

## THE WAYS OF RESTORATION OF ARMENIA'S DEFICIENT SOVEREIGNTY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL LEGAL ORDER

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### Abstract

*This article is devoted to the examination of the legal and political foundations of the sovereignty of the Third Republic of Armenia and the revelation of the deficiencies thereof in the light of the current deep geopolitical transformation. Particularly, the former foreign policy model of Armenia is defined, and the details and consequences thereof are elucidated, i.e. Armenia pursued a client-state model of foreign policy, which implies a one-sided political stance and the vertical relationship between the patron state and client state, including a patron state's domination in the internal policy dimensions of the client state, such as economy, internal politics, etc. It is substantiated, that as a result of the aforementioned foreign policy model Armenia lacked appropriate means of maneuver when the interests of the patron state started to contradict Armenia's national interests. Therefore, the Armenian side lost the 44-day war and is subjected to continuous aggression from Azerbaijan.*

*The article contains certain proposals, that may positively affect the restoration of Armenia's sovereignty and the revision of Armenia's foreign policy model. In particular, Armenia should exit the CSTO, denounce all the military and security cooperation agreements, signed with Russia and within the CSTO, adopt the policy of non-alignment, shake off the economic dominance of Russia by designing special economic policy, directed to attracting non-EAEU investors, and creating prerequisites for further exit from the EAEU, as well as regain relatively stable control over the management of strategic public assets. Also, it is necessary to draw the line between the autocratic and corrupted systems of state government, which internally undermined Armenia's sovereignty and contributed to the complete failure of its foreign policy. To this end, the proclamation of the Fourth Republic from the author's point of view is deemed indispensable. As a result, the Armenian people, as a sovereign, will be given an opportunity to build a state from a "clean slate", eradicating all the institutional and political vices of the past.*

**Keywords:** sovereignty, client state, the policy of non-alignment, the Fourth Republic of Armenia, Russia, the CSTO, the EAEU.

## Introduction

The modern world order is in an unprecedented crisis, which questions the viability of very roots of the post Second World War international political and legal system. It can be safely argued that the ongoing transformation of the world order is a test of the resources of states' potential, accumulated so far, on which the future picture of the political map of the world depends. The total of the states' capacity resources is construed within the concept of sovereignty.

In the mentioned overview, naturally, the geopolitical outline of the South Caucasus is also changing. Since the achievement of independence, Armenia has been one of the important hubs of the power arrangement in the South Caucasus region, taking into account its geographical area, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the complex and historically problematic relations between Armenia and Turkey, Armenia's border with Iran, the civilizational trajectory of the Armenian people and strong historical ties with the region. Despite its political potential, since Armenia's independence, the leadership of the state, perhaps bearing the complexities typical of a nation without a state for centuries and a survivor of genocide and avoiding the responsibility arising from the sovereign counteraction of threats from the Turkic element of the region, as well as due to negative internal political trends, affecting foreign policy, tended to actually ensure the country's security, outsourcing its maintenance to one power, in fact, completely subjugating Armenia to the interests of that power by using Armenia's economic, political and military resources to serve them.

In 2016-2023 the two wars in Artsakh and the occupation of Armenian territories demonstrated the "bankruptcy" of conceptual orientations, underlying Armenia's foreign policy and the harmful consequences of limiting Armenia's sovereignty to serve those orientations. As a result, the security architecture of the entire post-independence period has ceased to exist, and Armenia is faced with the imperative of active participation in the formation of a national security system, which is commensurate with the updated geopolitical realities and thus the creation of a new military-political balance in the region. This requires a radical revision of approaches to the sovereignty of the state and the task of conducting a self-sufficient policy as much as possible.

This research is dedicated to the above-mentioned problems and their possible solutions.

The current world order is undergoing a deep transformation. In particular, the paradigm of international law and security is being subjected to radical revision. Correspondingly, the balance of power and legal-political structures, derived from it, are changing in all focal regions. As a result, all states face the "natural selection" challenge. The latter especially touches upon small states, whose viability is being put to the test.

Actually, the cracks in the post the Second World War political and legal order were visible, starting from 2007, when the Russian president V. Putin held a speech in the Munich Security Conference, challenging the existing international legal order.

In particular, V. Putin raised the issue of dismantling the unipolar world order and its transition to the multipolar world (President of Russia, 2007). By this, one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and a nuclear power voiced a demand for a cardinal change of foundations of the international relations paradigm, that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Particularly, it is well-known, that now existing international legal order is built upon the principle of sovereign equality of states. Hence, did Russia question the inviolability of the idea of state sovereignty and its auxiliary principles (territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-aggression, etc.). The answer is yes. And subsequently, Russia embarked on unilateral actions, aimed at turning the Russian leader's political rhetoric into reality. In 2008 Russia invaded Georgia under the pretext of humanitarian invasion to protect the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as a result, occupying about 20 percent of Georgia's territory (Embassy of Georgia to the United States of America, 2020).

In 2014 Russian invaded Ukraine, occupying Crimea peninsula, the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, having substantiated its actions by the necessity of protection of the Russian population, residing therein (Walker, 2023).

In 2015 Russia intervened in Syria's civil war and launched military operations against armed groups, fighting against the Syrian president's rule (Taddonio, 2022).

In 2022 Russia attacked Ukraine once more, declaring its goal to overthrow "illegitimate the Nazi regime" and forestall Ukraine's accession to NATO (President of Russia, 2022). Simultaneously, Russian-Turkish relations were consistently warming, in the context of which both Russia and Turkey strengthened Azerbaijan's positions in the region, as their key client in South Caucasus. Particularly, since the 2010s, Russia has been comprehensively arming Azerbaijan, supplying the latter with not only defensive but also offensive weapons. Turkey, in its turn, signed a Declaration on Allied Relations with Azerbaijan in 2021, known as the Shushi declaration, by which a start of gradual incorporation of Azerbaijani armed forces into the Turkish military system was signaled, and the obligation of mutual assistance in case of external aggression was enshrined. At the same time, Russian-Chinese relations warmed up, gradually acquiring a strategic character (Shushi Declaration, 2021).

Obviously, Russia's immediate objective was and is to delegitimize the principle of sovereign equality of states, conditioning states' right to exist by fictitious concepts of historical justice and ethnic dominance. Under this ideological cover, Russia endeavours to restore its political hegemony in the post-Soviet territory and to integrate the former Soviet republics into a new type of political formation.

In order to face the existential challenges, arising within new geopolitical realities, the actual sovereignty of states, that is, the degree of their viability "on the ground" acquires additional importance.

Armenia has "met" these crucial historical events with its internal and external sovereignty, downgraded to a nominal level, not having self-sufficiency to ensure its internal and external security. Being unilaterally dependent on Russia, having handed over its economic, border security, military-technical and air defense, as well as main economic assets to the latter, Armenia, as a state, was completely incorporated into

the system of Russia's strategic and tactical interests and in case of their change was unable to independently face the external threats, that were accompanying it from the moment of secession from the Soviet Union (the Artsakh conflict and the danger of Azerbaijani aggression, arising thereof and the threat, coming from Turkey, which backs Azerbaijan). At the same time, as a result of foreign policy, unbecoming of a sovereign state, Armenia had no other institutional ally, that could compensate for Armenia's security vulnerability. The result was the defeat of Armenian forces in the 2016 and 2022 Artsakh wars, Azerbaijan's aggression towards Armenia, and occupation of several Armenian territories, with Russia remaining neutral and failing to perform its duties as Armenia's ally both at the bilateral level and under the auspices of CSTO. The latter also manifested a neutral stance, when Armenia was subjected to Azerbaijani aggression, notwithstanding the fact, that Armenia is a member of that organization of collective self-defense.

The above-mentioned sequence of events was the test of the sovereignty of the Third Republic, which failed. It can be deduced, that from the very beginning of its formation, 1991, Armenia radically deviated from the path of sovereign statehood, outlined in the Declaration of Independence, eventually reaching political default.

Meanwhile, the transformation of the autocratic political regime, which started as a result of the revolution and the restoration of the democratic constitutional order is not enough to overcome the legacy of the past and thoroughly renew the state mechanism, deviating from the constitutional idea of sovereignty. This statement was confirmed in 2020-2023, when Armenia, which has already returned to the principles of democracy and rule of law, was unable to overcome the challenges against its sovereignty. Therefore, the Armenian people, as a state-making entity, need a "new beginning", which should be manifested at the constitutional and political-symbolic levels.

"New beginning" from a constitutional perspective means full restoration of legal, political, and value pillars of statehood. This process commenced during the Velvet Revolution and is still ongoing. Though several significant steps were made toward strengthening statehood, however, the only fully completed "task" so far is the restoration of the legitimate government. Notably, the latter is indispensable but is only one item of constitutional reality, that ought to be built in Armenia. The issue is that the previous autocratic political regimes completely distorted the political, economic, and social foundations of the constitutional order through fraudulent elections and constitutional referenda, a monopolistic economy, and widespread multi-dimensional systemic corruption, social inequality, and lack of justice. As a result, the people were deprived of their collective political and social rights, and authorities practically bore no responsibility towards the electorate. This social and political landscape gravely affected social harmony and coherence, thus weakening the internal endurance of the state.

In light of the foregoing, there is a need for a new "social contract" between the people and the government – the new Constitution, which will reflect the restoration of a democratic political regime and provide necessary legal and political bases for the start of independent state-building from the "clean slate". These bases are – the

legitimacy of the constitutionally organized political process, protection of fundamental human rights, and social justice.

The text of the new Constitution should be balanced and take into account the socio-political and legal realities of Armenia, as well as a dialectic of their development, so that it is possible, on the one hand, to express the current reality through principles and legal norms and, on the other hand, to outline the vision of the state's overall policy, regardless of political forces in power. Along with the preservation of the parliamentary form of government, this also includes a review of the constitutional mission of the highest bodies of the state power and, based on it, a review and redistribution of functions and powers between the legislative and executive powers and within the latter, as well as those at the level of Presidency and the definition of effective constitutional solutions to political crises.

At this crucial point of the evolution of the sovereignty of Armenia, it is important to touch upon the problem of interrelation between the Declaration of Independence of Armenia and the Constitution. It is worth mentioning, that nowadays there is a lot of talk about removing the blanket clause, referring to the Declaration of Independence from the preamble of the Constitution on the grounds, that some of the provisions of the Declaration of Independence no longer correspond to social and political realities.

Despite the relevance of the existing problem, its importance cannot be reduced to the simple editing of the preamble of the Constitution. In the end, the fundamental value and normative importance of the Declaration of Independence for the legitimacy of the restoration of Armenia's sovereignty, in defining the guidelines for the internal and external content of the newly independent Armenian statehood and in the constitutionalizing of public and political life, is undeniable. Moreover, the Declaration of Independence per se has self-sufficient legal existence and special affiliation with the Constitution, which does not depend on the reference, made to the Declaration of Independence in the text of the Constitution. In particular, from the analysis of the actual text of the Declaration of Independence, it already follows, that it is not only a political but also a legal document because inter alia contains legal norms, that have compulsory character. In this context point 12 of the Declaration is of paramount importance. It reads as follows: "This Declaration shall serve as a basis for the development of the constitution of the Republic of Armenia and, until the new constitution is approved, as the basis for the introduction of amendments to the current constitution; and for the operation of state authorities and the development of new legislation for the Republic". That is, the parliament and other state institutions were constrained in their activity by the provisions of the Declaration of Independence and were obliged to unconditionally abide by them. It also follows from this, that the Declaration of Independence, before the adoption of the Constitution of sovereign Armenia, practically had the status of the Constitution, as it had a higher legal force than the Constitution of the Soviet Armenia of 1978 then still officially in force.

The problem of the interplay between the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence of Armenia has another dimension: like any existing legal and political document, the Declaration of Independence also faces the factor of time and the need

for its adequacy to current realities. Therefore, it is necessary to solve the question of correspondence of the Declaration of Independence to appropriate legal instruments. Particularly, if we proceed from the assumption, that the Declaration of Independence has self-sufficient legal existence and take into account its legal significance for the formation of national legislation in the pre-constitutional period of 1990-1995 and later for the development of the Constitution, it turns out, that the Declaration of Independence is a directly applicable normative legal act at least as a source of interpretation of legislation.

The constitutional law of different countries refers to the legal force and direct effect regime of the Declaration of Independence. In particular, the Constitutional Court of Latvia in its decision of November 2007 stated, that the Declaration of Independence has constitutional status, after the adoption of the Constitution the Declaration of Independence retained its validity, and the Constitutional Court has the right to examine the issue of compliance of laws with the Declaration of Independence, the preamble of the Declaration of Independence is a constituent part of that document, and the constitutional court can assess the disputed normative act also from the point of view of its compliance with the preamble of that document. The court also stated that the Declaration of Independence regulates the most essential, fundamental issues of constitutional law, therefore, its norms should be recognized as norms of constitutional law, that have binding legal force, even though this act was not adopted in accordance with the procedure established by the current Constitution (Harutyunyan & Vagharshyan, 2010, p. 36).

Having acknowledged the normative nature of the Declaration of Independence and the legal force of its norms, it is necessary to clarify, whether there can be a legal means of judicial review of the Declaration of Independence in the legal system of Armenia. To answer this question, it is necessary to find out what place the Declaration of Independence occupies in the system of normative legal acts of Armenia.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted by the parliament of Soviet Armenia, the Supreme Council, on August 23, 1990. Taking into account the object of regulation of the Declaration of Independence and its legal significance, as well as the political situation of the country at that time, i.e. the collapse of the socialist legal system and the process of establishing a new sovereign and democratic constitutional order, it is obvious that the Declaration of Independence was adopted as a result of performance of the legislative function of the Supreme Council and is a constitutional law per se. Being a product of revolution, when the old and new legal systems clash, the Declaration of Independence was superior to the Constitution of the Soviet Armenia and both in terms of the legal regime of its adoption and its legal content had autonomous status within the existing Soviet legal order.

Having confirmed, that the Declaration of Independence is a law, it may be concluded, that as a law, the Declaration of Independence is subject to the abstract and concrete control of the Constitutional Court in accordance with the Constitution and the Constitutional Law “On the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia”. Therefore, if the normative requirements regarding the applicant and the content of the application are met, the Constitutional Court is authorized to interpret

the meaning and content of the Declaration of Independence as to its compliance with the Constitution. Accordingly, the Constitutional Court can determine what mode of legal effect the provisions of the Declaration of Independence have, whether they are norms of direct effect, principles, or goals, and which provisions are legally viable today and which are not. Thus, carrying out its constitutional function of ensuring the supremacy of the Constitution, the Constitutional Court will guarantee the legal coexistence and harmony of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The relevant decision of the Constitutional Court, in turn, will form an important part of the constitutional doctrine of Armenian sovereignty, clarifying the place and role of the Declaration of Independence and its provisions in the legal system of Armenia and making political speculations on this sensitive issue pointless.

At the political-symbolic level, to make the idea of a “new beginning” accessible and tangible to the broad layers of society, the state authorities of Armenia, as a legitimate government, that received the people’s mandate, should declare the Fourth Republic of Armenia. Contrary to the claims of opponents of this idea, the proclamation of the Fourth Republic is not a play on words or demagoguery. It has semantic symbolism and objective determinism. In particular, the Third Republic of Armenia, as a political, legal, and value product of the Armenian people, has run out. In the historical memory of the people, it is associated with corruption, amounted to state capture, authoritarian political regime, and complete failure of the foreign policy, as a result of which Armenia has become Russia’s client state with deficient sovereignty. Meanwhile, the proclamation of the Fourth Republic will capitalize, albeit belatedly, the ideology of the revolution, as a value condensation of the political categories of freedom and justice. The Fourth Republic is, on the one hand, a symbolism, and on the other hand, a political impulse regarding the future vector of the state, the constitutionality and people-centeredness of whose content must be filled by the current and future state power. Consequently, the Fourth Republic must become not only a component of the pre-election program of the ruling political team, but a supra-political phenomenon, an institutional and intellectual structure, that gives life to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The Fourth Republic must embody the opposite of the vicious phenomena, presented, and analyzed above, that brought the Third Republic to institutional, political, and practical “bankruptcy”.

International practice “knows” cases of radical changes in the historical-political movement of the state in this way. For e.g. the dynamics of the development of the republican order, established by the Great Revolution of 1789 in France, conditioned by historical events of major importance for the development of French statehood and political ideologies, closely related to them, were divided into stages of development, and dated as the First, Second, Third, Fourth and now the Fifth Republics. The basis of the Fifth Republic is the political belief of its founding president Charles de Gaulle regarding a sovereign, powerful France, having the status of superpower. This political ideology, named “Gaullism”, is based on the institution of a strong president at the constitutional level, and as a part of the foreign policy doctrine, pursues the idea of France as an equal and full partner of the USA in

the NATO. “Gaullism” is even named the political myth of the Fifth French Republic (Mikhailov, 2022, pp. 60-62).

Notably, the ideological bridge between the Fourth Republic of Armenia and the Fifth Republic of France is the fact that Gaullism considers the sovereignty of the state to be an exclusive and non-negotiable value (Mikhailov, 2022, p. 66).

Proclamation of the Fifth Republic and adoption of the new Constitution in 1958, as political acts, were conditioned by the need to adopt a new course of foreign policy as a result of the defeat of France in the war against Algeria, a French colony fighting for its independence, and to prevent a civil war, brewing in France, due to the Algerian crisis (Mikhailov, 2022, p. 71).

In the Armenian case, there is both an internal political prerequisite for the foundation of the new Republic, that is, the transition from the authoritarian political regime to democracy, and an external political prerequisite, a complete nullification of the decades-long Artsakh conflict resolution doctrine and, as a result, defeat in the war. Otherwise stated, there is a need to start the process of state-building from a “clean slate” by re-proclaiming a sovereign and democratic state with the rule of law and having renewed ideological guidelines.

Another layer of the political-symbolic level of the “new beginning” of sovereign Armenian statehood is the change of the foreign policy model. The foreign policy model of Armenia in the aftermath of the restoration of independence may be formulated as “sovereignty in exchange for security”.

The post-independence political elite could not shake off the stereotypes, underlying the existence of the dependent state entity of the Soviet era, when security and military-defense issues were completely handed over to the central government of the USSR, and the Union republics dealt only with current issues of the internal political agenda. This separation of jurisdiction is evident from the analysis of the text of the 1978 Constitution of Soviet Armenia.

After independence, the new political elite, which consisted of a large number of representatives of the former Soviet nomenclature, was unable to develop and implement a political course, strengthening Armenia’s sovereignty, implying a resolution of the Artsakh conflict and the regulation of Armenian-Turkish relations, based on the genuine interests of the Republic of Armenia and without a disproportionate interference of third countries, the conduct of a multi-vector and balanced foreign policy, the creation of combat-ready national armed forces and a self-sufficient military-industrial complex, the diversification of foreign investments, significant participation of the state in the management of strategic public assets, countering corruption in a systemic manner etc. Instead, due to the inertia of the political system during the Soviet period, an economic-political environment was formed, which was, by and large, identical to the nature and content of the relations between the USSR and Soviet Armenia, where the legally sovereign Republic of Armenia voluntarily conducted a pro-Russian policy to the extent, that the presence of Russia in the Armenian economy and domestic politics was comparable to that of the central government of the USSR in the Soviet period. In fact, the Armenian political elite of the first post-independence generation chose the *de facto*



international status of Armenia as a client state of Russia (Abrahamyan et al., 2023, p. 7).

Within the Russian-subordinated foreign policy paradigm, Armenia's relations with other states had a complementary nature and were mostly focused on the humanitarian agenda, having only minor economic and defense aspects. The grave consequences of such a foreign policy are summarized above. Now we shall briefly elaborate on the approach that, in our opinion, should be adopted to ensure the real diversification of Armenia's foreign policy.

In today's newly forming multipolar world order the unipolar policies of small states, which, moreover, have an asymmetric and subordinate character, are not only ineffective but also carry existential threats. In particular, one of the features of the multipolar world is the strong competition between states, which is also manifested by multi-layered conflicts, being not always of a military nature and being conducted through informational, biological, and other means. The status of a sovereign state is no longer perceived as a somewhat static, once-and-for-all phenomenon and requires, that especially small states pursue a creative foreign policy as a result of an objective inventory of its own resources and occupation of adequate "niches" in the global division of labor and create guarantees or preconditions for its sovereignty and security through the establishment of mutually beneficial political, military, economic and humanitarian ties with the largest possible number of influential states in the world.

Inter alia it is worth mentioning especially the economic aspect, which is characterized by its potential to promote peace and security, with which it will be possible to establish trade and economic relations with as many regional and extra-regional partners as possible. Diverse trade and economic relations are one of the guarantees of peace because they create interdependence and mutually tangible interests between states, which significantly reduces the possibility of armed conflicts.

To achieve these ends the greatest possible freedom of political decision-making is necessary. The latter is conceptually possible if a small state does not have asymmetric and vertical relations with another state or group of states, including not being included in international or supranational organizations, limiting the state's sovereignty in the security sphere. This allows a small state to focus as much as possible on increasing its own limited strategic potential and not be burdened with multi-sector and multi-subject security obligations. It is also noteworthy, that the pretexts and grounds for the fulfillment of mutual security obligations of member states of international organizations of collective self-defense may not be sufficiently clear and predictable in practice, because in contrast to bipolar or unipolar world systems when the geopolitical opponent was known or did not exist at all, interstate relations in the multipolar world system take on a more complex and networked nature. Therefore, even for states in the same defense alliance the scenarios, in which they must fulfill their security obligations to allies, are not entirely clear. Moreover, there may be cases when, as in the case of CSTO-Azerbaijan relations, member states of an organization have strategic or even alliance relations with the state, that have performed aggression against their ally within the framework of that

organization. Accordingly, the political and economic “price” to be paid by the state for providing military aid to its ally within the organization may exceed the political benefit of ever receiving military-political support from the organization.

Such cases and ambiguities, including the tendency of international organizations to become bureaucratic and non-transparent in their decision-making, on the one hand, weaken the external guarantees of sovereignty and security of small member states of these organizations, and on the other hand, undermine the authority of these international organizations. Instead, the so-called non-aligned state has the opportunity to distribute its resources more purposefully and to build interstate relations from more realistic positions.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of “non-alignment”, it is viewed as the policy of a state to refrain from joining any military alliance. It is noteworthy, that the policy of non-alignment is not a position during a certain conflict, but a comprehensive policy (Abrahamyan et al., 2023, p. 20).

However, if the policy of non-alignment is not combined with an active inclusive policy at the bilateral level or with small groups of political actor-states with overlapping interests and the institutionalization of that policy in the form of relevant international treaties, non-alignment will turn from a tool of foreign policy into a goal, leading not to state sovereignty and increased flexibility, but to self-isolation. In that case, the security risks of the state will even increase. Therefore, the policy of non-alignment should be the political and institutional measure that will serve the purpose of ensuring a true multi-vector policy of a small state. The latter allows especially small states, which are more sensitive to changes in the external environment due to the lack of resources, to reduce the risks from changes in international conditions or at least create balanced security “cushions” to manage them, since a priori there is no monopoly on the security and safety of the given small state. It should be noted that there are different approaches to the selection of means of adoption of the non-alignment policy. For example, Austria and Turkmenistan have declared a policy of permanent neutrality at the constitutional level, which is essentially a way of legally enshrining the policy of non-alignment (Constitution of Austria, Article 9a, para 1; Constitution of Turkmenistan, Article 2, para 1). In the case of Azerbaijan, a flexible option was chosen not to raise the policy of non-alignment to the constitutional level, but to leave the decision on duration of this policy within the jurisdiction of the executive power, depending on external circumstances (Avatkov, 2020).

In addition, in South Caucasus and more widely, in the Greater Middle East region, nodal interests with a complex structure are concentrated, the relations of stakeholder states are of an unstable nature, manifested in the forms of conflicts, temporary agreements and multi-level and multi-party alliances. At the same time, the balance of power in the region is determined by participation of not only regional, but also extra-regional global states, which creates additional complexity for more or less long-term policy development and implementation. This geopolitical structure is supplemented by historical tense relations between Armenia and Turkey, animosity between Armenia and Azerbaijan and incompatible foreign policy vectors of Armenia’s rest neighbors Georgia and Iran, which necessitates existence of

flexible and responsive foreign policy in order to make up castellation of allies and partners, enabling to utmostly reconcile various mutual interests and, accordingly, to determine mutual rights and obligations in the field of security, including military and defense. Of course, the multi-vector foreign policy does not imply the same level or the same degree of intensity of relations with possible stakeholders; objectively, there will be and should be “first among equals”, such as France, the USA, India, Iran, Greece and others, but it is important that Armenia does not have institutional constraints in providing an individual approach to each of the stakeholders and does not form “common enemies” typical of institutional security alliances. This will allow to formulate an independent system of mutual interests with geopolitical and regional actors, interested in sovereignty of Armenia, as a result of complementing the external guarantees of sovereignty and security, taking the following urgent steps: the withdrawal of border guards of the Russian side from all borders of Armenia, including the “Zvartnots” airport, as well as the Russian military base and other units of the Russian armed forces, located on the territory of Armenia, the joint anti-aircraft system arising from the CSTO and Armenian-Russian security and defense agreements, immediate denunciation of the agreements on the joint Armenian-Russian military force, exchange of strategic secret information and other agreements pertinent to military and security cooperation.

At the same time, Armenia should actively diversify its defense and security policy, based only on its national interest. Moreover, Armenia should find an optimal balance between the interests of global political actors and regional states, on the one hand, forming a new regional power balance, and on the other hand, strategically striving to pursue the policy of “zero problems with neighbors” in order not to become a “besieged fortress”, because in any case, Armenia’s geographical position dictates certain preconditions of foreign policy, such as at least normal and predictable relations with its neighbors. Another approach can create significant strategic risks for Armenia’s sovereignty and uncertainties in the management of the latter. By and large, this will also be a process of learning from past mistakes, such as having a confrontation with some neighbors and practicing a policy of purely peaceful coexistence with others without strategic depth, Armenia, in 2016, 2020, and 2021-2023 fell in a security crisis, remaining alone in the region. As to the legal fixation of non-alignment doctrine, the issue of its constitutional enshrinement may be considered. The standpoint for any legal measure in this case should be predictability of Armenia’s positioning for external actors.

In the context of strengthening economic sovereignty, Armenia should implement wide-scale diversification of the economy and gain state participation or management authority in strategic assets (communications, telecommunications, railways, strategic factories, mining, etc.) or increase their relative weight. At the same time, strategic realism, arising from the current international situation, should be given to Armenian-Russian relations, and in the light of the “agreement on disagreements” principle, known to the negotiation theory, the spectrum of relations, in which there are truly weighted mutual interests, should continue to function. The economy is such a sphere, where Armenia and Russia are objectively important for each other. Along with this, all the international agreements should be denounced

and all the guarantees, that ensure Russia's privileged economic status in Armenia, should be reviewed. In parallel, Armenia should provide state support to large investors from non-EAEU states to stimulate alternative business activity in Armenia, to promote system-building investments, and thus to overcome Russia's direct or indirect monopoly status in leading sectors of the economy. Strategically, Armenia should also consider the EAEU as a tool of Russian economic expansion and form necessary economic alternatives in order to stop the EAEU membership in the visible future.

The policy of non-alignment cannot be considered beyond economic sovereignty in the context of Armenia's geographical position, composition of neighboring states, and regional geo-strategic realities. The EAEU is a supranational organization, that actually develops the customs policy and some part of the economic policy of Armenia and participates in ensuring the implementation of this policy. This circumstance will obviously hinder the financial and economic maintenance of the restoration of regional self-sufficiency of Armenia and making independent decisions in this regard. At the same time, however, a dual approach should be taken along with the gradual expansion of economic sovereignty through diversification of economic relations, membership in the EAEU should be maintained, as long as there are still no sufficient guarantees of self-protection against economic sanctions of Russia after the termination of the EAEU membership and, in particular, guarantees to ensure macroeconomic stability and the social well-being of the population. Among such guarantees can be the conclusion of the Association Agreement with the EU, following the suit of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and thus the establishment of a free trade regime between Armenia and the EU member states, deepening strategic cooperation with Iran in the field of gas supply, institutionalization of economic cooperation with Georgia, etc.

Generally, the strategic vision of Armenia should be not to participate in any supranational organization and to develop its military-defense and economic ties in such formats, that do not have supranational institutions and extensive collective obligations due to the large number of participating states. In this way, Armenia will ensure the substantive protection of political decisions from interference and will keep its commitments to other external actors within the framework of predictability and feasibility.

Ultimately, the process of restoring the military and economic sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia is inevitable in order to ensure the political presence of the Armenian ethnos in its cradle, but at the same time, caution and balance are necessary in order not to be guided by the principle "all or nothing" and thus to avoid provocations, aimed at collapsing Armenian statehood.

### **Conclusion**

The conducted research has shown, that since the beginning of the post-independence period, the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia has already been subjected to disproportionate restrictions, both in military-defense, security, economic, and foreign policy terms. Particularly, the sovereignty of Armenia was limited in favor of one state, in order to receive security for the Armenian people.

However, that one-sided policy did not contain necessary guarantees of the viability of the political identity of Armenia in terms of ensuring bona fide fulfillment of the contractual obligation to maintain the security of Armenia by the beneficiary state, to whom the sovereignty of Armenia was surrendered. As a result, Armenia faced both a sovereignty and security crisis, the way out of which was the adoption of a comprehensive policy of restoration of national sovereignty. If in the past, until 2018, Armenia's internal resistance and political decision-making structure were undermined by the dictatorial political regime, now, when the democratic constitutional order is restored, there are necessary legal and political prerequisites for making groundbreaking political decisions.

The Republic of Armenia is not only a state, located in a certain geographical area, but the institutional source of the historical memory of the Armenian people and the genetic and dialectical interdependence of generations. Therefore, regaining control over the components of Armenia's sovereignty and their reintegration into the political-state structure of the new Fourth Republic is the only guarantee of the political survival and historical perspective of the Armenian people as a state-forming nation.

As it follows from the aforementioned research material, the sovereign policy does not mean becoming a client state of another geopolitical entity, but implies a political worldview, based on the standpoints of etatism and protection of national identity and a foreign policy derived from them. Such a policy implies, that figures of permanent friend and permanent enemy should be absent, and therefore, there should be no saviors and liberators. Instead, there are and can only be equal allies and partners.

The Armenian people, as a sovereign, have only one unchanging and cornerstone constitutional mission: to protect and pass on its political freedom from generation to generation, which can only be embodied in the sovereign state. This mission should be the basis of the political behavior of the Armenian political elite and the electorate to whom it is accountable.

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