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THE DYNAMICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARMENIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

Abstract. Relations with the post-soviet countries, especially with the Caucasus republics became a special aspect of Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, after the collapse of the USSR. The processes around the Islamic Republic of Iran have increased the attention to the foreign policy of this country, its relations with neighboring countries and its strategic goals. It is known that the Islamic Republic of Iran expected its main threats to its security from its southern and western neighbors. In this sense, the collapse of the USSR has created a new sphere of diplomatic activity for the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, Iran's loss of influence in this region could pose new security threats to him.

The main purpose of this article is to analyze the stages of political relations between one of the regional powers of the Asian continent the Islamic Republic of Iran and its sole Christian neighbor Armenia and to forecast future of bilateral relations. This article explores the dynamics of Iran-Armenia relations in the context of regional security. The methodological basis of the research is the principles of the theory of realism. A number of theoretical and applied methods have been used to study the development of bilateral relations.

Keywords: Iran; Armenia; Caucasus; security; bilateral relations; geopolitics.

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ДИНАМИКА РАЗВИТИЯ АРМЯНО-ИРАНСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ПЕРИОД


Аннотация. Отношения с постсоветскими странами, особенно с кавказскими республиками, стали особым аспектом внешней политики Исламской Республики Иран после распада СССР. Процессы вокруг Исламской Республики Иран усилили внимание к внешней политике этой страны, ее отношениям с соседними странами и ее стратегическим целям. Известно, что основные угрозы своей безопасности Исламская Республика Иран ожидала получить от своих южных и западных соседей. В этом смысле распад СССР создал для Исламской Республики Иран новую сферу дипломатической деятельности. С другой стороны, потеря Ираном влияния в этом регионе может создать для него новые угрозы безопасности.

Основной целью данной статьи является анализ этапов развития политических отношений между одной из региональных держав Азиатского континента Исламской Республикой Иран и ее единственным христианским соседом Арменией и прогнозирование дальнейшего развития двусторонних отношений. В данной статье исследуется динамика ирано-армянских отношений в контексте региональной безопасности. Методологической основой исследования являются принципы теории реализма. Для изучения развития двусторонних отношений был использован ряд теоретических и прикладных методов.

Ключевые слова: Иран; Армения; Кавказ; безопасность; двусторонние отношения; геополитика.

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Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ties with the newly independent countries, especially with the Caucasian republics, took a special place in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The establishment of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) was important to Armenia, which at that time also proclaimed its independence. On December 25, 1991, the recognition of the independence of the Armenian Republic by the Islamic Republic of Iran facilitated the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries [1:43].

A delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (RA) Raffi Hovannisyan visited Tehran in February 1992. Two weeks later, another delegation led by the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati headed to Yerevan. During those visits, the diplomatic relations were established between the two countries [2: 87].

Analysis of the IRI-RA relations since 1991 shows that there have been no significant conceptual changes, apart from some exceptions. The Republic of Armenia needed to establish ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran to rebuild its weakened in the post-Soviet period economy, to gain support of Muslim countries in the conflict with the Republic of Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and to avoid regional isolation. The Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to use the power of its only Christian neighbor – the Republic of Armenia, the Armenian diaspora and its lobby – to weaken the influence of the Western powers, including the US, and expand its ties to prevent the strengthening of the United States and the State of Israel in Armenia.

In this context, the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran coincided with the interests and geopolitical plans of the Russian Federation in the Caucasus.

Stages of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia

Researchers distinguish several stages of the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia. In his studies, Petros G. Tifanny distinguishes two stages: the pre-2002 and the post-2002 period [3:9].

Vladimir Mesamed, the author of a study on Iran's relations with non-Muslim countries of the Caucasus, did a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the two countries in various fields, without chronological stages [4]. Iranian researchers I. Koolai and M. Goderzi analyzed the relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Republic of Armenia from 1991 and proposed the following stages: 1991-1997, 1997-2000 and post-2000 periods [5:38-70]. Azerbaijani researches V. Qasimli, Z. Shiriyev, Z. Valiyeva divided the progress of these relations into three stages:

I stage – 1991-2001;

II stage – 2001-2008;

III stage – post-2008 period [6: 11].

Н. Jabbarli compared the relations between the two countries until and after the year of 2000 in his books and papers dedicated to the foreign relations of the Republic of Armenia and touched upon the reasons of changes in their relationship [7: 153].

Based on the analyses, relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia can be divided into 4 stages:

I stage – covers 1991-1997;

II stage – covers 1998-2008;

III stage – covers 2008-2018;

IV stage – covers post-2018 phase.

Establishing the Relations and the Convergence Stage

The first stage from 1991-1997 was the stage of convergence in accordance with geopolitical changes and establishing relations. Armenia established its representative office in IRI, in Tehran in December of 92, and Vahan Baibourtian was assigned to the position of the temporary attorney in Iran¹. The consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Armenia was declared as an embassy in 1994 [8: 27]. Hamid Rza Nikkar Esfahani was assigned as the first ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Armenia [9: 118].

During this period, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan waged war in Nagorno-Karabakh region and its surrounding territories. Islamic Conference Organization supported the position of Azerbaijan in this conflict which urged Armenia to look for allies among the Islamic countries. Both the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with their borders on the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia, were aware of the situation. In the period prior to the cease-fire in 1994 between Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Armenia, Iran made several attempts to settle the conflict peacefully; yet those efforts yielded no results. Each time after the agreements with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran were reached, a military campaign would restart; as a result of it, sustainable peace was never achieved.

Throughout the period of 1991-1997 Iran and Armenia were not involved in any political, economic, religious and ethnic conflicts. However, several minor conflicts still occurred. The leaders of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Iran estimated all opportunities to strengthen their relations and, as a result, a series of projects were realized in the fields of transportation and energy. In the given period Armenia paid official visits to Iran eight times (by the president and ministers of Foreign Affairs). The same was true for Iran. During this period Armenian president paid two visits to Iran, and Iranian president to Armenia three times.

Thus, the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia in the foregoing years can be summarized as follows:

Geopolitical processes made their way to convergence of relations between the two countries.

¹ Bilateral Relations. Islamic Republic of Iran. [Internet] - mfa.am – 2018, Available from: www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/ir.

Iran and Armenia did not take part in the wide range projects implemented in the region, which led the states to put forward claims to perform alternative projects.

Russia strengthened its control over Armenia, which affected the relations between Iran and Armenia.

The attitude of Armenia to the sanctions on Iran has been defined by the position of Russia.

The stage of interrelated evolution

The second stage covers 1998-2008 and coincides with the period of Robert Kocharian's rule as the second president of the Republic of Armenia. Researchers call this period "Inter-Related Evolution" in the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia (9: 36-41). During this stage Armenia tried to gradually develop close relations with the USA and the European states along with Russia-Iran partners in the region, yet it could not leave the political spectrum of Russia unambiguously.

In according with the events in the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to converge with Armenia. The attempts of Iran in this direction after 2001 have increased in number. Two factors impacted it:

The participation of Azerbaijan against international terrorism together with the USA and support of anti-terrorist measures.

After violation of water borders in the Caspian Sea by Iranian vessels launch of military campaigns by Republic of Azerbaijan with Turkey.

Military campaigns of the Republic of Azerbaijan together with Turkey over the Caspian Sea caused disagreement of Iran. A number of serious discussions were carried out. Even the chief of the headquarters of the Community of Independent States of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran M. Dovletabadi reported in an interview with then ambassador of Republic of Azerbaijan to the Islamic Republic of Iran Abbasali Hassanov that the news about the fact that the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan conducted military trainings with Turkey in the Caspian Sea expressed a keen sensitivity in several military circles of the Islamic Republic of Iran [10: 155]. The Iranian side did not hesitate to threaten the Republic of Azerbaijan even with military force, too. Thus, after the dissemination of the market information, Dovletabadi informed the ambassador of Azerbaijan that corps of the Islamic Revolution Guards – Commander of the SEPAH Rahim Safavi was ready to resolve all issues [10: 156]. Nevertheless, military unit № 102 of the Russian Federation in Armenia held military trainings together with Armenia. The Islamic Republic of Iran had nothing to do with those trainings in the border area, and they had not been concerned about it.

At that time, Armenia was trying to determine its relations with the Iran in accordance with the American cooperation with the Russian Federation on terrorism. American-Russian rapprochement had a negative impact on the Iranian-American relations.

The United States, which consistently accused Iran of supporting terrorism, imposed a series of sanctions in 2002, accusing Armenia of selling chemical weapons

to Iran. Those pressures resulted in the repatriation of the Republic of Armenia and began to support the efforts of the USA in the fight against terrorism in order to keep relations with the Western States intact. The Iranian side has shown an interesting approach in response to such actions by the Armenian officials, who often emphasizes the prevailing principles of complementarity in foreign policy. The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Armenia M. Koyelini addressed then minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Vartan Oskanian: “Do you think it would be more appropriate to use “multilateral relations” instead of “complementarity” to describe your own policies?”².

M. Koyelini stressed that Armenia, while supporting American anti-terrorist campaigns, allowed more than 600 American-led flights to Central Asia in its airspace and this situation worried the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, in all cases, Iran was trying not to break its ties with Armenia, which had its own geopolitical reason.

The convergence stage in the context of new geopolitical threats

The main difference from the previous phase of the third stage of 2008-2018 was that if the rapprochement between 1997 and 2008 mainly served the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the post-2008 period, Armenia would be more in favor of intensification of relations. The military conflict between the Russian Federation and Georgia in 2008 had a negative impact on economic and transit relations between Armenia and Russia over Georgia. The railway project to be built between from Yerevan (Armenia) to Sokhumi (Abkhazia/Georgia) was canceled because of the said conflict. Seeing the impossibility of Georgia to access the world market, the Republic of Armenia began to work to reconnect ties with Turkey [11: 23-26]. However, the failure of those efforts resulted in Armenia's rapprochement with the Islamic Republic of Iran as a last resort. Since 2009, agreements have been signed between the two countries to establish close ties in the fields of energy, agriculture, science and culture. As a result, the trade volume between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia increased to \$1 billion in 2010. At that time, Armenia's exports to Iran were 65.1 million euro in value and Iran's imports – 151 million euro. Iran was the fourth largest country in the Armenian economy³.

One of the key factors, characteristic of this stage, especially since 2010, has been Armenia's political and economic dependence on the Russian Federation and its actions under the dictate of Russia in most of its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2 Armenia: Westward Foreign-Policy Shift Brings Unease in Iran. - [Internet] - eurasianet.org - 2002. [Accessed: 26.11.2018]. Access by link: <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-westward-foreign-policy-shift-brings-unease-in-iran>.

3 Trade.ec.europa.eu (2006) Directorate General for Trade of the European Commission. Bilateral relations statistics, Armenia. - [Internet] - trade.ec – 2006. [Accessed: 29.11.2019]. Access by link: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113345.pdf.

The uncertain future

Both the geopolitical processes, the events in Armenia, the silence in irreconcilable rapprochement in Iran-Armenia relations allow us to differentiate the post-April of 2018 phase as a new stage. Compared to the previous ones, it demonstrates that in this period, Armenia has paid more attention to relations with the Western countries than with the Islam Republic of Iran. One of the key factors affecting relations with Iran is the fact that Nicol Pashinyan, who became the Prime minister as a result of “Velvet Revolution” at this stage, seeks to win support from Western countries, including the USA, and makes a number of strategic changes with Russia. The first meeting of N. Pashinyan with the president of the Islam Republic of Iran took place on September 26, 2018 following his appointment to the post of Prime Minister.

The meeting that was held in New York city in connection with the next annual meeting of the UN ⁴, a number of researchers “consider it as a gesture of” Armenia`s relationship with Iran under the US control.

It should be recalled that, after Nicol Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister, the president of the Islam Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani congratulated and invited him to visit Iran, but Nicol Pashinyan ignored his invitation. The new Prime Minister answered the invitation only seven months later.

Nicol Pashinyan`s press release in November 2018 also highlighted the importance of American authorization. Pashinyan in this statement said that “Despite the US sanctions, Armenia will try to maintain and elevate relations with Iran”. While following as an indication of American permission, Nikol Pashinyan said that “the USA understands our situation and our policy”⁵.

Following the announcement of the government`s program in February 2019, steps were taken to restore relations with the Islam Republic of Iran; Nicol Pashinyan realized that reducing Russia`s influence over the Armenian army and economy is not a simple task. At the time when relations with Russia deteriorated, economic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran were indispensable.

It should be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was closely following the developments taking place in Armenia in the post-April 2018 period, was not inclined to strengthen its ties with this country. It was clear that in such a period of geopolitical changes, it was more important to improve relations with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan than trading with Republic of Armenia on any economic resources. On the other hand, Iran, being aware that Nicol Pashinyan was an American-backed politician, kept its time with stepping up and ratifying the signed documents on the creation of the Iran-Armenia railway and border free economic zone, which was considered to be one of the most important projects with Armenia.

It is no coincidence that on February 27, 2019 the new Prime Minister of Armenia,

⁴ Armenian news: breaking news. [Internet] – youtube.com – 2018. [Accessed: 26.11.2018]. Access by link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=S35vK-uO9iM [00:38-01:32].

⁵ Pashinyan Rules Out Change In Armenia`s Policy On Iran. - [Internet] - asbarez.com – 2018. [Accessed: 11.02.2019]. Access by link: <http://asbarez.com/176289/pashinyan-rules-out-change-in-armenias-policy-on-iran/>.

Nikol Pashinyan visited Iran to discuss the issues with the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran⁶.

On the eve of Nikol Pashinyan`s visit, the country`s website “theiranproject.com” published a report on the export potential of the Islamic Republic of Iran according to the State Customs Administration of Iran; it was reported that on the first place among the countries-importers from Iran was Italy, and the second place was held by Azerbaijan. During the same period the Republic of Azerbaijan imported \$502,128,355 worth of goods from Iran, while Armenia only \$160 million⁷. It is worth mentioning that in previous years, Armenia was second after Italy in importing goods from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Naturally, Nikol Pashinyan`s anti-Iranian stance and “USA Fears” lead to the decline in import. On the other hand, this could also be due to the deep economic crisis of the Armenian economy and the low purchasing power of the population.

During his visit as the Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan met with the Supreme Religious leader of Iran Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the president Hasan Rouhani and the speaker of the Parliament of Iran Ali Larijani. The official welcoming ceremony of the Prime Minister of Armenia was held at the Sadabad Palace by the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani. Following the ceremony, a meeting was held between the delegations, headed by the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan. During the meeting, a part of the Hassan Rouhani`s speech was particularly remarkable. The president of the Islam Republic of Iran, pointing to the possible changes in the foreign policy of Armenia stated: “Iran wants to have long-term close relations with its neighbors, in particular with Armenia. I am convinced that your visit to Iran will contribute to the further strengthening of bilateral political, economic and humanitarian relations”⁸.

The Prime Minister of Armenia stated that the changes in his country were not influenced by any external forces: “Fundamental transformations are taking place in Armenia, which are of internal character and no external power has been involved therein. This is a fundamental point in understanding the essence of the process. I am convinced that new opportunities have emerged in our relations, and we have the necessary political will to implement them”⁹.

At the meeting with the delegations, it was announced that the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani and the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol

6 High expectations from the secret agenda: with what will Pashinyan return from Iran. [Internet] - ru.armeniasputnik.am – 2019. [Accessed: 04.04.2019]. Access by link: <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/politics/20190219/17378689/bolshie-ozhidaniya-ot-sekretnoj-povestki-s-chem-pashinyan-vernetsya-iz-irana.html>. (In Russ.)

7 Katanov R. Pashinyan's Iran visit and unrealistic hopes. [Internet] - azertag.az – 2019. [updated 02.03.2019], Aviable from: https://azertag.az/xeber/Pasinyanin_Iran_seferi_ve_dogrulmayan_umidler-1253526. (In Azerbaijanian).

8 Nikol Pashinyan meeting with Hassan Rouhani. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated 27.02.2019], Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-with-Hassan-Rouhani/. (In Armenian).

9 Nikol Pashinyan meeting with Hassan Rouhani. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated 27.02.2019], Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-with-Hassan-Rouhani/. (In Armenian).

Pashinyan had agreed on another project to further enhance energy cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, a construction of the third Iran-Armenia power line would be started for this purpose. The steps to increase bilateral trade, mutual trade in Tehran and Yerevan, the creation of the North-South transport corridor were also discussed at the meeting. The parties also exchanged views on agriculture, information technology, health care, tourism and environmental protection.

At the meeting with the delegation, the views of Nikol Pashinyan on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh were no different as those of the previous Armenian leaders. Nikol Pashinyan noted that Armenia appreciated the balanced position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

At a joint press conference after the meeting, Hassan Rouhani's statement showed that the Islamic Republic of Iran was able to obtain concessions from Armenia on a number of issues of interest to the country. Hassan Rouhani who said that they wanted to develop cooperation in the political, economic, tourism, science, cultural and academic fields between Iran and Armenia expressed satisfaction with the position that the official Yerevan had on American sanctions and said: "We are determined not to let any third country interfere with Iran's relations with Armenia"¹⁰.

The president of the Islamic Republic of Iran said that they had agreed to establish a power line between Iran, Armenia and Georgia and that later the Russian Federation would also join the project. They also discussed the creation of infrastructure that would connect the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea. Touching on energy relations with Armenia in the end, Hassan Rouhani said that the Iranian side has been evaluating the power plant to be built in Armenia and that the Islamic Republic of Iran was ready to export more gas to Armenia.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in his speech stated that Armenia could play an important role in relations of Iran with Eurasian Economic Union. Nikol Pashinyan, cautious about the Hassan Rouhani's idea that Iran may increase gas export to Armenia said that this issue was also important to determine pricing and should be further discussed¹¹. In fact, it was a diplomatic idea that the Iranian republic was calling for the avoidance of this cooperation proposal amid tightening trade sanctions imposed by the USA and Western countries on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Two agreements on economic cooperation between the two countries were signed¹². One of these documents was the memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Economic Development and Investment of Armenia and the Institute of Irrigation Standardization and Industrial research, of İRİ; the other was a

¹⁰ Iranian President Hasan Rouhani has met with Pashinyan.[Internet]. - TRT.net – 2019. [updated 2019 February 27].Avible from: www.trt.net.tr/azerbaycan/bolg-x-b-rl-ri/2019/02/27/iran-prezidenti-h-s-n-ruhani-pasinyan-il-gorusub-1153813. (In Azerbaijani).

¹¹ Nikol Pashinyan – Hassan Rouhani Joint Statement. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated 27.02.2019], Avible from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-Hassan-Rouhani-Joint-Statement/. (In Armenian).

¹² Iranian President Hasan Rouhani has met with Pashinyan.[Internet]. - TRT.net – 2019. [updated 2019 February 27].Avible from: www.trt.net.tr/azerbaycan/bolg-x-b-rl-ri/2019/02/27/iran-prezidenti-h-s-n-ruhani-pasinyan-il-gorusub-1153813. (In Azerbaijani).

memorandum between the Ministry of Development and Investment of Armenia and the Supreme Council of Free Trade, Industry and special Economic Zones of IRI.

The number of documents signed between Iran and Armenia, and the essence of the documents show that the Islamic Republic of Iran did not fully trust the new Prime Minister of Armenia.

Later on, Nikol Pashinyan met with the speaker of the parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ali Larijani. The meeting was based on traditional views on the development of relations between parliaments of the two countries. The only serious issue discussed between Nikol Pashinyan and Ali Larijani was that the parliaments would soon ratify the free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran [3]. At that time, the chairmanship of the organization was Armenia and it made the Islamic Republic of Iran want to seize this opportunity and accelerate the process.

The Prime Minister of Armenia was also received by Seyed Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khamenei said that he was aware of Pashinyan's meetings in the Islamic Republic of Iran and stressed the importance of developing economic ties. Nikol Pashinyan informed Seyed Ali Khamenei about "the velvet Revolution in Armenia" and called it "People`s Revolution". The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran said that he was closely following the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijan situation. The parties expressed their support for a peaceful and gradual settlement of the conflict¹³. However, that statement of Nikol Pashinyan was not regarded by experts as a genuine peace request. After all, he made different, harsh statements back in his country after making such statements at international meetings.

At the end of the first day of the official visit, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, his wife Anna Akopyan and members of the delegation met the representatives of the Armenian community in Iran. The meeting was held at Tehran's Ararat Sport and Culture Club. Speaking at the meeting, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, with his underline expressions, confirmed that Armenia couldn't get enough support of IRI. The Armenian communities also tried to increase tension between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran by taking provocative actions at that meeting. On the other hand, Armenia was well aware that any step taken in Tehran against the Republic of Azerbaijan could increase the social and political tension in the Islamic Republic of Iran where Azerbaijanis resided. From this point of view, unable to obtain sufficient support from Iran, Armenia responded to Iran by creating both external and internal problems.

From the speech of the Prime Minister, it is also possible to observe the tension between the Armenian authorities and the Armenian diaspora organizations abroad. Pashinyan said: "I want to make a point. Yes, there may be discussions, debates, different approaches and views on diaspora issues in Armenia, but above all that, I

13 Nikol Pashinyan hosted by Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated 27.02.2019], Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/02/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-with-Ali-Khamenei/.

want to say that our former government has created distrust between Armenia and the Armenian diaspora organizations abroad and in Iran. However, this alliance is more important than any political party's interest; our alliance stands high above all else and we are all just serving it"¹⁴.

Nikol Pashinyan highly appreciated the efforts of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Armenian Evangelical Church to unite the Armenians in Iran. He said that the Armenian Republic and the Armenian diaspora shared the same goal.

At the end Pashinyan answered a series of questions regarding the strengthening of the Armenian diaspora, the results of the meetings held in the Islamic Republic of Iran, government priorities, the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Armenian-Turkish relations and more.

On February 28, 2019 Pashinyan headed to Isfahan, where the Armenian community was more densely populated. Accompanied by the governor of the city Abbas Rezai, the Prime Minister of Armenia visited the Naqsh-e Jahan Square where a number of spiritual and cultural monuments were located. Pashinyan and his wife visited Imam and Sheikh Lutfullah mosques in the city, Ali-Qapu Palace and Kastabazar-Qeyseruyye¹⁵.

The Prime Minister of Armenia also visited the holy Amenaprkich Monastery in Isfahan where he met with the Armenian patriarch of Isfahan Sipan Kechechyan. Nikol Pashinyan also met with members of the Armenian community at the Ararat club in Isfahan. He said at this meeting: "Yes, the Bible says that pride is a sin, but I think that arrogance is implied. Pride in modern language is used to describe people with strong legs, a solid backbone and working hands. Proud citizens, proud Armenians of New Julfa, I greet you"¹⁶.

Nikol Pashinyan also pointed to the activities of the "Karabakh Clan" in Armenia and said: "We have to maintain our identity, unshakable alliance and do not pay tribute to foreigners. We must get rid of those politicians in the Republic of Armenia, who are foreign agents rather than citizens of their own country"¹⁷.

Nikol Pashinyan spoke about the Nagorno-Karabakh issue: "We will not allow anybody to think that the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh can be

14 "We no longer have separate agendas for Armenia and the Diaspora: we have a national agenda aimed at achieving national goals" - Nikol Pashinyan meets with Armenian community representatives in Iran. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated: 27.02.2019], Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-meets-with-Armenian-community/. (in Armenian).

15 "The revolution in the Armenian people's historical destiny must come around under the slogan "We are the master of our destiny" - Nikol Pashinyan meets with Armenian community representatives in Isfahan. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated: 28.02.2019]. Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/28/Nikol-Pashinyan-meets-Isfahan-Armenian-community/. (In Armenian).

16 "The revolution in the Armenian people's historical destiny must come around under the slogan "We are the master of our destiny" - Nikol Pashinyan meets with Armenian community representatives in Isfahan. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated: 28.02.2019]. Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/28/Nikol-Pashinyan-meets-Isfahan-Armenian-community/. (In Armenian).

17 "The revolution in the Armenian people's historical destiny must come around under the slogan "We are the master of our destiny" - Nikol Pashinyan meets with Armenian community representatives in Isfahan. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated: 28.02.2019]. Aviable from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/28/Nikol-Pashinyan-meets-Isfahan-Armenian-community/. (In Armenian).

taken away because we are the proud citizens of the Republic of Armenia, proud citizens of the Republic of Artsakh, we are the descendants of Tigran the Great, we are the descendants of King Pap”¹⁸.

At the meetings with Armenian communities during the prime Minister`s visit to Iran, the citizens of the country demonstrated the slogan “Karabakh is Armenia. Stop!”, which was met with protest both by the Republic of Azerbaijan and by the Azerbaijanis, who are considered to be one of the largest populations in Iran. In this case, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman called the events of the Armenian Prime Ministers meeting with the Armenian community unpleasant and said Iran did not want to damage its relations with both countries, cause the events between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

After the visit Nikol Pashinyan took a number of steps. On April 5, 2019, the chairman of the State Revenue Committee of the Republic of Armenia David Anayan made a decision to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran on April 14-16 and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Customs Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran on customs value of goods and other issues [12].

Steps have been taken to accelerate the north-south corridor. The deputy Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of RA Armen Arzumanyan visited the Islamic Republic of Iran in the spring of 2019. He attended the seventh meeting of the Coordination Council on the North-South corridor [13].

In May, the Islamic Republic of Iran took several steps to strengthen its economic ties with Armenia in the face of the tougher economic sanctions imposed by the United States. One of these steps was the active participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the trade fair in Armenia.

However, despite all this, the efforts of Nikol Pashinyan`s government to strengthen ties with the western countries have increased the distrustfulness of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Armenia.

Consequences

Thus, the analysis of the stages of development of political relations between RA and IRI shows that the recent years have been quite different in comparison to the previous ones. It can be stated unequivocally that in the years following the appointment of Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran started to worsen.

Nikol Pashinyan, who was trying to present himself as a leader supported by US and European countries, in his early days had completely negative views of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Support for the creation of the North-South corridor with the participation of Armenia was also an indication that the Islamic Republic of Iran

¹⁸ “The revolution in the Armenian people`s historical destiny must come around under the slogan “We are the master of our destiny” - Nikol Pashinyan meets with Armenian community representatives in Isfahan. [Internet] - Primeminister.am – 2019. [updated: 28.02.2019]. Available from: www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2019/02/28/Nikol-Pashinyan-meets-Isfahan-Armenian-community/. (In Armenian).

does not want to lose its authority over Armenia. It should be noted that the purpose of the corridor was to create a passage in the direction of Iran-Georgia-Russia, to carry out import-export operations. In this case, Republic of Azerbaijan is more favorable to IRI. The fact that the Republic of Azerbaijan has a transport infrastructure that connects the Republic of Iran and Russian Federation and Georgia, the still coldness in the relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation, and the fact that the Russian Federation has no close relations with the Nikol Pashinyan government has made Azerbaijan more valuable in their eyes. Taking all the above into consideration, the feasibility of the project is still questionable.

The research also shows that, despite the Islamic Republic of Iran's desire to exploit the Armenian diaspora's propaganda, the Armenian community in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the current policy pursued by Armenia can pose serious problems to Iran.

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