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Armenia's National Role Conceptions After the Velvet Revolution: Implications for the State's Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

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Armenia's Velvet Revolution hasn't brought considerable changes to Armenia's foreign policy priorities. Yet, with the changes in domestic policy, the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs of those who are responsible for formulating foreign policy objectives have been changing, bringing new dynamics to Armenia's relations with its external partners. Building on the social constructivism approach and the theory on National role conceptions, the Master's thesis aims to find out how Armenia's role conceptions and the evolution of the state's identity in the post-Velvet Revolution context affect Armenia's foreign policy and whether and how those changes influence the relations with its strategic foreign partners, namely Russia and the EU.

I applied the discourse analysis approach to find out how the national role conceptions have been (re-)produced in the post-Velvet Revolution context. The analysis was based on 13 semi-structured face-to-face interviews that I conducted with representatives of the executive and legislative branches of Armenia's current government, as well as the expert community. Through the discourse analysis, the study revealed six role conceptions dominating in the discourse of the current political leadership. The analysis showed conflicting aspects between Armenia's role as a faithful ally-balancer and the one of a full sovereign subject. Putting those conflicting aspects in the context of Armenia's relations with Russia and the EU, the findings indicated tensions between Armenia's current political leadership's view on the development of relations with each of those actors (the ego part of the role) and Armenia's political leadership's perceptions of those actors' expectations with regard to Armenia's foreign policy behaviour (the alter part of the ego).

The study suggests that the discourse about Armenia's role of a full sovereign subject has increased after the Velvet Revolution. On the other hand, Armenia's role of the faithful ally and a balancer is still strong in the discourse of the political leadership, which suggests that no major changes in Armenia's foreign policy can be expected in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Armenia, Velvet Revolution, foreign policy, national role conceptions, state identities, Russia, EU

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

The non-violent transition of power in Armenia in April 2018, referred to as the Velvet Revolution, put the small post-Soviet country in the South Caucasus in a new position, not only in the domestic and regional, but also in the international arena. The revolution, widely accepted by the international community as a transition from a semi-autocratic regime to one striving for democratic changes (Vardanyan, 2018), brought international attention to Armenia. *The Economist* magazine ("Country of the year", 2018) recognised Armenia as the country of 2018 that has improved the most, stating that the South Caucasus nation has a "chance of democracy and renewal". *The Economist* nevertheless admitted that "good work over the year never guarantees unequivocal success for the future".

Unlike other "colour revolutions" in the region, it is believed that the popular uprising in Armenia did not have any geopolitical component, as it was exclusively driven by domestic economic, social and political troubles (Ohanyan, 2018; Davidian, 2019). The main trigger for the popular uprising was the attempt by President Serzh Sargsyan to prolong his grip on power after his ten-year presidency term came to an end in 2018 (Giragosian, 2019). In fact, in 2015, Armenia held a referendum in which it voted for the transfer from a presidential to a parliamentary system of governance. Although President Sargsyan promised in 2014 not to seek the post of Prime Minister if Armenia voted for the parliamentary system, he actually broke his promise and was nominated as Prime Minister by the Parliament in April 2018 (ibid.). This move was followed by a mass protest led by the opposition leader, Nikol Pashinyan. The popular uprising brought together various social groups: youth, rural population, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, all frustrated by the monopolisation of power and oligarchisation of the economy (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018). A few weeks of mass mobilisation in April 2018 led to the resignation of Serzh Sargsyan without the use of force and violence, while Nikol Pashinyan was nominated as Prime Minister on 8 May 2018. In December 2018, extraordinary parliamentary elections were held in Armenia in

which Pashinyan's "My step" bloc gained an overwhelming majority in the new parliament (ibid.).

The new leadership of the country has undertaken a set of measures domestically, such as the fight against corruption, as well as improvements in the areas of human rights, justice and the rule of law, to demonstrate that the country is set on a path toward sustained democracy (Lankoy & Suthers, 2019). Despite the challenges and lack of consolidation within the country, Armenia portrays itself as a carrier of democratic values striving to implement reforms and strengthening its democratic institutions. While openly talking about its orientation towards Western values, Armenia is also keeping its strategic partnership with Russia (Terzyan, 2018). Although this role of the balancer, based on the concept of complementary foreign policy, is not new for Armenia, the domestic changes, however, brought some new insights into Armenia's national role conceptions, which might have implications for the foreign policy, especially in relation to Armenia's external strategic partners.

Since its independence in 1991, Armenia has been largely reliant on Russia's massive economic, political and military support. It is commonly believed that Armenia has no means to reduce its heavy political, military and economic dependence on Russia, mainly due to its geographical location, closed borders with two neighbouring countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in which Russia's role as a dominant arbiter is crucial (Markarov, 2018; Lankoy & Suthers, 2019). On the other hand, Russia has considered Armenia as a loyal ally since its independence in 1991, not least because of Armenia's former political leaderships' close personal ties to Russia's top political leadership (Terzyan, 2018). Armenia's revolution greatly surprised Russia (Giragosian, 2019). Although Armenia's leadership stressed the importance to keep strategic ties with Russia within the existing cooperation format, while Russia showed a soft approach to Armenia's pro-democratic aspirations, there have been, however, some apparent tensions in Armenian-Russian relations, as both Armenia and Russia have been adjusting their ways of working with each other in the post-Velvet Revolution context (Shirinyan, 2019).

Apart from the strategic partnership with Russia, cooperation and dialogue with Europe has been one of the major foreign policy priorities for Armenia since its independence in 1991.

Armenia's aspirations for European integration stemmed from the country's willingness to adopt the European model of development and European values as a means of the country's modernisation (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2018). In 2008, Armenia was included in the European Union's Eastern Partnership Programme, alongside five other post-Soviet countries. However, Armenia's political leadership often prioritised the hard security over European integration by taking decisions in favour of Russia. Thus, Armenia's sudden refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union and to join instead the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union in 2013 was mainly justified by security concerns (Shirinyan, 2019). This move resulted in a limited cooperation with the European Union and the current scope of the cooperation with the EU is based on the CEPA (Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement), a compromise solution compatible with Armenia's membership within the EAEU, signed by the country's previous leadership in 2017 (ibid.).

Although after the Velvet Revolution Armenia's foreign policy priorities have not undergone big changes on a formal level, a more nuanced approach is needed to understand the foreign policy dynamics in Armenia in the post-Velvet Revolution context. The research will address this issue from the state's identity perspective, exploring whether and how the changes in national role conceptions as they appear in the discourse of the current political leadership affect the country's foreign policy.

1.2. Research gap and questions

As the Velvet Revolution occurred recently, few studies of post-Velvet Revolution Armenia have so far considered its foreign policy. Moreover, it is commonly believed that the analysis of Armenia's foreign policy doesn't deserve much attention as Armenia's foreign policy priorities have largely remained consistent with those of the previous governments, and that the current government is focusing its efforts mostly on domestic reforms (Terzyan, 2018). However, it could be argued that with the changes in domestic policy, the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs of those who are responsible for formulating foreign policy objectives have also changed, and those changes have had important repercussions on Armenia's relations with its external partners. This research aims at identifying the representations of Armenia's national role conceptions through the discourse of the current

political leadership, and exploring the impact of the evolving national role conceptions of Armenia for its foreign policy, especially with regard to Russia and the EU.

The research questions are as follows:

- **How have the national role conceptions of Armenia evolved since the Velvet Revolution?**
- **How do evolving role conceptions affect Armenia's foreign policy?**
 - **How are Armenia's existing relations with its strategic foreign partners, namely Russia and the EU, influenced by the changing role conceptions?**

By answering these questions, it is hoped that the research will provide new information, as well as extend knowledge about the post-Velvet Revolution foreign policy development dynamics in Armenia.

1.3. Research purpose and significance

The master's thesis aims at analysing how the conceptions of Armenia's national roles in the post-Velvet Revolution context have been produced and how they influence Armenia's foreign policy. This topic is important because, on the one hand, the context is relatively new and has not yet been studied much, and, on the other hand, Armenia's foreign policy choices have often been overlooked due to the assumption that Armenia lacked geopolitical alternatives (Markarov, 2018). The study of the topic from the identity perspective offers valuable insights and argues that the structural limitations are not the only factors that determine Armenia's foreign policy choices. Tsygankov (2014) points out, "by studying how the officials themselves justify their policies, we can develop an understanding of a particular state action" (Tsygankov, p.1).

More specifically, the research focuses on the perceptions of the current political leadership on how the relations with Russia and the EU have evolved since the Velvet Revolution and whether the Velvet Revolution has brought any changes to Armenia's relations with Russia and the EU. By showing the continuity and change in Armenian–Russian and Armenian–EU

relations, it is hoped that the research will help us to understand whether those relations are undergoing any substantive changes. In addition, It is hoped that the research will provide a fresh perspective on Russia's and the West's role not only in Armenia, but also in the wider post-Soviet region, where Russia's dominant role is taken for granted and where countries often need to choose between Russia and the West to define their foreign policy priorities. Overall, my master's thesis will attempt to elucidate how the national role conceptions in the post-Velvet Revolution context influence Armenia's foreign policy and whether and how those changes affect its relations with its strategic foreign partners, namely Russia and the EU.

1.4. Thesis structure

The thesis is structured as follows. After introducing the topic in the first chapter, Chapter 2 will present the main foreign and security policy directions of Armenia since its independence in 1991 till 2019, with a particular focus on Armenian–Russian and Armenian–EU relations. The existing studies related to the implications of the Velvet Revolution for Armenia's foreign policy will be also addressed in this chapter. Chapter 3 focuses on my theoretical approaches to the study and provides justifications for the chosen theory. Chapter 4 outlines the methods used throughout the whole research process, including the data collection, the analysis process, and also addresses the limitations and challenges of the chosen methods. Chapter 5 illustrates the findings that emerged from the data analysis. After presenting the national roles as they emerged from data, I focus on the conflicting aspects of the roles, putting them in the context of Armenia's relations with Russia and the EU. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present my discussion and the conclusions drawn from my research. The final chapter addresses also the limitations of the study and offers directions for future research.

2. Armenia's evolving relations with Russia and the EU since its independence

2.1. Armenia's foreign policy in a nutshell

2.1.1. Main principles of Armenia's Foreign and Security Policy (FSP)

The South Caucasus region has traditionally been a place of geopolitical confrontations and interactions. The region serves as an important energy hub between Central Asia and the Caspian Basin. It is also a platform of control of the Central Asia, Middle East and Caucasus regions. Those factors explain the presence of many international actors in the region. The relationships and confrontations of those actors make the region's geopolitics complex and multifarious. In addition, various international actors have used the protracted conflicts in the region for their own interests (Markarov et al., 2016).

Armenia's Foreign and Security Policy is based on Armenia's National Security Strategy adopted in 2007. The document reflects Armenia's strategy both to internal and external threats and highlights the main objectives and principles to address those threats. The two main principles of Armenia's external security strategy are *complementarity* and *engagement* (MFA of Armenia, 2007). The complementary foreign policy has been applied since 1998 aiming at developing effective relations with all interested actors in the region: not opposing, but rather complementing the interests of powers where they have a common interest. The complementary approach consists of the idea that various foreign policy dimensions should complement each other, rather than being considered as mutually exclusive (Iskandaryan, 2013). Within this approach, Armenia is looking for an active participation in international processes that are compatible with Armenia's interests. "The complementarity principle is based on strategic relations with Russia; the European path of development; mutually favourable cooperation with the USA and with Iran; membership of CIS and of the CSTO; and cooperation with NATO" (Markarov et al., 2016, p.109).

The main priority of Armenia's Security Policy is the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict¹, in which Armenia acts as a security guarantor of the NK population. The conflict is mediated by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation of Europe) Minsk Group, co-chaired by the Russian Federation, France and the United States (MFA of Armenia, 2007). The resumption of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan within this conflict is considered as the main threat to the country's security and stability. Other threats include the Turkey–Azerbaijan blockade, which is considered as a tool used against Armenia to exclude it from regional cooperation opportunities and is seen as a direct threat to the country's security. In addition, ethnic or internal clashes and military operations in the neighbouring countries are also considered as indirect threats to Armenia's security (Markarov et al., 2016). Overall, the Foreign and Security Policies (FSP) of Armenia reflect the country's geographical and geopolitical realities and limitations: security threats, landlocked geography, lack of natural resources (ibid.). Markarov et al. argue that as long as security threats remain in place, the FSP is unlikely to change. According to Iskandaryan (2012), the partnership with Russia in military and energy fields has no alternatives as long as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unsolved (Iskandaryan, 2013).

Currently, the NSS of Armenia is under revision and the new version is expected to be released in the course of 2020 (Armenia News, 2019). According to the Security Council's Secretary, Armen Grigoryan, a new Security Strategy is needed in order to address the fundamental changes that have occurred in the world, in the region and in Armenia during the last twelve years. These particularly include: Russia–Georgia war in 2008 resulting in rising tensions between the two countries, deepening confrontation between Russia and the West since 2007, rising tensions between the USA and Iran, and regional challenges related to the sanctions imposed on Iran, the short outbreak of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in April 2016 within the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia's membership of the EAEU, the Armenia–EU agreement, as well as political changes in Armenia as a result of the Velvet Revolution (ibid.).

¹ Although the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has an important dimension both for Armenia's domestic and foreign policy, its analysis falls out of the scope of the current research. Thus, in this research, the conflict is referred to only in the context of Armenia's relations with other countries.

The programme of the government adopted after the Velvet Revolution in February 2019 is largely consistent with the main principles of the foreign policy directions reflected in the 2007 National Security Strategy (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018). Thus, continued development of mutually beneficial relations with all states, involvement in international and regional processes, strategic partnership with Russia, deepening cooperation with the European Union and EU states, as well as the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk group are considered as priorities of the current Armenian government's foreign policy (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2019, p.15–17; Markarov & Davtyan, 2018).

2.1.2. Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia

Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia has been one of the main directions of Armenia's foreign and security policy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the country's independence in 1991. It is based on the economic and military alliances, as well as Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, where Russia is one of the co-Chairs of the Minsk group. The existence of the largest Armenian community in Russia is also playing an important role in the strategic alliance. The cooperation between Armenia and Russia is formalised within the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), the CSTO (Common Security Treaty Organization), and Armenia's membership in the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) (Markarov et al., 2016; Iskandaryan, 2013). Russia is Armenia's main trade partner, accounting for about 28% of Armenia's total good exports and with a quarter of imports coming from Russia in 2018 (Bhutia, 2019).

Armenia is very dependent on Russia in a number of areas. In the energy sector, Russia is the main supplier of natural gas and nuclear fuel. Gas import and distribution is carried out by Gazprom Armenia, which has been 100% owned by Russia since 2014. The gas supply from Russia is of a critical importance for Armenia as the country lacks sufficient energy supplies to meet its needs. The railway sector is also marked with a strong Russian presence, where Russia manages the South Caucasus Railways. The company has strategic importance for Armenia as it ensures Armenia's connection with Georgia. In terms of the military cooperation, Russia has had a military base located in Armenia's second largest city, Gyumri, since 1995. In 2010, the term of the military base has been extended by Armenia for 49 years.

Within the CSTO, Armenia and Russia are committed to mutual collective defence and cooperate in a number of military fields. As a member of the CSTO, Armenia is also buying weapons at low prices from Russia. The military cooperation with Russia is one of the pillars of Armenia's military security (Markarov et al., 2016). Richard Giragosian describes Armenia's overdependence on Russia in "3G" form: "guns and other discounted weapons; gas supplied at below-market levels; and goods, as both a major trading partner and with Russia as the primary destination for Armenian migrant labour, which is the largest source of remittances to Armenia" (Giragosian, 2019, p.5).

Despite the mutually beneficial nature of Armenia–Russia cooperation, the heavy reliance and dependence on Russia creates considerable limitations for Armenia's foreign policy choices (Iskandaryan, 2013; Terzyan, 2016; Markarov et al., 2016). Although the complementarity remains the main direction for the foreign policy, there is also the "Russia first" principle dominating the foreign policy. The country's complex and comprehensive dependence on Russia in all strategic areas limits the room for manoeuvre for Armenia (Terzyan, 2018). The heavy dependence on Russia has also been the main reason for Armenia's unexpected U-turn from signing the Association Agreement with the EU after a few years of intensive negotiations (ibid.). Indeed, even a few days before President Sargsyan announced Armenia's intention to join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union (later upgraded to the Eurasian Economic Union), the Armenian political leadership was considering the accession to the Customs Union as unlikely (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). The lack of common borders with Russia, structural differences between Armenia's economy and those of CU member states, as well as Armenia's membership of the WTO were considered as factors that would make Armenia's membership of the CU as unrealistic and unwise (Rafal, 2013; Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). However, in September 2013, President Sargsyan unexpectedly announced Armenia's intention to join the CU and justified this U-turn by security concerns. More particularly, he stressed the following:

"The necessity of Armenia's participation in the architecture of new geopolitical space; the international political climate; regional conflicts, specifically the problem of the Nagorno-Karabakh; the perspective of a deepening strategic partnership with Russia, including stronger military technical cooperation; and the acknowledgement of the possible negative consequences if Armenia does not join the CU." - (Galstyan, 2014, in Markarov et al., p.129).

The Post-Velvet Revolution Armenia's foreign policy priorities remained consistent with the ones of the previous governments (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018). Although Prime Minister Pashinyan was against Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union during the time when he was representing the opposition at the parliament, during the protests in 2018 and right after being elected as Prime Minister, Pashinyan confirmed in several meetings with Russian officials that Armenia's foreign policy priorities and obligations would not change (ibid.). Particularly, he stressed on several occasions that Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia will continue within the existing frames, which include the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the membership of the Eurasian Economic Union. Markarov and Davtyan (2018) explain Pashinyan's such position by pragmatic calculations, as declaring his loyalty to Russia would prevent the Kremlin from intervening in Armenia's domestic matters in defence of its own interests. After his election as Prime Minister, Pashinyan's first visit abroad was to Russia, where he took part in the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Sochi and again stressed the importance of maintaining and deepening strategic partnership with Russia (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017).

According to Markarov and Davtyan, as long as the geopolitical challenges facing Armenia are still in place, it is unlikely that there will be considerable changes in the foreign policy priorities. However, the changes in domestic policy have changed after the Velvet Revolution and those changes have been impacting also the foreign policy provoking tensions in Armenia–Russia relations (ibid.). Thus, Russia's negative reaction to the arrest of the CSTO Secretary General Yuri Khachaturov, who was charged as part of an investigation related to a bloody crackdown on protesters in 2008, is one of the examples of such tensions (Kucera, 2018). Shirinyan (2019) argues that although Armenia's foreign policy choices have not undergone fundamental changes after the Velvet Revolution, the government's legitimacy might allow a more Armenia-centric foreign policy to be adopted on a long-term perspective. In fact, the new government's emphasis on the country's sovereignty is a new phenomenon, to which Russia still needs to adapt, as the country's sovereign aspect has often been overlooked in the past. The post-Revolution context is still fresh and Armenia and Russia are going through the process of learning to work with each other in the new reality (ibid.).

2.1.3. Armenia's European Integration

The perception of the EU in the South Caucasus is one of a normative power with the emphasis on peace, human rights and democracy. Those values form the foundation of the EU's interaction with other states and aim at influencing the thinking of other actors in the international system. This type of intervention is close to the "soft power" in contrast with a "hard power", where the influence over other actors is done through military threats and economic incentives (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2012). The integration to Europe has been one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy since its independence in 1991. However, despite its active engagement in the European integration, Armenia, unlike Ukraine and Georgia, did not have ambitions to become a European Union Member State (Shirinyan, 2019).

The starting point of Armenia's integration to Europe was the signing of the EU–Armenia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1999. It was aimed at stipulating the relations between Armenia and the EU in economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural fields (Iskandaryan, 2013). In 2001, Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe. In 2004, Armenia was included in the EU's ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy) alongside fifteen other countries neighbouring the EU.

In 2008, the EU launched a new initiative: the EaP Eastern Partnership project, covering a wide range of areas, such as institutional reforms, political dialogue, culture, migration, etc. (Iskandaryan, 2013; Markarov et al., 2016). This initiative included only six former-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine and was aimed at expanding the EU's regional cooperation within the Association Agreement (AA). Armenia was actively engaged in the negotiation of the AA, which had both political and economic components (Markarov et al., 2016). The DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) with the EU was the key part of the AA. The prospects for increasing trade with the EU created additional motivation for Armenia's political elite to join the AA and a roadmap for the implementation of the AA was adopted in May 2012, including an action plan until 2013 (Iskandaryan, 2013). The AA was expected to be finalised and signed during the Vilnius Summit in November 2013 (Markarov et al., 2016).

After Armenia's decision to join the Russia-led Customs Union in September 2013, the negotiations over the AA were suspended, as membership of the CU was incompatible with the DCFTA. Armenia's suggestion to separate the political and economic components of the AA and sign only the political part of the agreement was rejected by the EU (Markarov et al., 2016; Shirinyan, 2019). Despite this, the EU remained Armenia's important trade partner, with the export of goods to EU countries representing a 25% share of Armenia's total exports in 2018 (second after exports to Russia and the EAEU countries). In addition, Armenia still benefits from the preferential access to the EU market within the EU's GSP+ (Generalised Scheme of Preferences) (Giragosian, 2019).

Despite Armenia's unexpected U-turn to join the Customs Union, Armenia continued its European integration efforts and a new cooperation formula has been established between the EU and Armenia: the CEPA (Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement), compatible with Armenia's accession to the EAEU, was signed in 2017 (Shirinyan, 2019). The CEPA has been ratified by the Armenian Parliament in April 2018 and is currently being ratified by the EU Member States. The importance of the CEPA grew significantly after the Velvet Revolution, because it offers mechanisms and tools to support the government's pro-European aspirations to strengthen the democratic institutions (Paul & Sammut, 2018). As Shirinyan (2019) points out:

“The CEPA represents an important basis for furthering relations with the EU, and lets Armenia regain its European anchor. Because the EAEU is not a fully-fledged economic union, and its political symbolism is more important than its technical rules, there might be some room for Armenia to manoeuvre into closer integration with the EU in the future.” - (Shirinyan, 2019, p.22).

According to Iskandaryan (2013), Armenia's European integration has had both external and internal dimensions: on the one hand, accession to European bodies and organisations, and on the other hand, institutionalisation of European models and practices in Armenia. Those two dimensions are influencing each other: efficient implementation of domestic reforms could stimulate the EU's institutions to increase the extent of cooperation with Armenia, while the accession to various EU institutions would ensure the support for domestic reforms (Iskandaryan, 2013). Within this perspective, the Velvet Revolution has brought new

opportunities for efficient implementation of the CEPA and could possibly push the EU–Armenia partnership further (Shirinyan, 2019).

2.2. The identity dimension of Armenia’s foreign policy

Despite the obvious structural limitations determining Armenia’s foreign policy choices, Aberg and Terzyan (2018) argue that structural factors are not sufficient to explain Armenia’s foreign policy. In order to gain a more holistic explanation for Armenia’s foreign policy choices, it is important to consider the structure–agent interplay by paying attention to the personal choices and beliefs of Armenia’s leadership (Aberg & Terzyan, 2018). According to Aberg and Terzyan, individual-level factors such as the beliefs and perceptions of Armenia’s presidents are key to understanding why Armenia followed a path that made it economically and militarily over-dependent on Russia (ibid.).

Armenia’s foreign policy identities have been constantly (re-)constructed over the past three decades (Terzyan, 2016). Thus, shortly before gaining independence in 1991, Armenia was marked by the nationalistic foreign policy identity, strongly opposing everything related to the Soviet past. During this time, anti-Russian mood was prevailing, as Russia was seen as an obstacle to Armenia’s development (ibid.). Although the presidency of Armenia’s first President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, started in this mood, the anti-Russian sentiments cooled down shortly after independence, while the President adopted a pragmatic foreign policy approach (Terzyan, 2016). Ter-Petrosyan considered the symmetric relations with Russia as unrealistic, but believed in the potential of regional cooperation. His pragmatic approach consisted of moving beyond the hostilities with neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan, prioritising the economic and political cooperation at the expense of the historical dimension, especially putting aside international recognition of the genocide committed against Armenians by the Turkish government in the beginning of the 20th century and the readiness to easily compromise over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Aberg & Terzyan, 2018). Turkey and Azerbaijan’s portrayal as “enemies” was challenged by Ter-Petrosyan, who considered those two countries as Armenia’s most natural allies. Overall, Ter-Petrosyan’s presidency was characterised by low regard to identity and collective memory-related issues, which was strongly criticised by the opposition and eventually led to his resignation in 1998 (ibid.).

In contrast with Ter-Petrosyan, the second President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, adopted another foreign policy identity. Kocharyan's presidency was marked by increased agency and less pragmatism, an emotionalised approach to the recognition of the genocide, and a stricter position towards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue by setting red lines in conflict resolution options (Terzyan, 2016). At the same time, Kocharyan shifted towards the European identity narrative. European integration was seen as a path towards fully-fledged democracy. He believed that European integration would contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the region. Simultaneously, strategic partnership with Russia was not seen as contradictory with the European path of development, as it was considered that Russia was also pursuing the European path (Aberg & Terzyan, 2018). Russia was not considered as an identity-driven strategic partner, but rather a strategic partner with whom Armenia shared political, economic and military interests.

The complementary foreign policy concept was developed under Kocharyan's presidency. However, the security challenges facing the country made the co-existence of the pro-European political choice of Armenia with Russia's strategic alliance difficult and slowly overshadowed Armenia's European identity, prioritising the "Russia first" approach. Terzyan argues that although the structural limitations are evident, this shift is also linked to agency factors (Terzyan, 2016). The consolidation of power around Kocharyan impacted Armenia's foreign policy outputs. Thus, under Kocharyan, the country smoothly moved to authoritarianism marked with unfair elections, weak opposition and civil society and censored media. Kocharyan largely relied on Russia, because strong personal relations with Russia's political leadership were considered as a way to keep his political power (Aberg & Terzyan, 2018).

Armenia's third President, Serge Sargsyan, initially aimed at redefining the Armenian identity, bringing it in line with the European identity (Terzyan, 2016). Similarly to Ter-Petrosyan, Sargsyan also prioritised the restoration of diplomatic relations with Turkey. Although this attempt failed, it showed that the Armenian government was ready to re-establish the relations with Turkey without any precondition. As for the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership, like his predecessor, Sargsyan has never questioned the strategic ties with Russia (Terzyan, 2016). Despite the lack of identity-related reference to the Armenian-Russian

cooperation, the strategic partnership with Russia was seen as an indispensable factor for ensuring stability and security in the South Caucasus. Thus, Armenia's balanced role was consistent with the one of Kocharyan. However, over time Sargsyan prioritised the strategic alliance with Russia. The intensified East–West confrontation resulting from the Russian–Georgian War called into question the country's complementary foreign policy and was the main reason for Armenia's U-turn towards Russia (Terzyan, 2016; Shirinyan, 2019). In fact, the Russian–Georgian war showed that the EU could not offer any security guarantees in the region. Delcour and Wolczuk contend that the EU's engagement in regional security has not met the local actors' expectation, because of its weak performance as a contributor to the conflict settlement and, as a result, the EU's perception as a security actor in the region has faded over time (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2018). In this context, Armenia's leadership prioritised the security alliance with Russia over the European identity aspirations. In fact, Sargsyan, along with other high-ranking officials, justified the unexpected accession to the EAEU primarily in terms of the country's security concerns (Aberg & Terzyan, 2018; Shirinyan, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous section, during and after the Velvet Revolution, Armenia's political leadership stressed the importance of keeping the strategic partnership with Russia. At the same time, the Revolution itself was an affirmation of European values and ideas and gave a new impetus to promote Armenia's European aspirations (Giragosian, 2019). In this context, the current government's vast legitimacy has increased its agency and offered an opportunity to the newly-formed political elite to review the heavy dependence on Russia's economic and political support (Terzyan, 2018; Shirinyan, 2019). According to Terzyan, Armenia's role might be redefined depending on Armenia's newly-formed elites' behaviour vis-à-vis the Kremlin. "The Armenian Velvet Revolution engenders a glimmer of hope that, owing to his vast popularity and legitimacy, the newly-elected prime minister Pashinyan will not necessarily carry on with the malpractices of his predecessors" (Terzyan, 2018, p.247).

Table 1 provides an overview of the main literature that contributed to the understanding of Armenia's foreign policy since its independence in 1991 till the end of 2019.

Literature	Conceptualisation/Research perspective on phenomenon	Research data/design	Main argument	Contribution
Aberg, H.S., Terzyan, A., 2018	Armenia's foreign policy trajectory since its independence through the interplay of structure and agency dimensions	Explaining outcomes on the basis of structural, dispositional and intentional dimension	Individual-level factors are key to understanding Armenia's foreign policy trajectory since 1991.	Provides an understanding of Individual-level factors in foreign policy decision making, differences in agencies of all three Presidents of Armenia from 1991 until 2018.
Gasparyan, A., 2016	Interpretation of Armenia's political elite's foreign policy perceptions	Qualitative research: in-depth interviews with 50 Armenian politicians	The perception of "friends", "enemies" and "neutral actors" differs considerably from one party to another.	Examines the position of six main political parties on neighbours, on regional or mega-treaties, on alliances and on major world powers.
Iskandaryan, A., 2013	Contrasting Armenia's value-based pro-European political orientation with the strategic partnership with Russia	Qualitative analysis	Although the complementary foreign policy implies not to choose between the East and the West, on a daily basis it is very difficult to avoid the choice.	Provides an understanding of the pros and cons of Armenia's complementary foreign policy
Markarov, A., Davtyan, V., 2018	Post-Velvet Revolution Armenia's Foreign Policy Challenges	Literature review	Armenia's foreign policy is highly determined by the regional geopolitical environment and the constant security threats.	Examines the prospects of the post-Velvet Revolution Armenia's foreign policy both from domestic and regional and geopolitical perspectives.
Markarov, A., Galstyan, N., Hayrapetyan, G., 2016	Issues and challenges related to the main aspects of Armenia's FSP (Foreign Security Policy)	Qualitative research	The FSP reflects the country's geographical and geopolitical realities and limitations: security threats, landlocked geography, lack of natural resources. As long as security threats remain in place, the FSP is unlikely to change.	Explores the main aspects of Armenia's foreign and security policy based on the 2007 National Security Strategy.
National Security Strategy, 2007	-	Official document	-	Provides a detailed overview of Armenia's National Security Strategy addressing the internal and external threats.
Programme of the Government, of the Republic of Armenia, 2019	-	Official document	-	Provides a detailed overview of Armenia's internal and external development vision for five years.
Shirinyan, M., 2019	Post-Velvet Revolution Armenia's possible manoeuvring in foreign policy	Qualitative research	Challenges the assumption that Armenia's foreign policy has no alternative.	Provides a thorough understanding of the challenges of Armenia's complementary foreign policy and examines the possibilities of geopolitical bargains that opened up after the Velvet Revolution.
Terzyan, A., 2016	Foreign policy of Armenia through identity perspective	Qualitative research: the paper analyses speeches and policies of Armenia's presidents	Armenia's foreign policy identities have been constantly (re-)constructed over the past three decades.	Provides a thorough analysis of Armenia's foreign policy identity evolution, construction of "us" and "others" since independence until 2016.
Terzyan, A., 2018	Prospects of Armenia–Russia relations	Qualitative research	Owing to its vast popularity and legitimacy, the new Armenian government has an opportunity to reduce the overdependence on Russia.	Examines the reasons for Armenia's overdependence on Russia and discusses the prospects of Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia after the Velvet Revolution.
Ter-Matevosyan, V., Drnoian, A., Mkrtchayn, M., Yepremyan, T., 2017	Armenia's foreign policy choices through the country's membership of the EAEU.	Qualitative research	Armenia's decision to join the EAEU was caused by both geopolitical constraints and internal socio-political problems in Armenia.	Provides an explanation for Armenia's political decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union and examines political and economic implications of Armenia's membership of the EAEU.

Table 1. Main literature contributing towards the understanding of Armenia's foreign policy from 1991 until 2019

2.3. Russia's perceptions of Armenia as part of its "near abroad"

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's policy towards the South Caucasus region has been based on the strategy of maintaining and consolidating the power and pressure over the former Soviet states (Giragosian, 2017; Shirinyan, 2019). The foundation for this policy has been the assumption that the former Soviet space is Russia's natural zone of influence. For this purpose, Russia's leadership undertook important steps to increase Russian capital, create close ties with political leaders of CIS countries and strengthen its military presence (Terzyan, 2018; Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). By doing this, the Russian leadership aimed at tightening its control in the post-Soviet space in order to "protect" those countries from Western intrusion. Thus, the monopolisation of strategic economic and energy infrastructures of CIS countries has been a tool to influence those countries' foreign policy behaviour (Terzyan, 2018). At the same time, by offering militarisation-oriented support, Russia aimed at persuading the leaders to "building up security forces and pro-regime groups against unwanted political and social attacks" (Terzyan, 2018, p.236). According to Terzyan, promotion of authoritarianism in the CIS countries has been at the core of Russia's post-Soviet policy (ibid.).

Within this policy, Armenia holds a specific place as the only country hosting a Russian military base and being a member of the CSTO and the EAEU (Giragosian, 2017). In a relatively short time, in the 2000s, Russia took control of 90% of Armenia's power generating capacities and the key sectors of Armenia's economy including energy supply, transport, telecommunications, banking, insurance, and mining (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). Interestingly, just before Armenia's President's decision to join the EAEU, Russia increased the gas prices for Armenia by 50%, thus warning about the economic consequences of Armenia's rapprochement efforts with the EU (Terzyan, 2018). This shows that Russia has been using economic and political tools to influence Armenia's foreign policy decisions (ibid.).

Zevelev (2016) argues that in order to understand Russia's foreign policy, it is necessary to analyse how the discourse about Russia's national identity has evolved in Russia. According to him, Russia's foreign policy is shaped around its history, legacies of the past and national identity. The emphasis on national identity has been particularly strong in Putin's third-term

presidency. The national identity is shaped around the idea of restoring Russia's power in the global arena, portraying itself as a country that has its own place in the world.

In Russia's domestic discourse, the main threats to Russia's national identity are globalisation and the decadent West. Within this discourse, the "West" began to be perceived in Russia as a power that tries to change Russia's unique and increasingly conservative national identity, including patriotism, traditional gender roles and Orthodox Christianity (Zevelev, 2016). Within this doctrine, Russia portrays itself as distinct from Western civilisation. The perceptions about Russia's exceptional place and mission in the world have led to isolation from the rest of the world and created tensions between Russia, the West and post-Soviet countries. The Ukraine crisis showed that Russia's relations with the West and the post-Soviet countries are very much interlinked. Thus, EU enlargement and partnership in the Eastern neighbourhood have been perceived by Russia not only as a breach of Russia's geopolitical interests, but also a threat to its singular civilisation and historic narrative (ibid.).

2.3.1. Russia's reaction to the Velvet Revolution: a sign of Russia's changing strategy toward its "near abroad"?

Since the beginning of the protest movement in Armenia in 2018, Russia has shown an unusually soft reaction and hasn't intervened in the political turmoil taking place in Armenia (Riegg, 2018; Kucera, 2018; Poghosyan, 2019; Davidian, 2019). This type of reaction was surprising for many, because it contrasted with Russia's interventionist strategy towards other "colour revolutions" in the region (Markarov, 2018). One of the reasons for non-intervention from Russia was the lack of a geopolitical component in Armenia's revolution and that Prime Minister Pashinyan himself, even before he came to power, stressed his commitment to strategic ties with Moscow (Markedonov, 2018; Kucera, 2018; Davidian, 2019). Another reason for such a soft reaction from Moscow is also the pragmatic calculations from Moscow, as Russia understood that Armenia doesn't have a viable alternative to its security (Markedonov, 2018; Riegg, 2018; Kucera, 2018; Mkhdesyan, 2019, Interview with Lukyanov; Davidian, 2019). Moreover, Russia's experience with Abkhazia and South Ossetia showed that the power change resulting from popular protests did not lead to a change in foreign policy priorities among the Abkhaz and South Ossetian elites. All those factors combined provided a soft continuity of bilateral relations between Armenia and Russia

(Markedonov, 2018). Riegg (2018) contends that Russia's mild reaction to Armenia's Revolution was also an opportunity for Russia to illustrate its non-interventionist approach in its "near abroad" "amidst a global panic over Russian belligerence" (Riegg, 2018; Shirinyan, 2019).

With regard to Armenia's intention to embrace democracy and Western values as its path for further development, Denisenko and Skorobogatiy (2019) contend that Armenia–Russia relations should not be viewed from the simplistic perspective of a choice between East and West, but rather from the perspective of a multi-vector approach: on the one hand, Nikol Pashinyan is actively working with the EU and the USA, like his predecessors; on the other hand, Moscow maintains active and successful geopolitics in the Caspian region and is interested in strong partnerships with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, which is not a very pleasant factor for the Armenian–Russian friendship (Denisenko & Skorobogatiy, 2019).

Moreover, according to Lukyanov, the EU's and NATO's diminishing interest towards the region is another factor that makes the East–West confrontation less relevant. Lukyanov argues that Russia is going through the process of rethinking its strategy towards the countries in the post-Soviet space: it is no longer willing to intervene in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, as previous attempts have led to negative consequences (Mkhdesyan, 2019, Interview with Lukyanov). Particularly, Russia's heavy-handed reaction to the events in Georgia and Ukraine turned those two countries against Russia (Kucera, 2018).

Davidian argues that the main concern for Russia is to keep the geopolitical balance of power in the region: as long as Armenia does not make any sudden moves, the political leadership cooperates with Russia and the geopolitical balance remains stable, there is little chance that Russia will intervene in Armenia's internal affairs (Davidian, 2019).

2.4. The EU's perceptions of Armenia as part of the Eastern Partnership Project

Within its Eastern Partnership project introduced in 2008, the EU's approach to all six countries included in the project was similar: the project aimed at expanding the EU's regional cooperation within the Association Agreement offering both political and economic integration components (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015). However, the war between Georgia and

Russia in 2008 and the Ukraine–Russia crisis in 2014 showed that a more nuanced approach was needed as each of the countries of Eastern Partnership has their peculiarities related to their foreign policy choices: it became clear that the EU's relations with the post-Soviet countries could not be constructed without taking into consideration the dynamics of each of those countries' relations with Russia (Iskandaryan, Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2018).

Shirinyan (2019) argues that the EU's relations with Armenia were not put in the same line as with Georgia and Ukraine, as, unlike those two countries, Armenia was lacking pro-Western political elites. In addition, Armenia's dependence on the EU has been rather limited, especially compared to Georgia and Moldova, which has weakened the EU's leverage over Armenia and led to the EU's diminished interests towards the country (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015). At the same time, Armenia's growing ties with Russia and the widening confrontation between the West and Russia led to the perception of Armenia as a country serving primarily Russia's interests. Overall, Armenia has been considered through the lens of its alliance with Russia. This perception was strengthened by the fact that on international platforms, such as votes at the UN General Assembly, Armenia always defended Russia's interests (Shirinyan, 2019).

Although the EU was displeased by Armenia's over-reliance on Russia, it has accepted that Armenia falls within Russia's sphere of influence and was constructing its relations with Armenia based on that assumption (Shirinyan, 2019). Armenia's policy of complementarity was seen as an optimal approach for the country's development. In this context, as a result of Armenia's decision to join the EAEU, the EU offered an alternative model of cooperation with Armenia, the CEPA, which was compatible with Armenia's membership of the EAEU (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017).

Shirinyan (2019) contends that in Armenia's case, unlike in Georgia and Ukraine, the EU has opted for stability over democratisation. Thus, although it was clear that Armenia's transition from executive presidency to a parliamentary system was an attempt by President Sargsyan to maintain his grip on power, EU officials have not criticised this move, but rather opted for a position of restraint when the protest movements sparked across the country in 2018 and didn't show open support for the Velvet Revolution (Weise, 2018). The somewhat passive reaction of the EU to the Velvet Revolution and the lack of immediate financial support to

encourage the institutional reforms can be explained by the fact that the EU was faced with a new phenomenon in the Eastern Partnership countries, where, as a result of a revolution, a country showed democratic ambitions, while, at the same time, remaining in Russia's "zone of influence" (Shirinyan, 2019a). However, after the Armenian government presented the priority projects to the EU leadership in July 2019, the EU increased its technical support directed to strengthening the democratic institutions of Armenia, especially reforming its judiciary system, fostering the economic development, as well as focusing on projects on infrastructure and environment (Panorama.am., 2019).

3. Social constructivism as theoretical framework

The below chapter presents the theoretical framework of my master's thesis. It consists of four sections and is organised in the following way: Section 3.1. gives a brief overview of the main ideas and concepts of social constructivism in international relations, as well as addresses some critics of the theory. This is followed by a more specific focus on rule-oriented constructivism, presented in Section 3.2. Section 3.3. discusses the concept of national identities, while the concluding Section 3.4. focuses on national role conceptions.

3.1. Social constructivism: main ideas, concepts and critics

Social constructivism highlights the constructed nature of social and political realities. At the same time, it offers an opportunity to study the phenomenon from a wider perspective, looking beyond the structural limitations and constraints. As my thesis focuses on Armenia's construction of realities with the external world, the theory of social constructivism in international relations offers a useful framework for analysis, because the theory challenges the realistic assumptions about Armenia's foreign policy behaviour, which are traditionally based on structural limitations. In my research, I show the process of reality constructions as a result of an important political change in the country, the Velvet Revolution. The interpretation of Armenia's current political realities through social constructivism offers an alternative view to realism of how Armenia's foreign policy decision makers' behaviour and choices have been shaped since the Velvet Revolution.

Social constructivism in International Relations started to develop alongside the end of the Cold War. At that time, the main theories in International Relations, namely Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Policies (IP), faced serious challenges in interpreting the change of the world order related to the end of the Cold War and the construction of relations between states as a result of the end of the Cold War (Kubálková, 2001). The reason for those difficulties was the fact that the main focus of the FPA was the explanation of state behaviour via the attributes of states, such as decision making, internal environment or domestic sources of foreign policy, psychological factors, external environment, etc., without necessarily connecting those aspects to a bigger picture, the world as a system. On the other

hand, the IP theory was focusing only on ideational and material elements, the interconnection between states by looking only at system attributes (ibid.). With the end of the Cold War it became increasingly evident that the state and the system within which it functions, in other words, the agent and structure, could not be studied in isolation from each other (Theys, 2018).

The approaches theorised within the social constructivism served as a bridge between the structure and agent, claiming that the world is socially constructed. Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted and that structure influences agency, while, in turn, agency influences structure (Theys, 2018). Thus, after the Cold War, the interest shifted from what states could do depending on their position in a structure to what they wanted to do depending on their own vision of relations with the others (Kubáľková, 2001). Constructivists see the international life as social and constructed and they argue that beliefs and ideas held by individuals or collectives such as states can change relations (for example, from enemy to friendship and vice versa). In other words, it is not only the distribution of material power and geopolitical conditions that determine a state's behaviour, but also ideas, beliefs and goals (Theys, 2018). Constructivists see the international life as social (as opposed to material only) and constructed (as opposed to pre-given). Constructivists do not see a contradiction between human choices (agency) and material determination (structure), because they believe that international relations are happening in a social context where social relations are constantly changing and evolving. Otherwise stated, different social structures (norms, rules, institution, language) are mediating, mutually reproducing, enabling, co-constructing agency and structure (ibid.).

Another important aspect in social constructivism is the central role of identities and interests. In fact, constructivists highlight not capabilities, but identities of states. Constructivists argue that not only individuals, but also states can have various identities which are formed through interaction with other agents. Identities define the interests and actions of states. It should be noted that the actions of a state should go hand-in-hand with its identity. The place of identities in social constructivism will be elaborated further in Section 3.3.

It is important to note that there are various approaches within the social constructivist scholars and researchers, who examine the social world from different perspectives (Kubáľková, 2001). Alexander Wendt, the most cited and quoted constructivist scholar (ibid.), highlights two increasingly accepted basic principles of constructivism: “the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature” (Wendt, 1999, p.1). Despite those generally accepted principles, there are also variations in approaches amongst constructivist scholars. Thus, Ted Hopf (1998) distinguishes two main directions in constructivism approaches: “conventional constructivism” and “critical constructivism”. Conventional constructivists explain the world in causal terms, exploring relations between actors, social norms, interests and identities. They ask “what” type of questions, such as “*What causes an actor to act?*” They consider identities as independent variables and look for causal relations between identities, national interests and specific actions of foreign politics. The critical constructivists go beyond the causal terms and try to reconstruct the identities themselves, trying to find different components of identities by asking “how” type of questions, such as “*How do actors come to believe in certain identities?*” (ibid.). They consider identities as dynamic variables, as identities develop during the interaction between agent and structure. For the critical constructivists, language plays a key role, as it has the ability to change and reconstruct the social world. Despite those two main distinctions, most constructivists place themselves in the middle of those two extreme views (Theys, 2018). The middle view is based on the assumption that there is a constitutive relationship between a state’s identity and foreign politics. This means that, while the state’s identity greatly affects how the foreign policy is shaped, at the same time, foreign policy determines how the identity is constituted and articulated. I will adopt this middle view for my analysis, as I want to articulate the interlinkage between the national identities and foreign politics and show how they affect each other in Armenia’s context.

It should be noted that many constructivists are critical about how the theory has developed (Peltonen, 2017). They think that the theory lost something important while becoming popular, because different variations of the theory have been developed on its evaluation path. Thus, in early constructivist works, the constructivist approach was seen as a social

theory, rather than a substantive theory within the International Relations (IR). In later works, constructivists developed such an approach so as to present constructivism as a bridge connecting other IR theories, mainly realism and liberalism (Adler, 1997 in Peltonen, 2017). Adler suggested that constructivism combines insights from other IR theories. This approach allowed the constructivism to be popularised. However, it made many scholars unhappy, because, as a consequence of the theory's popularisation, the scholars and researchers lost a unified and consolidated view of what the constructivism actually is. Peltonen (2017) contends that those claims are misplaced. He argues that there has never been any consolidated approach towards the constructivism, and that since the beginning, there have been many different approaches to the theory. Because the constructivism itself is socially constructed, there is no "right" or "wrong" constructivism, but there are different perceptions of the theory (ibid.).

Constructivists have made a huge contribution to the International Relations discipline in the past 25 years (Dormer, 2017). However, the constructivist theory has also been subject to criticism from other IR theories scholars or, as we already saw above, even from the constructivists themselves. One of the issues with constructivism is the assumption that everything is constructed, which is interpreted as there being nothing inevitable and unchangeable in world politics. (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003). This assumption is problematic because everything becomes uncertain and unpredictable. If the existing system is the creation of states, this means that once the states reconsider their conceptions of who they are and what their interests are, the reality will change, because the reality is constructed by states. If everything is uncertain, it will be impossible to predict how the international relations will develop. Jackson and Sørensen (2003) argue that constructivists are not happy with this kind of reasoning. Most constructivists contend that the constructivism theory should be built around the states' inter-subjective reality, rather than the external, objective reality. This means that between human agents, including those who act on behalf of the states, there can be shared ideas, joint practices, common rules that gain a social position which is independent of any of those agents. Those collective rules and practices build an inter-subjective political reality. Most constructivists argue that the goal of the constructivism should be the analysis of this inter-subjective political reality (ibid).

Another line of criticism is that constructivism gives a huge space to the *agency* (Kowert, 2001). As a result, there is too much expectation to change and also too much attention to the reflective source of change rather than practical ones (ibid.). As a response to this critique, constructivists contend that the role of agency should not be under-estimated, as there are many historical examples when only one person or one rule changed the entire system. One clear example of such a change could be Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt to reform the Soviet Union, through the so-called *perestroika and glasnost*, which led to the collapse of the whole system (Kubáľková, 2001). In the context of the Armenian Velvet Revolution, it could be argued that the transition of power took place as a result of the agents' (understood here as opposition of the previous government) actions, which brought an unexpected change to the Armenian political landscape. Here again, the agency's role should not be undermined.

Alexander Wendt's theses offer a valuable framework for analysis, emphasising the co-determination of agents and structures through processes, highlighting the states' role in world politics, considering states as actors with a sense of self which affects the nature of the international system (Wendt, 1999, p.194). The place of identities and interests is also central in his works. However, Wendt's approach is problematic for my research, as Wendt's notion of state-as-actor may remove the role of domestic processes on foreign policy behaviour (Kubáľková, 2001). Wendt's theory is a theory of foreign policy of states, which considers that the foreign policy is constructed through the interaction of state actors. The identities can change as a result of interactions between states, but not as a result of the foreign policy making processes (ibid.). Thus, it doesn't pay much attention to the actors within the state or the processes behind the construction of a state's international identity. Yet, it is precisely from this angle that I would like to analyse the foreign policy changes that have been happening in Armenia since the Velvet Revolution. This is very important, because the changes in Armenia's foreign policy have, arguably, been primarily triggered by domestic factors. Therefore, the approach of Nicholas Onuf (1989) seems to be more relevant, as he emphasises the role of particular actors in the foreign policy process and he acknowledges that the actors can be driven by language, rules or choices which determine the foreign policy directions of states (Onuf, 1989).

3.2. Rule-oriented constructivism

Nicholas Onuf, one of founding fathers of the constructivist theory (e.g. Pouliot, 2004, Griffiths et al., 2009), claims that the starting point for studying the interlinkage between the material world and people should be placed in the middle of those two dimensions (Onuf, 2001). He introduces a third element, rules, which always links people and the society. Rules should be understood as certain norms that make people involved in foreign policy processes act in a certain way. However, people can choose how to deal with rules – whether they follow or break them, whether they make, change or get rid of them (ibid.).

Looking at this concept from the International Relations perspective, one could argue that in international relations agents within states (those who speak on behalf of a larger group of people) act based on some rules that determine their relations with other agents (Onuf, 2001). The rules here can be understood not only as tangible elements, such as agreements, memberships, conventions, etc., but also non-tangible elements, such as foreign policy traditions, the state's role, national identities etc., that define a certain kind of relationship of a state with other international actors (states, blocs, global organisations, etc.).

Rules give agents choices. The most basic choice is to follow the rule – to act in accordance with the rule. It is only up to the agents, the actual human beings, to decide and make the choice over those rules. This choice will depend on the agent's preferences based on intangible factors, such as their beliefs, values and goals. The human factor is key in rule-oriented constructivism. However, the agency is always limited, because agents cannot act freely in the ways they might wish to. Rules, in general, limit the scope of acts that agents are free to take (Onuf, 1998). Otherwise stated, the rule-oriented constructivism means that agents operate within a certain existing structure, which sets limits and provides the social context within which agents exercise judgement. At the same time, the agents co-construct the existing structure depending on a number of factors and resources, such as goals, values, beliefs etc. (Onuf, 1989). (Fig. 1).

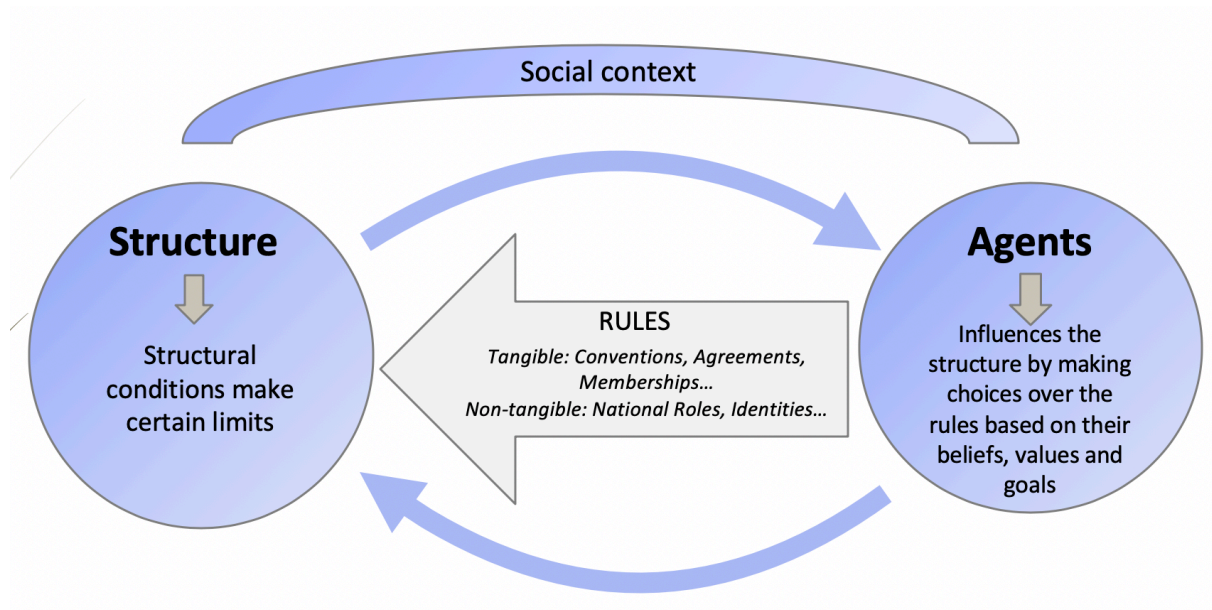


Fig. 1. Rule-oriented constructivism in international relations.

Figure by the author based on Onuf (1989, 1998, 2001)

According to Onuf, the conduct of the agent towards the rule is often materialised through speech acts. People use the language in order to influence other people. He claims that “rules derive from, work like and depend on speech acts, and that language and rules together are the medium through which agents and structures may be said to constitute each other” (Onuf, 1998, p.64). According to him, international relations should be studied through language and rules. According to Onuf, “constructivism’s first concern is to find “rules”, understood here as a crucial form of human and social activity that enables us to see people as interacting in, and with, an inextricably social and material world” (Onuf, 1998, p.67). Constructivism presents a picture of a complex social reality. While using this approach for analysis, it is possible to choose a specific aspect of this complex picture, as sometimes the change of only one rule can affect an entire system (Kubáľková, 2001).

Based on the above theses on rule-oriented social constructivism, the central three concepts that form the analytical concepts for this research are: *identities, role and rules*.

Identities or ideas about who “we” are, serve as a guide for political action and worldviews. They create a system of orientation for people involved in foreign policy making which determines their actions (Aggestam, 2018). Identities are seen as general beliefs and attitudes about one’s own nation, about other nations and about the relationship it should have

between the self and others in the international arena (ibid). Therefore, through the analysis of identities it is possible to reveal whether and how the changes in self-conceptions are linked to the foreign policy changes.

Role concepts serve as an analytical and operational link between identity constructions and the design of foreign policy (Aggestam, 2018). It should be stressed, however, that the role concept is not an official policy or strategy of the government that is discussed, agreed and conceptualised in any official documents. It is the task of the researcher to define the lines of the national role conceptions based on values, goals and beliefs of the government officials who speak on behalf of the state.

Rules create a link between agent and structure as they shape the state's foreign policy by telling agents, through language, what they should do. Identities and roles can be seen as types of rules constituting the social structure of international relations and world politics.

In the context of Armenia, the material structures to be taken into account are Armenia's geographic position, its small size, lack of natural resources, as well as the closed borders with two of its neighbouring countries: Turkey and Azerbaijan. Conversely, there are rules: on one hand, those are conventions, agreements, memberships that Armenia has with its external partners, and on the other hand, national role and identities. Using the three above-mentioned key concepts for my research, I will analyse how Armenia's foreign policy decision makers have been shaping their relations with Armenia's strategic external partners since the Velvet Revolution.

3.3. State's Identity formation as a dynamic process

As already noted in Section 3.1., constructivists put at the centre not capabilities, but identities and interests of the state. Thus, formation and evolution of identities is a key concept in social constructivism. Identities are important for foreign policy analysis, because through them the researcher can identify the intentions of the foreign-policy makers (Kowert, 2010). While policy statements made by decision-makers cannot serve as a reliable guide to

intent, the state identities give a meaning to such statements and, as such, serve as a guide to intent (ibid.).

Identities are often conceptualised with the help of the “Self” and the “Other” dichotomy. Marco Siddi links the national identities to foreign policy and notes that “...constructions of the “Other” are not fixed, but evolve as a result of policy makers’ agency, the domestic contestation among different identity narratives and their interaction with international structures” (Siddi, 2018, p.47). According to Campbell, identity and difference are linked in a relationship of opposition of one to the “Other” (Campbell, 1998). The identity is reinforced through the designation of what “identity” is not, as it represents a threat to what the “Self” should be (ibid.). Messari (2001) contends that identities are formed not only in a relationship of opposition of one to the “Other”, but also in a relationship of positive approximation to the “Other”. The “Other” can be divided into two categories: allies and enemies. The identity of a state is produced and reproduced through its relations with the “Other”, either through antagonistic representations (enemies or adversaries) or approximation (friends or allies). The “Self” and the “Other” elements play an important role in determining any state’s identity and interests (ibid.).

While studying state’s identities, their external and internal dimensions should be considered. Some constructivists see identities as the state’s reputation and image as they are seen from other states (Mercer, 1996; Huth, 1997 in Kowert, 2010). In this case, identities of states refer to the image of individuality and distinctiveness held and projected by the state within particular international contexts. Within this approach, the state identity represents what the country is and what it represents. Values, beliefs and goals of foreign policy decision makers play a key role in a state’s definition of identities. Other constructivists consider identities not only as the country’s image, but also as a substantive element that gives a meaning to their behaviour within the state (Kowert, 2010). Kowert gives an example which is particularly relevant to the Armenian case, where democracy and democratic values are dominating in the current political leadership’s discourse. Kowert says: “Conceiving of one’s own state as democratic is consequential not only because it may affect how the state is treated by others, but also because democracy may serve as a key element of political awareness within the state” (Kowert, 2010, p.3). At the same time, if a state behaves contrary to its identity, it will

bring into question the validity of identity, as well as its preferences (Theys, 2018). For example, if a state promotes the image of democracy in the international arena, but does not show a democratic behaviour in its domestic policy, the legitimacy of the state's identity will be called into question.

According to Wendt, a state's identity serves as the foundation for its interests. The interests are formed within the social context and agents define their interests in the process of defining situations. For example, during the Cold War, the identities of the United States and the Soviet Union were constructed in opposition to each other and the interests of each party were defined based on those identities. Without identities, these states would be uncertain about their interests (Wendt, 1992). In my research, I will focus on how the new elements of national identity are being constituted after the Velvet Revolution and how they are reflected in Armenia's foreign policy.

3.4. National role conceptions

Since the research builds upon the domestic changes as a result of the transition of power, Holsti's theory of national role conceptions (NRCs) can serve as a useful tool to operationalise the concept of social constructivism and to understand how the internal changes have been redesigning Armenia's national role in the international context. Kalevi Jaakko Holsti's theory attributes a particular role to states that he considers as actors. Holsti attempts to explain the foreign policy behaviour of a state through identifying states with state leaders' self-conception of their international roles (Pehlivanurk, 2016). According to Holsti, the national role conceptions are "the foreign policy maker's definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state and of the functions their state should perform in a variety of geographic and issue settings" (Holsti, 1987, p.93). As such, the national role conceptions can be considered as drivers to define the foreign policy (Caffarena & Gabusi 2017). Wendt also stresses the importance of the state's role in the international arena (Wendt, 1992). According to Wendt: "The absence or failure of roles makes defining situations and interests more difficult, and identity confusion may result" (ibid., p.398).

Holsti's theory stresses the role of policymakers, in particular, heads of government/state and foreign policy ministers in determining the NRC. It assumes that leaders speak on behalf of the state. Brummer and Thies (2015) challenge this view and argue that this assumption masks important domestic political processes. According to them, in order to understand the selection of a particular NRC out of many possible NRCs, one should look into the domestic sources of the NRCs, more specifically domestic contestation over the NRCs and the debates that lead to the selection of a particular NRC. They place the domestic policy-making process at the heart of their model of NRC contestation and selection. They contend that this contestation and selection happens both within the executive and legislative branches of the government, where the government coalition and opposition advocate different NRCs (Brummer & Thies, 2015). With regard to Armenia, it could be argued that the ideology of the Velvet Revolution itself is at the heart of NRC's change. Currently, both executive and legislative branches of the government in Armenia are ruled by representatives of the "My Step" alliance, which benefits from major popular support. In that sense, the undisputed dominance of the incumbent government results in little leverage of other political forces to challenge the NRC advocated by the majority government and especially the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

The concept of role can be used in different ways to understand the foreign policy. Thus, Harnisch (2011) distinguishes between "role conception", "role expectation" and "role performance". The role conception consists of expectations of certain foreign policy behaviour by the role-holders themselves. The role expectation refers to other actors' expectations towards the role-holder's actions, while the role performance is the actual foreign policy behaviour of the role-holder (ibid.). In addition, the role conceptions can be analysed from two various angles: the ego and the alter parts of the role: while the ego part refers to the actor's perception of their position vis-à-vis others, the alter part of the role is the actor's perception of the role expectations of others (Deitelhoff, 2006, p. 66; Kirste & Maull, 1996, p. 289 in Harnisch, 2011, p.8). Bengtsson and Elgström (2012) contend that an actor's foreign policy is driven not only by internal processes and strategies, but it is also partly shaped by other actors' expectations and reactions. Because the roles are constantly evolving, "there is potential for conflict within a role (intra-role conflicts, e.g. between ego and alter expectations) and between roles (inter-role conflicts)" (Harnisch, 2011, p.8.).

In this research, I will focus on Armenia's role conceptions and I will analyse them from two different perspectives: Armenia's current political leadership's perception of their position vis-à-vis Russia and the EU (the ego part of the role), as well as Armenia's political leadership's perception of those actors' expectations with regard to Armenia's behaviour (the alter part of the ego). By contrasting those two perspectives, I will point out some conflicting aspects and try to show how they shape Armenia's foreign policy orientations.

To summarise, the analytical framework of the thesis will be based on values, beliefs and goals of Armenia's foreign policy decision makers that form a foundation for state identity, which, in its turn, defines the country's national role conception. The interconnection of Armenia's national role and the relations with its strategic partners, namely Russia and the EU, is analysed within this framework. (Fig. 2).

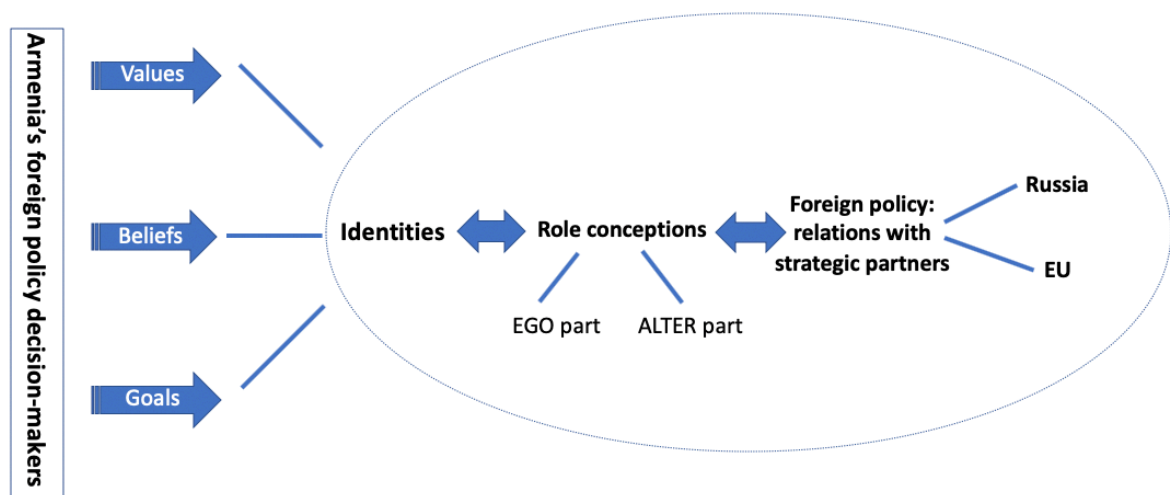


Fig. 2. Analytical framework for the research

Figure by the author

4. Perceptions of reality through qualitative research methods

Undertaking research involves a number of decisions regarding methods used at various stages of the research process. Those decisions are important, as choosing the right methods allow us to effectively address the research problem, which greatly influences the research outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this chapter, I will outline the methods used throughout the whole research process.

The research procedure for this study involved qualitative research methods, focusing on the meanings, concepts, definitions and descriptions to examine the study phenomena (Berg, 2009). The benefit of the qualitative research approach is that it allows us to capture the perceptions of reality in a specific social context and the meanings that are attributed to social processes (*ibid.*). In my research, the qualitative methods offered an effective way to understand how the current Armenian political leadership is creating meanings of the post-Velvet Revolution realities with regard to Armenia's foreign policy.

It is important to note that the methodology cannot be isolated from the theory, as it usually mirrors some theoretical perspectives, thus creating a link between the theory and the methods (Berg, 2009). In this regard, the qualitative methods complement the theoretical approach of social constructivism used in this research. They both are shaped around the idea that the world is socially constructed by the agents who are making meanings of realities through shared ideas and interaction (Onuf, 1998). In order to find those meanings of realities made by agents, I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with various stakeholders in Armenia (representatives of the executive and legislative branches of government, as well as the expert community). I first elaborated a written interview guide with three specific questions and sub-questions covering the topic under study (see Appendix I for the interview guide). The design of the questions for the semi-structured interviews was directly linked to the research questions, as I hoped that the information gained from the interviews would provide answers to the research questions. The written guideline allowed a framework for the interviews to be created without a fixed range of responses to each

question (Ayres & Given, 2008), thus letting the interviewees provide as much narrative information as possible.

Besides the interviews, I have also used additional primary data, as well as secondary qualitative data to complement the research. The additional primary data includes speeches and statements made by various officials in Armenian, Russian and English languages, which are available through public sources and are therefore easily accessible. The secondary data includes specialised journal articles, analytical reports and research literature, which can be also accessed through open sources. Using various data-gathering techniques to examine the same phenomena or, otherwise, triangulation, allowed me to “refine, broaden and strengthen conceptual linkages” (Berg, 2009, p.5). Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations have been employed to validate the findings (ibid.).

The chosen method of data analysis for my research is the discourse analysis. The discourse analysis has allowed me to observe the social reality and to understand how the national role conceptions have been (re-)produced in the post-Velvet Revolution context. As such, the discourse analysis in this research is used as an interpretive methodology aiming to identify structures of meaning in a specific historical-cultural context (Aydin-Düzgi & Rumelili, 2018).

4.1. Data collection

The primary interview data for this research was collected in Yerevan, Armenia, in July–August 2019. As the research primarily aims at presenting Armenia’s current political leadership’s perspective, I tried to include in the research individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in Armenia’s foreign policy design process, as I estimated that they were best suited to address study objectives. Thus, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, as well as four members of Armenia’s Parliament. I then complemented their views with the opinions of high-level experts, either those who closely collaborate with the current government, or independent experts whose expert opinion is regularly published in Armenian and foreign (mainly in the EU and/or Russian) publications. In addition, in order to balance the official opinion, I also conducted interviews

with some opposition figures who either represent the previous Armenian government or the opposition that has been formed after the Velvet Revolution. By doing so, I tried to ensure the impartiality of my research by being open to and aware of various, sometimes radically opposing views with regard to the phenomena under study.

I used social media (Facebook and LinkedIn), as well as email communication to reach the possible interviewees. Although I identified the main participants directly, the snowball technique was also used to reach the interviewees. The snowball technique refers to individuals involved in the study identifying other possible relevant participants (Eide & Given, 2008). Overall, three out of thirteen interviewees were identified through the snowball technique. The main goal of the interviews was to identify the representations of Armenia's national role conceptions, as well as changes and continuities in Armenia's relations with Russia and the EU. It should be also noted that all the interviewees showed openness and willingness to participate in the study, thus making the interview process very smooth and efficient.

A total of thirteen interviews were conducted, involving three women and ten men. Ten out of thirteen interviews were conducted in Armenian, and two in English (see Appendix II for the list of interviewees). The age range was also taken into account while identifying the participants in the research, as I tried to involve representatives of both the Soviet and Post-Soviet generations. Thus, the age of the interviewees ranged between 31–61 years old. A sample of thirteen interviews was estimated to provide a suitable amount of data for two main reasons: on the one hand, the sample is large enough to illustrate the study phenomena in a diverse group of individuals. On the other hand, the sample is small enough for in-depth coding and analysis processes.

The length of the interviews varied between 22 and 53 minutes, with an average of 35 minutes per interview. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, either in public spaces, mainly cafés, or in the interviewees' workplaces. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher transcribed all the interviews entirely. The total length of all interviews was 7.5 hours, while the transcription represented 60 pages.

4.2. Research ethics

I have been aware of the ethical considerations and have taken steps in order to ensure the appropriate conduct for my research. I have especially paid attention to the ethical codes of the study, such as honesty and integrity, confidentiality, objectivity and carefulness (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015).

The issue of privacy and confidentiality was taken into account while conducting interviews. All the interviewees were introduced in advance to the aim and purpose of the study. The participants' consent for recording and using the data for this research was verbally confirmed at the beginning of each interview. Only one out of thirteen interviews was done off record at the request of the participant. Eleven participants accepted the use of their full names and affiliations in the research. Thus, in the study, I used either their full names or codes. I used pseudonyms for two participants who preferred to remain anonymous (see Appendix II). In order to ensure the protection of the data throughout the whole research process, all the audio recordings and transcripts were carefully stored on external hard drives and locked in secure places. In order to ensure the impartiality of the research, I remained open to various opinions regarding the study phenomena and took all points of view into account in my analysis. In addition, I have been careful to exclude any intentional or unintentional plagiarism.

4.3. Data analysis process

After the detailed transcription of the interviews, the data was imported to the Atlas.ti qualitative computer software for further coding and analysis. Atlas.ti's user-friendly interface allowed me to easily understand its basic functions and learn how to use it. Atlas.ti has been an efficient and useful tool to visualise the data and create relationships with different parts of the data and theoretical concepts and generate linkages between them (Given, 2008). The coding in the Atlas.ti software aimed at identifying segments of meaning in the data and labelling them with a code: a word or short phrase (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). As noted by Linneberg and Korsgaard: "Coding offers a useful craft that enables deep

immersion in the data, as well as transparency in the development and presentation of findings [...]” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.260).

An abductive approach, combining inductive and deductive coding, was chosen for the coding process (Peirce, 1978). The inductive approach refers to the use of terms and phrases retrieved directly from the data, rather than using theoretical concepts for the coding process (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The advantage of the inductive approach is that the codes are loyal to the data. However, it might become difficult to manage the big amount of the codes created through this approach. In this case, the deductive approach can be applied, which consists in using the theoretical framework and concepts, to narrow down the codes and focus on the most relevant information for the research. The combination of those two types of coding is called the abductive approach (ibid.).

Thus, the inductive approach was adopted for the first phase of the coding, meaning that the codes were created directly from the data (ibid.). This approach allowed me to stay close to what has actually been said and “...capture the complexity and diversity of the data” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.263). Overall, 73 initial open codes were created as a result of the first coding exercise. Once the most important codes were identified and recognised, they were reorganised into categories. An example of the first phase coding is illustrated in Table 2.

Quotation	Open codes	Category
<i>AI: “You need to have strategic relations with the Russian Federation. Russia is one of the fundamental bases for Armenian security: not ideal, not brilliant. We need them, because they provide a political form of security, but weapons are also extremely important for us: you don’t have another way to buy them except from Russia.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia • Security • Weapons • Dependence • Strategic partnership 	Russia as the main provider of Armenia’s security

Table 2. Example of the first phase coding

During the second phase of the coding, a deductive approach was applied, as the most relevant codes were kept and grouped into themes and categories based on theoretical

concepts. This allowed me to make the coding process more focused, structured and oriented to the research aims (ibid). At this stage, the entire transcription was carefully reread a few times to make sure that no important data was left out. An example of the second phase coding is illustrated in Table 3.

Themes (National role conceptions- NRCs)	Categories based on values, beliefs and goals	Codes
Faithful ally-balancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complementarity • Consistency in foreign policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictability; • Balancing between East and West; • Western values; • Strategic partnership with Russia; • No major changes; • Diversification.

Table 3. Example of the second phase coding

During the third phase of the coding process, I started exploring the patterns of similarities and differences between categories and I found both connections and contradictions between them. Finally, the fourth phase involved analysing those connections and contradictions, which constituted the actual findings. Those findings are explored in the analytical part of this research.

Figure 3 below represents the stages of the data analysis process. Although I divided this process into a few stages, it hasn't been a linear process, as it required "cycling back and forth between the data and theory" (Peirce, 1978 in Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.264), in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

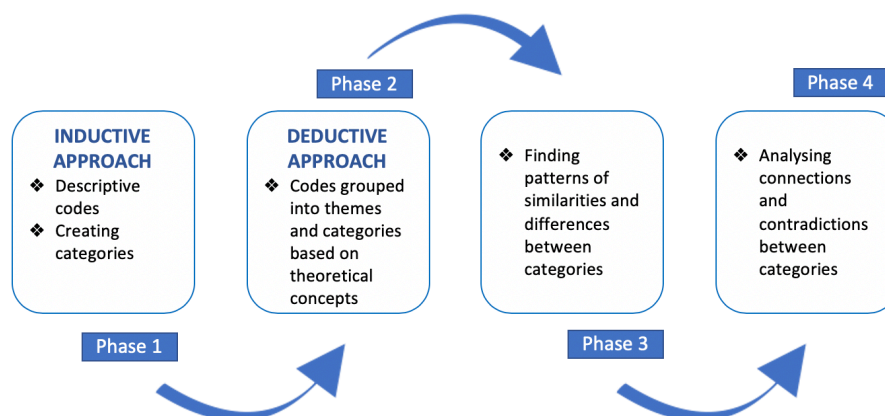


Fig. 3. Visualisation of data analysis process

4.4. Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method which studies the use of language and its role in a social context. It can be approached from various perspectives, such as a language's coherence over sentences or its relation to the context (Potter & Given, 2012). In my research, I have studied the role of language as a meaning making tool to construct realities. This type of analysis complements my theoretical approach, the one of social constructivism, in which the interaction between the agency and structure is mediated through the language (Theys, 2017). Thus, the language is perceived as a "reach source for analysis", rather than just words (Larsen, 2004, p.62). As Henrik Larsen points out: "Social constructivist discourse analysis is a theory (and a method flowing from that) about the shaping of the social world through the process whereby meanings are produced and reproduced" (Larsen, 2004, p.64).

The choice of the discourse analysis largely stemmed from my concern of the discursive construction of state identities which lay the foundation for the national role conceptions. The identities are produced based on the ideational factors, such as goals, beliefs and values of state agents and require linguistic tools to find those representations in the discourse (Aydin-Düzgi & Rumelili, 2018). My aim as a researcher was to find out how those ideational factors are communicated through the speech. The discourse analysis thus allowed me to depict the values, beliefs and goals of the foreign policy decision makers, based on which the main NRCs were sketched out. It also allowed me to examine the Identity dimension of Armenia's relations with its strategic partners, which shape Armenia's foreign policy orientations.

In my research, the discourse analysis is applied to study primary data, more specifically face-to-face interviews, which were conducted for this research and complemented by official speeches, declarations, newspaper interviews, considering that it can offer a meticulous interpretation of the NRCs representations in the discourse of the agents who are involved in the foreign policy design. In addition, texts were analysed in their original languages: Armenian, Russian and English, thus allowing a more nuanced understanding of those representations (Aydin-Düzgi & Rumelili, 2018). The discourse analysis allowed me to study not only those representations, but also their connections, differences and similarities, as well

as their continuity (Dunn & Neumann, 2016), thus offering a more comprehensive picture of the state identity (re-)construction.

4.5. Challenges and limitations

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) distinguish three stages of the qualitative research process: preparation, organising the data and reporting the results. Each of those stages represents some challenges and limitations that the researcher needs to address in order to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of their research (ibid.). Thus, in the preparation phase, it is important to select the suitable unit of analysis. The selected sample must be representative, neither too large, making it difficult to grasp the overall picture, nor too narrow, resulting in fragmentation of analysis (ibid.). For this research, semi-structured interviews were considered as the most relevant sample, as they were large enough to be considered as a whole unit and small enough for a thorough analysis process.

The challenges in the organising stage of the research are related to coding, creating categories and themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Because of the overwhelming amount of data, it is difficult to manage the coding process, which often makes the researcher confused and frustrated (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). In this regard, the use of the Atlas.ti software for this research allowed me to make the organisation of the data more manageable and ordered. Another challenge is related to the fact that by trying to find linkages between various codes and categories, there is a risk of losing the holistic and comprehensive understanding of the study phenomena (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Thus, the researcher needs to always keep in mind “the understanding of the phenomena in order to make sure that the findings emerging from the coding process are valid and relevant” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.267).

Reporting the results of the analysis should also be done very carefully, because analysis goes through various stages and it might be challenging to maintain the integrity of narrative materials (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In order to keep the right focus, I always kept in mind the research questions and captured the information that was relevant for this particular study, even if it required dropping some other interesting aspects that came up during the analysis (ibid.).

The discourse analysis chosen for this research has also its limitations. Thus, it is considered as an interpretive method, so the researchers are giving themselves a meaning to the text. That meaning can be subject to excessive interpretation, while the results can suffer from bias and subjectivity (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). However, according to the social constructivism approach, the meaning is never fixed, so everything is subject to interpretation (Theys, 2017). Sandra Harding (2005) contends that the researcher's bias can never be really removed, as the researcher's life experiences are always reflected in the research. Nevertheless, in order to avoid as much as possible bias and subjective interpretations, I did my best to be open to all different opinions and take all of them into account in my research. Furthermore, the triangulation was an effective way to broaden the understanding of the study phenomena and hopefully contributed to increasing the credibility and validity of the results. Overall, qualitative methods allowed me to discuss in detail various social processes that agents use to create and maintain their social realities (Berg, 2009).

5. Analysis and presentation of findings

The below chapter illustrates the findings that emerged from the data analysis. The analysis is based on interviews with the Armenian officials and experts related to Armenia's foreign policy evolution since the Velvet Revolution. The interviews are complemented by speeches of officials and experts found in open sources. My aim as a researcher has been to gain insight into the roles of the state as they emerged from the discourses. Overall, six national role conceptions (NRCs) are discussed in Section 5.1. In Section 5.2., two conflicting NRCs are put in the context of Armenia's relations with its strategic partners, namely Russia and the EU. This is done from two different perspectives: Armenia's current political leadership's view on the development of relations with each of those actors (the ego part of the role), as well as Armenia's political leadership's perceptions of those actors' expectations with regard to Armenia's foreign policy behaviour (the alter part of the ego). Finally, Section 5.3. summarises the findings.

5.1. Armenia's national role conceptions (NRCs) after the Velvet Revolution

In order to define the main NRC, I first grouped the key ideas based on the values, beliefs and goals of Armenia's current political leadership. Through this grouping, the following six national role conceptions of Armenia were sketched out: "Democratic European state", "Internal developer", "Bridge", "Pioneer of modernisation", "Full sovereign subject" and "Faithful ally-balancer". Those roles are sometimes interlinked, thus making it difficult to define clear dividing lines. In addition, as the analysis shows, some roles have conflicting aspects. A summary of the NRCs, categories and codes is presented at the end of this section in Table 4.

5.1.1. Armenia as a democratic European State

The analysis shows that one of the features of Armenia's Velvet Revolution lies in its value-driven nature. Several interviewees argue that the main incentive and motivation for the Revolution was the society's resistance to non-democratic developments in the country.

Democracy was chosen as a model for the country's development. The word "democracy" was the one that occurred most during the interviews. Overall, the interviewees mentioned the words "democracy", "democratic" and "democratisation" 63 times during the interviews. The interviewees noted, however, that democracy has not been a new choice for Armenia. Thus, as noted by the current Deputy Foreign Minister, Armenia's state governance system has been developed on the European model since its independence in 1991. On a formal level, at least, Armenia aimed at becoming a European country based on the European model of development. What were missing, however, were the performance and the content, as often the reforms adopted on a former level were not implemented or poorly implemented because of corruption and lack of democracy. The following quote from the RA Deputy Foreign Minister illustrates Armenia's image of a democratic European country.

"In some cases, the performance has been bad, in some cases institutions were created, but unfortunately, there was lack of substance. But, overall, the precondition to have the European level [of development] has always been there." - Artak Apitonyan, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia.

The interviewees thus see Armenia's image as a democratic state as a continuation of the path adopted by Armenia since its independence in 1991. The changes, according to them, happened on a more substantive level. The Revolution gave an opportunity to build on the existing foundation and to fill it with content. At the same time, many interviewees noted that the strong image as a democratic state creates both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it allows Armenia to behave more confidently in the international arena. On the other hand, from the geopolitical perspective, promoting the image of a democratic state is seen by the interviewees as a risk, as it might create tensions with the countries in the Eurasia region that do not always welcome democratic achievements.

The analysis shows that the current political leadership lacks a clear vision on how to position the Velvet Revolution in the foreign policy domain. The recognition of risks and geopolitical constraints was prevailing in the interviews, and yet, some of the interviewees (AH, GA) expressed the idea that Armenia could act in a more confident way in advancing and promoting its image as a democratic European state in the international arena.

It could be argued that even though democracy, as a core value, is prevailing in Armenia's current political leadership's discourse, the role of Armenia as a democratic European country serving as an example/model in the region is not the one that foreign policy-makers are actively promoting, so as not to harm the relations with the strategic partners in the region.

5.1.2. Internal developer

The official five-year programme of the Republic of Armenia Government adopted in February 2019 (Programme of the RA Government, 2019) emphasises strong domestic focus as one of the main priorities of the current government. At the same time, as noted by interviewees, because of, on the one hand, the heavy economic and military dependence on Russia and, on the other hand, willingness to put in place reforms to strengthen democratic institutions in Armenia, it is in fact difficult to separate domestic politics from geopolitics. Richard Goragosian explains it well in the following quote:

"[...] Although the government came up with the domestic agenda, it was not about geopolitics, at the same time, foreign policy issues are inescapable, because of Russia, especially, and because of the need for economic development; European support for reforms. So, it would be probably irresponsible to say that there can't be or shouldn't be a foreign policy focus. And I think the government is realising this." - Richard Giragosian.

It could be argued that while being more confident and determined in pursuing domestic reforms in Armenia based on democratic values, the government shows cautiousness, as it realises that the domestic reforms cannot be carried out independently of the foreign policy. The following quote from the Deputy Foreign Minister illustrates the cautious determination in carrying out domestic reforms.

"Our goal is to build a country with a developed judiciary, free society, elections that are not faked, an army of politically neutral professionals, a democratic security system, all of which are the path we are slowly taking. Many things cannot be done at

once. We must also make those changes so as not to damage our relationships with our strategic partners.” - Artak Apitonyan.

Without Armenia's domestic politics so closely linked to the foreign policy, Armenia's NRC of Internal developer could be considered as one of the main NRCs. However, in Armenia's case, when the domestic politics is closely linked to geopolitics, this role conception is rather weak.

5.1.3. Armenia as a bridge

The dominating idea among the interviewees related to the international community's perception of Armenia is that since its independence, this perception was shaped around two main beliefs: i) Armenia as an arena of Russia-West confrontation and ii) Armenia as a neighbouring state to Iran. The interviewees believe that the Velvet Revolution brought Armenia to the attention of the international community and opened up the potential to reconsider those beliefs. The following quote illustrates this idea:

“The changes in Armenia were quite unique, unprecedented, and globally significant, inspiring to some, and the opposite to others. But I truly think that, in general, Armenia, perhaps after 1988, once again appeared in the spotlight of the international arena in 2018, and that revolutionary baggage has also helped to increase our international reputation and role today, which is quite serious.” - Mikael Zolyan.

Although all the interviewees acknowledged that Armenia's role in international relations depends on global processes which are still out of Armenia's influence, many interviewees stressed that Armenia's role as a regional actor can increase. The belief that Armenia could serve as a bridge between countries and international structures was highlighted by many interviewees. For example, Member of Parliament Gayane Abrahamyan sees Armenia's geographical position as an advantage and stressed that Armenia has the potential to become a bridge between Iran and the outside world, the US and Europe, the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU. Armenia's successful cooperation with both Russia and the West, on the one hand, and the increasing trust of the international community towards Armenia after the Velvet Revolution, on the other hand, is seen by many interviewees as an opportunity for

Armenia to assume the role of a bridge. The bridging role was also put in the context of Armenia's membership of the Eurasian Economic Union. Thus, Artak Apitonyan noted that instead of considering Armenia's membership of the EAEU as a limitation, it should be perceived as an opportunity to create a link between Armenia and other countries that want to cooperate with the EAEU. At the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Prime Minister Pashinyan has also highlighted the bridging role of Armenia in his speech:

“Armenia, as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, plays a good bridging role between the E.E.U. and the European Union, creating multiple opportunities for western companies to do business within the E.E.U., utilising the knowledge and skill of Armenians, thoroughly familiar with this market and its rules.” - Nikol Pashinyan (World Economic Forum, 2019).

The bridging role of Armenia was also emphasised in the context of the visit of the Iranian President to Armenia in October 2019 for participation in the EAEU Council meeting and signature of free trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU (Harutyunyan, 2019). Richard Giragosian, Director, Regional Studies Center, qualified this visit as an important development for Armenia and an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of Armenia as a “bridge” between the EAEU and Iran (OC-Media, 2019).

The word “bridge” was explicitly used by the interviewees. It has occurred 22 times during the interviews, which shows that the belief about Armenia's role as a “bridge” for other regional actors was dominant among the interviewees.

5.1.4. Armenia as a pioneer of modernisation

Another dominating belief that came up during interviews was related to Armenia's potential to become the pioneer of modernisation in the Eurasia region. This belief was strongly connected to the idea of generational change. Indeed, generational change was mentioned as a transformational factor not only by the interviewees who represent the current political leadership, but also by the foreign policy experts and opposition figures whose views on other questions were otherwise different, if not opposing. While some of the interviewees see the generational change as a factor for societal transformation, others, like Mikael Zolyan, believe that the generational change will also bring major political transformations in the region. The following quote illustrates this idea:

"In Armenia, the whole political elite was removed and a new political elite started to be formed, which has not yet been fully formed. In other countries, this process is just beginning, but we are already seeing similar processes in Moldova, Kazakhstan. It doesn't matter how that generational change is going to happen – by revolution, from top to bottom – but in any case, that generational change is going to happen, and I think the Eurasian region is expecting a very serious modernisation process because the Eurasian region has been frozen for the last 20 years, since the 90s. During that period, the political system remained unchanged, but society has evolved, that is, a new generation has emerged – young people who have learned, travelled, and so on. Mentality has changed." - Mikael Zolyan.

The interviewees representing the current political leadership mentioned that Armenia is currently in the position of pioneering this modernisation process. Interestingly, this process was also put in the context of Europe–Russia relations. According to Mikael Zolyan, as a result of this modernisation process, the current East–West confrontation will gradually transform into cooperation in mid- and long-term perspectives. The generational shift is seen as process that will make the East-West confrontation irrelevant and, in the contrary, boost the East-West cooperation in Eurasia region. As noted by Zolyan, the generational shift is visible in Armenia and the Velvet Revolution is the point of departure of this change that will involve

the whole post-Soviet space. While the previous “colour revolutions” in the region arose from the conflict between the Eastern or Western oriented political elites, for the new, post-Soviet generation, this confrontation is not relevant anymore. The post-Soviet generation is not opposing anything related to the Soviet time or Russia. Thus, according to Zolyan Pashinyan cannot be considered as an anti-Soviet or anti-Russia leader, as he has developed his career and was formed as a professional in the post-Soviet period. Therefore, for him, the East-West confrontation is not relevant. This concerns also the new political elite in the country which was formed after the Velvet Revolution. Ideas similar to the ones of Mikael Zolyan emphasising the East-West cooperation were also expressed by other interviewees representing the current political elite, which means that the generational change is perceived by the current political elite as a positive phenomenon enabling the East-West cooperation.

The belief about Armenia becoming a pioneer of modernisation in the Eurasian region was quite strong amongst the respondents. However, in comparison to other roles, it could be considered as a vision for the future rather than a role that the country would assume at present. Adopting this role depends very much on the successful implementation of the reforms advocated by the current government, which is a long process and cannot be achieved with a short-term perspective.

5.1.5. Armenia as a full sovereign subject

The analysis shows that two main concepts related to Armenia’s role as a full sovereign subject in international relations are dominating in the current political leadership’s discourse: the legitimacy of the current government and the trust towards the government. In fact, the interviewed members of Parliament stressed that having a legitimate government allows Armenia to behave more confidently in the international arena, giving more political independence and confirming its sovereignty. In this regard, most of the interviewees noted that Armenia’s foreign policy choices are first of all based on the state’s national interests, rather than pressures from outside. It was also highlighted by some of the interviewees (MZ, GA, HS, TS, MK, AK) that Armenia’s image as a full sovereign subject of international relations

was strengthened after the Velvet Revolution and that the country is perceived as more predictable and trustworthy than prior to the Revolution.

Some interviewees (MK, GA, MZ) noted that the democratic self-image of Armenia is also dominant in the public perception, which gives the government a legitimacy and mandate to pursue its actions based on democratic values. At the same time, it implies more accountability towards the population and requires constant feedback about its actions and policies. The following quote from the Prime Minister of Armenia illustrates this idea.

“With the unprecedented level of public confidence and legitimacy, the Government of Armenia adopted an ambitious reform agenda[...] We are determined to move forward on this path [building on truly technological and industrial economy] in order to reach our final goal – a stable, democratic, and economically developing Armenia based on the rule of law and accountable governance. We have no right to fail. We ought to justify the trust of our people and protect democracy.” - Nikol Pashinyan, World Economic Forum, 2019.

The analysis shows that legitimacy of the government, its accountability towards the public and trust have a central place in the political leadership’s discourse, thus constituting the essence of the NRC of Armenia being a full sovereign subject in international relations. We can also observe that Armenia’s role as a full sovereign subject is relevant not only to the state’s foreign policy, but also to its domestic policy. This observation is important when put in the context of Armenia’s heavy economic and military dependence on Russia. In fact, the heavy dependence on Russia puts considerable limitations to Armenia’s role as a full sovereign subject. It can be argued that the government relies heavily on public support for putting in place democratic reforms, without which the state’s sovereign role becomes much more vulnerable. The conflicting aspect of this role will be elaborated in a later part of this chapter.

5.1.6. Armenia as a faithful ally and a balancer

As the faithful ally and balancer aspects of Armenia's role are tightly interlinked, it is more appropriate to analyse them together. This role is built on the concept of complementarity. This concept has been applied since Armenia's independence in 1991, when Armenia was trying to develop its relations with both Russia and the West, not being in between, but rather taking cooperation opportunities from all directions. All the interviewees emphasised that the Velvet Revolution in Armenia has not been supported by any third party. This makes the Armenian revolution different from other "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space, for example, Georgia or Ukraine, where a concrete model of state development was chosen as a result of the Revolution at the expense of their relations with Russia. Here again, we can observe a continuation of the foreign policy directions under the previous governments. The below quote shows that the post-revolution discourse confirms this ideological approach.

"But for us, there is no East–West choice. We are members of the EAEU, and we have an agreement on a comprehensive and expanded partnership with the EU. Russia is not against our cooperation with the EU, and the EU is not against our membership in the EAEU." - Solovyov 2019, Interview with Pashinyan.

However, many interviewees stressed that the concept of complementarity under the previous government has not been fully respected. In many cases, Armenia's government opted for choices favourable to Russia. Many interviewees referred to the "U-turn" from European integration in 2013, when after having negotiated the Association Agreement with the European Union, Armenia suddenly made a "U-turn" and decided to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Most of the interviewees agreed that this choice was made under Russia's pressure. As a result, Armenia's reputation on the international arena suffered considerably. The interviewed Members of Parliament, as well as the former Adviser to the Prime Minister, stressed that in the post-revolutionary Armenia this type of behaviour is not possible anymore. The below quote illustrates this idea:

"One of the key things that was said and is continued to be said is that our revolution has no foreign policy agenda, and, at the same time, there will be no U-turns. And

there will be no twists, both in the existing domains and the new ones. If there are to be positive turns, then I think they should be expected first and foremost in the domain of much more concrete bilateral relations (i.e. Armenia–EU, where the issues of visa liberalisation and others remain on the agenda).” - Arsen Kharatyan.

This confidence is connected to Armenia’s role as a full sovereign subject discussed in the previous section. Some interviewees (AA, AI, AH) indicated the areas where the cooperation with Russia and the West should complement each other. Thus, they believe that the democratic reforms in Armenia should be based on the Western model and values, while Russia should remain as a strategic ally in the economic and military spheres. Moreover, many interviewees (AA, RG, TS, MZ, MK) noted that the Velvet Revolution opened up new cooperation opportunities with other countries, which would allow the diversification of Armenia’s economy in a long-term perspective, thus loosening the dependence on Russia.

At the same time, the analysis shows that the discourse about confident behaviour collides with Armenia’s cautious attitude towards Russia. Thus, some interviewees (MZ, AA) noted that one of the priorities of the new government right after the Revolution was to ensure its strategic partners, and especially Russia, about Armenia’s intention not to change the foreign policy directions, being predictable and reliable, in order to avoid any negative consequences. In addition, some interviewees (AH, HS, BP) believe that Armenia’s political leadership has been showing loyalty to the Russian government even to a greater degree than the previous government, which could be explained by the fear of not angering its strategic ally.

Interestingly, the representatives of the political leadership emphasise the role of a faithful ally and a balancer while this role conflicts somewhat with the NRC of full sovereign subject. This conflicting aspect will be further elaborated in Section 5.2. of this chapter.

National Role Conceptions (NRCs)	Categories based on Values (V), Beliefs (B) AND Goals (G)	Codes
Democratic European State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value-driven Revolution (V). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democratic image; - Changes in substance; - Opportunities; - Risks; - Geopolitical constraints.
Internal developer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on domestic reforms (G). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic development; - Democratic reforms; - Overdependence on Russia; - Geopolitics; - Cautiousness.
Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic regional significance (B). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation; - Potential; - Regional player; - Trust; - Successful cooperation with East and West; - EAEU/EU/Iran.
Pioneer of modernisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generational shift (B). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Societal and political transformation; - Modernisation; - East–West cooperation; - Eurasia region.
Full sovereign subject*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legitimacy (V); - Trust (V). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legitimate government; - Accountability; - Popular support; - Confident; - National interests; - Reliable; - Predictable; - Trustworthy; - Dependence on Russia.
Faithful ally and balancer*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complementarity (G); - Consistency in foreign policy (G). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predictability; - Balancing East–West; - Western values; - Strategic partnership with Russia; - No major changes; - Diversification.

*Conflicting roles

Table 4. Summary of the NRCs/categories/codes

5.2. NRCs – Armenia’s relations with Russia and the EU

In the previous section, I presented Armenia’s main national role conceptions as they emerged from the data analysis. Through the analysis, I identified some conflicting aspects in the NRCs of Armenia: being a **full sovereign subject** and a **faithful ally-balancer** at the same time. In this section, I will take a closer look at those conflicting aspects by examining those roles in the context of Armenia’s relations with its strategic partners, namely Russia and the EU. The NRCs include not only the social identity of an actor, but also the perceptions of the others (Harnisch, 2011, p.8). The role conceptions are constantly produced and reproduced, as they also depend on the roles of other actors (ibid.). In other words, the other actors’ perceptions and actions play an important role in the formation of NRCs. In order to illustrate the above-mentioned two perspectives of the NRCs, this section analyses both Armenia’s current political leadership’s perception of their position vis-à-vis Russia and the EU (*the ego part of the role*), as well as Armenia’s political leadership’s perception of those actors’ expectations with regard to Armenia’s behaviour (*the alter part of the ego*). By doing this, I will point out more precisely the tensions and conflicts between the roles and show how these tensions and conflicts influence the interactions between Armenia and its strategic partners. The summary of the findings is presented in Tables 6 and 7 at the end of this section.

5.2.1. Armenian–Russian relations: continuity and change

5.2.1.1. Armenia’s perspective: the ego part of the NRCs

Through the discourse analysis, two main categories have been identified related to Armenia’s NRCs with regard to Russia: from the Armenia’s leadership’s perspective, Russia is seen as irreplaceable, but also an equal partner. Each of those categories is elaborated below.

a) Russia as an irreplaceable partner

As noted in Section 5.1.4., one of the main concerns for Armenia after the Velvet Revolution was to ensure Russia that Armenia’s foreign policy priorities had not changed. Nikol Pashinyan’s first visit to Russia in May 2018, right after his nomination, was the occasion to

stress Armenia's willingness to keep and deepen the strategic partnership with Moscow, within the existing cooperation format, the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) and the CSTO (Common Security Treaty Organization). This was confirmed in Pashinyan's speech during the EAEU's Council's meeting in Sochi, Russia, on May 15. Thus, in his speech Pashinyan highlighted the following:

"We have already formed our new government, whose programme doesn't include any changes to our foreign policy. It doesn't foresee any reverses on foreign policy track. I confirm my commitment to all international obligations of the Armenian Republic, including the ones within the framework of the EAEU. We are focused on active cooperation with the EAEU partners in terms of establishing free movement of goods, services, labour and capital, as well as implementing preferential treatment on economic cooperation regulated by the Union's rule [...]" - Vesti News (2018).

As many interviewees pointed out, such a position can be explained not only by historical friendly ties with Russia, but also by Armenia's overdependence on Russia in political, economic, but most importantly, military and security fields. Although all the interviewees acknowledged those dependencies, the security aspect was particularly highlighted by most of them. In fact, Russia is the security guarantor of Armenia within the CSTO. The word "security" was the one that was the most frequently used during the interviews while referring to Armenian-Russian relations. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was especially emphasised in this context as an issue where Russia's role is seen as irreplaceable (BP, AA, AI, AH). In addition, Russia is the main weapons supplier to Armenia. As the supply is based on low rates, the interviewees (AA, BP, AI, AK) noted that there is no alternative for Armenia to purchase weaponry from elsewhere. Many interviewees noted that, the probability of war being high, security is the top priority of the current government. In this context, they noted that Russia remains the only country that can ensure Armenia's security. Therefore, keeping strategic ties with Moscow is of utmost importance for Armenia. Thus, steps such as withdrawal from the CSTO, closing the military base in Gyumri or signing the Association Agreement with the European Union at the expense of the Eurasian Economic Union is not on the agenda of Armenia's current government, as it could considerably destabilise Armenia's security.

The interviewees noted that Armenia's dependence on Russia in the economic field is also important, as Russia controls the key sectors of Armenia's economy. Most of them especially referred to the energy dependence, as Russia is almost the only natural gas supplier to Armenia. Many interviewees acknowledged the dangers of such a high dependency and noted that Armenia is looking for other energy carriers, such as Iran, but yet, they stressed that for the moment the Russian gas price remains very competitive, thus making it impossible to switch to other options.

Interestingly, some interviewees described the dependencies on Russia as an opportunity for Armenia, rather than a threat. For example, the Deputy Foreign Minister highlighted the attractive side of strategic partnership with Russia. Thus, while acknowledging the overdependence in different fields, he stresses its advantages. The following quote illustrates this idea.

"From a competitive point of view, they remain quite attractive. And let's also remember that we have the largest Armenian community in Russia [...]. All this is a very serious basis for us to keep up the cooperation and, in the end, Russia remains a decisive factor in this region. It is clear that without the Russian influence in the region, the chaos would be much greater. The Russian influence has a rather balancing effect, at least in terms of maintaining peace." - Artak Apitonyan.

At the same time, the need for economic diversification has been also emphasised by many interviewees (AA, MK, BP, GA, MZ, TS). The economic diversification is seen as a long-term goal which could eventually boost Armenia's economy, while at the same time diminish the dependence on Russia.

Overall, the analysis shows that Russia is seen as an irreplaceable partner for Armenia, at least in the foreseeable future. Moreover, according to the data analysis, there is no option for Armenia to avoid overdependence in Russia on a short- or mid-term perspective. The role of a faithful ally to Russia can be considered as a continuation of the previous government's position, which was also stressing the importance of keeping and developing strategic ties with Russia within the existing cooperation framework: the EAEU and the CSTO. However,

what is different is that after the Velvet Revolution, Armenia's political leadership's discourse is also stressing the importance of positioning itself as an equal partner to Russia (MK, GA, MZ, RG, TS, AP), rather than a state always serving Russia's interests.

b) Russia as an equal partner

According to Richard Giragosian, after the Velvet Revolution, Armenia has challenged the terms of relationship with Russia. Many interviewees noted that previous Armenian governments have underestimated Armenia's value to Russia and overestimated Russia's importance to Armenia (MK, GA, RG, AP). They especially emphasised that Armenia is currently the only faithful partner for Russia in the region and referred to the importance for Russia to have a military base located in Gyumri. In this regard, they stressed the need to renegotiate the terms of strategic partnership with Russia. The following quote by Member of Parliament Taron Simonyan illustrates this mindset.

"A strategic ally remains a strategic ally, which means that in economic, military and security relations, we must act to the maximum of our mutual benefit. Well, in the past it was understandable, that it was not so mutually beneficial, sometimes it was only one-sided. We have to work on it." - Taron Simonyan.

The idea of the equal partnership with Russia is closely linked to Armenia's role as a full sovereign subject, in which the government pursues its own best interests, a role that was sketched out through data analysis. It should be noted, however, that many respondents acknowledged that for a small state like Armenia, dependencies are unavoidable, as the global players have greater power in influencing the political landscapes. Yet, many interviewees acknowledged that the government should work on balancing those dependencies, rather than establishing one-sided relations for the benefit of Russian interests, as was the case before the Revolution. As noted by Arsen Kharatyan, since the Velvet Revolution, Armenia has been openly raising issues of strategic importance directly with Russia's top leadership, which is by itself an expression of Armenia's more sovereign position and contrasts with the previous government's behaviour.

As noted earlier, most of the interviewees pointed out that the legitimacy of the current government allows Armenia to act in a more confident way in the international arena and renegotiate the terms of relations with Russia. For example, Arsen Kharatyan referred to the voting on international platforms where all the countries, independently of their size, are equal as they have only one voice. Those platforms, according to Kharatyan, offer Armenia the opportunity to demonstrate its position as a sovereign state by not always voting in Russia's favour (Kharatyan, 2019). In this context, many interviewees referred to the voting at the United National General Assembly on 4 June 2019, when for the first time Armenia did not vote against the Georgian Resolution, thus opposing Russia (Mejlumyan, 2019).²

Prime Minister Pashinyan has also emphasised on various occasions and in his different speeches the sovereignty as a guiding principle in the Armenia–Russia relationship. Thus, during an interview with the Russia TV Channel “Russia Today”, he noted:

“Russia and Armenia are sovereign countries. I think, in many respects, the interests of our countries correspond to each other, but there may be some nuances where they may not correspond. The main thing is the atmosphere in which we will discuss all these issues. I think we will be able to reach an agreement.” - (Petrenko 2018, Interview with Pashinyan).

Based on the above analysis, it could be argued that while acknowledging structural limitations, such as the geopolitical constraints and heavy dependence on Russia, Armenia's current political leadership also highlights the importance of equal partnership with Russia, emphasising its own sovereignty and ability to act as an independent actor who takes decisions that serve foremost its national interests.

5.2.1.2. *Russia's perspective as perceived from Armenia: the alter part of the NRCs*

While analysing the alter part of the role conception, three main categories were identified in relation to Russia's expectations from Armenia: issues of trust, pragmatic cooperation and

² “On 4 June, the United Nations General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution reaffirming the rights of Georgians displaced from South Ossetia and Abkhazia to return to their homes. The two territories are considered Georgian by most of the world but have been controlled by Russia-backed self-declared Republics since the early 1990s” (Mejlumyan, 2019).

overdependence used as a taming tool. In the below sub-section, I will analyse those categories.

a) Issues of trust and pragmatic cooperation

While talking about Russia, most of the interviewees acknowledged that Russia considers the post-Soviet space as the zone of its strategic influence. As such, when other geopolitical centres get interested in this space, Russia shows an envious resentment (AH). Some interviewees noted that when some drastic developments are happening in that area, it causes a sense of danger for Russia (AI, AH, HS). The sudden and unexpected change of power in Armenia took the outside world by surprise and Russia was not an exception (AH). As many interviewees noted, Russia needed some time to make sense of those events and react accordingly: Russia needed to readjust their approaches and adapt to the new government (AH, AI, MK, MZ, AK). “Suspicion” and “lack of trust” were the phrases most used to describe Russia’s attitude towards changes that happened in Armenia. The lack of trust and suspicion are seen as a result of changes of political elites in Armenia, which is considered as young and unknown to Russia. As AH noted:

“What characterises Russia’s State structures is a long history and continuity. There is a huge difference between Russia’s and Armenia’s political elites. Russia’s elites do not know them [the Armenian elite], most of them are non-understandable and different, and this creates additional tensions.” – Armen Harutyunyan.

Other interviewees also highlighted the gap between Armenian and Russian political elites. For example, Mikael Zolyan referred to the language issues between the two elites. He pointed out that for most of the newly formed political elite in Armenia, Russian is already a foreign language as opposed to the previous government representatives for most of whom the Russian language was the second mother tongue. A few interviewees (MZ, GA) referred also to the different value systems, noting that Armenia has clearly adopted the western values as its path for future development, while Russia’s value system is still based on the Soviet legacy. Some of the interviewees (TS, BP, KB, AH) noted also that the lack of trust could be explained by the fact that many representatives of the current political elite in Armenia,

including the Prime Minister himself, have been criticising Russia and Armenia's membership of the Eurasian Economic Union before the Velvet Revolution. Although their discourse changed after the Velvet Revolution, the lack of trust towards them still prevails in Russian's attitude (BP).

While acknowledging this gap and lack of trust, many interviewees stressed the importance of developing personal relationships with Russian political elites as a measure to overcome misunderstandings and increase trust towards each other (MK, AK). Thus, Maria Karapetyan noted that an open dialogue is important in order to understand perceptions towards and expectations from each other. Similarly, Arsen Kharatyan highlighted that developing personal relationships between the Armenian and Russian political elites would contribute to increasing trust and resolving various issues much more efficiently and quickly.

Personal relationships were also emphasised by Prime Minister Pashinyan in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*. Pashinyan noted:

"[...] relations [between Armenia and Russia] are developing very well, and my personal relations are developing very well with the President of Russia, with the Prime Minister of Russia. All high-ranking officials of Armenia develop relations with Russian colleagues very well." - Solovyov (2019).

Despite the trust issues described above, most of the interviewees noted that there are no serious reasons for Russia to deteriorate its relations with Armenia, as many described Russia as a pragmatic regional player (BP, MZ, AI). According to AI, Russia usually works with the existing political elites in the post-Soviet space, as opposed to Europe that also works with other parts of society, such as opposition or civil society. In this context, the interviewees noted that unless there are some clear unfriendly gestures towards Russia, the cooperation between Armenia and Russia is not endangered. In addition, the lack of viable alternative to Prime Minister Pashinyan at the moment was also mentioned as a reason for Russia's restraint and pragmatic cooperation. Mikael Zolyan noted that overlapping geopolitical interests are enough in order for Russia to keep good relations with Armenia.

b) Overdependence used as a taming tool

While acknowledging the mutual benefit of keeping good relations between Armenia and Russia, some interviewees noted that Russia continuously reminds Armenia about the limits and red lines of the foreign policy and does not allow Armenia's leadership to take steps that would be considered by Russia as unfriendly (BP, RG). As an example of unfriendly gestures, some interviewees (BP, AI, MZ) referred to the arrest of Yuri Khachaturov³ or the former President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan⁴. According to them, Khachaturov's arrest was perceived by Russia as having a negative impact on the work of an organisation of great importance to Russia (KB), while Robert Kocharyan's arrest irritated the Russian top leadership because of the close friendly ties of Kocharyan with Russian President Putin.

As an example of a taming tool, some interviewees (GA, BP, RG) noted the concerns over the possibility of higher gas prices. As Richard Giragosian explains:

"Russia's state-affiliated Gazprom energy monopoly imposed a sudden price rise in January 2019, increasing the wholesale price of gas from 150 USD to 165 USD per thousand cubic metres. The Armenian government was well prepared for this, however, and avoided passing the increase on to domestic consumers – instead persuading the Russian-owned gas distribution network in Armenia to absorb the new cost. But that success may be short-lived, as Armenian officials expect a further rise in the price rise of Russian gas." - Richard Goragosian (2019).

Overall, the analysis shows that the Armenian political leadership realises the risks related to overdependence on Russia. While generally being confident about the prospects of Armenian–Russian cooperation, it also feels the pressure of proving its loyalty, so as to minimise Russia's intervention in Armenia's domestic and foreign policy matters, which is seen as unavoidable. This acknowledgement clearly conflicts with Armenia's role as a full sovereign subject.

³ Yuriy Khachaturov, the Head of the CSTO, was charged by Armenia's Special Investigative Service in 2018 with regard to the crackdown on protesters in 2008, when he was the Head of the Yerevan military garrison (Kucera, 2018). The arrest was followed by several closed-door meetings between the Armenian and Russian top leadership, after which the issue was eventually resolved (note by the author).

⁴ In 2018, Robert Kocharyan, the former President of Armenia, was arrested over charges related to the violent breakup of protests in 2008, when he was President (Mejlumyan, 2019).

5.2.2. Armenia's relations with the EU: continuity and change

Although it is hard to consider the EU as single entity sharing the same views and objectives, in this research the EU is considered based on its perception as a normative great power based on the values such as peace, democracy and human rights, with the mission to spread those values to the world outside the EU (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2012, p.98).

5.2.2.1. Armenia's perspective: the ego part of the NRCs

a) Increased cooperation within the framework of CEPA

The increased cooperation with the EU has been highlighted by most of the interviewees while talking about EU–Armenia relations after the Velvet Revolution. At the same time, the interviewees noted that the cooperation is framed within the existing format: CEPA (the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement), which was signed under the previous government. While the framework of CEPA was elaborated under the previous government, the Velvet Revolution allowed it to fill with more substantive content and enlarge its scope. Thus, the Foreign Minister noted:

“We are currently elaborating a set of ambitious projects with the EU. The number of annual projects has been multiplied several times.” - Artak Apitonyan.

Some interviewees noted the somewhat passive reaction of the EU in support of Armenia right after the Velvet Revolution, which was the result of different expectations from each other (BP, GA, RG). Thus, the Members of Parliament noted that Armenia's leadership was expecting an immediate support to the pro-democratic reforms in Armenia and was disappointed with the EU's passive attitude. On the other hand, while the EU showed a certain restraint in providing immediate support to Armenia's democratic reforms, the Armenian government was rather late in identifying its own priorities for the EU (RG). However, once those priorities had been identified and presented to the European counterparts, the EU's support remarkably increased in a number of fields, including legislative and judicial reforms, education, institutional amendments, multi-sector reforms, democracy and human rights, the

fight against corruption etc. Overall, the EU increased its financial assistance to Armenia by 20–25%. Many interviewees stressed the importance not only of financial, but also technical support in terms of knowledge and expertise sharing. The judicial reforms were especially highlighted as an area where the cooperation with the EU has a vital importance. According to the Deputy Foreign Minister, Armenia is currently one of the most active participants within the Eastern Partnership Programme of the European Union. Many noted that regular and substantive meetings with various EU officials contribute to enhancing mutual cooperation and trust. The following interview passage illustrates the improved cooperation with the EU both qualitatively and quantitatively after the Velvet Revolution.

“The cooperation with the EU expanded after the Velvet Revolution. One thing is CEPA, which is an agreement, but another thing is how the agreement is implemented. We have an agreement, but its implementation dynamics, depth and width are very different now and here we can talk about qualitative changes. That is, the political emphasis seems to have remained largely the same, but there is a different quality of cooperation, more favourable for Armenia.” - Artak Apitonyan.

While some interviewees described the cooperation with the EU as positive, dynamic and promising (RG, GA, AA, MK, AK, AP), others said that Armenia cannot benefit from the full potential of cooperation with the EU unless it passes to a higher degree of European integration by signing the Association Agreement. However, all emphasised that Armenia does not intend to sign the Association Agreement in the foreseeable future, as it contradicts with Armenia’s membership of the EAEU. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, withdrawal from the EAEU is not on the agenda of Armenia’s current government. Interestingly, while all the interviewees stressed that the withdrawal from the EAEU would be considered as strong anti-Russia behaviour, some interviewees (AA, TS, MZ) stressed that staying within the EAEU is a deliberate choice of the Armenian government as it first and foremost benefits Armenia, while others (RG, GA, AH) noted that Armenia’s membership within the EAEU has no alternative because of the risks described in the previous section.

5.2.2.2. *EU's perspective as perceived from Armenia: the alter part of the NRCs*

a) Gradually increasing trust

While referring to the alter part of the role conception, many interviewees mentioned the initial passive reaction of the European Union right after the Velvet Revolution. According to them, this was related to the lack of understanding of what the Velvet Revolution really meant. There was also a certain disappointment with the fact that the Armenian government didn't undertake any radical changes in its foreign policy. From the EU's perspective, the fact that the new political leadership was pursuing the same foreign policy as under the previous anti-democratic regime could mean that no substantial changes took place and that the country's new leadership was not committed to undertaking real democratic reforms. However, according to many interviewees, as a result of the Armenian government's active and regular negotiations with EU officials, those initial tensions were eventually overcome and the EU's perception of Armenia has gradually moved towards a more trustworthy, transparent and predictable partnership (MZ, AK, MK, RG, TS, GA, AP). As noted by Maria Karapetyan, the change in Armenia's government's style of communication also contributed to the perception of Armenia as a trustworthy and predictable actor: prior to the Velvet Revolution, the government communicated different messages to the external and internal audiences, which resulted in a number of conventions and agreements that the Armenian population was not aware of. Currently, the messages to the internal and external audiences are coherent, which contributes to increasing Armenia's image as a transparent actor in the eyes of both Armenia's population and international partners.

Many interviewees noted that the inclusion of Armenia in the EU's "Umbrella fund" in 2019 is by itself a testimony of growing trust and changing attitudes towards Armenia, as membership of this fund is only proposed if the EU recognises progress towards political reform. Thus, by including Armenia in this programme, the EU is sending signals about the EU's high appreciation of Armenia's democratic reforms. According to Gayane Abrahamyan, the EU is especially focusing on supporting the institutional reforms in Armenia aiming at strengthening the bases of democracy, as it believes that sustainable democracy can only be achieved when it is based on solid democratic institutions.

At the same time, the EU's unfulfilled expectations about Armenia's willingness to sign the Association Agreement, implying the withdrawal of Armenia from the EAEU, conflicts with the role of Armenia being a full sovereign state, as from the EU's perspective this limitation is due to the heavy dependence on Russia which is used by the later as a tool of leverage over Armenia.

5.3. Summary of the findings

The analytical part of this research has identified Armenia's national role conceptions after the Velvet Revolution as they emerge from the discourse of the current political leadership. The analysis was organised around the expressed values, beliefs and goals. Overall, six roles were sketched out through the analysis.

Some interesting and also partly surprising observations emerge from the analysis related to each of the roles.

The Velvet Revolution was a value driven event. It was underpinned and motivated by people's will to fight against the corrupt political system and to make democratic changes in the country. It is thus somewhat counterintuitive that, despite this, the role of Armenia as a "democratic European State" is not actively promoted in the foreign policy thinking of the post-revolution Armenia. Arguably, openly promoting this self-image can harm Armenia's relations with regional partners who are not always welcoming of democratic reforms.

Secondly, although the current government's focus is on the domestic reforms, Armenia's internal affairs are tightly linked to geopolitics, thus making the role of "internal developer" less relevant for Armenia. In fact, as Russia controls key sectors of Armenia's economy, in many cases Russia's interests are inevitably taken into account while undertaking economic reforms. On the other hand, efficient democratic reforms on the institutional level cannot be achieved without the financial support of Armenia's Western partners.

The analysis also shows that while some roles may be considered more realistic for the current state of affairs, others rather reflect the current political leadership's vision of the mid- or long-term perspectives. Thus, although the roles of the "bridge" and "pioneer of modernisation" are strong in the discourse of the current political leadership, they are very much in their embryonic stage and their feasibility depends not only on domestic factors, such as a successful implementation of pro-democratic reforms pushed by the current government, but also on bigger regional players' dispositions in perceiving Armenia in such roles. This eventually opens up an interesting discussion about the "realistic" vs. "desired" role pursued by a small state. According to Müller, small states lack power resources to pursue their preferred role and they need to seek the agreement, by means of communication, of more powerful states to support them in their role preferences (Müller, 2011).

The most striking observation that emerged from the data analysis was the conflicting aspects between the NRCs of a faithful ally-balancer and the full sovereign subject. In order to illustrate in greater detail the tensions between those roles, I put them in the context of Armenia's relations with its strategic partners: Russia and the EU. I examined them via the ego and alter parts of the role, not only to show their interrelations, but also to find out how they influence each other's actions and behaviours. By showing the continuity and change in Armenia's relations with its strategic partners, I identified the tensions and conflicts in Armenia's NRCs both in relation to Russia and the EU. According to Harnisch (2011), external and internal circumstances usually lead to revalidation and revision of role conceptions, opening space for change for political leaders. Changes in role conceptions occur as a response to tensions within and between roles. Based on the data analysis, it could be argued that in Armenia's case, the inter- and intra- role tensions that occurred as a result of the Velvet Revolution led to adaptation of strategies and instruments, rather than fundamental changes of role conceptions.

5.3.1. Conflicting NRCs

As Table 5 shows, there are some tensions between Armenia's role as a faithful ally and Russia's perception of the changes that occurred in Armenia as a result of the Velvet

Revolution. The Armenian government's response to the signs of suspicion and lack of trust from the Russian side is expressed by showing loyalty and enhancing personal contacts with the Russian political leadership (blue arrow between "Issues of trust–suspicion" and "Faithful ally–balancer"). At the same time, there is also some confidence from Armenia about Russia's continuing cooperation based on the assumption that Russia, as a pragmatic regional player, accepts working with Armenia's current political elite. This assumption allows Armenia to reconsider its terms of partnership by requesting a more equal attitude from Russia, something that was missing in the approach of previous governments (blue arrow between "Pragmatic cooperation" and "Equal partnership").

Moreover, the new Armenian government pushes the boundaries and promotes its role as a full independent subject, based on the legitimacy of the government and raising trust and support from the international community. However, the self-image of Armenia as a full sovereign subject enters into conflict with Russia's role conception, which lies in Armenia's heavy dependence on Russia in the economic, political and, most importantly, security fields. In this context, Armenia's role as a full sovereign subject can be questioned, as Russia can exercise pressure over Armenia to act based on Russia's own interests (red arrow between "Full sovereign subject" and "Overdependence as a taming tool"). On the other hand, Russia accepts the role of Armenia as a faithful ally-balancer, but uses the overdependence as a tool of leverage over Armenia by drawing red lines and limits. Armenia's leadership, in turn, acknowledges the risks and eventually tries not to cross the red lines designed by Russia (blue arrow between "Faithful ally-balancer" and "Overdependence as a taming tool"). Taking into account the conflicting aspect of the role of full sovereign subject and the Armenian government's top priority in security issues, the question is how far Armenia can go by expressing its sovereignty without putting at risk the state's security. This question is hard to answer, because despite the evidence of structural limitations, the exact limits (red lines) are difficult to draw.

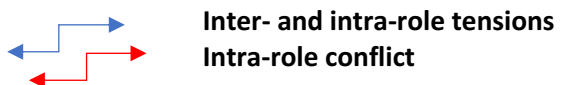
As for the relations with the EU (see Table 6), in the beginning, the expectations of Armenia were high with regard to the EU's support for democratic changes, based on the assumption that the EU, as a carrier of democratic values, would immediately offer its hand and support Armenia in its pro-democratic reforms. At the same time, the EU reacted passively to the

changes in Armenia and took some time to evaluate the situation. Once those initial tensions were overcome, the EU increased its support to Armenia, but only in the framework of the existing cooperation format that was negotiated under the previous government: CEPA. However, because of the increasing trust from the international community and overall positive perception of the Velvet Revolution, Armenia has been benefitting from increased financial and technical support from the EU aimed especially at strengthening its democratic institutions (blue arrow between “High expectations–Increased cooperation” and “Gradually increasing trust”). However, we see a conflict between Armenia’s role as a full sovereign subject and the EU’s expectations of a deeper integration (AA), which is not possible because of the geopolitical constraints (red arrow between “Full sovereign subject and “Expecting the willingness of Armenia to sign the AA”).

The findings of the analysis show Russia’s huge role in both Armenia’s domestic and foreign politics, which leads to the tensions and conflicts between and within Armenia’s NRCs. Although being a full sovereign subject in international relations is the choice of the Armenian government, the dependence on Russia puts considerable limitations on Armenia to push this role forward. At the same time, the tensions and conflicts within and between the roles also reflect the broader East–West confrontation, i.e. tensions between Russia and the EU, which find their repercussions in Armenia’s foreign policy, as the country tries to balance its relations with both Russia and the EU.

NRCs	Categories	Codes	Categories	Codes
Armenia–Russia Role conception (ego part of the role)			Armenia–Russia Role conception (alter part of the role)	
Faithful Ally-balancer	- Irreplaceable partner;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security; - Military; - Economy; - Energy/gas; - EAEU; - CSTO; - Overdependence; - Diversification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issues of trust/suspicion; - Pragmatic cooperation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with elites; - Unknown leadership; - Lack of personal relationship; - Adjustment; - Overlapping geopolitical interests; - No viable alternative.
Full sovereign subject	- Equal partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Terms of partnership; - Value for Russia; - National interests; - Balancing dependencies; - Legitimate government; - Voting. 	- Overdependence as a taming tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limits; - Red line; - Economy; - Security.

Table 5. Categories and codes: Armenian–Russian relations role conception (ego and alter parts of the role).



NRCs	Categories	Codes	Categories	Codes
	Armenia–EU Role conception (ego part of the role)		Armenia–EU Role conception (alter part of the role)	
Faithful Ally-balancer	High expectations - Increased cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge and expertise; - Financial resources; - CEPA filling with content; - Sectorial cooperation; - Active engagement; - Regular consultations with EU officials; - Support to strengthen institutions; - Supporting reforms; - Qualitative and quantitative changes; - Political will. 	- Gradually increasing trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cautiousness – lack of trust; Predictability; - Legitimate government; - Transparency; - Positive change.
Full sovereign subject	- Cooperation ONLY within CEPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limitations; - EAEU membership; - Geopolitical context; - Deliberate choice; - Association Agreement; - Substantive institutional changes. 	- Expecting Armenia to sign the AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change in foreign policy; - Association Agreement.

Table 6. Categories and codes: Armenia–EU relations role conception (ego and alter parts of the roles)


Inter- and intra-role tensions
Intra-role conflict

6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1. National role conceptions: Implications with short-, mid- and long-term perspectives.

This section elaborates the practical contributions of the study, discussing their implications with short-, mid- and long-term perspectives.

6.1.1. Short-term implications

In the current geopolitical context, the structural conditions limiting Armenia's room for manoeuvre in foreign policy are still in place. In fact, the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh still poses serious risks for Armenia's security. The country's closed borders with its neighbouring countries, namely Azerbaijan and Turkey, limit Armenia's communication with the external world. Moreover, the bigger East–West confrontation still makes Armenia's balancing act rather challenging. As long as structural limitations remain in place, Armenia will most probably work on increasing its role as faithful ally and a balancer trying to avoid becoming the East–West confrontation arena.

With regard to its relations with Russia, Armenia's political leadership might make efforts in strengthening personal contacts with Russia's top leadership in order to build up an atmosphere of mutual trust and constructive relationship. At the same time, it might be challenging for the country's young leadership to strengthen its role as a full sovereign subject and establish more equal relations with Russia, taking into account that Russia might use its leverage tool over Armenia at any moment. Thus, Armenia might demonstrate its sovereign position in certain areas, but it remains to be seen to which degree it can act fully independently without undesirable damage to Armenian–Russian relations. In this respect, much will depend on Russia's reaction to such sovereign behaviour. At the same time, it could be argued that as long as Armenia's government benefits from strong popular support and

does not make any substantial changes in its foreign policy orientation, it is unlikely that Russia will undertake any action against Armenia.

As for Armenia's relations with the EU, the current leadership will most probably stay committed to deepening Armenia's cooperation with the EU and carrying out democratic reform, as there is currently political will and public support to do so. It could be argued that the strong legitimacy of the government creates a rare momentum for Armenia to put in place its pro-democratic agenda without damaging its strategic ties with Russia. Otherwise stated, this situation creates an opportunity for Armenia to deepen its cooperation with the European Union within the existing cooperation format and implement the domestic pro-democratic reforms on the institutional level without any harm to its strategic partnership with Russia.

6.1.2. Mid- and long-term implications

It could be argued that Armenia might overcome the current structural limitations and enhance its role as a sovereign actor in the future under certain internal and external circumstances. Firstly, the diversification of the economy and alternative developments in the energy sector seems to be a viable solution in order to diminish the heavy dependence on Russia. In order to achieve this, Armenia should develop partnerships with other regional and international players, which could boost its economic development. Secondly, Armenia's successful implementation of democratic reforms on the institutional level would create a solid basis towards sustainable democracy and, thus, increase its image as a reliable and predictable actor in international relation. Thirdly, the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would greatly ease Armenia's security concerns, thus diminishing Armenia's heavy dependence on Russia in the security field. However, considering the current deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process (see, for example, Kucera, 2019), it is unlikely that a solution to the conflict will be found in the foreseeable future.

Looking at the broader picture, Armenia's role as a sovereign subject could be strengthened in case the East–West confrontation becomes less relevant, not least because of the generational change. Indeed, as discussed in the findings section (5.1.4.), the generational

change implying societal and political transformation in the CIS countries might transform the East–West confrontation into cooperation on a long-term perspective, in which case the complementary foreign policy of Armenia could demonstrate its full potential, allowing it to benefit from cooperation opportunities coming from various directions without putting the country towards unnecessary choices between the East or the West. Another important external factor impacting Armenia’s role conceptions is Russia’s attitude towards its “near abroad” in general. Within this context, Russia’s position of restraint towards Armenia’s Velvet Revolution and Armenia’s pro-democratic aspirations might be a sign of Russia’s changing strategy towards the CIS countries. As noted by Fyodor Lukyanov (2019):

“Russia no longer wants to intervene in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, as previous attempts have led to negative consequences. The West's assumption that Russia wants to keep the former Soviet republics under its control is becoming obsolete. In current realities, it is more relevant to work with each state separately, clearly weighing its potential and opportunities.” - (Mkhdesyan 2019, Interview with Lukyanov).

This context might offer new opportunities for Armenia to develop and deepen its ties in various directions, without Russia’s intervention in Armenia’s foreign policy choices. If Armenia’s model of cooperation with both Russia and the West succeeds, it could not only open up opportunities for Armenia to deepen ties with its Western partners without damaging its relations with Russia, but also increase Russia’s image as a constructive partner in the post-Soviet space, where Russia is often perceived as a threat to countries’ sovereignty. Moreover, in the case of success, Armenia might expand its national role conceptions, becoming a more active actor in international relations by pushing forward its role of a bridge and pioneer of modernisation. According to Holsti: “The more a country is active in international relations, the more roles it can assume” (Holsti, 1987, p.95).

The below two quotes from interview participants show that the revolution by itself is not sufficient to make positive changes and there is huge work ahead of the government in order to put Armenia on the path of sustainable democracy.

“It is also very important whether we succeed in the long run or not. [...] If our domestic reforms succeed, and it becomes as if we are setting a new standard in this Eurasian

region, we will be setting a new standard of living, thereby increasing our importance. If not, of course we will not go back to Serzh Sargsyan's era, but we will be just one of the post-Soviet countries that has some geopolitical significance, nothing more. ”- Mikael Zolyan.

“The real revolution is now under way and it is more psychological and, more importantly, demographic. When we see a completely new political elite in Armenia, much younger than their parents with Soviet legacy, and good or bad, this youthful enthusiasm – but inexperienced – is now coming to define the democracy in Armenia. Similar to Saakashvili in Georgia several years ago. Hopefully Armenia will only continue to prosper and further develop, however.” - Richard Giragosian.

6.2. Limitations of the research and future research areas

The most important limitation of this study lies in the fact that the Velvet Revolution took place relatively recently, while the context is rapidly evolving and new developments are happening on a daily basis. The post-Velvet Revolution context in this research encompasses the period from April 2018 until December 2019, which is a rather limited period of time and might not be sufficient to evaluate and trace changes in inter-state relations. In addition, the political developments that have already occurred in 2020 might also influence the outcomes of the research. In this regard, a fruitful area for further work would be to continue to monitor the situation and evaluate the inter-state relations dynamics over time.

Another limitation is that Armenia is still in a transitional period and no exact foreign policy directions are yet designed, as the country's foreign policy principles are still based on the National Security Strategy adopted in 2007. Therefore, some suggestions and findings of this study might need to be reconsidered after the release of the updated version of the National Security Strategy, which is expected in the course of 2020. It would be therefore purposeful to compare whether the interpretations of foreign policy discourse presented in this study are reflected in the new National Security Strategy.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of the actors chosen to evaluate Armenia's foreign policy. Namely, Armenia's foreign policy was examined here through the country's

relations with Russia and the EU. However, they are not the only ones that have an influence on Armenia's foreign policy choices. More specifically, Armenia's relations with the neighbouring countries, namely Georgia and Iran, fell out of the scope of this study. Moreover, the emerging cooperation with China, which might have an important impact on Armenia's foreign policy in the mid- and long-term perspectives, was not addressed in this research. In addition, it should be noted that Armenia's Western orientation involves not only the European Union, but also the USA and Armenia's cooperation with NATO. However, it would be unrealistic to conduct an extensive analysis involving all those actors within only one research. In order to gain a more holistic picture of Armenia's foreign policy development, further research could address the development of Armenia's relations with the above-mentioned actors.

In addition, from a broader perspective, further research could usefully explore the development of Russia's relations with other CIS countries. This would offer a more comprehensive view and show whether the assumption of Russia's changing *modus operandi* in the post-Soviet space is viable. Ultimately, this could contribute to a better understanding and projection of Russia's foreign policy priorities towards the CIS countries.

Last but not least, the data analysis revealed two types of Armenia's national role conceptions: the ones that are relevant for the current context and some others that represent the vision of the politicians for the future. A reflection about the temporal aspect of the role conceptions could be an interesting area for further research: how shall one address the desired roles versus actual roles?

Overall, in spite of its limitations, the results of this research shed light on Armenia's foreign policy dynamics in the post-Velvet Revolution period, which are relevant for a specific historic-cultural context. The results of the research might be of interest both for foreign policy decision-makers in Armenia and the expert community whose studies focus on Armenia or on Russia's or/and the EU's relations with Armenia or the broader post-Soviet space.

6.3. Conclusion

The present study was designed to determine the effect of an important political change on foreign policy of a small state that faces considerable structural constraints in its foreign policy choices. According to Neumann and Gstöhl (2006), the study of small states in International Relations has received little attention from the IR scholars, as it is assumed that small states' role in global agenda-setting is rather limited. However, the social constructivism approach offered a new perspective of studying the role of the small states in international politics based on norms, identities and ideas that offer room for manoeuvre for small states' foreign policy (ibid.). As Neumann and Gstöhl rightly point out: "...they [the small states] may not only engage in bargaining with the other (greater) powers, but also argue with them, pursue framing and discursive politics, and socially construct new, more favourable identities in their relationships" (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006, p.15).

Armenia's Velvet Revolution in 2018 came as a major surprise to regional and international players. This was mainly due to the assumption that Armenia lacked geopolitical alternatives. In fact, the closed borders with two neighbouring countries, Azerbaijan and Turkey, and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the overdependence on Russia in political, economic and military fields and a limited cooperation with the European Union were perceived as major obstacles for the country's democratisation. However, a non-violent transition of power, the so-called Velvet Revolution, did happen, and despite the prognosis of a deterioration of Armenian-Russian relations (Davidian, 2019), Armenia has so far managed to keep its strategic alliance with Russia and at the same time undertake steps to deepen its ties with its Western partners.

The aim of this research was to analyse how the conceptions of Armenia's national roles in the post-Velvet Revolution context have been (re-)produced and how they have been affecting Armenia's relations with its strategic partners, namely Russia and the EU. The research questions were addressed through qualitative research methods, which included semi-structured interviews with representatives of executive and legislative branches of Armenia's current government, as well as the expert community. Through the discourse analysis, the study revealed six role conceptions dominating in the discourse of the current political leadership. While some roles were relevant for the current context of Armenia's

relations with its strategic partners, some other roles reflected the politicians' vision for the future. The study revealed conflicting aspects between Armenia's role as a full sovereign subject and the one of the faithful ally and balancer.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Armenia's role of a full sovereign state has been strengthened after the Velvet Revolution thanks to the legitimacy of the current government and the major popular support. Armenia's more confident behaviour in the international arena and more symmetric relations with Russia are highlighted within this role. On the other hand, the study suggests that Armenia's role of the faithful ally and a balancer, which takes into account the structural limitations and especially the heavy dependence on Russia, is still strong in the discourse of the political leadership, which suggests that no major changes in Armenia's foreign policy can be expected in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, the findings suggest that Armenia's efforts to enhance the scope of cooperation with the European Union within the CEPA (Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement) can be achieved without harming its relations with Russia, as long as the regional geopolitical balance is maintained. Moreover, as long as the government benefits from a strong popular mandate, it might supposedly push forward a more confident behaviour by defending its national interests, thus challenging the "Russia first" approach which has been dominating in Armenia's foreign policy since its independence in 1991. Allegedly, this situation creates a window of opportunity for Armenia to deepen its cooperation with the European Union within the existing cooperation format, to advance the pro-democratic agenda on institutional level, as well as to diversify the country's economy allowing the heavy dependence on Russia to diminish in the long-term perspective. It remains to be seen how successful the current government will be in implementing its pro-democratic agenda, while also maintaining its strategic ties with Moscow.

Overall, this study complements the literature on national role conceptions by deepening and understanding the relationship between structure and agent through empirical investigation and by focusing on non-material aspects in foreign policy behaviour, such as beliefs and identities. Through Armenia's case, the research showed that the interaction between the structure and agent dimensions of the role theory are complementary, rather than interchangeable. The study also offered an alternative approach of studying Armenia's

foreign policy through the lens of social constructivism, based on the concepts of the state's identity and national role conceptions. The research thus complements the current literature on Armenia's foreign policy after the Velvet Revolution and highlights possible areas for further research on the topic of Armenia's foreign policy choices.

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Appendices:

Appendix I: Interview guidelines

Master's thesis topic: "Armenia's national role conceptions after the Velvet Revolution: implications for the state's foreign policy".

Type of interview: Semi-structured.

Language of the interview: Armenian/English

Interviewees target: up to 12 persons

- 3 representatives of the National Assembly's majority "My step" alliance;
- 2 representatives of the National Assembly's opposition: "Prosperous Armenia" and "Bright Armenia" parties;
- 1 representative of former ruling "Republican party", currently in opposition outside the National Assembly.
- 2 representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- 4 political experts.

Estimated time for each interview: approx. 30–45 minutes.

Interview structure:

- **Introduction:**
 - Introducing the interviewer, topic of the interview and the aim of the research;
 - Ethical considerations, confidentiality.
- **Questions:**
 - How has the national role conception of Armenia evolved since the Velvet Revolution?
 - How would you describe the role of Armenia within the international community? What kind of player is Armenia in world politics and international relations?

- Has there been any change in the role that Armenia plays in international relations since the Velvet Revolution? How would you describe that change?
- Do you think Armenia's attitude towards the outside world changed as a result of the Velvet Revolution? Can you give examples?
- Do you think the Velvet Revolution introduced changes in the way Armenia positions itself in the international arena?
- In your opinion, did the international community's perception of Armenia change after the Velvet Revolution? Does this perception imply any change in how Armenia positions itself internationally?
- How do evolving role conceptions affect Armenia's foreign policy?
 - Do you think the domestic changes that happened in Armenia as a result of the Velvet Revolution have been influencing Armenia's foreign policy, especially with regard to its strategic partners, Russia and the EU? How?
 - Do you think that Armenia's existing relations with Russia/the EU are influenced by the changing role conception?
- **End of interview:**
 - Thanks, additional points, queries, ethics.

Appendix II: Participants in the semi-structured interviews

	Interviewee Name, Surname	Position/Title	Code	Interview date	Duration of interview
1	Armen Harutyunyan*	Public figure	AH	06.07.2019	47:10
2	Anna Pambukhchyan	International Relations and Media Expert	AP	07.07.2019	38:27
3	Benyamin Poghosyan	Director, Chairman and Founder, Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies	BP	08.07.2019	53:41
4	Richard Giragosian	Director, Regional Studies Center	RG	15.07.2019	31:10
5	Hayk Simonyan*	High-ranking public figure	HS	15.07.2019	35:10
6	Artak Apitonyan	Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Armenia	AA	16.07.2019	29:30
7	Alexander Iskandaryan	Director, Caucasus Institute	AI	17.07.2019	35:20
8	Maria Karapetyan	RA Member of Parliament, "My step" faction, Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs	MK	19.07.2019	30:05
9	Taron Simonyan	RA Member of Parliament, "Bright Armenia" faction, Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs	TS	24.07.2019	27:26
10	Gayane Abrahamyan	RA Member of Parliament, "My step" faction, Member of Standing Committee on European Integration	GA	29.07.2019	33:52
11	Mikael Zolyan	RA Member of Parliament, "My step" faction, Standing Committee on Foreign Relations	MZ	01.08.2019	33:12
12	Arsen Kharatyan	Founder, Editor-In-Chief of Aliq Media, Former Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign relations	AK	02.08.2019	22:42
13	Karen Bekaryan	Political analyst, former RA Member of Parliament	KB	05.08.2019	34:03

* Pseudonyms (used for those participants who preferred not to disclose their names).