments of geopolitical strategy. Rather than purely economic initiatives, routes such as those envisioned under TRIPP are embedded in broader power dynamics.

This competition produces several challenges:

- *Fragmentation of initiatives*, as different actors promote competing corridor projects.
- *Politicization of investment*, where infrastructure financing is tied to strategic alignment.
- *Coordination deficits*, due to divergent regulatory standards and strategic priorities.

As Cooley and Nexon (2020) argue, contemporary global order is characterized by overlapping spheres of influence, where infrastructure becomes a site of contestation. In this context, TRIPP risks being drawn into broader geopolitical rivalries, potentially undermining its stabilizing function.

Despite ongoing works and the signed document about the implementation framework, a significant structural challenge to TRIPP is still the absence of institutional bodies on the ground governing its implementation.

Institutionalist theory highlights the importance of institutions in reducing uncertainty, facilitating cooperation, and managing conflicts (Keohane, 1984). Without such mechanisms, the cooperation will remain *ad hoc* and vulnerable to disruption.

For the success of this geo-economic project the works related to its institutionalization have to be accelerated.

The challenges and constraints facing TRIPP highlight the limits of connectivity-driven stabilization in the absence of political, institutional, and geopolitical alignment. Finally unsigned and not ratified peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani destructive narratives, great-power rivalry, as well as institutional deficiencies, collectively create a complex environment in which infrastructure initiatives operate.

These factors suggest that TRIPP cannot be understood as a purely economic project. Rather, it is embedded in a broader system of political relations and power dynamics. Its success as a stabilizing mechanism will depend on the extent to which these constraints are addressed through comprehensive peace agreements, narrative reconciliation, coordinated external engagement, and robust institutional development.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive analysis regarding TRIPP's initiative as well as its opportunities and challenges for the regional stability, the main conclusions are defined below:

- The "TRIPP" initiative embodies a significant strategic opportunity to redefine the South Caucasus from a historically conflict-prone geopolitical space into a functional route of connectivity linking Europe and Asia. By prioritizing transport integration, economic interdependence, and regional cooperation, it introduces a geo-economic logic that has the potential to gradually reshape interstate relations and reduce the structural incentives for confrontation. In this sense, TRIPP reflects a broader transformation in international relations, where infrastructure and connectivity increasingly serve as instruments of stabilization and influence.

  However, the analysis demonstrates that the stabilizing potential of TRIPP is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Its effectiveness is inherently contingent upon a set of interrelated political, institutional, and strategic conditions. First and foremost, the absence of a final and comprehensive settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains the most critical constraint. Without signed and ratified peace agreement, sovereignty, and security arrangements, infrastructure projects risk becoming vulnerable to disruption, politicization, or instrumentalization in periods of renewed tension.
- Equally important is the need to address Azerbaijani destructive narratives and perceptions that continue to shape the regional security environment.

The persistence of exclusive interpretations of history, territory, and political legitimacy limits the development of trust, which is essential for any form of sustained cooperation. In this regard, TRIPP cannot function effectively in isolation from broader processes of reconciliation and dialogue. Economic connectivity may create incentives for cooperation, but it cannot substitute for the political and societal dimensions of peacebuilding.

- Institutional capacity constitutes another decisive factor. The long-term success of TRIPP depends on the establishment of transparent, rules-based, and inclusive governance mechanisms and bodies on the ground capable of managing cross-border infrastructure, regulating transit, and resolving disputes. Without institutionalization, even well-designed economic initiatives may remain fragile and susceptible to external shocks or internal disagreements. Institutionalization is therefore not merely a technical requirement, but a fundamental component of stability.
- At the same time, the initiative must be understood within the broader context of regional and global geopolitics. The South Caucasus remains an arena of overlapping interests involving actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, the European Union, and the United States. While their engagement can provide resources, guarantees, and political support, it also introduces elements of competition that may complicate coordination and implementation. The ability of regional actors to balance these external influences while preserving strategic autonomy will be crucial.
- In its current form, TRIPP should therefore be understood as *a potential stabilizer with conditional effectiveness*. It offers a framework through which economic cooperation can reinforce peacebuilding, but it cannot independently generate stability in the absence of political alignment. Its transformative potential lies in its capacity to complement diplomatic efforts, create shared economic interests, and gradually institutionalize cooperation.
- Ultimately, the long-term impact of TRIPP will depend on whether regional actors can successfully align economic integration with political reconciliation. If these processes evolve in parallel, the initiative may contribute to a gradual reconfiguration of the South Caucasus into a space defined less by conflict and more by connectivity, interdependence, and cooperative regionalism. Conversely, if political divisions persist and governance mechanisms remain weak, TRIPP risks remaining an underutilized or contested framework, reflecting the very tensions it seeks to overcome.

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THE MAIN THEORIES OF VALUES AND ASSESSMENTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

Garnik Safaryan, Doctor of Law, Professor,
Chief Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy,
Sociology and Law of NAS RA
ORCID iD: 0009-0001-2991-8566
(email: garniksafaryan85@gmail.com)

Gevorg Khachikyan, PhD student at the
Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of NAS RA
(email: khachikyan.80@mail.ru)

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Abstract

The article discusses the main conceptual approaches to values and assessments in the philosophy of law, as reflected in the legal and political teachings of classical and contemporary authors. Particular attention is paid to the nature and content of legal values and its relationship with positive law and the existing legal system. Legal values constitute an important component of the philosophy of law and have significant practical importance in legal application.

***Keywords**:* Values, legal values, evaluative legal theory, legal and political teachings, conceptual approaches.

Introduction

Conceptual approaches to values, including legal values, began to take shape back in the ancient era, but value consciousness was destined to become the leading worldview of the new era, which opened a new millennium in the new historical era (Zarikyan, 2024).

There are three main explanations of the relationship between spiritual values and social systems. The first concerns ideals, the embodiment of values in existing reality (Plato, Hegel, and Kant). The second approach claims the opposite, namely that the conditionality of ideas and values is conditioned by material existence (K. Marx). The third does not condition one with the other, but asserts the fact of mutual adaptation of elements in a living socio-culture, in which ideological values participate in social processes together with other elements.

The main forms of worldview are myths, beliefs, and ideologies. Each of these forms has had its ups and downs, periods of peaceful life and fierce struggle within the framework of human civilization. Currently, the world is experiencing a pluralism of the foundations of value worldviews, which puts the issue of their mandatory communication and coexistence on the agenda. In this case, such communication should take place in the language of values. One can agree with the opinion that values are born from liberal-democratic ideology. The values of freedom of reason, civil equality, rights and freedoms do not always appear in the sphere of consciousness of the struggle with other values, and therefore condition only humanitarian and just ways of their realization. It can be assumed that a new value-legal worldview is formed on the basis of liberal ideology, which has a high degree of tolerance and which spreads forms of peaceful relations in the socio-cultural space.

The value sphere of society is not measurable, with the problems singled out for discussion by scientists in this field. It is the problems of the existence and development of the human race, its civilizations and cultures that are measurable with the foundations of the construction of values of morality and law.

Research Methodology

The methodological basis of the research consists of the laws and categories of universal dialectics, together with general scientific and specific legal methods – analysis and synthesis, and methods of legal comparative analysis.

The Essence and Characteristics of Legal Values and Assessments from the Perspective of Legal Theory

The general theory of law, like many social subjects, explains and describes its subject. The nature and forms of law, the activity of the legal system of society, the sources of law, the relationship of law with the state, the relationship of law and law, etc., are within its sphere of interest. The main task here is usually seen in the discovery of the regularities of the origin, development and functioning of the legal system (Nersesyants, 2005, pp. 1-3). The search for these regularities implies that the researcher is, as it were, outside the legal system, moving away from it in thought. In reality, however, a lawyer cannot be outside the legal system. The theoretical knowledge presented by him is an element of legal existence, the theorist's cognitive attitude to that existence. In addition, his involvement is determined by his practical attitude to legal life. The latter, in this case, acts not as an encompassing of the most diverse regularities possible, but as a world of diverse human needs. For this reason, a lawyer should strive to reveal the significance of material and spiritual requirements (including those related to

law) for the life of society, social groups and the individual. The description of the category of significance logically leads to the presentation of values, in particular, the problems of values and jurisprudence.

It should be noted that previously, from Aristotle to the ideology of the Enlightenment, the highest credo of discovering the world was epistemological doctrine, where the main emphasis was on knowledge as a reflection of reality and on knowledge as the acquisition of truth. The goal of science, as a rule, was truth, which is separated from the axiological sphere.

The replacement of being with value in the process of mastering a modern scientific subject expresses the approach of scientific forms to creative methods characteristic of art. This happens because the very value of art is "inhabited" with values.

In terms of the legal sphere, this means the development of the foundations for creative manifestations in law. These foundations relate, first of all, to the legislative basis, the development of local legislation, but, in addition, it also means a new value attitude of the subject to law. This attitude should be characterized by a high degree of humanism, with respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual.

Representatives of the classical theory declare as the goal of their science the self-elimination of one's own subjectivity from the result of cognition, since this is necessary for the effectiveness of socio-legal practice, in the event that this practice is expressed in the relationship between people's legal consciousness and legal feelings, that is, ultimately, in the change between legal values, which requires the cognition of values, not extra-valued existence (Schutze, 2011).

For modern science, including the theory of law, the fusion of epistemological and axiological criteria of study is possible and desirable. The world of law is presented as a world of values that the individual recognizes and assimilates within the limits of his capabilities. That is why the cognitive, practical forms of activity of modern man are closely intertwined with the perception of values. Value orientation directs a person to the sea of legal facts, initiates his cognitive activity in law.

In this regard, the problem of the correlation of the value and the result of cognition-truth is worthy of attention. Non-classical knowledge directly points to the coincidence of the real and the unreal in value. Transformed, "erroneous" values, illusions and delusions are objective circumstances of life in law, which require their meaning. Non-classical thinking in legal axiology means the search for the dependence of legal values on the provisions of the value system, as well as the characteristics of the existence of legal "erroneous" values. In the study of the latter, the effectiveness of the value

perception of the surrounding world from the point of view of group interests plays an equally important role.

In order to build a theory of legal axiology, it is necessary to proceed from the current level of development of cognitive activity. Referring to the description of the methodology used in this study, it should be noted that in the second half of the 20th century, the era of "non-classical thinking" ended, which at the beginning of the century had replaced the "classical" thinking that had dominated for about 300 years. At that time, a new epistemological paradigm began to form in science, which was based on two epistemological definitions: non-classical and classical synthesis.

The American researcher of scientific methodology, W. Weaver, distinguished three stages in the history of scientific thought: the "classical" stage, which he characterized as "organizational simplicity"; the "non-classical" stage, based on the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics and emphasizing "non-organizational complexity"; and the "non-classical" (neo-non-classical) stage, formed on the basis of discoveries made in the field of cybernetics, information theory, and systems theory and defined as "organizational complexity" (Weawer, 1948). There are a number of examples of how specific forms of transition to this new paradigm are observed in various spheres of human activity. In the description of this methodology, one cannot fail to take into account the achievements of synergetics, which applies the principles of systems theory to development processes and substantiates a new perception of harmony and chaos. The effectiveness of the application of synergistic patterns in the study of socio-cultural processes, as well as in the development of complex systems of laws at present, is beyond doubt.

Recent studies provide a clear idea of the systemic inclusive thinking that is currently forming at all levels of spiritual activity, overcoming their former dispersion and self-isolation.

In the modern era, a radical movement is taking place in social science. The beginning of the "non-classical period" has brought with it radical changes in the approaches to the spiritual assimilation of society. The analysis of axiological problems is not an end in itself and is intended to contribute to the clarification of the nature, essence and foundations of law. The application of the axiological approach in law inevitably leads to the analysis of the nature of law.

In practice, scientific thought is "driven forward", first of all, by the perception of the value and significance of law, its mission in society, and human life. In addition, the most complex and difficult task is the philosophical meaning of the value of jurisprudence – the dogmas of law, its philosophical elevation. Such an approach to a theoretical legal problem is called upon to overcome the centuries-old gaps between fundamental legal

knowledge and the philosophy of law. It is mentioned in the limits of I. Kant's "Philosophical Elaborations" and is characteristic of legal thought of the beginning of the 20th century. The approach to the perception of the nature of law is its consideration as the economic and political will of the ruling social group (stratum, class) materially conditioned and put forward in law. In this regard, the materially conditioned mechanism of law is important. Objective factors do not have an automatic and direct impact on law. They are mediated by spiritual factors. It is here that the values and value tendencies of people and social groups manifest themselves, including their standards of justice. From this abstract and characteristic perception of law, it is necessary to make a transition to its concrete, practical spiritual perception, as a value-normative framework of worldview, which has two levels of existence at the same time, abstract-general (perfect, legal behavior: law at the socio-cultural level, law as the internal value of a specific legal subject) (Stepanyan, 2016).

Such a view of law allows us to consider it as a living, dynamic phenomenon. Law should be perceived not as a set of static norms, but as a process. Kievan normativity is interpreted here as a special quality of an individual participating in social practice. The unity of the two forms of the existence of law is ensured by the framework of the principle of law and legality. Practically existing individual legal norms must correspond to the general model in the form stated in the law. In general, the system of value relations at the subjective level is embodied in value perceptions. Value consciousness has the following features: breadth and tolerance for ideological, cultural and other diversity, polysemy, the presence of a core of universal significance of ideas and principles, freedom and the possibility of development, readiness for compromises. The foundations of such a form of worldview, which are perceived as rationally expressed normative foundations of human consciousness and behavior. A person consistently moves the conditions and forms of his life from the sphere of traditional nomination to the sphere of conscious appropriation and construction. Therefore, values, sooner or later, will begin not only to change elementally, but also to be rationally assimilated, clarified and constructed.

At the same time, if we want to overcome the modern crisis phenomena in the sphere of national law, we must, as soon as possible, move on to the rational appropriation, discussion and correction of legal values, focusing on the meaning-making and construction of the value and world-perception foundations of constructive axiology.

By applying the principle of constructive axiology to the sphere of legal activity, a number of fundamental regularities of the axiology of law can be changed. First of all, the individual disclosure and study of legal values lead to their formation and construction. As already mentioned, it is difficult for a

researcher to objectively study the sphere of legal values. Second, the period of construction and definition of legal values is separated from the period of its assimilation and following it. The definition of legal values is a creative, constantly occurring process in society, the effectiveness of which is determined by the degree and speed of assimilation of legal values by citizens. Third, the revaluation of legal values is a long and painful process that threatens to give rise to social contradictions, periods of uncertainty, and the loss of the influence and authority of law in society. This leads to the gradual "seeding" of new values on the basis of a preserved cultural tradition. Fourth, the value sphere consists of different types of mutually complementary and mutually reinforcing moral, legal, religious, and other values. Therefore, the study of individual types of values separately from others does not correspond to the harmonious and natural process of the functioning of the axiosphere of society.

Constructive axiology implies the conscious definition and appropriation of legal values, which are perceived first and foremost as a form of human relations to law, certain features of objective reality, as well as the needs, interests, and emotions of the subject directed toward them. The attractiveness of this interpretation lies in the fact that it takes into account the positions of the subject (individual, social union, etc.), as well as in the fact that the subject of value relations can also act as an independent object of systematic study. Scientists draw a distinction between the subject itself and the features with which it is endowed. This is done because any object of reality, which possesses an infinite number and variety of axiologically relevant features, requires attention.

In the same object, various features coexist. These features sometimes come into conflict, and the value characteristic of the object often depends on its resolution. It is the individual features of the latter that attract the subject by the power of their physical, structural, operational criteria in order to satisfy their own needs and interests. The most important element of the value relationship is assessment. Assessment is a subjective act of human consciousness, a subjective reflection of an existing value. It is assessment that determines the subjectivity of the value characteristics of the object, which is considered separately from socio-cultural, legal activity. In evaluative relations, a given object is correlated with another, more general value, which is taken as a scale, a norm. Thus, the dialectic of the value and evaluative relationship is a rather complex phenomenon. The evaluative relationship arises within the framework of already existing value relations, but as a result of evaluative relations, a new value relationship may also emerge.

Assessments have a highly diverse nature. Those assessments that are characteristic of morality, politics, law, and art are considered purely

approbative. In the literature on the issue of values, axiological assessments are distinguished as general evaluative and specific evaluative. The former contain an assessment of the object in general, while the latter relate to individual aspects, characteristics, and features of the object, which are obtained at a particular stage.

Universal human values find their embodiment in universal forms of morality and law. According to N.S. Nersesyants (2013), such fundamental values are justice, freedom, and equality, which, being expressed in moral and legal forms, acquire a moral character (pp. 78-79). In the literature, the opinion has been expressed many times that the axiological sphere of law should be characterized by the regular use of the terms moral-legal consciousness and moral-legal values.

At the same time, despite the common value bases, law and morality do not merge but have an independent socio-normative life and their own value hierarchy, which sometimes acts as a justification for law, however, together they are in a complex relationship of mutual support (Maltsev, 2007).

It is necessary to welcome the attempt to "introduce" a value approach into the definition of law, but one cannot agree with the mechanical introduction of moral values into such a definition, which ultimately leads to value reductionism, a reduction in the role of values in normative regulation, and also calls into question the value interrelations between law and morality. Legal values are spiritual phenomena that are embodied, to one degree or another, in legal relations and define the purely human nature of law.

Conclusion

One of the important components of law is value, which is also one of the essential and mandatory features of positive legal systems.

Law acts as a universal form that fixes other social means, which is expressed in the social-regulating, transactional value of law. At the same time, the pure values of law – human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, legal order, and legality – acquire a necessary and sufficient embodiment.

From the perspective of necessity, the perception of law as a reflection of conscious will further enhances the place and role of law in the sphere of legal regulation. Moreover, will is always associated with freedom of will, that is, a choice among various motives that does not contradict the vital needs of a person.

For the will of law, specific legal norms and values can act as such content. Natural law gives legal phenomena a spiritual, humanitarian content. The spiritual dimensions of law constitute moral and legal values. Natural law perceives the highest, universal values, which are expressed in the way a person respects his own rights and in striving for freedoms.

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For example, Huntington (1993)

When the author is not mentioned in the running text, include the author's last name and the year of publication in parentheses. Separate author and year by a comma (parenthetical citation).
For example, (Huntington, 1993)

Two authors

(Lintz & Stepan, 1996),
Lintz & Stepan (1966)

Three and more authors

(Smith et al., 1998), Smith et al. (1998)

Two or more works with different authors

(Torbakov, 2019; Mankoff, 2022)

Two or more works with the same author

(Huntington, 1993, 1996)

Citations with the same author(s) and with the same publication year
Identify citations with the same author(s) and with the same publication year by the suffixes a, b, c, and so forth. Assign the suffixes alphabetically by title (consistent with the order in the reference list).
(Kissinger, 1979a, 1979b).

Authors with the same surname
If a reference list contains works by two leading authors with the same surname, provide the initials of both authors in all text citations.
R. Smith (2011) and S. S. Smith (2014).

Works with an unknown publication year
When the publication year of a work is unknown, use the abbreviation 'n.d.' (no date).
(Carter, n.d.).

When the author's name is unknown, use the source title.
(*Source Title*, 2020).

When the page number is missing either use an alternative locator or omit the page number.
(James, 2020, Chapter 3) or (James, 2020).

Direct quotations
In a direct quote include the page number or specific parts of a source.
(Brzezinski, 2000, p. 175)
Brzezinski (2000) … (p. 175)
(Atkinson, 2007, Chapter 8)
(Huntington, 1996, Table 2.1, p. 55)

Secondary sources
(Brzezinski, as cited in Kakachia, 2011)

REFERENCES
References must be arranged in alphabetical order by the last name of the (first) author, followed by the initials. (Hanging - 1.5).
The Latin transliteration of all non-Latin references should be included together with the English translation. There is no need to transliterate the author(s) surname(s).
Вебер, М. (1990). *Наука как призвание*. Москва: Прогресс.

Weber, M. (1990). Nauka kak prizvaniye (Science as a Vocation). Moscow: Progress.

Works by the same author (or by the same two or more authors in the same order) with the same publication date are arranged alphabetically by title. Add lowercase letters - a, b, c, etc. - immediately after the year.
Fukuyama, F. (2018a). Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(5), 90-114.
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To cite published proceedings from a book, use the same format as for a book or book chapter.
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GRAPHS AND DIAGRAMS

If the manuscript contains non-alphabetic characters (e.g. logical formulae, diagrams) then:

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- photo images should be of high quality.