The Road to Real Independence: Ending the Post-Soviet Era

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Capstone paper

*It may be claimed that the 20th century ended by the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the democratization process of the newly independent countries. By the beginning of the 21st century the traces of the failure of the democratization process in most of these countries could have already been noticed. These countries became democracies on official documents and speeches of their leaders but stayed hybrid regimes in reality that were strongly tied to Moscow. Revolutions to establish real democracy and gain sovereignty were done in some of the post-Soviet countries including Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia. Reasons for this outcome are multiple but the following paper will examine these revolutions, concentrating mainly on the case of Armenia, to understand their reasons and political implications.*

Introduction

The Soviet past had an immense role in the process of independence of the 15 states that started after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (2019, October 11). The world for seventy years knew only the Soviet Union with the center in Moscow as one political unit but now it had to deal with 15 independent states out of which only Russia with the capital remaining in Moscow was and still is proud of its Soviet past (РИА Новости, 2005). All the other states in the hope to be accepted to the world started democratization of their states (Bendersky, 2005), though they were still unsure about the ideology they want to base their politics on. Now, looking back, it is obvious that in short-term no post-Soviet country, disregarding Balkan states that joined after WWII (Danforth & Allcock, 2019), was able to change the yet predominant Soviet system in their countries as people with the Soviet mentality would come to power through free and fair democratic elections. Thus, looking at the bigger picture, it may be assumed that the revolutions that started in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2014) and Armenia (2018) actually were aimed at getting rid of the Soviet past, Moscow dominance, gain real independence, and be accepted by the world.

 Looking at the independence ballots of all of these countries, it may be claimed that independence was welcomed by the majority of the citizens as Soviet Union was the symbol of oppression, tyranny, deteriorating planning economy, constant deficit of food and other products, corruption, insufficient wages, closed borders, and censure. Looking at the promises of the revolutionary leaders in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, it can be noticed that they are mostly identical. All three revolutionary leaders wanted to end corruption, boost economy, guarantee private business rights, increase salaries, better regulate taxation, and implement reforms that would strengthen the democratic institutions (judiciary, executive and legislative branch). These revolutionaries wanted to correct problems that were meant to end with the collapse of the Soviet Union but it never happened. Thus, the following paper will examine these revolutions, concentrating mainly on the case of Armenia, to understand their reasons and political implications. The main claim is that all of these revolutions are identical because they were done to gain real independence, leave the Soviet past in the history books, and reject Moscow dominance over their states. Though, the roots and the motives of these revolutions are identical, the outcomes in terms of Russia’s response to it were very different.

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**Developments in Armenia After the Fall of the Soviet Union**

Starting from the first day of independence, Armenia faced many difficulties in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. The traces of Russian interference in terms of creating these difficulties may be noticed when observing the history of the modern Armenia. The following will observe the instances when Russian interference affected and sometimes even interrupted the development process of Armenia thus irritating the people and provoking a revolution. Though, first the developments happening is Russia during 1990s shall be observed to get a better picture of the further developments that concerned all the other post-Soviet states later as well.

 Before observing the developments that followed up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is important to understand what was happening in Russia in 1990s. In 1991 presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus signed Belavezha Accords according to which Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created and Soviet Union was officially dissolved (Luhn, 2016). As result of first democratic elections, Russians elected Boris Yeltsin, who earlier was a non-voting member of Politburo and the first secretary of Moscow’s Communist Party Committee, as their president (Britannica, Yeltsin, 2020). Yeltsin was seen as a democrat and declared that he is for free-market economy. Though his economic reforms failed and he had major health problems. “…the State Duma initiated an impeachment drive against Yeltsin, charging that he had encouraged the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991” (Britannica, Yeltsin, 2020). He was forced to resign and declared then the prime minister Vladimir Putin as the new president. “After heady democracy and huge economic inequality in the 1990s, Russia under Vladimir Putin has experienced a rise in living standards but a drop in pluralism” (Luhn, 2016). Stanislav Shushkevich, first head of the independent Belorussian state, was the one of the first to notice Putin’s disappointment with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. “I’m disappointed because the Belavezha Accords opened big opportunities, but Putin wants to turn this around,” Shushkevich said. “He said the breakup of the Soviet Union was a tragedy, but this is an unacceptable statement, because tens of millions died for this communist order. We need to make a government for the people, not sacrifice the people for the state” (Luhn, 2016). This is the reason why the Yeltsin era was so different than the Putin era. Yeltsin was more a supporter for Independent Russian Federation with its territories whereas Putin wanted to return control over the post-Soviet states and reinvent Soviet Union. This truth marked the beginning of the post-Soviet states clashing with the ideas of Putin to return to the Soviet order.

 In 1990, when the newly independent Armenia joined the CIS with the active efforts of first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Russia assumed the role of Armenia's security guarantor and its troops were stationed in Armenia. Armenia needed this support because by then the war over Artsakh started and Armenia didn’t yet have an officially formed army to fight. Thus, Armenia had no other choice but to agree to Moscow’s conditions and expect political and military support from them. One of these military bases was #102 placed in Gyumri, cultural capital of Armenia that in 1988 suffered from a devastating earthquake. This military base later became a real security problem for Armenia and its people (Վահանե, 2018). Problems started in 1999, when Putin was the prime minister and President Yeltsin’s power was very limited. In April 14, 1999 two Russian soldiers from base #102 started mass shootings in the market near the Gyumri town square. Two people died and seven were injured. By the decision of the Armenian Court Russian soldiers Alexander Kamenov and Denis Popov were sentenced to 14 and 15 years by the verdict issued by the Armenian court (Վահանե, 2018). The decision of the court didn’t correspond to the cruelty level of the crime committed but at least it was the Armenian Court issuing the verdict that was actually later implemented. This was a relatively soft punishment and it made Gyumretsis (people of Gyumri) become irritated by the Russian troops’ presence in their area. The irritation grew by the incidents that continued happening in Gyumri. The next incident happened in 2013 when two children were killed between Hovani and Vahramaberd villages because of a mine blast. The area where the incident happened is used by the Russian Armed Forces for military trainings and as usual when they finished their trainings they didn’t clean after themselves as a result of which two innocent kids who were playing there were killed (Վահանե, 2018). Then, in 2015, Valeri Permyakov ran away from the base, entered the home of Avetisyan family and killed everyone and even the new born child. Permyakov was isolated in the base. Armenian investigators were never allowed to enter and question him and the decision of Armenian court to life-sentence him was never implemented. He was extradited to the Russian side. All of the above mentioned examples show how helpless Armenians are when the government that is meant to protect them is unable to do that. These people still remain unpunished. The tradition continued even after the Velvet Revolution of 2018, when a soldier early in the morning when going to the base saw an old woman cleaning the streets, beat her up and eventually killed her (Վահանե, 2018). Nothing happened to the guy who did that. The irritation of people grew intense because it happened right after the revolution and everyone was expecting the Government to act accordingly meaning in a way as if we had a real sovereignty. This also never happened. The head of the journalist’s club of Gyumri, Levon Barseghyan organized a meeting in front of #102 military base with the slogan “Keep your monsters in your cell” and posters with the pictures of the killed woman Julieta Ghazaryan and Avetisyan family members (Հակոբյան 2019). Barseghyan claimed that every time after these kind of incidents when people die, one of the commanders of the base comes out and has a really nice, politically correct conversation with the governor of the area and promises that it will never happen again (Հակոբյան 2019). On this note usually everything stops. This time was not different.

 These were not the only times when Russia positioned itself as security guarantor of Armenia but in reality appeared more as a security threat than a big trustworthy brother. Conspiracy theories about Russian active presence and even interference in Armenian internal affairs got worse when Armenia tried to solve the Karabagh issue in the scope of OSCE Minsk Group that was created specifically to help Armenia, Karabagh and Azerbaijan to negotiate on this matter to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Russia was and still is a presiding member of OSCE Minsk Group which means that they were aware of all the details of the negotiations process. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia was the first president who really tried to solve the Karabagh issue and tried to do it in the scope of OSCE Minsk Group.Thus, it can be assumed that the suggestions that President Levon Ter-Petrosyan came up with were discussed with the presence of Russian diplomats. After the negotiations in Minsk Group, on September 26, 1997 President Ter-Petrosyan opened the discussion with the public and organized a press conference to present his two suggestion packages of possible solutions of the Karabagh issue to the people (Տեր Պետրոսյան, 1997). The press conference was a failure and after it even his cabinet started to harshly criticize his approach and suggestions. After the failure of the press conference, he published a long article entitled “War and Peace: Time to get serious” in which he replied to the opposition comments and presented details of his suggestions. Even then, his suggestions for the possible solutions of the Karabagh issue appeared to be treacherous for the opposition. Ter-Petrosyan was unable handle the pressure and convince the public that these suggestions benefit the Armenian side because his own cabinet was against his suggestions. This can be identified from the speech of Ter-Petrosyan during Security Council (SC) meeting on January 7-8, 1998 (Հունվարի 8, 1997).

Security Council meeting that lasted two days (January 7-8, 1999) was held to thoroughly discuss this matter. Vazgen Sargsyan, Serzh Sargsyan, Vano Siradeghyan (Yerevan mayor), Arkadi Ghukasyan (President of the Republic of Karabagh), Samvel Babayan (Defense Minister of Karabagh, known as a general with real and suppressing power) were a few of the most important members of the Security Council. From Ter-Petrosyan’s speech there are some important excerpts that are worth looking at in terms of having a bigger picture of the following events. It is after the publication of this speech that he was forced to resign on February 3, 1998. He presented very pragmatic views regarding Russia’s support. Specifically he states “After independence Armenia-Russia relationship evolved in an extremely favorable atmosphere and today are at the highest level. But, unfortunately, this situation cannot go on forever. First of all, I have to reiterate that Russia will never recognize the independence of Karabagh, at least because it has about twenty Karabagh in its own territory. … not to have problem with the West, Russia will one day stop supplying arms to Armenia” (Հունվարի 8, 1997). In terms of Russia, Vazgen Sargsyan (then Minister of Defense, later killed during the terror attack in National Assembly) also made a not really friendly statement which Ter-Petrosyan cited in his speech. Specifically Ter-Petrosyan recites Vazgen Sargsyan who states “It is impossible to completely isolate Armenia. Russia and Iran will help us. And if for some reason Russia stops supplying weapons, then we will get weapons from Iran" (Հունվարի 8, 1997). Thus, it becomes obvious that the role of Russia in this resolving the conflict was high or at least the Armenian side perceived it that way (Հունվարի 8, 1997).

The first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan resigned and the reason was his inability to solve the Karabagh issue because his own cabinet publicly went against him. Country started to prepare for the new elections. Karen Demirchyan and Vazgen Sargsyan united and created an alliance to participate in the elections. Demirchyan became NA President, Vazgen Sargsyan became the prime minister and formed the government. There was a hope that the newly formed parliament will be able to find a better solution to the Karabagh issue. The hope was destroyed by the October 27 events. As later events showed, it appeared to be the turning point for Armenia and its relationship with Russia. On October 27, 1999 a terrorist group led by Nairi Hunanyan, entered National Assembly (NA) during a parliamentary session and killed Karen Demirchyan (NA president, former first secretary of Armenian SSR), Vazgen Sargsyan (prime minister, former minister of Defense, founded Armenian Armed Forces), Yuri Bakhshyan (NA Deputy Speaker), Ruben Miroyan (NA Deputy Speaker), Leonard Petrosyan (Minister of Urgent Affairs), Henrik Abrahamyan (Member of Parliament), Armenak Armenakyan (Member of Parliament), Mikayel Kotanyan (Member of Parliament). Just a few hours later after the terror attack Russia sent its special Alfa group to Armenia. October 27, 1999 became a decline point for Armenia’s prosperity and real sovereignty.

Within just a few hours Russia sent its special Alfa group to “protect” Armenia. Out of this immediate actions form Russia there was a big conspiracy theory that the assassinations were ordered from Russia and this group came to cover everything. The next day, then the prime minister of Russia, Vladimir Putin visited Armenia and had a meeting with then the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan. The biggest benefactor from the situation became Robert Kocharyan, then the President of Armenia and previously the president of Karabagh, as the only remaining legitimate leader of the country. The conspiracy grew bigger when during Kocharyan’s presidency the energy sector of Armenia was given to Russia to cover the debt. This might not even be true but this belief has such deep roots that the truth doesn’t really matter.

Armenian economy and energy sector suffered sufficiently because of Russian interference. From economic and energy dependence to military reliance, Russia has many pressure points on Armenia (Mayissian, 2013). Everything started with the deal called “Property to cover the debt” which was signed in 2002. It was a deal to transfer four Armenian companies to the Russian Federation for a $ 98 million debt that was legally signed. The agreement was signed by the co-chairs of the Armenian-Russian intergovernmental commission Ilya Klebanov and Serzh Sargsyan. Accordingly, the Hrazdan thermal power plant and three electric power plant companies were transferred to the Russian side for full ownership (Մարգարյան, 2002). Then, in 2014 Armenia sold its last 20% to Arm –Russian GazProm which as a result became GazProm Armenia. This was done to strengthen ties with Russia in the newly created Customs Union. Though there was an expectation that the prices will go down after this, they didn’t. “There is a huge price difference in the current member states of the Customs Union and in Armenia. For example, gas in Russia is three times cheaper than in Armenia, gas in Belarus is 4.5 times cheaper than in Armenia, and gas in Kazakhstan is 6.5 times cheaper than in Armenia," Hayk Gevorgyan, an economist at Haykakan Zhamanak, told RFE / RL. (Հարությունյան, 2014). In December of 2013 when the agreement wasn’t signed yet opposition MP Nikol Pashinyan gave a speech in parliament and said that he is “against this document because it is a document about the trade of another share of Armenia’s statehood and its strategic perspectives.” He continued that the current regime in Armenia “is trying to solve the problem of maintaining power and the Russian authorities are trying to solve the problem of Armenia’s vassalship” (ԱԺ մոնիտորինգ, 2013). Thus Pashinyan claimed that the ruling regime and it relationship with Russia including this agreement are a threat for Armenia’s statehood. It is not a secret that Russia uses energy as a political weapon. “Russia uses energy as a tool in foreign policy in both terms: to reward its friends and punish its enemies” (Meena, 2018).

Russia’s influence on Armenian economy was big before September 3, 2013 but it became even bigger when Sezh Sargsyan, then the president of Armenia, made an overnight decision to join Russian-led Customs Union (since 2015 Eurasian Economic Union) and to abruptly cease negotiations with European Union for signing the Association Agreement (Mayissian, 2013). Armenia was negotiating over the Association Agreement for four years and there is no logical reason why Armenia in a very short period of time changed its mind and joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). “That Sarkisian [Armenian president] was subjected to significant pressure to join the Customs Union during his visit to Moscow is unquestionable. Signs of mounting pressure were also apparent in recent months with the dramatic increase of Russian gas prices in Armenia and the sale of Russian weapons to Azerbaijan” (Mayissian, 2013). “Hrant Bagratyan, an economist and former Armenian prime minister, believes that Armenia should have never joined the EAEU without clarification on custom duties. He believes that by joining the EAEU, Armenia lost the possibility of working with several countries based on customs privileges” (Hergnyan, 2018). Words of Bagratyan were proved if looking at the economic growth that Armenia had after joining EAEU. “According to the National Statistical Service (NSS), economic growth in Armenia in 2015 was 3.2%, dropping 0.2% in 2016. (Economic growth was 3.3% in 2013, and 3.6% in 2014)” (Hergnyan, 2018). After all EAEU membership was not only an economic union but a political one because expectations were to get the acceptance of Russia and avoid scenes that happened with Ukraine and Georgia when they “betrayed” Russia and chose another path. By joining Russia led unions Armenia showed a friendliness gesture to Russia. Armenia had no resource for open confrontation with Russia like Ukraine did when it refused to join EAEU and engaged in war with Russia as a result of which Crimea was annexed and there is still an ongoing war in Donbas. However, EAEU appeared to be so ineffective that Nikol Pashinyan, then “Yelq” opposition faction leader and currently the prime minister of Armenia, initiated a discussion to start a committee to quit the EAEU. Pashinyan primarily stated "We believe that in the context of Armenia's membership to the EEU and the processes surrounding it, the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia has received serious blows, and there is every reason to believe that this process will continue and become uncontrollable for us starting an X moment if it has not already become uncontrollable” (Լազարյան, 2017). This was just the beginning of the new kind of relationship of Armenia and Russia that is stopped being only bilateral but enlarged and became more comprehensive including other parties, mainly other post-Soviet countries.

The decision to join EAEU was also because of the security issues considering the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. “Putin pressured Armenia not to sign the EU Association Agreement in 2013, not least by sealing a major arms deal in Baku.” There were even attempts by the Russian side to convince Azerbaijan to join EAEU (International Crisis Group, p. 16, 2016). If Azerbaijan agreed, that would have created a major security problem for Armenia. It came out that even without the presence of Azerbaijan in EAEU, it still benefits more from bilateral relations with Russia rather than Armenia with its both bilateral and comprehensive relation with Russia. “Not without foundation, Armenians suspected that an element of any such move (e.g. Azerbaijan joining EAEU) would be a shift by Russia towards a position on NK more sympathetic to Azerbaijan.” (International Crisis Group, p. 16, 2016). For the coming years Armenia having “strong” economic relations with EAEU countries Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia failed to have a major economic growth. Though the situation was corrected with the appointment of an Armenian prim-minister from GazProm, Karen Karapetyan who was able to show %7.5 economic growth in 2017. This was an attempt to prove that Armenia’s decision to join EAEU wasn’t wrong.

 After joining EAEU the socio-economic condition of Armenia didn’t improve but even got worse. The brightest example is the Electric Yerevan protests that started in Yerevan because the “decision by the state utilities commission to increase electricity tariffs from the beginning of August by more than 16% was issued” (Demytrie, 2015). The request to increase the price was made by Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA). “ENA is wholly owned by Inter-RAO, a large Russian energy company whose chairman Igor Sechin is a close friend of President Vladimir Putin” (Demytrie, 2015). Yevgeny Bibin, director of the ENA was accused in corruption because it was because of his mismanagement that under his leadership ENA accumulated a lot of debt and on that many he overpaid the contractors and bought luxury items. Bibin even publicly admitted his fault but when Armenian Regulatory Commission invited him to a meeting to explain himself, he didn’t attend it (Avedissian, 2015), “Many Armenians felt that they are forced to pay more for electricity because of fraud and mismanagement within the loss-making network” and that is the primary reason why people went on streets to protest (Danielyan, 2015).

The politicization process of Armenian protests started from highest Russian political elite members, like Sergey Lavrov, then the Russian foreign minister. In his address to international youth forum in Moscow, Lavrov stated “A lot of attention is being paid to youth in forming a national agenda, including through the prism of so-called peaceful protests which are increasingly becoming the norm,” Then Lavrov continued “You know how the color revolutions began -- the Maidan [movement] in Ukraine, the current events in Armenia” (Danielyan, 2015). Reason of these kind of statements was based on an incident when “a small group of would-be protesters turned up at the Yerevan rally on the evening of July 2 waving EU flags [were quickly confronted](http://www.armenialiberty.org/content/article/27106927.html) as "provocatuers" and told to "go away" (RFE/RL, 2015). Russians started to be threatened by EU or “hidden Western influence” when in 2013 Ukraine’s Euromaidan protests as a result of which Ukraine didn’t join the Russian led Customs Union started. This Ukrainian misconduct was never forgiven and in 2014 Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and there is still an ongoing war in eastern Ukraine, Donbas. After “The United States supported Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity [and] denounced Russia’s actions in Crimea and the Donbas as flagrant violations of international norms and threats to European security“ Russia’s anger towards west increased geometrically (Graham, 2020). Thus, it is not of a surprise that any protests in the post-Soviet area is viewed as a result of Western influence. Armenia was not an exception.

To further avoid politicization of the protest, the protesters would claim that this way they show their civil position to their government and that’s it. In order to delegitimize the protesters’ claims the Russian media was covering the events happening in Baghramyan Avenue by providing an “extremely politicized 'color revolution' style coverage” (Avedissian, 2015). The protesters multiple times claimed that the protests are not anti-Russian but it didn’t stop “Russian state media [that] has largely framed of Electric Yerevan as stemming from 'outside influence'” (Avedissian, 2015). For example, Russian Radio Free Europe published an article entitled “’Euromaidan’ built barricades” (Крутов et al., 2015). In the interview with political scientist Alexander Iskandaryan, the journalist starts asking why people went on streets to protest when the electricity price rise was not that drastic. The question itself has a clear statement that Armenians protest not for electricity price but for something else (Крутов et al., 2015). This question becomes reasonable when reading the response of Lavrov to Ria Novosti’s question. He claims that “even though the root cause of these events is purely economic but somebody, it seems, finds it useful to go further and develop these processes in a political direction” (Danielyan, 2015). No one knows who that mysterious somebody is and Lavrov’s implication is that Armenian civil society cannot protest or is unable to make a decision to go on streets without “somebody’s” push or help.

 To soften the situation Armenian Government initiated actions that resulted in ENA passing from by Inter-RAO to Tashir group. Tashir group a Moscow-based company “owned by one of the world’s wealthiest entrepreneurs, Armenia-born Samvel Karapetian.” The government considered that ENA passed into safe hands. Primarily, prime minister Hovik Abrahamyan claimed that “the government asked Karapetyan to purchase the the company after its previous owner, the Kremlin-linked Inter RAO, expressed a desire to sell” (Eurasianet, October 2, 2015). The interesting part is that later Karapetyan indicated that “he will use his ‘personal resources’ to help the government provide electricity subsidies” (Eurasianet, October 2, 2015). While Samvel Karapetyan was trying to position himself as hero who solved the problem and subsidies electricity prices for his fellow Armenians at the same time 2016 September developments showed that he wants more than that. Karen Karapetyan was appointed as Armenian prime minister. It came out they are two good friend coming from Russian GazProm. “The two men most probably struck up a friendship when Karen Karapetyan held senior executive positions in Gazprom subsidiaries in Russia from 2011-2016. Highlighting their close relationship, Karen sat next to Samvel at the extravagant wedding of the latter’s younger son.” “[Samvel Karapetyan] has made no secret of his strong support for Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan (no relation)” (Danielyan, 2017). Taking into consideration Samvel Karapetyan’s strong ties with Russia and it primary officials, one can conclude that this wasn’t a coincidence. “Samvel Karapetyan benefited from close government ties, in particular with officials in Kaluga, some senior Gazprom executives, and current Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyanin.” In addition to this “Russia’s RBC business news agency [estimated](http://www.rbc.ru/business/27/04/2016/571e2ebf9a794739bc632213) that in 2014-2015 alone, Karapetyan-controlled firms won roughly $2 billion worth of construction and supply contracts from Gazprom, the Moscow municipality and other state entities” (Danielyan, 2017). “Samvel Karapetyan, an Armenian-born billionaire who has built a business empire in Russia, is increasingly investing in Armenia and, in particular, its energy sector where he is becoming a key player. And his close ties to Armenia's prime minister are raising questions about Russia's influence on Armenian politics as the Caucasus country approaches a delicate political transition next year” (Danielyan, 2017).

#  Armenia, as a country with unresolved Karabagh conflict seeks and anticipates economic, military and moral support from its strategic partner. However, as strategic partner of Armenia not Azerbaijan, Russia in order to gain economic benefit sold heavy armors to the Azeri side and didn’t sell much to the Armenian side, justifying it with the fact that Armenia doesn’t have enough budget. In 2016, Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov after multiple visits to both Yerevan and Baku “called the settlement of the conflict one of Russia’s ‘foreign policy priorities’ and directly ‘supervised by Putin’” (International Crisis Group, p. 7, 2016). After Lavrov’s active engagement in negotiations process and talking with both sides in autumn of 2015 Moscow came up with suggestions and submitted an official document to discuss in the format of OSCE Minsk Group. The document was later known as Lavrov Plan. This document wasn’t of public usage but it aimed to restart the peace process with the suggestion of “Armenian withdrawal from two or three of the occupied districts around the former NKAO (Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast), with two more then to follow in exchange for an NK interim status” (International Crisis Group, p. 8, 2016). Thus Armenia should have just given 4 or 5 provinces of Karabakh to Azerbaijan and in exchange get an interim status for Karabakh. Taking into consideration that Karabakh has only 8 provinces (Stepanakert, Martuni, Martakert, Askeran, Hadrut, Kashatagh, Shushi and Shahumyan) with overall 11.500 square kilometers of territory this means giving away half or even more of this territory to Azerbaijan and get some kind of a “status” for NK recognized by Azerbaijan. This mean that actually Armenia loses a lot but gets nothing in exchange. This was the suggestion that the declared strategic partner of Armenia had to offer on the table of the negotiations.

 “The role of Moscow is significant, of course, as we could see taking into consideration the volume of arms trade to both Azerbaijan and Armenia” ([Zoppellaro](https://www.evnreport.com/profiles/simone-zoppellaro), 2017). This created disbalance in the region and as a result in 2016 the four day April War escalated. Estimated 110 soldiers were dead, 121 servicemen and volunteers injured from the Armenian side and 800 acres of land were lost (Panorama.am, 2019). According to the records provided by the Armenian side not only soldiers but civilians living in the near to border villages harshly suffered. Armenian press and official sources claimed that Azeri soldiers entered villages, killed children, beheaded soldiers, and tortured their dead bodies (Titizian, 2017). “At the presence of the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic’s State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons registered that all bodies of the deceased transferred by the Azerbaijani side had signs of torture and mutilation” (Panorapa.am, 2019).

From the beginning to the end of the war, Russia was suspiciously silent and didn’t make any statements supporting one or the other side. The other members (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan) of Russia-led organization called CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) that Azerbaijan is not a member of, didn’t differ from each other in term of reaction. If any of them published any statement it was only a call to both parties for ceasefire. Though, Belarus’s president Alexander Lukashenko’s reaction is worth of mentioning. Belarus, in a wartime when one of its partners in CSTO and EAEU is struggling, chose first to talk with Azerbaijani side then only with the Armenian side. By the time when there was the ongoing war the “Belarus' Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei has already held consultations with Azerbaijan Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov. In the near future he planned to have the negotiations with Armenia Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian” (Belta, 2016). That was so unacceptable for Armenia that a statements was issued. It particularly said “Yerevan decided that official Minsk's position doesn’t correspond to the spirit of Armenian-Belarusian relations and runs counter to the obligations of the parties in the framework of the CSTO” (Vestnik Kavkaza, 2016). This wasn’t the only time that CSTO appeared to be ineffective. “[CSTO’s] short history has been dominated more by internal conflicts than any political or operational successes (Kucera, 2019).

 ”Russia has firmly [rejected](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-will-continue-selling-weapons-to-azerbaijan-and-armenia---rogozin/565479.html) calls for it to stop selling weapons to Armenia and Azerbaijan, maintaining that its policy ensures a balance” (Amos, 2016). This once again marks the level of dependence of Armenia on Russia. In fact “immediately after the April 2016 fighting, Armenia launched efforts to accelerate the delivery of new weaponry from Russia, based on a July 2015 $200 million military loan agreement” (Garibov, 2017). Even more “Armenia also strengthened its military alliance with Russia by establishing a joint military force (Garibov, 2017). After April War, it came out that Armenia didn’t have modern weapons because didn’t have “enough budget” to buy them from Russia and the soldier had to fight with guns of 1980s production. After April War, Pashinyan (current Prime Minister, then the opposition leader) when referring to Republican majority in the parliament said “After joining to the Eurasian Economic Union, Armenia lost a significant part of the territory. You say that this is connected with the security issue, but in this case, how did it happen that a member of the EAEU fought weapons of the 1980s” ([Меджлумян](https://russian.eurasianet.org/people/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B6%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BC%D1%8F%D0%BD), 2019). And that was a rhetorical question. “There also has been a deeper anxiety among the Armenian public that Russia might switch sides, founded on its ambivalent attitude during the early 1990s’ war, when it supported Azerbaijan at times” (International Crisis Group, p. 16, 2016).

 Anxiety after April War grew into protests. In April 16, 2016 David Sanasaryan, 2018 Revolutionary who initiated “Reject Serzh” protests later was appointed as head of State Supervision Service in Pashinyan’s Government, was one of the organizers of the protests that demanded Russia to act as an ally and stop selling arms to Azerbaijan. People on the streets were disappointed “over a lack of reaction from Moscow.” In one of his interviews Sanasaryan said “Lots of people think that Russia is a military ally and a friend, but a military ally and friend cannot sell arms to our adversary” (Amos, 2016). Interestingly enough, the other important result of the war was that people felt that the leader of their country is unable to do anything and it is Putin who grabbed all the power in his hands and Armenians should beg for help from him. A good example is the words of Maksim Sarkisyan who participated in this protest and previously played a big role in Electric Yerevan protests. He said “Above all we have to demand something from our own government … I don’t accept Putin as my president, so why should I ask something of him?” (Amos, 2016).

“The main beneficiary of the four-day crisis, however, is Russia, which maintained an ostentatiously reserved attitude for several days, and then within just a few hours (according to press releases) most likely delivered the ceasefire” (Jarosiewicz, A. & Falkowski M). The agreement about ceasefire was reached in Moscow). “Though Russia initially took the leadership in brokering peace but now seems to have relinquished its plans, whereas the West has turned a blind eye to the region after Donald Trump’s election as U.S. president” (Garibov, 2017). Armenia was left alone in the battlefield. Russia proved again that it can impose peace which means that Armenia should behave accordingly so that the war doesn’t restart.

 In 2016, after the April War, the resolution of the Karabakh conflict became a priority not that much for Armenia or Azerbaijan but for Russia with enforcement of Lavrov plan. Thought the plan was ruined because of the efforts of an armed group that “call themselves the “Daredevils of Sassoun” (Sasna Tsrer) after a legendary [medieval] Armenian epic poem” (Grigoryan, 2016). “Early in the morning of July 17, roughly a dozen men, many veterans of Armenia’s 1988-1994 war with Azerbaijan over breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh, broke into the Erebuni district’s police station with a truck, taking several policemen hostage” (Grigoryan, 2016). They were demanding the release of opposition representative Jirayr Sefilyan (Lebanese-born Artsakh War veteran arrested for illegal possession of weapons) and resignation of President Serzh Sargsyan (Աֆյան, 2016). “Sefilian’s supporters claim that he was arrested because of his group’s opposition to the government’s willingness to let Azerbaijan keep what “insignificant” territory (800 acres lost) it gained from Armenian troops during fighting in Karabakh this April (Grigoryan, 2016). “The attackers held the police station for two weeks, during which time three police officers were killed and more than 100 demonstrators – who flocked to the station to support the attackers – were injured in clashes with police” (Kucera, 2017). “Deputy Commander Arthur Vanoyan was killed during the occupation, Tatul Tamrazyan, a member of the Sasna Tsrer group, was wounded as well as four police officers - Colonel Aram Hovhannisyan, Lieutenant Colonel Hrach Khoterian, Lieutenant Gagik Mkrtchyan, Operator Hayrapetyan. Several policemen were taken hostage” (Աֆյան, 2016). Prior to these events a presidential meeting at Moscow with Putin and [Armenia’s President] Sargsyan was planned. Acceding to the head of independent research institute AIISA (Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs) and former MP, Styopa Safaryan “A few days prior to the activities of ‘Sasna Tsrer’ group RF Foreign Minister made a rather unbelievable statement, that currently, they are as close to the settlement [of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict] as ever” (Martirosyan, 2016).There were some news that Russian Alfa Group (like during 1999 terror attack on parliament) was moved to Yerevan to regulate the situation but later Ashot Karapetyan, head of the Yerevan Police Department the denied them (Աֆյան, 2016). Pro-Kremlin experts claimed that Armenia should give some territories by the end of the year [2016] so that the peace negotiations are successful (Martirosyan, 2016). Safaryan continues “… during his visits paid to Yerevan and Baku Lavrov brought non-official proposals to the countries’ authorities, accordingly, in this regard, of course, we should realize, that against the background of these developments, when it seemed that the processes are developing at a lightning speed, suddenly ongoing developments in Yerevan and instigated public passions are becoming a serious factor for if not cancellation, then for temporary suspension of that plan” (Martirosyan, 2016). “What hardcore positions society takes when it comes to Nagorno-Karabakh, including the return of the seven surrounding territories, that was really shocking,” one Western diplomat anonymously shared thoughts with Eurasianet. That is going to make it all more difficult for the Armenian government to sell the public on an eventual peace deal, the diplomat added (Kucera, 2017).

 On July 17 street protests started that later became more organized and starting July 29, protests named ‘No to Robbery’ («Ոչ թալանին») started in Freedom Square to support Sasna Tsrer group members. At that time, it was difficult to understand what was the reaction of the majority of the nation towards their actions but the Government would claim that Sasna Tsrer doesn’t have many supporters. In response to that “an opposition news website ran a poll asking whether the attack was a ‘rebellion’ or ‘terrorism,’ and by the end of the day, a slender majority had opted for ‘rebellion,’ prompting police spokesman Narek Malyan to weigh in and claim that the poll was rigged” (Kucera, 2017). Right from the beginning, opposition and government media had a different perspective in covering these events. Pro-Governmental media considering the deaths of policemen would endlessly claim that it is unacceptable that after April War, now Armenians start killing Armenians. Government-controlled media and the NSS (National Security Service) described the actions of Sasna Tsrer a terror attack. “They have compared the Daredevils [Sasna Tsrer] with the 1999 [October 27] gun attack on the Armenian parliament that killed Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Parliamentary Speaker Karen Demirchyan and several other senior political figures” (Grigoryan, 2016).

 The Soviet-like tools to control the situations were put in use. “Aside from the arrests on July 17, Facebook was blocked for at least an hour, while pro-government TV channels, borrowing a tactic from the Soviet past, switched their programming to light movies” (Grigoryan, 2016). Protesters claim that Sasna Tser are revolutionaries and “demand that the situation be resolved without bloodshed. Police arrested Davit Sanasaryan (in 2018 Revolution head of “Reject Serzh” initiative) and MP Nikol Pashinyan (current RA Prime Minister as result of 2018 Revolution)” (Աֆյան, 2016). Vahan Babayan, MP from Prosperous Armenia opposition faction, in response to the created situation claimed that at some point Sasna Tsrer will have to surrender because there is no other option. Babayan agreed with the government and shared their opinion. He underlined that the “NSS should take note of those Armenians who support ‘the terrorists’ on the social media site. ‘They, as a matter of fact, live in our country,’ he warned. ‘They walk among us and protect terrorist killers, justifying and making heroes of them.’ (Grigoryan, 2016). On July 17, one activist at Freedom Square claimed that “Those who stand by the government, and the government itself, call this a terror attack, but the actual terrorists are the current government.” “They drove people to this condition…” (Grigoryan, 2016). From the other side the families of the dead policemen were in grief because their husbands died while doing their service. “How could an Armenian kill another Armenian? One policeman dead, and can you imagine the situation for his family? Why could this happen?” asked one young woman. “This is just unbelievable. They are just terrorists who even have no idea what they’re doing and what exactly they demand.” (Grigoryan, 2016). Chairperson of the Armenian Helsinki Commission, Avetik Ishkhanian claimed that it is easy to criticize Sasna Tsrer’s actions but the “blame lies with the government and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia as well” (Grigoryan, 2016).

 Post-war depression took over Armenia after the April War and then the Sasna Tsrer ‘s actions directed to overthrow the government, though not through the best ends but became a hope for some percent of the nation that things might change for better. For many years, Armenia was left stagnated, there was no significant economic growth, no hope for prosperity and development especially after joining Russia-led institutions instead of EU, and protests were constantly suppressed resulting in many political prisoners. Head of Yerevan Press Club Boris Navasardyan in conversation with Armenian service of RFE/RL said “A large part of the population is dissatisfied with the current socio-political situation, and to a significant degree that dissatisfaction is expressed in the position that any methods against the authorities are acceptable, since the authorities themselves use so many unacceptable measures against their own population” (Kucera, 2017). April War traumatized all Armenians and the same is true about Sasna Tsrer activities, disregarding whether one is their supporter or not. When they failed to accomplish their mission and it put into despair many Armenians. Safaryan, head of Yerevan-based think-tank, said “On the one side, society doesn’t believe in changes through elections. On the other hand, society doesn’t believe in changing power through force. Those two options are effectively discredited. That loss of faith in any sort of change was one of the reasons that parliamentary elections earlier this year [2017] saw ‘unprecedented’ levels of vote-buying”, Safaryan added (Kucera, 2017).

 After Sasna Tsrer incident, the governing Republican party realized that there needs to be a change and that people should be granted a hope. To energize Armenians and get them out of deep depression and win the upcoming parliamentary election, a bright and attractive prime minister from Russian was imported and appointed to that position. “The government has made some domestic concessions as a result of last year’s attack, bringing in a new group of relatively young officials led by Prime Minister Karen Karpetyan” (Kucera, 2017). Karapetyan with work experience at Russian GazProm brought new energy and a vision for development. Karapetyan was leading Republican Party’s list in parliamentary elections. It wasn’t just a vision. His government was able to reach 7.5% economic growth that was unprecedented since 2008. He wasn’t only offering hope but his presence also meant that President Serzh Sargsyan won’t be elected as prime minister when 2015 changes of Constitution come to power in April of 2018. That was at least a hope. Yerevan-based analyst Alexander Iskandaryan said “For the first time in 15 years, I see some hope, now they’re trying to do something. We’ll see how it will go, but this is a result of the July [2016] events.” (Kucera, 2017).

Prior to 2017 parliamentary elections and 2018 April shift to parliamentary system of government the ruling Republican party made one very important and interesting appointment. In September of 2016, after 2015 Electric Yerevan events as result of which one of his GazProm friends Samvel Karapetyan bought ENA, April War, Sasna Tsrer actions and nationwide post-war depression, Karen Karapetyan (previously held senior executive positions in Gazprom subsidiaries in Russia from 2011-2016) with a “reputation as a technocratic reformist” was appointed as the prime minister of Armenia (Danielyan, 2017). “The ruling Republican Party, in order to correct the situation of previous year’s April war and Sasna Tsrer, appointed Karen Karapetyan from Russian GazProm who brought with him relatively young officials (Kucera, 2017). Karen Karapetyan came with full of energy and presented his optimistic plans for economic growth and how he plans to raise the living standards. “The politically inexperienced premier has repeatedly pledged to improve living standards in Armenia by attracting large-scale foreign investment and improving the domestic business environment.” The question was how he was planning to attract investment and the answer is Russian billionaire of Armenian descent and his GazProm friend Samvel Karapetyan’s and taking into consideration his growing economic presence in Armenia this is a good indication that this therefore could strengthen his hand.” (Danielyan, 2017). Samvel Karapetyan’s support was immediate. “The tycoon [Samvel Karapetyan] was behind a [joint statement](https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28259506.html) issued by three dozen Russian entrepreneurs of Armenian descent during Karen Karapetyan’s official visit to Moscow in January [2017]. They praised ‘profound reforms’ promised by the prime minister and pledged to ‘participate in business projects with the Armenian government’” (Danielyan, 2017). Taking into consideration Samvel Karapetyan’s ties with high officials from Russian government, ‘in particular with officials in Kaluga, some senior Gazprom executives, and current Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyanin, ’this wasn’t only a friendly gesture but something that might have political reasons (Danielyan, 2017).

 There was one very important factor: Armenia was shifting to a parliamentary style governing and there was a chance that president Serzh Sargsyan following the example of EAEU partner countries’ leaders would want to continue and lead the country but this time as prime minister. Karen Karapetyan within a short period of time as appointed PM managed to reach some success and by that “has potentially placed him in competition with President Serzh Sargsyan. Armenia will switch to a parliamentary system of government in April 2018 immediately after Sargsyan completes his second and final term” (Danielyan, 2017). This didn’t stop Karen Karapetyan to “repeatedly indicated his desire to retain his position as prime minister.” Thought this could have created ‘a clash of two political titans over the country’s leadership position’ it is worth remembering Samvel Karapetyan’s growing economic influence in Armenia [that] has clearly boosted Karen’s chances of retaining power.” (Danielyan, 2017). Samvel Karapetyan would repeatedly express his support towards Karen Karapetyan. For example, when they “jointly announced the creation of the ICA [Investors Club of Armenia] in Yerevan in March [2017] he said “We are going to defend and support him [the prime minister], and I’m sure that very soon goals will be scored every day.” (Danielyan, 2017). “David Petrosian, a Yerevan-based veteran analyst who closely monitors Russian-Armenian dealings, suggested the Russian government is “encouraging” such investments [Samvel Karapetyan and other Russian businessmen with Armenian descent] out of a belief that they will bolster the Kremlin’s strong position in Armenia. Russian leaders, Petrosian said, want Karen Karapetyan to remain prime minister next year for the same reason, even though the latter is “not the kind of guy who will duly obey everything he is told to do.” (Danielyan, 2017). A person who wants to continue ruling the country would have never appointed someone who has the full potential to replace him. If really the problem was to bring in new and young people so that people could forget the horrors of 2016 then Serzh Sargsyan had many options who would have been both non-partisan and at the same time royal to him but he chose to appoint Karen Karapetyan who apparently didn’t want to give up his ambitions to become the prime minister with the new Constitution coming in force. Considering Karen Karapetyan’s ties with Russia the decision to appoint him might also have been the result of immense pressure put on Sargsyan.

Parliamentary elections of 2017 significantly changed the situation in Armenia not only with the presence of the new prime minister Karen Karapetyan appointed in September 2016 but also the creation of the “Yelq” alliance (in translation “Way Out”) comprised of all major opposition parties (Bright Armenia, Civil Contract and Hanrapetutyun party). In the light of the campaign was one important factor: Serzh Sargsyan’s 2014 statement made in front of journalists. He said "I, Serzh Sargsyan, will never run for the presidency of the Republic of Armenia again. I am convinced that one person should not run for the country's leadership position in Armenia more than twice in his life" (Ազատություն, 2014). After his words, there was a hope that these elections will be competitive and that President Sargsyan will follow his promise but he didn’t and it became the ground for 2018 Velvet Revolution.

 The opposition group “Yelq” won only 7% of the vote but were able to get seats in the parliament. Styopa Safaryan, head of AIISA think tank, underlined that the electoral fraud reached ‘unprecedented level’ in 2017 parliamentary elections (Kucera, 2017). This already wasn’t a good sign. Nikol Pashinyan became the chairperson of “Yelq” faction in the parliament. “Yelq” faction was highly critical of the decision to further deepen relationship with Russia by engaging in Russia-led organizations to the point that they offered to create a temporary committee to discuss the question of leaving EAEU. In one of his speeches at the parliament Pashinyan said “We are fixing the serious threats that Armenia has in case of continuing EAEU membership. The Republic of Armenia should look for security alternatives not only from outside sources but from inside as well. We mean the development of the military-industrial complex. In the context of the political process, the most important problem that we see is the protection of the sovereignty of RA, because the historical experience shows that the fall of the Armenian state happens when the role of one or the other superpower become disproportionally heavy.” (1in TV, September 27, 2017). These are direct remarks relating to the predominant presence of one superpower, Russia, in our region that threatens Armenian sovereignty.

 Nikol Pashinyan was one of the most active opposition parliamentarians. His speeches at the parliament about both the internal situation in the country and the foreign policy were the most memorable. He addressed concerns about unhealthy relationship between Russia and Armenia multiple times. Besides Pashinyan’s strong disagreement regarding joining Russsia-led institutions he accused Russia in letting Azerbaijan to attack Armenia. Pashinyan said “I insisted that Azerbaijan agreed on [2016] April War with Russia" (1in.am, 2018). According to Pashinyan the first reason why he thinks so is the example of the neighboring country, Georgia, because they had a war with Russia. During 2008 August events when Georgia made an attempts to take control over South Ossetia Russia’s response was very fierce. They almost took over Tbilisi. Therefore “Azerbaijan couldn’t have taken such actions [April War] without preliminary agreement with Russia” (1in.am, 2018). Pashinyan continued by claiming that “the war was for making Azerbaijan an EAEU member.” According to him “Armenia’s response to the war would have been to kneel in front of Russia and beg them to stop Azerbaijan.” This was Pashinyan’s theory. To him this would have been a good exchange between Russia and Azerbaijan. Russia would have given part of Armenian territories to Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan would agree become an EAEU member instead. In this case Armenia could have not put a veto to stop that because it would be devastated by war. Then Russian peacekeeping troops would enter the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. “Similar to 1920 events when Armenia and Azerbaijan became members of the Soviet Union, now they will become members of EAEU” (1in.am, 2018). This is beneficial for Russia and Azerbaijan but never for Armenia. Pashinyan when he was yet an opposition leader was very suspicious about Russia’s reliability as a strategic partner to Armenia and he brought out all the reasons why he has the legit right to feel that way. Pashinyan’s negative relation to Armenia-Russia deals and suspicions towards reliability of Russia as a good partner have deep roots. For example, back in December 2013 when the ruling Republican party was preparing to sign a deal with Russian Gazprom and sell the remaining 20 % of the Armenian shares, Pashinyan said that “This [Gazprom deal] is an anti-state deal based on mutual interests between the Russian and Armenian authorities. This agreement is a conspiracy against the statehood of Armenia” (ԱԺ մոնիտորինգ, 2013).

 As opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan was never a fan of Armenia-Russia relationships and multiple times claimed that these relationships are a threat for Armenia's statehood. Though things changed when 2018 Velvet Revolution led by Pashinyan started. The aim of the revolution was to to overthrow the corrupt government, reform the system for the benefit of the people and better the living standards. It is of no surprise that during the revolution Pashinyan’s statements about Russia became softer because by the end of April of 2018 it became clear that revolution won and Pashinyan decided to retreat from his previous statements. This is understandable taking into consideration Georgia’s and Ukraine’s experience in revolutions. After 2003 Revolution of Roses in Georgia, Georgia-Russia relationship broke apart but not immediately. In 2008 a war escalated between Georgia and Russia as a result of which Georgia lost territories. 2014 Revolution in Ukraine with the demand to join EU rather than EAEU hurt Russia’s feeling and a strong anti-Ukrainian propaganda machine was put into force. As a result, Crimea was annexed and there is still an ongoing war in Donbas. Armenia doesn't have resources to confront with Russia and this is something that Nikol Pashinyan as leader of the revolution took into consideration when he decided to change his position regarding Russia. In his speeches Pashinyan “insisted that the protest movement had a purely internal agenda, and even read out at a protest meeting a statement by Russia’s Foreign Ministry as testimony that Moscow understood that” (Zolyan, 2018). Moscow's affirmation was very important for Pashinyan and overall for the success of the revolution.

 Russia-Armenia relationships during the Velvet Revolution were so important that the ruling Republican party was doing its best to present Pashinyan as an anti-Russian prime minister, if elected. Mikael Zolyan, Yerevan based analyst and an elected MP from Pashinyan's faction after the Revolution, in his article for carnegie.ru said that “The republicans tried hard, especially between Sargsyan resigning on April 23 and Pashinyan being elected on May 8, to present Pashinyan as fervently pro-Western, in order to secure the Kremlin’s support in their internal political battle. Pashinyan himself, however, did everything to ensure that, in Moscow, he was not considered a pro-Western politician” (Zolyan, 2018). It is not only the fact that the opinion of a foreign country is that important in internal affairs of Armenia but also that the leader of the revolution is highly involved in this discourse. Interestingly enough, this discourse didn’t stop even after the victory of Revolution. It became the main topic when the date of snap elections was announced. “During his campaign for the post of prime minister, Pashinyan constantly emphasized that Armenia would not leave the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) or Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and that Russian border guards and a Russian military base would remain in Armenia. At the same time, he said that Armenia would continue to develop its relationship with neighbors Georgia and Iran, as well as with the EU and the United States” (Zolyan, 2018). Pashinyan promised that his government will go for multi-vector foreign policy. Though, over time this proved not to be true. Armenia continues to have Russia-oriented foreign policy with little interaction with other states. it came out that the only benefit that Armenia got from this revolution was the fact that “…Pashinyan—unlike Sargsyan—will probably not be afraid to publicly ask tough questions on issues such as the delivery of weapons to neighboring Azerbaijan by CSTO member countries” (Zolyan, 2018). Probably Yuri Khachaturov, former Secretary General of CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), case was one of those ones when Armenia tried to create an impression that internal decisions are more important than the imposed external ones. Following the revolution promises to restore justice, Pashinyan started with the investigation of March 1 events when the constitutional order in Armenia was overthrown. Notably Pashinyan as supporter of first President Ter-Petrosyan participated in March 1 protests and was later jailed for that. During March 1 events Khachaturov was deputy defense minister. Khachaturov was relieved from his duties. He left the post at the request of Armenia’s government (RFE/RL, 2018). Russian newspaper Kommersant commented on the created situation and stated that “the drawn-out crisis is the result of “the intransigence of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who has been counting on naming his own candidate” (Kucera, 2019). “In theory, Armenia should have earned some points with Moscow when it [sent a small deployment](https://eurasianet.org/armenia-sends-military-deminers-and-medics-to-support-russian-mission-in-syria) of sappers and medics to support Russia’s mission in Syria earlier this month. And leaving the position open for a year, rather than appointing [Belarus’s cnadidate] Zas ahead of schedule, may be a form of compromise between the two sides” (Kucera, 2019). In this case again the steps taken by Armenia bring to no results but just confident actions and impression that Armenia is using its sovereign rights.

 Pashinyan during and after the revolution continued claiming that the revolution had “purely internal agenda” but what to do if certain percentage of internal problems are because of external reasons. For example, the potential of electricity or gas price hike. Energy sector belongs to foreign, Russian, owner. It is not a surprise that Russia doesn’t like and by no means tolerate revolutions especially in the post-Soviet states. Right after the snap elections of 2018 and before the New Year, Russia punished Armenia for the success of the revolution and increased gas prices on the border. Pashinyan somehow made an agreement with Gazprom to supply gas to the houses of the citizens with the same price. The question rose again with a new 36% price hike during 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when any country’s economy is severely suffering (News.am, 2020). This is the level of support Armenia received from its strategic partner and maybe that’s because of one vector foreign policy. Armenia doesn’t have any other partner to ask for help. Besides, Armenia is a country in constant war with two closed borders, no sea and limited natural resources. Armenia’s economy cannot grow without trade with Russia, Iran, Georgia and other courtiers in this world that Russia might like or dislike. All of these are foreign policy issues that are highly connected with internal socio-economic problems leader of the Revolution promised to solve. In terms of economy Armenia already failed when the decision to join EAEU instead of EU was made. In terms of strategic objects Armenia lost when the presence of two Russian military stations in its territory were allowed, signed the deal well known as “Property to cover the debt” and sold its remaining 20% of shares to Gazprom. Probably there is nothing else to lose.

 Though the main leader of the revolution was Pashinyan the role of others cannot be neglected. For example, Davit Sanasaryan who initiated “reject Serzh” protests that were so successful it became a slogan that people would chant on the streets. Considering the strict absence and avoidance of anti-Russian rhetoric during the revolution Davit Sanasaryan’s involvement and active role and then engagement in the Government after the success of the Revolution becomes surprising because of his anti-Russian background. For example, in December of 2015 “united regional air defense system in the Caucasus region of collective security” between Russia and Armenia was signed. It had to be ratified by the National Assembly. Sanasaryan participated in the demonstration organized in front of the National Assembly and said “Signing such an agreement in a pre-war period and giving up one of the main attributes of Armenia's sovereignty to a so-called ally is a betrayal. Rest assured that in the future Russia will not allow Armenia to take part in Artsakh's air defense. In case of war, Azerbaijan will strike directly on Artsakh and not Armenia's borders so as not put Russia in an awkward position” (epress.am, 2016). Thus he not only claimed that Russia is taking away one more piece of Armenia’s sovereignty and blamed Armenian Government for anti-state actions but also claimed that this is the secret plan of Russia to give Artsakh to Azerbaijan because after this Armenia will be unable to protect Artsakh. The other example is after April War protests when Sanasaryan took out a couple of eggs and threw them at the Russian Embassy” (Amos, 2016). Then in an interview with International Business Times he said “Our protests are not against Russia but against Russian policy and Putinism” (Amos, 2016). It is not a surprise then that Sanasaryan didn’t stay in Pashinyan Government for too long and was accused of corruption. Armenian National Security Service on April 18 2019 declared that Sanasaryan is charged for misuse of official power to “create favorable conditions for a company de-facto controlled by his employees” (news.am, 2019). Maybe his dismissal was because of his anti-Russianness but a year passed since these accusations were made and so far his guilt wasn’t proven. Maybe Sanasaryan’s avoidance of anti-Russian rhetoric during revolution wasn’t a coincidence and there was a message control among smaller leaders by Pashinyan. Though all of these may be true but the most reasonable restraining circumstance is the experience of Ukraine’s and Georgia’s revolutions when Russia’s response to it was overly aggressive. Vardan Geravetyan, an Armenian activist in anti-Russian protest in Yerevan said “Once upon a time, the USA, Great Britain, and Russia promised Ukraine an inviolability of borders if it handed its nuclear weapons over to Russia. Ukraine did as told, and now we have a separated Crimea, the issues of Donetsk and Lugansk. The fact is that Ukraine has lost part of its territories as a result of the superpowers' guarantees” (epress.am, 2016). This is the impression that Ukraine’s revolution left on the Armenian public. Both Georgia and Ukraine are still struggling because of bad relationship with Russia.

 Considering all of the deals and decision that Armenia made so far for the last 29 years of independence from Soviet Union’s Moscow that was and there is an impression that it still remains decision making center for the post-Soviet territory, Armenia gave up a lot to Russia. Armenia nearly lost its bargaining power and not much room is now left to negotiate for better conditions. The feeling of constant control and big brother from Russia following is left in Armenia’s not only in the internal and external politics but also in the minds of the people of Armenia.

**Ukraine’s attempt to get a divorce from Moscow**

 Ukraine that already suffered much from the Soviet Moscow’s decisions continued suffering from Moscow dominance even after the fall of the Soviet Union. After 1921 when Red Army took over Ukraine, they were forced to join the Soviet Union. Though, the Soviet Union was devastating not only for Ukraine but also for Armenia and Georgia and all other Soviet socialist states, Ukraine faced enough to make Ukrainians today become suspicious about Moscow’s intentions. During first years of Stalinist tyranny in 1932, millions of Ukrainians were left to starve to death. That was a man-made famine that now Ukrainians call Holodomor. During pre-WWII time, in 1939 “Western Ukraine is annexed by the Soviet Union under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact” (BBC, 2020). In 1944, because Red Army is unable to protect its citizens, Nazis occupy Ukraine. “More than five million Ukrainians die fighting Nazi Germany.” 1.5 million Jews living in Ukraine die (BBC, 2020). Already devastated from WWII, one more punishment order came from Moscow. “Stalin deported 200.000 Soviet citizens in Ukraine, falsely accusing them in betrayal (BBC, 2020). Already at the decline of the Soviet Union, in 1986 a reactor in Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded causing death to over ten thousand people and millions become ill because of the high levels of radiation. Ukrainians suffered enough from the rotten Soviet system and Soviet Moscow’s ill-management but the situation continues to this day even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet model of Moscow centered government failed but it doesn’t stop Putin to become nostalgic about Soviet era and claim that if he could he would prevent “the collapse of the Soviet Union” (Ruptly, 2018). After all the devastating effect of the Soviet Union on Ukraine, Putin, before 2014 revolution, claimed that Russia and Ukraine “are united by many centuries of friendship” (Stern, 2013).

 Ukrainians looked for for sovereignty and real independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Everything started with 2004 Orange Revolution when for the first time Ukrainians got rid of pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich who won the elections and was announced to be the new president of Ukraine in 2004. However, it came out that the elections were rigged. To support Yanukovich, Russia used its gas to solve geopolitical issues. “In summer 2004, Russia had agreed to unusually low gas prices - USD 50 per thousand cubic meters - in order to tip the balance in favor of Viktor Yanukovich, its candidate in Ukraine's presidential elections” (Motyl, 2003). People went on streets and started the 2004 Orange Revolution. The revolution won and the election results were overturned. “Although Yanukovich lost the election, the biggest loser was Russia's president, Vladimir Putin” or at least his reaction showed that he felt that way (Motyl, 2003). Putin couldn’t handle it and used the gas to punish Ukraine. Just like in Armenia after the victory of Revolution when first parliamentary elections happened in December of 2018, in Ukraine as well in mid December of 2005 Russia increased gas price. The difference is that in Ukraine it was a fivefold increase. If Ukrainians didn’t accept it, the Gazprom promised “to cease pumping gas to Ukraine as of January 1st [2006]” (Motyl, 2003). Soon a new deal between Moscow and Ukraine was signed. It was agreed that the gas price would double. Though “the agreement was soon revealed to be full holes” (Motyl, 2003). According to the deal shadowy Russian-controlled RosUkrEnergo became “the sole supplier of gas to Ukraine” (Motyl, 2003). The same happened in Armenia when the last 20% of Armenian shares were given to Russia and ArmRosgazprom became fully Russia-controlled Gazprom. Most important point of the Ukrainian deal was that the initial “five-year arrangement turned out to be a six-month deal to provide Ukraine with gas priced at USD 95 per thousand cubic meters” (Motyl, 2003). Russia doesn’t use gas tool to only punish Ukraine or Armenia, it became a tool that Russia uses to take control over the post-Soviet states. With the help of gas “Russia acts like a regional bully” (Motyl, 2003). “Gazprom also shut off gas supplies to Moldova and raised the price for Georgia. Energy has clearly become a political weapon in the hands of a Russian president who recently bemoaned the Soviet Union's collapse - and not, say, two world wars, Stalinism, or the holocaust - as the greatest tragedy of the 20th century” (Motyl, 2003). Russia considers the revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine as “major security problems, which in turn gives Georgia and Ukraine reason to leave the Russian geo-political axis” (Matsaberidze, 2015). This statement in fact refers to all the post-Soviet countries that are under Moscow’s tight control that so far failed to free themselves.

 Russia couldn’t stop there and in order to increase its influence over Ukraine they organized the return of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010 elections. Yanukovich was able to be elected because he promised to negotiate over the Association Agreement and join the European Union. Inna Bohoslovska, a member of Yanukovich’s Party of Regions said that “He [Yanukovich] told us Russia was not fit for talks, Russia did not consider Ukraine to be an equal partner, that it tried to force us to act by its own rules, that Russia does not act in Ukraine’s best interests in any negotiations, and therefore there can be no talk of having negotiations with Russia,” she said” (Piper, 2013). This became the trigger for the second wave of Revolution that started in December of 2013 when Yanukovich refused to sign the EU Association Agreement. The scenario was the same for Armenia. Just Like Ukraine, Armenia negotiated for the Association Agreement for many years and was ready to sign it in December of 2013 but all of a sudden one visit to Moscow changed Serzh Sargsyan’s and Viktor Yanukovish’s mind. Though this didn’t trigger a revolution in Armenia, it triggered a revolution in Ukraine. The “protesters in Kiev voiced anger over a "sell-out" to Moscow” (Walker, 2013). The revolution that started with demands to sign the Association Agreement, towards the end it “was more about ending the corrupt rule of the Kremlin-backed president and establishing the rule of law to finally replace the nepotistic-criminal system that had pervaded Ukraine since independence was gained in 1991” (Raczkiewycz, 2018). In their goal to put their country into the right path, the protesters were very perseverant. One of the protesters, 20-years-old Ruslan said “We are simply standing for our rights and if the police force us out, we will come and stand here again” (Stern, 2013).

 One of the biggest difference between the revolutions between Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia is that in Ukraine there was no leader of revolution or even if there was, his/her role was not noticed neither by local or international media. Although, the opposition tried to get involved in the movement. That’s the reason why in case of Armenia and Georgia, it was clear that after snap elections the leaders of the revolution will become the leaders of their states. In addition to that, Russia’s reaction to Ukrainian revolution was the most devastating one and the words of the protesters come to prove that. For example, in interview with the Guardian, a protester Anastasiia said “Just when you think it can’t get any worse, Russia decides to go into war with you. This is surprising, but not unexpected” (Fishwick, 2014). She explains the worsening of the situation by Russian not only political but much extended military force with Putin’s interest in Crimea as a tourist destination that competes well with Russian’s resort city Sochi. Anastasiia believes that “this makes sense, since [Russian president Vladimir] Putin has invested billions into Sochi, that he can’t allow having any other resort in the region profit from tourism” (Fishwick, 2014). Another protester, Anya, said that “I want that not only Russian troops leave the country, but also Russia not interfering and pressuring Ukraine’s politics and choices, [and] democratic elections for the president and the parliament in May/June [2014]” (Fishwick, 2014). The revolution that started with demands to join European Union instead of strengthening ties with Russia. Then, it continued with demands of resignation of the president ended up in a devastating war with Russia. If at the beginning of the revolution, there was a difference in opinion of Ukrainians of Easter and Western part of Ukraine, then as soon as Russia started military interventions, Ukrainians united. “If until recently the southeastern regions were not fully satisfied with the new government, they are now unified against the new aggressor, Russia. Mass protests against Russian occupation took place in many Ukrainian cities over the weekend” said Anastasiia (Fishwick, 2014). Anastasiia continued by saying that “…when Ukraine is at its weakest moment, is a disgraceful and low act that I would never expect from a Russian government that calls Ukrainians its “brothers” (Fishwick, 2014). Though, the discourse about “brother states” and “brother nations” tied with united history, the Soviet one, continues to exist in Moscow's communication with its post-Soviet allies, Ukraine’s case was different because of its strategic importance. “Russia has courted other potential EU-member states — Armenia, for example — but Ukraine would be a huge get for the ECU. The country has 45 million people, huge land mass, an important geopolitical position, and — perhaps most importantly for Putin — an important historical link to Russia” (Taylor, 2013).

#  In order to calm Ukrainians, Putin was doing his best to show that Russia is the best choice for Ukraine. Gas deal was used to both pressure on Ukraine and make sure that Ukrainians understand that gas price might be cut down for Ukraine if they agree to get rid of their European dream. “Putin said the price of gas supplies to Ukraine would be cut by about one-third to $268.5 per 1,000 cubic meters, from about $400” (RFE/RL, 2013). Of course this was a big cut and to guarantee that he can increase the gas price anytime things get to normal, Putin continued by claiming that it was a ’temporary solution’, bearing in mind that long term contracts should and will be agreed upon regarding both gas supplies to Ukraine and ensuring an uninterrupted transit [of gas] to Russian customers in Europe” (RFE/RL, 2013). Besides, to make Russia more appealing for Ukrainians on the streets, Putin announced “that Russia would convert $15 billion worth of its National Welfare Fund, an emergency fund, into Ukrainian securities” (RFE/RL, 2013). In addition to that “Russia also agreed to remove trade barriers it put up at the beginning of the year” so that there is more pressure on Yanukovich (RFE/RL, 2013). During the meeting with Putin, he [Yanukovych] told Putin he hoped the "traditional" issue of gas prices could be solved” (Walker, 2013).

#  Besides gas, Putin uses economic ties to put pressure on its “allies.” “Ukraine relies on imports of Russian gas - and heavy energy-intensive industries in eastern Ukraine are especially anxious to keep the price of gas down. Some 75% of Ukraine's engineering exports go to Russia” (Stern, 2013). “Moscow has already put economic pressure on Ukraine, with customs delays and a ban on Ukrainian chocolates” (Stern, 2013). Thus, spoiled relationship with Russia is not a good idea for Ukraine but economic relationship limited to only Russia is not beneficial for Ukraine or any other post-Soviet country that Russia forcefully keeps on its side. On the another hand, any post-Soviet states’ involvement in any organization that is not Russia-led or multi vector foreign policy is not acceptable or is even threatening for Russia. This way Russia extends its control over the post-Soviet territory, questions these states’ sovereignty, and overall stops its post-Soviet territory “allies” from development and there is no reasonable justification for that. In meeting with the post-Soviet state’s leaders Putin occasionally remembers and becomes nostalgic about their united historical past. The meeting with Yanukovich was no different. Putin claimed that "Russia and Ukraine are... united both by many centuries of our friendship and by having lived a long time together in the same country" (Stern, 2013). After the meeting, “He [Yanukovych] admitted his decision had been influenced by heavy pressure from Russia” (Stern, 2013). Putin”s wish for Ukraine to join the Russia-led Customs Union was so evident that in front of journalists he even claimed that that in the meeting Ukraine’s Customs Union membership wasn’t discussed. This statement didn’t change the opinion of protesters about Russia-led institutions. “The Russian-led union now also includes Belarus and Kazakhstan, but pro-EU protesters regard the grouping as a modern embodiment of the Soviet Union” (Stern, 2013).

 **“**Control at any cost” could have been Russia’s slogan considering its policies over its post-Soviet allies. To ensure that Yanukovich makes the right choice when making decision between Russia and EU, Putin sent in agents that served as Yanukovich’s advisers. For example, “Andriy Kluyev, secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, and Viktor Medvedchuk, who has no formal role in government, are called Putin’s emissaries by opposition leaders and Yanukovich allies alike” (Piper, 2013). They are the two advisers that have “stronger ties to Moscow than others” and they are the ones that over time have grown influential. Besides, “both have business interests in Russia” (Piper, 2013). “Kluyev arranged the purchase by Russians of Prominvestbank, a private bank in Ukraine, and Putin is godfather to one of Medvedchuk’s children, sources close to both men say. Both helped on Yanukovich’s 2004 and 2010 election campaigns” (Piper, 2013). “Kluyev is the direct agent of Putin’s influence in Ukraine. He is a big friend of Medvedchuk, who has family ties with Putin” (Piper, 2013). It appears that Ukraine became the battleground for Russia’s fight against the West in best traditions of Cold War and the Soviet Union’s foreign policy. “The EU's losing battle for Ukraine is likely to encourage the Kremlin in its view that Europe is weak and divided and lacks foreign policy muscle. In September Armenia succumbed to Russian pressure and turned its back on years of negotiations with the EU in a move that stunned Brussels” (Traynor, 2013). From four countries’ of EU Neighbor’s East policy (Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine) Ukraine is the main prize because of its size, its geography and its history” (Traynor, 2013). Putin viewed the the created situation as a contest for Ukraine. For him it was “a zero sum game between Russia and the west” (Traynor, 2013).

 The response of Ukraine’s western allies wasn’t very supportive. For example, Congressman Mike Pompeo, after his short visit to Ukraine, said the following in an interview with Fox News “I believe Vladimir Putin is completely aimed at a single objective that is to recreate as much of the former Soviet Union as he possibly can. In some cases, he’ll do that by force as we saw in Ukraine. Another cases he will do it in a different way. He will rig elections, he will send in agents, he will exert control both financial, economic as well as military pressure to go assert control in much the way that he had done in Finland” (Fox News, 2014). There was a response to Russia’s pressure from European Council in the face of Hannes Swoboda, leader of the social democrats in the European Parliament. She said “We deplore the pressure and blackmailing tactics that Russia has used against Ukraine, and other countries. It is equally deplorable that Ukraine seems to have given in to this pressure” (Traynor, 2013). Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt and his Polish colleague Radek Sikorski who supported Ukraine’s integration in EU “called the showdown a victory for Putin. Bildt wrote "Ukraine government suddenly bows deeply to the Kremlin. Politics of brutal pressure evidently works” (Traynor, 2013). EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton expressed her concerns about the situation in Ukraine and two-sided violence and called for tensions to stop and dialogue between protesters and governments to be built. Ashton said “The only solution to this crisis is a political one. I and the European Union remain fully committed to seeking a way from this crisis (“Ashton,” 2014). In April of 2014 “Pro-Russian armed groups seize parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on Russian border. Government launches military operation in response.” (BBC, 2020). Later in September of the same year, “NATO confirms Russian troops and heavy military equipment entering eastern Ukraine” (BBC, 2020). No Western state intervened in military actions between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine was left alone in the battlefield.

 The main goal of the revolution was to change the foreign policy of Ukraine towards West. Not without the help of Russia, the failure to reach that goal became evident when in March of 2016 European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said that “Ukraine will definitely not be able to become a member of the EU in the next 20 to 25 years, and not of NATO either” (Oleinikova, 2018). After the revolution, Vikor Yanukovich ran away from Ukraine. “After Yanukovich fled, Putin revealed a special operation organized by Moscow had helped the Ukrainian leader escape” (Al Jazeera, 2019). One more intervention in internal affairs of Ukraine but this time maybe a smaller one compared to military campaign that he started and didn’t end to this day. Later, after years of trials, 68-year-old Ukraine’s former president was sentenced to 13 years in prison. “Yanukovich was charged with high treason for asking Russian President Vladimir Putin to send Russian troops to [Ukraine](https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/country/ukraine.html) after he fled the ex-Soviet country” (Al Jazeera, 2019). Kiev's Obolon district court judge Vladyslav Devyatko said that "Yanukovich committed a crime against the foundation of Ukraine's national security" (Al Jazeera, 2019). “Ukraine’s decision to pursue a “Western direction” caused a wave of social cleavages in cross-border, multi-ethnic southern and eastern Ukraine.” Russia used the moment and annexed Crimea. Later, “war around two Russian-backed breakaway provinces started. 10,225 citizens had been killed as of August 15, 2017. [1.4 million](http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/ukraine/figures-analysis/) people had been internally displaced by August 2015” (Oleinikova, 2018). Russia was Ukraine’s largest trading partner and spoiled relationship and active military actions between Russian and Ukrainian military men even today in Donetsk and Luhansk, can be traced in economic indicators. In 2105, “the National Bank of Ukraine stated a 11.6% decline. Even if the economy now manages to sustain 3-4% annual growth, it will take four to five years to return to 2013” (Oleinikova, 2018). Besides the actual war, media war between Russia and Ukraine started and it affected freedom speech in Ukraine which “has significantly deteriorated in the past four years, with unavoidable radicalization on both sides of politics.” Human Rights Watch “urged Ukraine to protect free media and drop its ban on Russian and Western journalists” (Oleinikova, 2018). This is how devastating were the results of 2014 Revolution when everything that people asked for was real sovereignty and independence from Moscow but what they got is the complete opposite. In return Russia punished Ukraine so badly that even after six years since the Revolution, Ukrainians are still suffering.

 Unlike Armenia, when the revolutionary leaders continuously claimed that the goal for the revolution is to solve internal not external issued thus making sure that in Moscow heir ruling elite doesn’t get irritated by these political processes, in Ukraine protesters demanded their president to join EU instead of Russia-led Customs Union. Russia was losing its authority as a superpower in the region in case of Ukraine but not in case of Armenia. Besides, gas pipes that deliver Russian gas through the territory Ukraine to Europe played an important role in making Russia more interested in making sure that Kiev never again chooses the wrong partner. This factor didn’t exist in Armenian case because the energy sector in Armenia fully belongs to Russian companies.

**Georgia**

Just like in any other post-Soviet state, the collapse of the Soviet Union was devastating for Georgia. Though the Soviet system was not the best one, the soviet governing inertia continued in Georgia, the same way it did in Armenia and Ukraine. Besides, socio-economic issues in Armenia, Karabakh War started that made the situation even worse. In the case of Georgia, it was a civil war that started in early 1990s and secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These were also the two reasons why Georgia was forced “to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in exchange for stabilizing the country and freezing conflicts over twenty percent of the country’s territory” (Matsaberidze, 2015).

 The first democratically elected president of Georgia Zviad Gamasakhurdiya was unable to effectively govern Georgia that’s why he was removed in 1992. “A military coup in January 1992 toppled President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.” Gamasakhurdiya was replaced “with former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevarnadze in an acting capacity until he was formally elected in 1995” (Crosby, 2018). Shevardnadze’s administration continued the Soviet inertia and best traditions of the Soviet style corrupt and ineffective governing. Shevardnadze “was almost immediately wracked by defeat to Russian-backed separatists in Abkhazia, in western Georgia, and ethnic conflict in South Ossetia, in the country's north. Adding to the instability, the economy stagnated, infrastructure decayed, and allegations circulated of widespread state corruption” (Crosby, 2018). Shevarnadze was not an ordinary Soviet official. From 1965-72, he was in charge of the Georgia police. This is when he gained prominence and became first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Part of Georgia in 1972 (“Shevardnadze,” 2020). Later in 1976, “Shevardnadze became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in 1976 was a candidate member of the Politburo in 1978.” In 1985 he was promoted to full membership in the ruling Politburo and became minister of foreign affairs. (“Shevardnadze,” 2020). This tendency of the Soviet officials taking leadership in their newly independent states happened in Ukraine as well with Leonid Kravchuk who was a member of Communist Party since 1958 and became a member of Ukrainian Communist Party Bureau in 1989 and in July 1990 de facto became the head of the state when he was appointed as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Ukrainian SSR. The only exception was Armenia, when the president became Levon Ter-Petrosyan who never had a political position in the Soviet Armenia or the Soviet Union overall. Soviet Union collapsed, but rulers with the soviet mentality in these states remained and their way of governing was also proven ineffective in just a few years.

 Soviet foreign minister Shevarnadze remained in his position as President of Georgia until 2003. November parliamentary elections were rigged and that was the bottom line that served as a big trigger pushing people to go on streets and protest. ‘Enough’ was the protesters slogan. A “wave of protesters led by the country’s youth” went to central Tbilisi on November 3, 2003. After the election results were announced, Shevarnadze went to parliament where after his speech, the parliament would officially start operating. This became the turning point. “There was uncertainty as to whether this session would open and make it a legitimate parliament after the elections” (Crosby, 2018). Nino Zoriashive who spent three weeks protesting remembers that she was afraid of the consequences of storming the parliament building. She said “On the one hand, I wanted to change Shevarnadze regime but on the other hand I was afraid of violence and civil war” (Mcguinness, 2011). These concerns are not baseless because if Shevarnadze decided to remain in power and oppress people then a bloodshed would start that would leave Georgians desperate. However, just like in 2018 revolution in Armenia Serzh Sargsyan resigned so that no bloodshed happens, Shevarnadze resigned for the same reason. In fact, from 1992-1993 there was a civil war in Georgia between the official Tbilisi and South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions that fought for independence. Twenty thousand people died as result of these clashes and around two hundred fifty thousand people had to flee their homes (Mcguinness, 2011). Nino remembers that in Tbilisi “at night it was dangerous to walk around the city” (Mcguinness, 2011). This tense was the situation before the revolution but if it failed then it would become even worse. Nino continued “we were afraid that the country will go back to violence and bloodshed” (Mcguinness, 2011). With these thoughts in the crowd, “[Mikheil] Saakashvili and his supporters entered the building and didn’t allow Shevardnadze to finish his speech and open parliament” (Crosby, 2018). This came to mark to victory of the Rose Revolution. “However fragile this new trend is, the inertia of the 1990s has been broken” (Lynch, 2006).

 It took twenty days of peaceful protests for the Shevarnadze administration to resign (Crosby, 2018). Media played a big role in the success of the revolution but also it was with the help of one journalist, Natia Zambakhidze, from private Rustavi TV that Georgia’s revolution of 2003 was named the “Rose Revolution” (Crosby, 2018). The weapon of Armenian peaceful revolution was “hand-up” gesture with clapping to show the police that protests are peaceful and people don’t bear arms. In Georgia, that weapon were flowers “which they passed out to soldiers confronting the crowds” (Crosby, 2018). In contrast to these two peaceful revolution, Ukraine’s one was a bloodshed with an escalated war with Russia. Zambakhidze, director of RFE/RL's Georgian Service claims that the Rose Revolution aimed to end “corruption, kleptocracy, autocracy, power outages, economic hardship”. Zambakhidze continued that "The younger generation wanted to steer where the country was going. There had been no hope, no sense of direction, everything was kind of gloomy. But there was that feeling, that people have power, they can change something, and that those who are in power must listen” (Crosby, 2018). The same happened in Armenia, when people felt desperate and depressed after 2016 April War and Sasna Tsrer’s actions that followed up. With none of these revolutions Russia was happy. After the Georgian Revolution “Russian elites saw Saakashvili as part of an American project to expand NATO and encircle Russia, a strategy to fragment remaining Russian influence in the former Soviet space. Putin wanted Russia’s sphere of influence back as much as Saakashvili wanted those separatist territories [Abkhazia, south Ossetia, Adjara]” (Kofman, 2018). These worries were not baseless but it doesn’t mean that Russia has the right to intervene in internal and external policies of Georgia or any other post-Soviet state that it continues to do till today. In 2004, following the example of Ukraine “Georgia developed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with the aim of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by 2008” (Lynch, 2006). Fraud elections were a sign of the lack of democracy and now that Georgians were able to stop that democratization process initiated by Saakashvili started. “During this period democracy was largely understood by the leadership as something that was required for Georgia to become Western so it could integrate into NATO and the EU” (Mitchell, 2015). That’s why after the victory of the revolution, large scale reforms started to be implemented in Georgia.

 “Russian government has had little interest in the ‘success’ of the revolution. “(Lynch, 2006). Every country has problems but the weak points of the post-Soviet states are the ones that are well known to Russia therefore these are the ones that it can have influence on. This is what happened with Georgia, Armenia and Ukraine. In case of Georgia, the internal big problem was the issue with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajara. When Saakashvili became the president in 2004 “he [Saakashvili] immediately prioritized the return of all breakaway regions, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Adjara” (Kofman, 2018). To realize his ambitions, the first thing that Saakashvili needed to do was to increase the imports of weaponry and he did it. “Georgian military expenditures grew dramatically from 2004 to 2008. The share of GDP spent on defense went from 1.1 percent in 2003 to 9.2 percent in 2007” (Kofman, 2018). The first success of Saakashvili in terms of getting back these separatist territories was Adjara. He returned Adjara in 2004. Thus, starting from 2004, it was of no surprise that Saakashvili was planning to attack and use its military force to return Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well. “Tbilisi’s plan was to recapture South Ossetia with its capital Tskhinvali, reintegrating what had by then become a Russian dependency and outpost of Russian influence back into Georgia proper” (Kofman, 2018). Though, when the military operation of recapturing these territories started “Georgia did not expect to defend against a major Russian offensive” (Kofman, 2018). This is how 2008 August war between Russia and Georgia started. Though there is still a very tense discourse about who actually started the war. Saakashvili in interview with Current Times said that it was Russia who started the invasion. He said “The objective of the Russian invasion was not only to attack Georgia as a country, but [to attack] Georgian statehood, because Georgian statehood had created problems [for Russia] in the form of successful reforms" (RFE/RL, 2018). On the other hand, “Russia contends that Georgia started the war by launching an offensive on the main city in South Ossetia, Tskhinvali” (RFE/RL, 2018). Saakashvili disagreed with what Russian part claims and in response to that gave a very harsh response, in particular, he said that "only complete idiots and complete imbeciles can say that Georgia started it” (RFE/RL, 2018). It became obvious that relationship was spoiled.

 The bases for Russia’s integration in the conflict between these territories and official Tbilisi was the fact that the people in these territories held Russian passports. This was a process that started earlier and was the Russian plan for the attack. That is a “Russian compatriot policy known as passportization” (Kofman, 2018). For the same reason Putin annexed Crimea by claiming that many Russian-speaking Slovak people and people who hold Russian citizens live there and that’s why Russia has full right to protect its compatriots. Armenian case is a little bit different because frozen conflict in Karabakh remains unresolved so that whenever there are behavioral changes in official Yerevan, Azerbaijan can start a war, so that Armenians are forced to go and seek for peace in Moscow. However, the policy of passportization or ‘protecting compatriots’ works for any post-Soviet state because there is no post-Soviet state where there are no people holding Russian citizenship or people who are ethnically Russian or Slovak. Besides, there is a lot of Russian investment “to rebuild many of Abkhazia’s resort complexes” (Lynch 2006). For Russian tourists Abkhazia is a destination to spend summer holidays. Annually, Russian tourists spent fifty million dollars in Abkhazia. “On occasions when Georgia has sought to enforce the trade sanctions regime against Abkhazia, the Russian government has declared its intention to defend the safety of Russian tourists sojourning in the breakaway region” (Lynch, 2006). Russia “feels entitled to intervene in case of perceived danger to Russian citizens abroad and to use this tool to reinforce its political and strategic goals” (De Maio, 2016).

 Prior to the war and spoiled relationship between Russia and Georgia, in 1999 “at Istanbul OSCE summit, Russia agreed to withdraw from its four bases deployed in Georgia” (Lynch, 2006). This is something that didn’t happen with Armenia and it can be observed with the horrifying events that happened in #102 Russian military base in Gyumri, second largest city in Armenia that got people living their become irritated by the Russian military presence. Though, after agreeing to withdraw Putin made sure that the withdrawal process happens with good conditions for Russia “to avoid any perception of Russia being ‘humiliated’ by Georgian pressure” (Lynch, 2006). Kremlin continued to be suspicious about the Rose Revolution and believed that Saakashvili is an American project. That’s why before withdrawing Russia had in mind that their military bases maybe replaced by other country’s military base, supposedly by American ones. In May 2005, President Vladimir Putin declared “I would not like foreign troops or the contingents of other countries to appear in Georgia after our pull-out” (Lynch, 2006). This is one one evidence of Russia’s intervention is Georgia’s internal affairs.

 In 2008 August war Russian intervention wasn’t only aimed at restoring the status quo in South Ossetia, Kremlin also wanted a regime change because they thought of Saakashvili as an American project. During the war Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told “Misha Saakashvili has to go” (Kofman, 2018). “Credited with major reforms, he [Saakashvili] was accused of abusing his power in his later years as president and is now wanted in Georgia after being convicted of abuse of office in connection with a 2006 murder case. He has been sentenced in absentia to three years in prison. Saakashvili shifted his political career to Ukraine after his presidency ended” (RFE/RL, 2018). It didn’t take too long after Lavrov’s announcements that regime change in Georgia happened. Besides its imperialistic ideas for Russia Georgia is also of strategic importance. “Georgia matters because of its importance as a transit route for energy goods from the Caspian Sea region” (Lynch, 2006). Georgia used it to gain support from West. Like in the case of Ukraine Georgia plays an important role for Russia in terms of it geographical location. It serves as a “transit zone for energy supplies to Europe” (Lynch, 2006). “Georgia, located strategically in the heart of Eurasia and crisscrossed with pipelines carrying Caspian oil and gas to Europe, pulled itself out from under the umbrella of the Soviet Union in 1991” and wanted to pull itself out of the umbrella of Moscow dominance including through the revolution and promises of democratization but failed in reaching its goals (Crosby, 2018). If energy, then Russian Gazprom. “Russian energy suppliers provide for most of Georgia’s energy needs. In 2005, the Russian company Gazprom declared its intention to increase the price of natural gas to Georgia to world market prices, well above the heavily subsidized price from which Georgia had long benefited” (Lynch, 2006). Again, Russia uses Gazprom as a geopolitical tool to dictate the rules. “…Moscow wants to have a say in setting the rules and geopolitical veto rights in what it considers as its sphere of influence: the post-Soviet space” (De Maio, 2016).

**Conclusion**

 After the collapse of the Soviet Union, fifteen newly created republics were left alone in solving their internal and external issues but it didn’t take much time for the big brother, Russia, to land a helping hand to its compatriots. This was a natural and unavoidable process because thought physically the Union dissolved the mentality and most importantly the inertia remained. From the created situation the previous and yet remaining decision-making center, Moscow, now capital of the newly independent Russian Federation, was the one who benefited most from the situation. Later several post-Soviet states tried to get rid of the big brother’s full control through revolutions but they all failed to achieve their goals. The goal for all of these revolutions was to end corruption, boost the economy, increase the life standards, guarantee all kinds of rights for their citizens (human rights, property and business rights) and implement reforms that would strengthen the democratic institutions. This was in the agenda of all revolutionary leaders in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. With the help of all of these revolutions “the ‘former Soviet Union’ was collapsing as a concept and reality” and with that the Moscow dominance as well (Lynch, 2006).

 Previously world only knew one, big and strong country that was the Soviet Union, representative and defender of socialism. After its collapse fifteen previously mostly unknown to the world countries became independent. Neither the Cold War nor the Iron Curtain, weren’t in the far past. The collapse of the Soviet Union also meant losing the war on ideology (capitalism of the West versus socialism of the Soviet Union) that lasted for too long. Turned out that Western-model capitalistic states with free market economy and democratic institutions are more successful. Therefore, it is of no surprise that all the post-Soviet newly independent states declared to be democracies following the Western model with an undeclared aim to get rid of failed institutions of Soviet era. Alongside with these processes Russia was forming its way of moving forward and later imposing that on post-Soviet states that it perceived and continues to perceive as its zone of influence. Most of the time Russia uses gas as a geopolitical tool to put pressure on them but sometimes also military force. “Using the energy as a tool of foreign policy, Russia has been trying to regain its imperial status in the former Soviet territories and Europe” (Meena, 2018). Though, Russia didn’t limit itself with only the gas tool but added the military tool as well. For example, “The two cases of military drive of the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy in Georgia (2008) and in Ukraine (2014) can be seen as revenge for the humiliation of Russia [by the West] in early 2000s (NATO bombing campaign on Serbia and EU enlargement and neighborhood policy) (Matsaberidze, 2015). It was seen as a catastrophic humiliation in Russian foreign policy circles” and loss of respect on the world stage (Matsaberidze, 2015). “… Putin’s political doctrine towards the “near abroad” can be categorized as a new version of Leonid Brezhnev’s doctrine of “limited sovereignty,” entitling the USSR to intervene in the case of threats of regime change in its satellite states” (De Maio, 2016).

 The revolutions in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine put them in the map. This is especially true about Armenia and Georgia because these are smaller and more isolated states whereas Ukraine is bigger in territory and resources and in terms of border is closer to Europe. “Instead of being perceived as a backwards post-Soviet banana republic, Georgia had followed the European way to change” (Crosby, 2018). Though, revolutions were never welcomed by Kremlin. In Ukraine Russia removed the government that came as result of 2004 Orange Revolution by pressuring them to sign a deal with Gazprom that came out to be full of dark sides and very short term. Then in 2014, in response to Ukrainians demands to join EU instead of Russia’s Customs Union, Russia annexed Crimea and escalated war in Donetsk and Luhansk regions that continues till today. In case of Armenia, right after the snap elections of December 2018 followed by the Velvet Resolution, Russia announce about its intentions to increase the gas price thus making sure that Armenia makes the right decision in choosing partners. In Georgia, Kremlin didn’t welcome the Rose Revolution. They were successful in removing revolution leader Saakashvili at the end of his first terms after the results of Russo-Georgian August War of 2008. After 2004 revolution both in Ukraine and Georgia, Russia felt that the post-Soviet area is in flux. That is why “in July 2004, Putin stated: ‘We are facing an alternative – either we will achieve a qualitative strengthening of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and create on its basis an effectively functioning and influential regional organization, or else we will see inevitably the erosion of this geopolitical space” (Lynch, 2006). This was a direct warning to all the post-Soviet states that are not in favor of ‘qualitative strengthening of CIS,’ that was created immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union to ‘reunite’ these states.

 Revolutions in all three states, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, were done to solve first and foremost internal issues with the exception of Ukraine with its “join EU instead of Russia-led Customs Union” external agenda. However, all of these states’ internal issues have external reasons and that external reason is the Moscow dominance. “The Russian imperial tradition played a significant role in determining Russian relations with the newly-independent states soon after the USSR’s collapse” (De Maio, 2016). The brightest example is gas price negotiations, military actions in Georgia and Ukraine or overinvolvment of Russia in resolving the Karabakh issue when they create a disbalance in favor of Azerbaijan by selling more arms to them.

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