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# THE PAST AND THE FUTURE OF GEORGIAN-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

VALERI CHECHELASHVILI

96

EXPERT OPINION





საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი  
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## **EXPERT OPINION**

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Establishing reliable, firm and partner-like (although friendly would be even better) relations with neighbors is one of the main foreign policy priorities for any state. In this regard, Georgia is no exception. Our country has four neighboring states and this desire for good neighborly relations is only divorced from reality in the case of Russia – the axis component of its foreign policy priorities is to reinforce its dominance in the Post-Soviet area and thereby to weaken the influence of NATO and the European Union, not to mention their expansion.

Independent Russia has failed to establish itself as a center of gravity. It is clear that Russia cannot compete with the West and more specifically with the European Union member states in terms of quality of life, protection of human rights, quality of education and business opportunities. In-turn, it is specifically these aforementioned aspects that define the aspirations of Russia's neighbors towards the European space. These trends are probably the most noticeable in Georgia, but also in Ukraine and Moldova. This is true for Georgia because the main foreign policy priority for our country for the past quarter century has been to fully and rapidly integrate into the European Union and NATO. The fact that this priority has remained steadfastly at the top of the agenda despite *several* complete – and at times radical – transitions of power between feuding parties is highly important.

This disturbs Russia and further fuels its attempts to find alternative levers of influence in the form of political parties or public movements. Along with Georgia, and especially after the Dignity Revolution of 2013, Ukraine has also been consistently aspiring towards the West (including NATO). As for Moldova, as a constitutionally neutral state, it does not speak of NATO membership at all. It should be pointed out that this neutrality has not managed to move the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict forward at all – and this development (or rather lack thereof) should serve as a compelling argument against the political forces that fictionally promise the Georgian population that a neutral status will resolve it's territorial problems.

As already pointed out, Russia has failed to establish itself as a center of gravity in the region as it has been unable to propose an attractive, concrete, alternative model to its neighbors. The Eurasian Economic

Union, members of which (apart from Russia) include Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, is an attempt to do just this. Of course, it cannot be more attractive than the European Union. Russia retains its neighbors in the Eurasian Economic Union through various means, which, to put it mildly, are not consistent with civilized practices recognized by the international community, not to mention norms and principles of international law.

A clear example of this was the unprecedented impact on our neighboring Armenia during the September 3, 2013 visit of Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to Moscow, as a result of which Yerevan, surprisingly for the Europeans (but not for the Georgian experts), refused to initiate the Association Agreement with the European Union and decided to join the Eurasian Economic Union instead.<sup>1</sup> With this decision, the Government of Armenia created a new geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus and this paper represents a humble attempt to analyze these realities.

This episode was another clear manifestation of the cynical policies exercised by the Russian Federation towards its neighbors. Russian President Putin unequivocally confirmed the discourse of this policy when he underlined that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup> during his 2005 address to the State Duma of the Russian Federation. This thesis has become the basis of Russia's policies towards its neighborhood. For us, with a background experience of relations with the Russian Federation in various formats for 25 years, this confirmed the unfortunate reality – the opposing side is irritated with the very existence of an independent Georgian state and the consequent unavoidability of having to negotiate with it. This irritation can only be dispelled and the perception of Russian diplomats can only be changed by exercising a foreign policy that is sustainable, consistent and hereditary in nature. Today, Russia is an enemy of Georgian statehood, which is clearly stated in the November 16, 2016 foreign policy strategy ratified by the President of the Russian Federation. This document confirms that without serious concessions, we cannot normalize relations with today's Russia.<sup>3</sup>

This was a couple of words about Russia. Cooperation with two of the remaining three neighbors – Turkey and Azerbaijan, is developing consistently and logically. These relations, while containing some problems, have a predictable nature and furthermore, they demonstrate clear signs of strategic partnership.

Georgian-Armenian relations appear to be in order. This sense of an imaginary well being was further reinforced by the recent official visit of the President of Armenia to Georgia on 25-26 December 2017. This visit witnessed a rare occurrence in diplomatic practice as no documents were signed during the official visit – no declarations were compiled, no joint statements made, no agreements, not even a visit communiqué. The parties underlined positive trends in relations, including in the field of trade and did not say a word about the existing problems, neither in bilateral, nor in regional dimensions.

According to a statement of the President of Georgia<sup>4</sup>, the parties discussed: “The strategic engagement of our countries, both within the European Union and the Eurasian Union. Even though we have signed the Association Agreement with the EU and we benefit from free trade with Europe while Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Customs Union, this circumstance has not weakened the economic cooperation between our countries – on the contrary, this year the trade turnover between our countries, as well as the tourism indicator have been significantly increased.”

It is difficult to fully agree with the comments made by the President of Georgia – especially the part according to which the cardinally different strategic choices made by the two countries will not influence the quality of their bilateral relations. As for bilateral economic relations, certain problems have appeared in the past few years in this regard as well.

Trade Turnover between Georgia and Armenia (USD Million).<sup>5</sup>

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Exports	315,4	288,1	180,2	150,8	208
Imports	181,9	210,1	175,1	216,8	281
Turnover	497,3	498,2	355,2	367,6	489
% of Overall Trade	4,6	4,3	3,7	3,9	4,7

Our export is decreasing while Armenian export is on the rise, and as a result, in 2016 we had a negative trade balance (of USD 66 million) with Armenia for the first time since our independence. This year the trend deepened: in 2017 we had a negative trade balance of USD 73 million.

This situation should not be satisfactory to us under any circumstances. New obligations taken on by Armenia under the Eurasian Economic Union probably offer some explanation for this.

The Armenian President was more open during his assessments: “for us it is a law, and I say this honestly, that during all negotiations we spare no effort to make sure we adopt documents and statements, which are not harmful to Georgian interests in any way. I believe that maintaining such a position from both Armenian as well as the Georgian side will only benefit our nations”. Well said, however, whether or not Armenia’s interpretation of Georgia’s best interests is aligned with Georgia’s interpretation of its best interests remains to be seen.

In any case, it is difficult to imagine that during the meetings the parties did not discuss the issues of transport communications and regional conflicts. This is openly discussed in Armenia, for example. This makes the fact that no official statements were made about these issues even more curious. Hopefully, we will have a clear position based upon our interests for the Georgian Prime Minister’s visit to Yerevan, which was also agreed by the parties. In this sense, it is interesting what kind of messages the Armenian President delivered to Moscow, where a non-formal meeting of the CIS Presidents was held on 26 December 2017, at 8 p.m.<sup>6</sup>

Both countries face similar domestic and external challenges: reforms, economic development, strengthening of democratic institutions, human rights, improving the welfare of their citizens, more active participation in international projects and programs and, more generally, further strengthening of their place and role in the international system. However, similarities between these challenges do not create a strong basis for approximation and do not manifest in the quality of cooperation.

Moreover, these issues, or more specifically the attempts at resolving them through differing principles and within differing formats will necessarily complicate bilateral relations as Georgia and Armenia try to resolve these problems using differing social-political and, if you like, value systems. In this sense, it is difficult to predict the future of relations between Armenia and Georgia. It turns out that the only firm component of bilateral relations is the traditional good disposition and friendly attitude between Georgians and Armenians, which, in itself, is very important, although not quite enough.

The Governments of Georgia and Armenia saw these problems back in the 90s, when the situation for developing bilateral relation was much more favorable. Even then, the foreign policy vectors of the two countries differed sharply. For example, Armenia traditionally has not supported and does not support the UN resolutions on the “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia, Georgia,” which irritates Georgia. On the other hand, and for understandable reasons, Georgia supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan on all international platforms, which is disliked by Armenia.

At the beginning of this century, on October 23, 2001, within the context of a visit of the Georgian President to Armenia, the Presidents of the two countries, Eduard Shevardnadze and Robert Kocharyan, signed a bilateral framework treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security. This agreement, at least through the assessment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, remains a defining document in bilateral relations.<sup>7</sup>

Even back then, Tbilisi considered Moscow as a main threat to its security. Armenia’s alliance with Russia, taking the factor of Gyumri military base into account, was being considered in a respective light. After the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, this irritation gained increased impetus, also reinforced by the issues regarding military transit. Armenia had a similar attitude towards the dynamically increasing relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan and Georgia and Turkey. That said, history showed that Georgia’s concerns had firmer basis.

According to the October 23, 2001 agreement, both countries were obligated to refuse joining alliances that opposed each other. Also, both parties agreed that further approximation of the region to Europe is necessary.

Notwithstanding, problems are accumulating in bilateral relations and for their resolution it is necessary for both countries to cooperate purposefully in order to form a common strategy and action plan and then, to implement them. Georgia and Armenia must manage to do this in the frameworks of their foreign policy priorities, which is no easy task. Compromises, possibly painful ones, will be necessary.

If a high level bilateral dialogue focused on these problems is not formed, the situation will worsen over time. In diplomacy, issues and especially problems do not resolve themselves, especially so for a country in a



situation such as Georgia is in and a country with such limited sovereignty, as Armenia is turning into. I hope this statement will not upset my Armenian friends, as I am not saying this in a negative context. For example, I dream of Georgia becoming a country with limited sovereignty as a result of its membership in NATO and the European Union. I also dream for the functions of the National Bank of Georgia to be transferred to the European Central Bank located in Frankfurt, as a result of Georgia joining the Eurozone.

What has changed and why has the situation become more alarming lately, even if it does not seem like that on the surface? The main geopolitical change is that Armenia has become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Eurasian Customs Union, which are dominated by Russia, whilst Georgia has signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. In addition, Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and will never become a member of NATO. Georgia, on the other hand, is aspiring to become a member of NATO and will never join the CSTO.

One dimension of the current situation is especially noteworthy: Armenia has already finished the process of integration in both the political, as well as economic formats. It is inside a security system, integrated in an economic area with the Armenian specialists amply represented in respective structures, including top positions in Moscow. For example, Mr. Tigran Sargsyan was appointed as the Chairman of the Board of Eurasian Economic Commission on February 1, 2016.<sup>8</sup> If the Eurasian Economic Union works according to its documents and within the adopted rules, the Government of Georgia will have to negotiate with Tigran Sargsyan about the free trade regime in the future, given his authority.

By implementing respective ratification procedures, in the past four years Armenia has managed to legally integrate into the Eurasian space, where Russia is dominant. In order for Armenia to leave these cooperation formats, the geopolitical situation in the region must change completely, which is not likely to happen in the upcoming 5-7 years. It is also clear that we cannot play a significant role in this regard.

As for Georgia, it is waiting for the fulfillment of its main foreign policy goals – membership in NATO and the European Union. This process

will cover and surpass this 5-7 year period, especially in the case of the European Union. It should be noted that apart from objective and subjective hindrances, the main strategic partner of Armenia, Russia is actively opposing the development of the process of our European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Moreover, disrupting these processes is one of the main foreign-policy priorities in the region. The fact that Georgia's integration in NATO and the European Union is not a threat for Russia and will foster the strengthening of stability and security in the South Caucasus is a correct and fine approach, however, it is impossible to convince today's Russia of this. This is confirmed both by the history of our relations, as well as the current reality.

What could be the interests of our neighboring Armenia in these processes? Objectively, it would be much more beneficial for it if Georgia became a member of Armenia's current natural space – Eurasian Economic Union, Customs Union and the CSTO. What would be the benefits for Armenia in this case?

**First**, the sense of isolation in the region for Armenia will end, whilst the room for maneuvering will be significantly reduced for Azerbaijan.

**Second**, through Georgian territory, Armenia would have access to the main space of the Eurasian Economic Union, Customs Union and the CSTO, with consequent economic and political advantages.

**Third**, Armenia will get clear transit guarantees, including through the conflict regions.

Armenian experts probably understand very well what Georgian membership in NATO and the European Union would mean for their country. This would be:

**First**, EU customs regime on Georgian-Armenian border;

**Second**, Schengen visa regime on Georgian-Armenian border;

**Third**, the establishment of a new transit reality and the need for regulating it not with Tbilisi, but with Brussels, based on the model of the Kaliningrad oblast, for example.

If the Government of Armenia considers membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, Customs Union and the CSTO as long-term decisions, it must be aware of these problems. Consequently, Armenia should not be

interested in the fulfillment of Georgia's foreign policy priorities, which is entirely consistent with Russia's foreign policy agenda. Such a situation creates additional risks for Georgia. These risks need to be analyzed, and an action plan for neutralizing them formulated and fulfilled.

This situation is further complicated for Georgia by another condition: its main strategic partner – Russia, assists Armenia in every field as it considers Armenia to be the stronghold of its policy in South Caucasus.<sup>9</sup> The confrontation of Russia with the civilized world in general and the process of Eastern expansion of NATO and the European Union in particular, is a part of the same faulty thinking. Hence, Russia considers Georgia's foreign policy agenda to be a challenge.

It can be said without exaggeration that our strategic partners, the US and the European Union, are providing immense help to us, as well as to Ukraine and Moldova – the signatories of the Association Agreement. However, they almost equally help Armenia, continuing active work with it despite its membership in the military, political and economic blocks formed by Russia. The clearest confirmation of the continuation of dynamic cooperation between the European Union and Armenia is the fact that at the November 24, 2017 Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was signed between the EU and Armenia.<sup>10</sup> Such an approach is a result of the traditions, standards, criteria and practices of cooperation formed in the civilized world in the aftermath of the Second World War and exercised by the European Union today. This reality also reflects the differing approaches taken by European Union and Russia on the international arena. Of course, the processes are significantly influenced by the powerful Armenian diaspora in the West.

It is probably also important that the main actors do not consider the structures formed by Russia to be stable ones and are preparing appropriate positions for when they are in crisis. Here we also approach the 5-7 year horizon.

Georgia and Armenia have been in the same civilization field for centuries. Both nations are integral parts of the European cultural-humanitarian space. After the restoration of independence, both were aspiring towards Europe and both countries were approximating to Europe prior to September 2013. This was facilitated by the EU policies focused on regional approaches,

the specific manifestation of which was, for example, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements signed with both countries at the same time, as well as simultaneously exercised European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>11</sup>

Now the roads of these two countries are divided and the basic contradictions have taken on an entirely new nature, previously diffused by the common, European choice of our countries. In these new conditions, the unfortunate reality that the enemy of Georgian statehood, Russia, is Armenia's main strategic partner whilst Georgia's strategic partners, Azerbaijan and Turkey, are practically in a state of war with Armenia, has been presented in a more complicated way.

Should the current trend continue, Georgian-Armenian border could turn into NATO-CSTO border, with all consequent results. After Georgia becomes a member of NATO, there will be obligation both for NATO as well as for Georgia. Given its membership in the CSTO, Armenia, on the other hand, already has certain obligation towards Russia. It is quite clear that such a new reality will constitute additional pressure on Georgian-Armenian relations. Today this scenario is difficult to imagine, although it is entirely possible in the future.

The situation is worsening; this is complemented by the pretenses accumulated in certain parts of Georgian and Armenian societies towards one another, some of them just, others emotional and baseless.<sup>12</sup>

By their history, culture and traditions Armenians, much like Georgians, are a European nation, not Eurasian. This condition should not have to be argued about in Armenia. It is in Georgian interests to have European Armenia by its side; taking the current policies into account, it is in Armenia's interests, however, to have a Eurasian Georgia as its neighbor.

We must admit that in the current situation, Armenia's European choice is more difficult to imagine than the possibility of changes in the foreign policy vector of Georgia. In the given situation, how long can the axis of Georgian-Armenian friendship withstand such pressure? Will the multi-century friendship formed through bilateral relations have enough resources to overcome new challenges?

Both parties should look after this painful issue, especially in the case of Armenia as its current policies do not correspond to the European nature of the Armenian nation; as of now, it appears that Armenia has turned

over the responsibility of solving this dilemma to Russia, so that the latter can pull Georgia into the Eurasian Union. This will be a tragedy for Georgia and apart from Georgia's European choice this will also bury Armenia's European perspectives.

The threat coming from Armenia for Georgia is growing. As long as the foreign policy vectors of the two neighboring countries remain so starkly different, the trend will grow further. In addition, at least in the medium-term perspective, Armenia has firmer positions, as it is already a member of respective economic (Eurasian Economic Union) and military-political (CSTO) structures through its own sovereign decision. Armenia follows the rules of the game, masterfully managed by Russia. In return, Russia supports it in every way and also tries to weaken Georgia by using external or domestic factors.

The analysis of the situation of bilateral relations and the threats originating from it is very important as these bilateral relations not only influence the security of both countries, but also the stability of the region.

Despite the fact that in the medium and long-term perspective this problem will reveal itself even further, neither of the two countries will refute their principled choice to not reveal any cracks in the bilateral relations. It should also be noted that before it becomes a member in NATO and the European Union, Georgia is free to make its own choices whilst Armenia does not really have this opportunity.

We do not know when Georgia will become a member of the European Union. However, we can assume that the GDP per capita of Georgia becoming equal, or at least approaching that of the poorest EU member states – Romania and Bulgaria – is not necessarily a requirement but at least a consideration in Georgia's goal of becoming a EU member.

Unfortunately, in this regard the data presented in the table below do not give a reason to be optimistic.

What does the dynamic of the past three years show?

	GDP, USD Billion, 2016	GDP Real Growth, 2016, %	GDP Real Growth, 2015, %	GDP Real. Growth, 2014, %	GDP Per Capita, PPP <sup>13</sup> , USD Thousand, 2016	GDP Per Capita, PPP USD Thousand, 2015	GDP Per Capita, PPP USD Thousand, 2014	GDP Per Capita, PPP USD Thousand, 2016-2014
Romania	187	4.8	3.9	3.1	22.300	21.200	20.300	2.0
Bulgaria	52.42	3.4	3.6	3.1	20.300	19.500	18.700	1.3
Georgia	14.22	2.7	2.9	4.6	10.000	9.700	9.400	0.6
Armenia	10.5	0.2	3.0	3.6	8.600	8.600	8.400	0.2

Source: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html)  
[www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html)  
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If the European Union does not take special geopolitical considerations, as it did when accepting Romania and Bulgaria, we will not be able to achieve our goal, given the current trends. I believe that until Russia becomes significantly weakened, we should not be hoping for EU's special geopolitical vision. This is further complemented by three additional reasons:

**First**, Romania and Bulgaria are EU's direct neighbors;

**Second**, Romania and Bulgaria had no territorial problems with Russia;

**Third**, Croatia's example shows that the economic indicators necessary for membership have increased.

To these three reasons the specialists might add several other reasons, which will definitely not alleviate our situation. It is obvious that the implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria is decisive in this process.

One could hypothesize that achieving our goal will be impossible unless we ensure a minimum of 10% annual GDP growth for at least several years, which must be followed or even preceded by attracting an annual minimum of USD 5-7 billion Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the economy of our country.

The current economic policies and the growth rate unfortunately cannot ensure the implementation of this objective. For this, it is necessary to overcome the divisions in our society, to unite to the main goal, mobilize all human resources of our country and unlock their full potential. This is much more important than any separate party interests.

If we do not account for the conflicts of the South Caucasus, a single glance at the map and even a superficial assessment of the potential of the region makes it clear that it is absolutely self-sufficient. Furthermore, it has unlimited geopolitical and geo-economic potential. Important components of it are transit, tourism, rich natural resources, and experienced and relatively cheap labor force. Hence, the South Caucasus has all the factors for overall success. It has all the pre-conditions for the region to occupy its deserved place in the international system and ensure proper living conditions for its population with sustainable perspectives of future development. Unfortunately, there is no trace of such development in South Caucasus.

The policies of Russia, as well as Armenian policies that are associated with and protected by Russia also hinder the implementation of these possibilities. Russia also considers an independent South Caucasus as a challenge because it represents Russia's competitor in the geopolitical context, more specifically in terms of the implementation of East-West transport corridor. In this situation, Russia uses Armenia as important leverage in the competition.

Russia has ripped Armenia from the regional context using its confrontation with Azerbaijan as a means of downplaying the region's abilities, to serve its own vicious plans. In addition, in the case of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's potential influence on both Azerbaijan as well as Armenia is reduced significantly. The principle of "divide and rule" will no longer apply. Hence, Russia is not interested in a peaceful resolution of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and will do everything in its power to deter this.

Because of the same considerations, Russia will use any means available to not allow the delimitation of the Georgian-Armenian border.

It is absurd that the main mediator of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is Russia, when it is not interested in the peaceful resolution of this conflict. In others words, Russia is interested in leaving this conflict outside the

framework of a peaceful resolution. In this case, the principle of divide and rule, which is well tested in the conflict regions of the independent states (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine), is used for the confrontation of two neighboring states. It is surprising, but both Azerbaijan as well as Armenia are proud of their good relations with Russia. Of course, Armenia has more reasons for this.

What can be done today?

First of all, a high level, bilateral expert group must be formed, which will analyze the current situation and risks, and formulate recommendations for both governments.

In the field of politics, Georgian-Armenian relations require a new level of trust, which must ensure an honest discussion about existing, including long-term, risks. The Georgian Embassy in Yerevan has always been important, however today it becomes a key diplomatic mission. No human or financial resource should be spared for its proper functioning. It would be good to open a general consulate as well, especially since the general consulate of Armenia in Batumi has been functioning for quite some time now.

Given the new realities, in the field of trade it is important to resolve the trade regime between Georgian and Armenia, giving it a legal basis of firm, long-term guarantees. The Agreement of the Eurasian Customs Union (subsequently referred to as “the Agreement”) about the Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union (subsequently referred to as “the Code”, signed by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia) was signed on 11 April 2017 in Moscow.<sup>14</sup> It has three appendixes, serving as indivisible parts. They abolish tens of international agreements and protocols, which were signed in the waiting period of the enactment of the Code. Following completion of the ratification processes in the member countries, the Code entered into force on 1 January 2018<sup>15</sup>.

The Code is a very serious document, consisting of 1,169 pages and two appendixes. These documents fully cover the whole field of customs affairs and regulate all customs procedures of signatory parties. The text allocates a special role to the Eurasian Economic Commission (subsequently referred to as “the Commission”) as the institution that is tasked with the implementation of the articles of the Code. According to the regulations of the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commission is a supranational entity,



the responsibilities of which include numerous fields of international cooperation and which is equipped with a surprising variety of instruments. The Commission has many fields of responsibility, including macroeconomics, competition, energy policy and so on. Among other fields, the functions of the Commission also include the establishment of trade regimes with third countries.<sup>16</sup>

If Armenia is a member of the a Customs Union together with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, an appropriate supranational institute must regulate its external trade regime, which, in this case, is the Commission. Germany cannot establish or abolish Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Georgia – all this has already been negotiated with appropriate structures of the European Union. Hence, with regards to trade regimes with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Georgia will have to negotiate with the Commission, more specifically, with the aforementioned Tigran Sargsyan, who is the Chairman of the Council or with Mr. Mukai Kadirkulov, who is the Member of the Council (Minister) for Customs Cooperation Issues.<sup>17</sup> This is no longer a field of bilateral relations. If we are invited for separate negotiations, this means that the Customs Union does not really exist, as theoretically, given the possibilities of such approaches, various countries can have differing trade regimes with Georgia, according to their interests. For example Armenia, due to understandable reasons, is more interested in developing trade relations with Georgia, then with some partners in the Customs Union.

Armenia may help us in initiating and signing a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Union. Armenia has free trade with Georgia and Georgia's DCFTA has not harmed the economy of Armenia in any way. Georgia's free trade agreement with the Eurasian Union is good for Armenia, as it will have a reliable prospect of trade relations with Georgia, also equaling a firm guarantee of access to the Eurasian customs area. Such an agreement is good for Georgia as well, as it will create more serious legal guarantees for markets important to us, as opposed to currently existing arrangement of free trade through bilateral relations.

This may be opposed by Russia. It will surely reiterate the arguments about the dangers to the Russian market due to the DCFTA between Georgian and the European Union. Objective conditions are, in this case, less important for Russia. What works in our favor is that the Commission also includes representatives from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and

Armenia, who, given their friendly relations and partnership with Georgia, will support signing the agreement. As a whole, this could become a very interesting legal precedent. The factor of the European Union would be an important component in these negotiations. Of course, it is necessary to hold preliminary consultations with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the European Union. If a free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and Georgia is enacted, it will definitely encourage the process of integration in the region.

From our side, we should encourage the acceleration of the process of visa liberalization between Armenia and the European Union, which has gained a genuine outline after the 24 November Comprehensive and Enhanced Cooperation Agreement signed between Armenia and EU. Of course, it is necessary to propose a similar scheme to Azerbaijan as well. EU's visa liberalization with our two neighbors will facilitate the establishment of a better overall environment in the region and if this is complemented with the accelerated process of the delimitation of border with Armenia and Azerbaijan, we will have prospects of maintaining peace and ensuring better future in the region.

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[www.ru.armeniasputnik.am/politics/20171124/9573876/armeniya-podpisala-soglashenie-o-vseobemlyushchem-i-rasshirenno-partnerstve-s-es.html](http://www.ru.armeniasputnik.am/politics/20171124/9573876/armeniya-podpisala-soglashenie-o-vseobemlyushchem-i-rasshirenno-partnerstve-s-es.html)
11. See: [www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/4080/Fact%20sheet%20on%20EU-Armenia%20relations](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4080/Fact%20sheet%20on%20EU-Armenia%20relations);  
[www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/23634/EU-Georgia%20relations,%20factsheet](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/23634/EU-Georgia%20relations,%20factsheet);  
[www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en)
12. See: D. Batashvili, About Georgian-Armenian Relations: [www.tabula.ge/ge/tablog/65266-qartul-somxuri-urtiertobebis-shehexeb](http://www.tabula.ge/ge/tablog/65266-qartul-somxuri-urtiertobebis-shehexeb)
13. PPP – Purchasing Power Parity
14. See: [www.docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01413569/itia\\_12042017](http://www.docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01413569/itia_12042017)
15. See: [www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/01-01-2018-1.aspx](http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/01-01-2018-1.aspx)
16. See: [www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Pages/about.aspx](http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Pages/about.aspx)
17. See: [www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/chairman/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/chairman/Pages/default.aspx)