

Transformation underway? Armenia's Russian and Western policy after the 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabakh

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Abstract

Since the very first years of independence, structural factors have heavily informed Armenia's foreign policy thinking and strategy. More specifically, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey's hostile attitude towards Armenia necessitated the strategy of external balancing via forging an alliance with Russia with which Armenia has aspired to compensate for the power asymmetry. Thus, Armenia firmly and fully embedded itself into the Russia-led regional order. As a result of the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh, fundamental changes took places in Armenia's security environment. The post-war period has witnessed Russia's partial disengagement from and increased Western engagement in regional affairs. In addition to that, Yerevan became increasingly dissatisfied with CSTO and Russia's refusal to protect Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan's large-scale attacks which led to a point where Armenia froze its membership in the alliance. At the same time, at Armenia's request, the European Union deployed a civilian monitoring mission along the Armenian-Azerbaijani frontline. Yerevan started to openly entertain the idea of joining or at least getting closer to the European Union. These developments necessitate revisiting the question whether the era of Armenia's pro-Russian foreign policy is over.

This research will have a qualitative research design. It will answer the following research question: has the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh affected Armenia's relations with Russia and the West, and if so, how? The research will apply the concept of bandwagoning and draw on the relevant academic literature, statements, speeches and interviews by Armenian, Russian, US and EU officials and statistical data.

To my knowledge, Armenia's foreign policy priorities with regards to regional powers in the post-2020 period have largely remained understudied in the academic literature. This topic has featured in short analytical publications most of which argue that Armenia has abandoned its Russia-centered foreign policy and embarked on a pro-western policy path. My hypothesis argues the contrary meaning that, despite (the mutual interest in) the expansion of partnership with the EU, Armenia still bandwagons with Russia.

The expected research output is an academic article in an international peer-reviewed journal.

Keywords: foreign policy of Armenia, bandwagoning