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**GEOPOLITICAL AND REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARMENIA-IRAN
RELATIONS IN 1998-2008**

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Abstract

Relations with the post-soviet countries, especially with the Caucasus republics became a special aspect of Iran's foreign policy, after the collapse of the USSR. Robert Kocharian was elected president and officially began his duties on April 9, 1998. In the period of Robert Kocharian, Armenia's relations with Iran had to be developed due to economic and geopolitical conditions. This article explores the dynamics of Iran-Armenia relations in the context of regional security. The methodological basis of the research is the principles of the theory of realism. A number of theoretical and applied methods have been used to study the development of bilateral relations. Research has shown that in relations with Iran, the Armenian side was more interested in developing economic relation in 1998-2008 years. Iran tried to use Armenia's opportunities to soften the economic consequences of the sanctions imposed by the US and some European states. Iran's attempts to bring natural gas to Europe via Armenia did not take place due to Russia's pressure on Armenia.

Keywords

Foreign policy – Relations – Iran – Armenia – Geopolitics

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Introduction

The processes around the Islamic Republic of Iran have increased the attention to the foreign policy of this country, its relations with neighboring countries and its strategic goals. It is known that the Islamic Republic of Iran expected its main threats to its security from its southern and western neighbors. In this sense, the collapse of the USSR has created a new sphere of diplomatic activity for the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, Iran's loss of influence in this region could pose new security threats to him. The main purpose of the article is to study the relations between Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1998-2008 and to identify key aspects of bilateral relations. Official documents signed between the two countries, periodicals and a number of research papers were used for this purpose.

As is known, on August 23, 1990, the Supreme Council of Armenia SSR adopted the Declaration of Independence as the first step that initiated the process of Armenia's independence¹. With the decision, the name of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was changed as "Republic of Armenia".

In Armenia was held a referendum on the separation and independence of Armenia from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) On 21 September 1991. More than 94% of the Armenian citizens who participated in the referendum voted for the independence of the country. Azerbaijani origin citizens, who were forcibly expelled from Armenia in 1988-1989, could not participate in the referendum. Based on the results of the referendum, on September 23, 1991, the High Commission of the Republic of Armenia declared Armenia independent state².

On October 16, 1991, Levon Hakobi Ter-Petrosyan was elected the first president and ruled the country until 1998. During his presidency, the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia occupied Republic of Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region and its surrounding provinces. The war, occupation and conflict in the region was dangerous not only for Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also for the other neighboring states. The conflict also pose a danger for the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), which is the southern neighbor of both Azerbaijan and Armenia. The main purpose of this article is to analyze the stages of political relations between one of the regional powers of the Asian continent the Islamic Republic of Iran and its sole Christian neighbor Armenia and to forecast future bilateral relations. This article explores the dynamics of Iran-Armenia relations in the context of regional security. The methodological basis of the research is the principles of the theory of realism. A number of theoretical and applied methods have been used to study the development of bilateral relations.

Republic of Armenia in the Foreign Policy of Iran. Common Interests of Armenia and Iran

Relations with post-soviet countries, especially Caucasian republics became a special direction of Iranian foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR. Iran was one of the major regional powers that bordered Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Armenia, the new states of the Caucasus. The new independent states of the Caucasus were chance to

¹ Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia, "Armenian Declaration of Independence" (The Government of the Republic of Armenia, August 23, 1990), <https://www.gov.am/en/independence/>.

² A. Movsisyan, *The history of Armenia* (Yeravan: Yeravan Devlet Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017), 114.

open up to the world for Iran, which had limited foreign policy after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran recognized the independence of Republic of Armenia on 25 December 1991 and established diplomatic relations with this state on 9 February 1992³.

Iran developed its relations with Armenia on a rising line during the period of Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan despite the military attacks of Armenia against Azerbaijan, the genocide against the Muslim Azerbaijani Turks living in the Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding provinces of Azerbaijan, the destruction of Muslim religious monuments in the same region and the humiliation of Azerbaijanis by Armenians, the fact that the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan was blocked by Armenia.

The occupation of Armenia could not be stopped, even though the steps taken by Iran to stop and solve the conflict and the parties agreed on some issues in the meetings held between the high officials of Azerbaijan and Armenia,

But Islamic Republic of Iran took steps to indirectly serve the economic and military strengthening of Armenia in 1992, after coming to power in Republic of Azerbaijan pro-Turkey and the pro-Western political forces. There also were many other reasons for Iran to strengthen relations with Armenia and in many cases to display non-objective position against Azerbaijan, during the presidency period of Levon Ter-Petrosyan. First of all, Azerbaijan's tendency to Turkey was the main factor that brought Iran and Armenia closer in the first years of independence. One of the main regional rivals of Iran was Turkey in the years.

On the other hand, Iran's opposition to Azerbaijan was based on the undesirable European-style, secular state system. Because Iran wanted to spread the concepts of "Islamic state" and "*Vilayat-e fagih*" (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) as a progressive model.

Third, one of the main issues that disturbed the political forces influenced by the ideology based on Persian chauvinism was the Turkish population of Azerbaijan and the vast majority of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran.

Fourthly, for Iran, which is guided by a historical approach rather than a legal approach in many international diplomacy issues, the same practice of Republic of Azerbaijan could cause serious problems. As it is known from history, with the Gulistan (was signed in 1813 between Tsarist Russia and Iran (Persia) ruled by the Kacars) and Turkmenchay agreements (was signed in 1828 between Tsarist Russia and Iran (Persia) ruled by the Kacars) Azerbaijan was divided two parts. Despite all the serious and even state-level efforts of the Iranian administration after the division, the Azerbaijani people of Southern Azerbaijan (today's Iranian Azerbaijan provinces) were not assimilated. Even during the Pahlavi rule the Azerbaijani Turks showed serious resistance, despite all the pressures. North Azerbaijan, which escaped the Russian and Soviet occupation and established an independent state, could be a precedent for South Azerbaijan. This could cause Iran to disintegrate and lose important economic and strategic regions.

³ N. Hovhannisyan, The foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia in the transcaucasian-middle eastern geopolitical region (Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 1998), 43.

At that time, the government of Republic of Azerbaijan did not deny these assumptions and in some cases expressed their views about the possibility of such transactions. Such challenges gave good arguments pan-Persia and pro-Armenian forces in Islamic Republic of Iran against Republic of Azerbaijan.

Change of Power in Armenia

The first president of Republic of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan took full account of the reality of the Karabakh conflict and took steps to solve it, which was one of the main reasons why he left the presidency. The Western countries' agreement with Azerbaijan on many issues, including oil reserves, the policy implemented by the Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev has reduced the support of Western countries to Armenia. For example, there have been some changes in France's approach to these issues, one of the countries where the Armenian lobby has the strongest position in the world.

In October 1997, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan met with French President Jacques Chirac. At that time, Jacques Chirac's position on the resolution of the conflict was as follows:

“Conflict can be resolved under peaceful conditions based on the principles adopted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe at the Lisbon Summit. Based on these principles, we will do our best to resolve the dispute. France's attitude on this issue is fixed.”⁴

Levon Ter-Petrosyan spoke about necessity ensure the security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as to establish direct negotiations between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in his speech at the Diplomatic Academy in Paris on October 15, 1997. The positive attitude of the Armenian president was related the changes in Baku and Khankendi (Stepanakert). Meanwhile, were held discussions on the construction the pipeline for the transportation of oil extracted in Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea to Turkey via Armenia. Levon Ter-Petrosyan believed that for the economic development of Armenia, the separatist Armenian administration of Nagorno-Karabakh should withdraw from the demands for independence and raised this issue in his speeches⁵.

But Levon Ter-Petrosyan's attitude and his speech in Paris led a local political crisis in Armenia. In fact, the position of Russia affected the emergence of the political crisis. Under the influence of Russia, Prime Minister Robert Kocharian and Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan opposed President Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Both of these politicians gained popularity in the Armenian public opinion in connection with the Karabakh conflict and directly participated in the bloody events in Karabakh.

For example, Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, born in the Ararat province of Armenia, became the commander of the Armenian volunteer groups fighting in the Armenian-Azerbaijani border near the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 1989 and 1990. After the declaration of Armenia's independence he was appointed Minister of Defense by Levon Ter-Petrosyan in late 1991 and became one of the foremost commanders of the Armenian forces during the Nagorno-Karabakh War.

⁴ H. Aliyev, Independence of Azerbaijan is eternal. 12nd book (Baku: Azər nəşr, 1997), 317.

⁵ M. Gasimli, Foreign policy of Azerbaijan Republic, vol. I (Baku: Mütərcim, 2015).

Vazgen Sargsyan strongly supported Ter-Petrosyan for holding power with the military forces after the cease-fire with Azerbaijan. However, he later opposed Petrosyan's concession in negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh agreement.

One of the members of the Miatsum campaign launched by Armenian nationalists in Karabakh since 1988, and then the leader of this movement, Robert Kocharian, led the armed groups that carried out massacres against the Azerbaijani population in Karabakh. Kocaryan was a member of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Supreme Soviet" (parliament - *autor*) from 1991 to 1992. Since 1992, as "prime minister" of the so-called "republic" and "chairman" of the defense committee, he has directly led to bloody crimes against the civilian population in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. On November 24, 1994, the "Supreme Soviet" of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" declared Robert Kocharian the president. In 1996, false elections were held in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and the presidential issue of Robert Kocharian was "legalized". Robert Kocharian, who served as the "president" of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" between 1994 and 1996, was appointed Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia by Levon Ter-Petrosyan in March 1997⁶.

When Levon Ter-Petrosyan resigned as a result of the pressures, which showed a positive attitude towards the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, Robert Kocharian started to carry out the duties of the President of the Republic of Armenia temporarily starting from 3 February 1998. Soon after, elections were held in Armenia. 12 candidates participated in the first round of elections in 16 March 1998:

1. Karen Demirchian (Former First secretar of the Armenian Communist Party);
2. Vazgen Manukyan (National Democratic Union);
3. Sergey Badalyan (Armenian Communist Party);
4. Paruyr Hayrikyan (Union for National Self-Determination);
5. Artashes Geghamyan (National Unity Party);
6. Vigen Khachatryan (Armenian Liberal-Democratic Party);
7. Hrant Khachatryan (Union of Constitutional Rights);
8. Aram Gaspar Sargsyan (Democratic Party of Armenia);
9. Ashot Bleyan (New Road Party);
10. Robert Kocharian (independent);
11. David Shahnazaryan (independent);
12. Yuri Mkrtchyan (independent).

⁶ E. Kalbizada, Ye Bakhshieva, and A. Azimov, Armenia is in the Caucasus policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Baku: MTM Innovation MMC, 2019), 115.

Robert Kocharian won 38.5%, Karen Demirciyan 30.5% and Vazgen Manukyan 12.2% of the voters in the first round of the elections. The independent candidate Robert Kocharian won 58.9% of the voters in the second round, was elected president and officially took up his post on 9 April 1998.

Foreign Policy of Armenia During the Presidency of Robert Kocharian and Relations with Islamic Republic of Iran

From 9 April 1998 to 9 April 2008, during the period of Robert Kocharian, who ruled Armenia for 10 years, Armenia's economy and foreign policy, which was accepted as independent in the previous period, went under Russian control⁷. Thus, during the presidency of Robert Kocharian, many enterprises and economic institutions in Armenia was given to Russia to repay Armenia's debt to Russia, which further strengthened the country's commitment to Russia. In fact, loyalty to Russia in foreign policy also affected relations with Iran. Although Russia and Iran's interests in the South Caucasus overlapped on many issues. But Iran's desire to export natural gas to Europe via Armenia was disturbing Russia. For this reason, during the period Russia has blocked the realization of many projects between Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Armenia. However, Russia Federation also encouraged Iran to help Armenia solve its domestic economic problems.

Islamic Republic of Iran had to develop relations with Armenia due to economic and geopolitical conditions at that time. Iranian researchers point out the following factors that brought Iran closer to Armenia in 1998-2008:

- Armenia is an important point for close access to Europe;
- the neighborhood;
- the presence of the Armenian minority in Islamic Republic of Iran;
- cooperative exploitation of Aras River and projects;
- possibility of protecting Iranian interests under the influence of the powerful Armenian lobby in the US Congress;
- using the Armenian lobby As a tool as a tool in accordance with its policies and interests., which is effective in the parliaments of some European countries such as France and Belgium⁸.

Between 1998 and 2005, the trade volume between Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Armenia almost doubled. During the same period, Iran's trade circulation volume with Republic of Azerbaijan was decreasing considerably. For example, the trade volume between Iran and Azerbaijan decreased from 266.4 million dollars in 1995 to 64.5 million dollars in 2000⁹.

⁷ A. Aslanli, "Caucasus in global politics: 22 years ago and present," QAFSAM (Caucasian Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies), May 20, 2013, <http://www.qafsam.org/page/469/az>.

⁸ "A look at Iran-Armenia relations the sustainable role in the northern borders," AFTAB International, October 10, 2018, www.aftabir.com/articles/view/politics/iran/c1c1193764798_iran_p1.php.

⁹ Ja Valiyev and M. Mammadli, eds., Azerbaijan-Iran cooperation: key directions and opportunities (Baku: SAM, 2018), 44.

In addition, there were signed agreements on the implementation of important economic projects between IRI and RA in 1988-2008. 34 documents were signed between to countries during the 10-year administration of Robert Kocharian.

During this period, Armenia opposed the sanctions of the USA and some European countries against Iran. However, this was not due to Armenia's fair attitude or its policy of solidarity with its neighbors. The truth is that instead of Armenia, these decisions were made for Russia's own interests in the South Caucasus¹⁰.

From Armenia to Iran were held eight high-level visits (presidents and foreign ministers) during Robert Kocharyan's presidency. The number of high-level visits from Iran to Armenia was 8. During this period, the Armenian president visited Iran twice, and the Iranian presidents visited Armenia three times.

In September 1998, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian visited Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result of the negotiations signed agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the Field of Agriculture in 1998. In the period following the weakening of the former economic relations with the Soviet Republics, it was vital for Armenia to benefit from the agricultural experience of neighboring Iran and to receive aid from Iran for developing own economy.

In August 1999, Foreign Minister of Islamic Republic of Iran Kamal Kharazi visited Armenia. Following this visit, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan's next visit to Iran took place in December 1999 (*Bilateral Relations*, 2012).

In this period, with the intensification of Armenian-Iranian relations, Iran was trying to intensify its relations with Azerbaijan and benefit from some economic projects. During the same period, the Azerbaijani side expressed its dissatisfaction with the development of relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and Armenia, which occupied the territory of a Muslim country and massacred Muslims in Karabakh. President of Republic of Azerbaijan Haydar Aliyev expressed his dissatisfaction in the meeting with the Yahya Mammadzadeh, governor of East Azerbaijan province (Ostan) of Iran in 1999 and said: "We have a general dissatisfaction. We have been saying that Iran and Armenia have close economic cooperation for years. We say this, but our wish is not fulfilled by Iran. They say they're creating economic relations. As a matter of fact, former President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan has repeatedly said: Yerevan will suffocate if economic relations with Iran are cut for two days. This economic relationship is undoubtedly beneficial for Iran. Because he has to trade.

But when we look at it in terms of fraternity, too much cooperation with a country that is damaging our country - I speak frankly, now some know to accept it - but this is going to be difficult for us" ¹¹.

¹⁰ Qaidz Minassian, "Is Armenia avanpost of Russia in the Caucasus?," *Russie.NEI.Visions*, Vol: 27 (February 15, 2006): 13; S. Sadraddin, "Could the Tehran Authority talk about Islamic values?," *Baki-Təbriz*, Vol: 3 (2005): 54.

¹¹ "Heydar Aliyev's views on the Islamic Republic of Iran," in *Embassy of Iran in Baku* (Baku: Çəşioğlu, 2004), 16.

In February 2001, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan met with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in Tehran, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran¹². In the meeting were discussed regional co-operation, Iran - Armenia gas pipeline and Nagorno-Karabakh problem. The president of Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Khatami said that the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline “will open a new chapter in relations between the two countries and will be a factor for stability in the region”. The Iranian leader expressed his satisfaction with the ongoing direct dialogue between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. He declared that Iran is ready to mediate the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Mohammad Khatami also spoke about the need for regional co-operation and stressed that “all countries in the region, including Russia, should adopt an appropriate plan for ensure progress and security”. The Armenian Foreign Minister said that Iran has made significant contributions for regional stability. Vardan Oskanyan informed the Iranian leader about the latest developments in the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict and expressed hope that the parties could find a solution in 2001. On February 3-4, Vardan Oskanian also met with Iranian Foreign Minister, Parliament Speaker and Secretary of the Iranian National Security Council.

In December 2001, Robert Kocharian visited the Islamic Republic of Iran for the first time since he was elected President. The visit was accompanied by serious propaganda by the pro-Armenian forces in Iran. Under the influence of such forces, Iran's “Nevruz” newspaper made the headline of the Armenian president and described the news he prepared for the trip as follows: “Heydar Aliyev did not come - Kocharian is coming”¹³. During the visit, Robert Kocharian met with The Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Khamenei mentioned the historical ties and relations between the two countries and emphasized the importance of strengthening the relations between the countries of the region. He said that the conflicts in the Caucasus region can be resolved through the countries of the region, without external intervention and stressed that the transnational powers, including the US, are considering their own interests¹⁴.

The third Joint Session of Intergovernmental Commission of Republic of Armenia and Islamic Republic of Iran was held during the visit of the Armenian President. 11 documents were signed between the two countries. Joint Declaration of Presidents of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted. An agreement was signed on Mehri - Gacaran automobile tunnel¹⁵.

¹² T. Akopyan, “Kocharian’s visit to Iran continues,” *Caucasian Knot*, December 27, 2001, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/14098/>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “President Kocharian’s meeting with the leader of the revolution,” *Khamenei.ir*, 2019, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=11690>.

¹⁵ E. Kalbizada, Ye Bakhshieva, and A. Azimov, *Armenia is in the Caucasus policy of ...* 118.

During the visit, Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Protection of Monuments was signed. Sign this agreement for both side was important and it provided a legal basis for foreign claims regarding the cultural heritage of Azerbaijan nation. Thus, the Armenian side found additional evidence to present Albanian-Christian monuments and historical structures within the borders of Iran, but close to the Azerbaijani border as examples of Armenian cultural heritage. The cultural heritage of the historical West Azerbaijan (in present-day Armenia), including the Turkish-Islamic monuments in Yerevan, has been destroyed by Armenian vandalism, especially since the 80s of the 20th century. According to this agreement, Iran restored the Turkish mosque (Goy Masjid) based on the traditions of Isfahan architectural style in the following period and the monument was described as the symbol of Iranian architectural heritage in various sources¹⁶. The state's attention to the preservation of "Armenian monuments" in Iran has increased.

Armenian writer Rouben Galichian proudly stressed such facts in his book published in London in 2010: "In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the historic Christian Armenian monuments are protected by the state. The "Department for the Protection of Historic Monuments" is repairing and maintaining most of the Armenian monuments, mainly with government funding. Such a religious complex is the twelfth century monastery of St. Thaddeus in the Northwest Iranian Province of West Azerbaijan. The complex has now been included in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage sites, thanks to the interest and concern of the Iranian authorities in preserving this cultural monument. Another example is the medieval Armenian monastery of St. Stepanos Protomartyr, located near the Arax River on the border of Nakhijevan, which, after extensive refurbishment has now become a pilgrimage site for Muslims" ¹⁷.

One of the interesting agreements signed at the time was agreement on cooperation in the area of ecology. The fact is that Armenia is adversely affecting the ecological status of Iranian legal land by distributing the toxic waste of the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant (MNPP) to the Aras River. The danger is not limited to this. Leakage from Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant neighboring Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan's border regions will lay exposed to radiation as well as Armenia. The nuclear power plant in Metsamor, built in 1976, is 32 km from Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. While Soviet scholars themselves objected to the construction of the Metsamor at Soviet period. Because it was located in the tectonic region of Mount Agri (Ararat). MNPP is the most vulnerable reactors in the world.

One of the agreements signed during Kocharian's visit to Tehran in 2001 was Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees and Higher Education. The Customs Cooperation Agreement between Armenia and Iran served to extend Armenia's "economic breath" in particular. Another agreement was the agreement on cooperation in the area of certification and standardization. Agreement on Quotas and Privileges was also signed during the visit between Armenia and Iran.

In 2002, the fourth Joint Session of Intergovernmental Commission of Republic of Armenia and Islamic Republic of Iran was held. In April 2003, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi visited Yerevan. Armenian President Robert Kocharian received Iranian Foreign

¹⁶ T. De Waal, *Q Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (Baku: İlay MMC, 2008), 16.

¹⁷ R. Galichian, *The invention of History. Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Show casing of imagination* (London/Yerevan: Printinfo Artbooks, 2010), 12.

Minister and they discussed a number of issues related to the Iranian President's visit to Yerevan¹⁸.

Iran began to pursue an active foreign policy towards the region and tried to intensify its relations with regional states in various ways in response to US active policy in the Caucasus region in September 2001. In response to US-Azerbaijani economic and anti-terrorist cooperation, Iran was using the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as means of repression. The signing military agreement between the two countries during the Iranian Defense Minister's visit to Armenia in March 2002¹⁹ can be seen as an element of Iran's repression policy.

On April 11, 2002 - just one year before his visit Yerevan, Kamal Kharazi visited Baku, during a meeting with the then President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev, noted that Iran had good relations with Armenia and was the mediator in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Kamal Kharazi said:

“One of the biggest problems of the region is the Karabakh conflict. We hope that the Karabakh conflict will be solved in a fair way through the efforts of the regional states including the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are ready to help Azerbaijan in this matter. We are happy that we have good relations with Armenia as well as Azerbaijan.”²⁰ (*Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev received Iranian Foreign Minister, 2002*).

The respons of Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev was very interesting, logical and thought-provoking at the same meeting:

“You said you are happy that you have good relations with Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and your good relations are a good chance for solving the Armenian-Azerbaijani, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. That's right. However, it would not be right to compare Iran-Azerbaijan relations with Iran-Armenia relations. Our countries, our people have a great common history, historical bonds, culture, religion, traditions and customs. But Armenia and your country have only economic relations. Therefore, I kindly ask you not to speak about these relations from the same angle.”²¹

As Heydar Aliyev pointed out, Iran and Armenia were mainly linked to economic relations, and Iran strengthened relations with Armenia in this area.

The parliamentary relations of the two countries which had not developed until this period were also improved by the visits of the delegates in 1998-2008. On December 16, 2002, the Iranian parliamentary delegation visited Yerevan. They met with Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian, Parliament Speaker Armen Khachatrian and Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan. During the meeting, Markarian described bilateral relations between Armenia and Iran as "strategic" and "long-term". He called for the expansion of "important" economic ties and bilateral trade between Armenia and Iran. V.Oskanyan expressed Armenia's satisfaction with Iran's "balanced policy against the Karabakh conflict". With the

¹⁸ Kamala Harazi and Robert Kocharian, "Robert Kocharian received Kamala Harazi," A1Plus.am, April 30, 2003, <https://a1plus.am/ru/article/213783>.

¹⁹ H. Jabbarli, *Foreign policy of Armenia (1991-2012)* (Baku: ATSAM, 2014), 292.

²⁰ "Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev received Iranian Foreign Minister," *Azerbaijan State News Agency*, April 11, 2002, www.azertag.az/ru/xeber/france-886380.

²¹ H. Aliyev, *Independence of Azerbaijan is eternal*, 38th book (Baku: Azərneşr, 2011), 58.

development of Iranian parliamentary relations with Armenia, the number of deputy seats that Iran has offered to the Armenian community in its own parliament is also noteworthy. There are a total of 290 deputies in the Iranian National Assembly, where deputies are elected for four years. In the National Assembly, where minorities also have the right to represent, Armenians have two seats. Even though the other minorities (Zoroastrians, Jews, Ashuri and Chaldeans) are given one seat²².

Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the Area of Electricity was signed in 2003. In April 2004, Armenian Foreign Minister V. Oskanyan visited Iran.

The highest level visit from Iran to Armenia was made in September 2004. President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Khatami visited Armenia. The parties signed an agreement on the principles and foundations of cooperation between Armenia and Iran²³. The 5th session of Intergovernmental Commission on Coordination of Economic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran was held. Treaty on Construction of Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline was signed. Thus, by helping Armenia solve its energy challenges, Iran has taken steps to prevent Azerbaijan's tactical and economic plans to prevent Armenia's aggressive actions.

Iran was also trying to strengthen the ties between the Azerbaijani provinces (East Azerbaijan province, West Azerbaijan province, Ardabil province and *etc.*) and Armenia, regardless of the local ethnic factors. In this provinces of Iran large part of the population are Azerbaijani Turks. One of these steps was the Memorandum on Cooperation in the Area of Agriculture between Republic of Armenia and Ardebil Province of IRI.

In 2005, two more important documents were signed between Armenia and Iran. One of them was Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Healthcare and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Healthcare and Treatment and the other Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Education in 2005-2008.

Meeting of Armenian and Iranian businessmen in Tabriz in June 2005, negotiations between governor of East Azerbaijan province and Armenian delegation, signing energy cooperation agreement between Iran Energy Minister Habibulla Bitaraf and Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsesyan²⁴, the meetings between Iranian Minister of Education Murteza Haji and Artases Tumanyan, the President of the Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, showed that relations were intensified.

The economic cooperation between the two countries was discussed once more during the visit of Robert Kocarian to Iran on 25 December 2005. However, some analysts wrote that Iran and Armenia had discussed secret cooperation issues before the official talks.

²² A. Yegin, Guide for understanding Iranian politics (Ankara: SETA: Yayınları, 2013), 56.

²³ Jabbarli, Foreign policy of Armenia (1991-2012), 274.

²⁴ S. Sadraddin, "Could the Tehran Authority talk about... 54.

In February 2006, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki visited Armenia²⁵. Mottaki stated Iran's intention to strengthen Republic of Armenia: "We are building multilateral relations with our neighbor and friend country Armenia. ... We are trying to ensure that they have regional importance"²⁶.

One of the most prominent figures Manuchehr Mottaki met during his visit was Serzh Sargsyan, Secretary of the Security Council of the President of Armenia and Defense Minister. Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakosyan, Ambassador of Republic of Armenia in Iran Karen Nazaryan and Ambassador of IRI in Republic of Armenia Alireza Hagigian also participated in the Mottaki-Sargsyan meeting and parties discussed many issues during the meeting²⁷.

After won the 2003 presidential election Robert Kocharian made his next visit to Islamic Republic of Iran in July 2006. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Establishment and Activity Conditions of Educational and Cultural Centers, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Archive Matters, the Agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Legal Cooperation of Civil and Criminal Matters and other documents were signed.

The main topic discussed during the visit was the gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia. In August 2005, the construction of a 22.5 km section of the gas line (Gajaran - Mehri line) between the "ArmRosGazprom" and Iran's "Arvandan" companies began. Under the agreement, construction of the gas pipeline was to be completed till January 2007²⁸.

In September 2006, Speaker of the Majlis of the Islamic Republic of Iran Gulamali Haddad Adel visited Armenia. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament visited the "genocide" monument in Tsitsernakaberd. Haddad Adel met with Armenian counterpart Tigran Baghdasarjan in Yerevan. He spoke at the press conference about the role of the Armenian community in domestic policy of Islamic Republic. Hadad Adel also answered the question at the press conference whether Iran could recognize the "Armenian genocide". He said: "I am proud of the people who died for their motherland". However, he did not comment on the recognition of the so-called "genocide"²⁹. He also met with Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan.

In December 2006, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan again visited Iran. Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mohtaki and Vardan Oskanyan discussed opportunities for expanding energy cooperation. The ministers also discussed regional issues. Expand cooperation in international organizations were also evaluated.

²⁵ "Bilateral Relations," Embassy of Armenia to Iran, November 12, 2012, <http://iran.mfa.am/en/bilateral-ir/>.

²⁶ E. Danielyan, "Armenia deepens ties with embattled Iran," Eurasianet, July 28, 2006, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-deepens-ties-with-embattled-iran>.

²⁷ "Iranian Foreign Ministry highlights Armenia-Iran defense and security cooperation," PanARMENIAN.Net, 2006, <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/16373/>.

²⁸ "We can assume that the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline is already in the hands of the Russians," REGNUM News Agency, 2006, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/671719.html>.

²⁹ E. Kalbizada, Ye Bakhshieva, and A. Azimov, Armenia is in the Caucasus policy of ... 126-127.

During the visit, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan met with President of Islamic Republic of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The sides appreciated the cooperation between Armenia and Iran, discussed the agenda of bilateral relations. At the meeting between V. Oskanyan and the Secretary of the Supreme Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ali Larijani discussed the position of international organizations on Iran's nuclear programs and the position of Armenia on this issue. Vardan Oskanian also met with Iranian Mejlis speaker Haddad Adel.

The Armenian Foreign Minister also met with the delegation of Iranian Armenians and members of the local Armenian community at the third Armenian Diaspora Forum.

In 2006, a series of steps was taken for the cooperation of the regional administrations of the two countries. On the one hand East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Mazandaran, Hormuzgan Ardebil provinces of Iran and on the other hand, Syunik, Ararat and Armavir regions of Armenia the cooperation intensified. In 2006, negotiations began on the opening Consulate General of Armenia in Tabriz, at the central city of the East Azerbaijan province.

In March 2007, President of Islamic Republic of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Armenia. The presidents of the two countries issued a joint statement. One of the most important events in the history of Armenian-Iranian economic relations took place during this visit. On March 19, 2007, the gas pipeline between the two countries opened. The Armenian side called this project "great success" in the field of "energy diplomacy"³⁰.

In July 2007, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki visited Armenia. Armenian President Robert Kocharian received Iranian Foreign Minister. The Armenian President said that the mutual visit of Iranian and Armenian statesmen, together with the historical partnership of the two peoples and good neighborly relations made an important contribution to the development and expansion of bilateral relations. Robert Kocharian said: "We are waiting visit of the President of Islamic Republic of Iran and we attach great importance his visit". Robert Kocharian stressed that the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on free trade between Armenia and Iran will also contribute increasing trade volume between the two countries. Manuchehr Mottaki expressed his satisfaction with the results of the 7th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran in Yerevan. "Iran does not see any obstacles to expanding bilateral relations and is particularly interested in further expansion and development of cooperation with Armenia in the economy, energy, transport and transit freight transport," said Iran's Foreign Minister³¹. The 7th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran began on 20 July in Yerevan. The parties discussed issues related to the construction of a new hydroelectric power plant on the Aras River, the establishment of a direct railway connection between the two countries, the construction of an oil factory in Armenia with the participation of Iran, Armenia and Russia and the establishment of an Iranian trade center in Armenia. At the meeting of the Armenian-Iranian intergovernmental commission, it was decided to start construction of the third high-voltage power line between Armenia and Islamic Republic of Iran.

³⁰ A. Galstian, "Political portraits of Armenia: Robert Kocharian", Erkramas, February 11, 2013, <http://www.yerkramas.org/article/51814/politicheskie-portrety-armenii-robert-kocharyan>.

³¹ "Robert Kocharian and Manuchehr Mottaki discussed the Armenian-Iranian relations", Iran.ru Russian Information Agency, July 23, 2007, https://www.iran.ru/news/politics/47825/Robert_Kocharyan_i_Manuchehr_Mottaki_obsudili_armyano_iranskie_otnosheniya/.

As president of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's next visit to Armenia was held in October 2007. However, the unforeseen circumstances in Iran caused Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to interrupt his visit to Armenia. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not even visit the monument to the victims of the so-called "Armenian genocide" in disregard of Armenia's state protocols. He returned without even speaking at the Armenian parliament.

In 2007, a new Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Armenian government and the Iranian government signed agreement on Cooperation in Construction and Operation of Run-of-River Power Plants on Aras River

In 2007 was adopted executive plan for Media Cooperation between the Council of Public TV and Radio Company of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. In addition, Armenia signed several documents with Iran in the fields of sports and banking.

In 2008, Armenia and Iran signed memorandum on Cooperation in Construction of Araks Run-of-River Power Plant and on Regulation of Technical Issues. The 8th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. That year, was held the 8th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In February 2008, next presidential elections were held in Armenia. 9 candidates participated in the elections. Robert Kocharian, born in Nagorno-Karabakh, the president of the country in 1998-2008, supported the candidacy of Serzh Sargsyan, who was born in Hankendi (Stepanakert). The Republican Party claimed his candidacy. Serzh Sargsyan became the head of the so called "Armenian Defense Army" in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan between 1991 and 1994. From 1996 to 1999 he served as the minister of national security, in 1999 - 2000 he served as the secretary of the national security council and from 2000 onwards he served as defense minister of Armenia. He was appointed prime minister by Robert Kocharian instead of Andranik Markaryan, who died of a heart attack in 2007. Former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan was an independent candidate. The candidate of the "Legal System" ("Armenian Renaissance" – "Orinats Yerkir") was Arthur Baqdasaryan in this election. The other candidate was the candidate of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaksutun Vahan Hovanisyan. Serzh Sargsyan won the elections.

Conclusion

Thus, while examining the relations between Armenia and Iran in 1998-2008, we can conclude that although the administration of Armenia's foreign policy with the approval of Russia in this period affected Iran-Armenia relations negatively, the overlapping of the interests of Russia and Iran under the influence of US regional policy in the period after 2001 caused Russia to give a lot of approval to Armenia regarding relations with Iran. In the relations with Iran, the Armenian side was more interested in the development of economic relations. Iran tried to use Armenia's means to soften the economic consequences of sanctions imposed by European states and the United States. But the Armenian side has always tried to confront Iran against Azerbaijan by using pan-Persian groups in this country with the discomfort they have heard about Azerbaijan.

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