

THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC IN THE DEFENCE SPHERE*

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Abstract

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic were established on January 20, 1992.

Since the 1990s, strong military-political relations were created between the two Republics. Particularly, the cooperation in the defence sphere includes not only military education and military-technical directions, but also an international peacekeeping mission.

Strong military-political relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic have also contributed to strengthening defence cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Cyprus. As a result of which the Armenia-Cyprus-Greece trilateral cooperation was initiated in 2019.

The defence cooperation between Armenia and Greece, especially in the military-technical sphere, creates a possibility for Armenia to get access to new western advanced military technologies and thanks to which the armament of Armenian army is diversified.

Keywords: defence sphere, military education, military-technical cooperation, Armenia, Greece, Cyprus.

Introduction

For centuries, Armenia and Greece have old historical relations. Particularly, the Armenian-Greek military-political relations developed during the Age of Hellenism (late 4th century B.C. – early 1st century A.D.) and the period of the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire, 4th – 15th centuries)*.

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

* See more in detail in Ramazyan, S. (2010). pp. 29-135.

Armenian-Greek military-political cooperation between the First Republic of Armenia and the Kingdom of Greece was demonstrated in the Armenian-Turkish war (1920) and The Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922)*.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic were established on January 20, 1992 (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2024b). Political relations between two republics grew rapidly, which is also contributed to the development of the cooperation in the defence sphere.

The Main Directions of Cooperation between Armenia and Greece in the Defence Sphere

Since the 1990s, strong military-political relations have been established and have grown rapidly between the two republics. In this context, on June 18, 1996, an Agreement on Military Cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic. Two years later, on February 17, 1998, an Agreement on the Order and Conditions of Training of RA Citizens in Military Educational Establishments of Greece was signed between the two ministries (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2024b).

At the beginning of the 2000s, Armenia and Greece also started to cooperate within the framework of an international peacekeeping mission. Particularly, on July 9, 2003, Memorandum of Understanding concerning the allocation of an Armenian Rifle Platoon under the Hellenic Armed Forces Contingent in Kosovo was signed between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2024b). As a result, in February 2004, a contingent of 34 Armenian peacekeepers was deployed to Kosovo to carry out a peacekeeping mission as part of a Greek unit. Armenia's participation in the NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo continues to this day, and every year about 70 Armenian peacekeepers carry out their mission in Kosovo (Official website of the MoD of the RA, n.d.).

Within the framework of bilateral cooperation, on November 10, 2008 an Agreement on the Training of Armed Forces Staff of the Republic of Armenia in Military Training Establishment and Training Centers of the Ministry of National Security of the Hellenic Republic was signed between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of National Security of the Hellenic Republic (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2024b).

The parties also began to develop military-technical cooperation, including in the sphere of the military industry. As a result, the Armenian-Greek company "LT-PYRKAL" was founded in Armenia in 1999. Its founders were

* See more in detail in Ramazyan, S. (2010). pp. 157-234. Nazaryan, H. (2020). pp. 199-234.

the Closed Joint-Stock Company “Laser Technology” from the Armenian side (holding 51% of the shares) and “Hellenic Defence Systems” company from the Greek side (holding 49% of the shares). “LT-PYRKAL” is a fully state-owned enterprise, as each of the founding companies subordinates to the Ministry of Defence of its country. The company has been engaged in particularly complex projects for the development and production of laser and optoelectronic systems for the military needs of Armenia and Greece (“Vpk-Armenii”, 2013). Particularly, the Armenian company developed and produced the LH-01 Laser Rangefinder, the 2D02 Optical-Electronic Artillery Reconnaissance System, and the “Shumits” Optical-Electronic Artillery Reconnaissance and Fire Control System, which was developed jointly with the South Korean company “C&S Security” (“Vpk-Armenii”, 2015).

In 2012, a military contract for the re-export of Franco-West German “Milan” anti-tank guided missiles systems (ATGMs) to Armenia was signed between Armenia and Greece. These systems were supplied to the Armenian Army in 2013 (“RAZM.info”, 2015).

On March 29, 2018, the delegation headed by Greek Defence Minister Panayotis Kammenos arrived in Armenia for a two-day visit. Greek Defence Minister had a meeting with Vigen Sargsyan, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia. The next day, the Greek delegation visited the ArmHiTec-2018 International Exhibition of Armament and Defence Technologies, which was held in Yerevan. During a press conference, Panayotis Kammenos announced the following: “Tomorrow, representatives of the Armenian defence industry companies will meet to Greek companies. That meeting means that the two states will open their doors for defence markets. This means that if we have products that can be used in the Greek Armed Forces, that product can get an EU certificate” (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2018).

The Formation of a Trilateral Cooperation Format between Armenia, Greece and Cyprus

Strong military-political relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic also contributed to the development of cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Cyprus in the defence sphere. Particularly, on February 21, 2002, an Agreement on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation was signed between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. Later, on November 30, 2010, a Memorandum of Understanding on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation for the implementation of the Protocol on Cyprus Intergovernmental Committee was signed. As a result, two years later, a session of the Intergovernmental Commission on Military and Military-

Technical Cooperation was held on October 21, 2013, in Nicosia (Official website of the MFA of the RA, 2024a).

On February 12-14, 2019, a delegation led by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus, Savvas Angelides, paid an official visit to Yerevan. After the official welcoming ceremony at the RA Ministry of Defence, Savvas Angelides held a tête-à-tête meeting with Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Davit Tonoyan. During the meeting, the results of last year's bilateral cooperation in the military and military-technical fields were evaluated, as well as the main directions of cooperation in 2019 were outlined. At the end of the meeting, a Bilateral Cooperation Program for 2019 in format of two ministries was signed (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2019b). On February 13, 2019, the delegation headed by Cyprus Defence Minister Savvas Angelides also visited the Mathematical Machines Research Institute of Yerevan, where they studied the high-tech defence projects developed in the Institute (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2019a).

One year later, on February 28, 2020, a delegation led by the Head of the Defence Policy Department of the RA Ministry of Defence, Levon Ayvazyan, participated in the discussions of the Armenian-Greek cooperation programs and military-political consultations in the field of defence in Athens. As a result of the consultations, the Bilateral Cooperation Program for 2020 between the RA Ministry of Defence and the Greek Ministry of National Defence was signed. The program included 21 events in Armenia and Greece: training programs in the directions of special significance forces, military-medical and tactical preparation, exchange of experience in the fields of cybersecurity, engineering, and other fields, military-political consultations, exchange of information. On the same day, a Trilateral Action Plan for 2020 was signed by the representatives of the Ministries of Defence of Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus. The action plan contained dozens of events to be carried out in Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus that concern trilateral training programs and military-political consultations in various fields (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2020).

After the 44-day war of 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh, cooperation between Armenia and Greece, as well as Armenia and Cyprus, in the field of defence gained new momentum. It was due to some main reasons:

1. The strengthening of Turkey's positions – as Greece's main geopolitical rival and Azerbaijan's ally – in the Mediterranean Basin and South Caucasus region.
2. Azerbaijani aggression against the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia in 2021-2022.
3. Russia's inability to fulfill military contracts – following the Russian Armed Forces' invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has been

unable to supply Armenia with armaments, therefore Armenia is trying to find other sources of supplement for recovering its heavy losses of military equipment after the 44-day war.

On April 25, 2021, the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Vagharshak Harutyunyan, received a delegation led by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus, Charalambos Petrides. During the meeting, issues related to the development of bilateral and trilateral Armenia-Cyprus-Greece cooperation in the field of defence were discussed. The Defence Minister of Cyprus noted that the two countries have similar security challenges, taking into account the experience gained by the Armenian side during the hostilities, and stressed the need for joint work to meet the challenges (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2021).

A few months later, on January 18, 2022, a delegation led by the Head of the General Staff of the National Guard of the Republic of Cyprus, Lieutenant General Demokritos Zervakis, arrived in Armenia. After the official welcoming ceremony on January 19 at the RA Ministry of Defence administrative complex, Lieutenant General Demokritos Zervakis first met with the Head of the General Staff of the RA Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Artak Davtyan, and then with Suren Papikyan, the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia. The Cypriot side was presented the post-war situation following the 44-day war and the security challenges in the region. The meeting also reviewed the bilateral and trilateral Armenia-Cyprus-Greece cooperation initiated in 2019, within which several joint events had already been conducted in 2021 (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2022).

The next year, from November 6 to 10, 2023, within the framework of trilateral cooperation, the special forces of Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus conducted joint military exercises in the Greek region of Attica (“First Channel News”, 2023).

One month later, on December 12, 2023, a delegation led by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Suren Papikyan, embarked on an official visit to the Republic of Cyprus, and with the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Cyprus, Michalis Giorgallas, discussed various issues related to Armenian-Cypriot cooperation in the defence sphere (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023b). Two days later, Suren Papikyan traveled from Cyprus to Greece. During the meeting with the Minister of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic, Nikolaos Dendias, the issues related to the Armenian-Greek defence cooperation were discussed and reached an agreement to invigorate cooperation across various dimensions, encompassing military-technical engagements, experience exchange, educational initiatives, training programs, tactical training, and other directions. At the culmination of

the meeting, the Defence Ministers of Armenia and Greece signed an agreement titled “On Military-Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Hellenic Republic” (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023c).

At the end of the same year, on December 18, bilateral consultations were conducted between Armenia and Greece, as well as Armenia and Cyprus, alongside trilateral discussions involving Armenia, Greece, and Cyprus, held at the premises of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia. The Head of the International Organizations Section of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, Brigadier General Vasileios Tsamis, led the Greek delegation, while the Cypriot delegation was headed by Colonel Alkiviadis Alkiviadis, Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Cyprus National Guard General Staff. Levon Ayvazyan, Head of the Department of Defence Policy and International Cooperation of the MoD of the Republic of Armenia, presented a detailed overview of the ongoing reforms within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia to his colleagues. Regional and international security issues were also discussed. Concluding the consultations, the participating parties formalized agreements by signing the Armenia-Greece, Armenia-Cyprus, and Armenia-Greece-Cyprus Military Cooperation Programs for 2024 (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2023a).

On June 12, 2024, the Armenian Parliament debated and, the next day, ratified the agreement “On Military-Technical Cooperation between the Governments of Armenia and Greece”, which had been signed on December 14, 2023, in Athens by Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Dendias and Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan. The agreement included such an important areas of cooperation as the production of weapons and ammunitions, the transfer of technologies and the technical support, as well as the exchange of experience in the spheres of ammunition production, military researches and assessments, the establishment of joint organizations for production of military goods, the implementation of professional education training and qualification programs in the sphere of military industry (Official website of the National Assembly of the RA, 2024).

In the same year, the Armenian Armed Forces participated in the “Olympic Cooperation-24” military exercises in Greece. Other participating countries included Greece, Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Jordan, and Cyprus. The exercises took place from November 9 to 22 (“Armenpress”, 2024).

In November 2024, the Greek information portal “Enikos” reported that Greece was negotiating with Armenia for the sale of Russian-made S-300PMU-1, Tor-M1 and Osa-AKM anti-aircraft missile systems. It is

noteworthy that the strengthening of Armenia is not a purely Greek initiative, but a product of cooperation with France. “Enikos” also added that the leadership of the Armed Forces is determined to continue the de-Russification of the Greek arsenal and the radical renewal of old systems with new Western technologies (“CAWAT”, 2024).

During the 2024, mutual visits and negotiations between the heads of the defence ministries of Armenia and Greece, as well as Armenia and Cyprus, continued intensively. Particularly, on March 4, 2024, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Suren Papikyan, welcomed Minister of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic, Nikolaos Dendias, who arrived in Armenia for an official visit (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024a). On September 25, 2024, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Suren Papikyan, held a tête-à-tête meeting with Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus, Vasilis Palmas (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024c). On December 4, 2024, within the framework of his working visit to the United States, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Suren Papikyan, met with Minister of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic, Nikolaos Dendias, at the Embassy of Greece in Washington, D.C. (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024d).

At the end of the year, on December 19, 2024, Armenia-Greece bilateral and Armenia-Greece-Cyprus trilateral defence consultations were held in Athens, where the delegation, led by the Head of the Defence Policy and International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia, Levon Ayvazyan, participated from the RA Ministry of Defence. During the consultations, the work carried out in the direction of defence cooperation in 2024 and the tasks to be done in 2025 were discussed (Official website of the MoD of the RA, 2024b).

Conclusion

Thus, in recent decades, strong military cooperation in the defence sphere has been established between the Republic of Armenia and the Hellenic Republic. At the same time, solid foundations have been laid for the development of military relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Cyprus. As a result, trilateral Armenia-Cyprus-Greece cooperation in defence sphere continues to develop.

Armenia and Greece have successfully developed cooperation in key areas such as international peacekeeping missions, military education, military-technical cooperation, and the military industry. As a result, Armenian Army officers get the opportunity to receive military-level education at the Hellenic Army Academy. Furthermore, military-technical cooperation has enabled

Armenia to access advanced Western military technologies, diversifying the armament of the Armenian Army.

Cooperation with individual European states also creates favorable foundations for Armenia to deepen its relations in defence sphere with the EU, particularly within the framework of the support of the European Peace Facility*.

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* The European Peace Facility (EPF), established on March 22, 2021, is a European Union financing instrument aimed at delivering military aid to partner countries and funding the deployment of EU military missions abroad under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). (See more in detail in the Official Website of the Council of the EU and the European Council. (n.d).

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