

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 5-17-2020

Armenia's Past, Present and Future -- Where it was? Where it is? Where is it going? -- Velvet Revolution 2018

Stella Tangiyan

stella.tangiyan@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Other Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tangiyan, Stella, "Armenia's Past, Present and Future -- Where it was? Where it is? Where is it going? -- Velvet Revolution 2018". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2020.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/859>

Armenia's Past, Present and Future

Where it was? Where it is? Where is it going?

Velvet Revolution 2018

By

Stella Tangiyan

Advisor: Andrew Flibbert

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

Table of Contents

Armenian Velvet Revolution 4

Chapter 1: Exploring Color Revolutions 9

Chapter 2: External Factors That Caused the Velvet Revolution 33

Chapter 3: Internal Factors That Caused the Velvet Revolution 46

Chapter 4: Post-Velvet Revolution Armenia 88

Conclusion 119

References 122

Acknowledgments

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank Trinity College's Political Science department. Professors that I met here truly inspired me to strive for knowledge and appreciate academia. Thank you to Professor Andrew Flibbert, my thesis advisor, who was with me throughout this whole journey. While not having much knowledge in the area of my research, he agreed to guide me through this process. His comments and contributions truly helped me with navigating my thesis-writing journey. Professor Flibbert found the perfect balance of involvement with my work -- I always felt truly supported.

I would love to thank my father, Georgi Tangiyan, who has always supported me through all of my endeavors. From the day I told him my research topic, he would constantly send me articles that might be important for my thesis and I truly appreciate that. I would love to thank my mother, Armine Tangiyan, whose positive energy lights up my day and who is always there for me. Thank you to my beautiful sister, Anna Tangiyan, who is one of my best friends and supporters.

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Stella Arustamyan. Without her involvement in my upbringing, I would never be who I am today. Her strong nature and kind heart always serve as an inspiration to me.

Finally, I would love to thank Emma Schneck and Roza Momot for being with me throughout my 4 years at Trinity. I would always cherish the memories of late-night Level 3 of the Library with two of you.

Armenian Velvet Revolution

"Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was wrong The street movement is against my tenure. I am fulfilling your demand".¹ Those were the last words Serzh Sargsyan publicly said before giving up his power after 8 years of presidency and 6 days of premiership.

It was Monday, April 23, 2018. I was woken up at 8 am by a phone call. It was Nelly, my childhood best friend from Armenia. I was shocked and worried when saw her name popping up on my phone screen as, when I am in the US, she never calls me without prior arrangements, unless it is an emergency. I picked up the phone immediately and the first words I heard were: "Stella, we won! He resigned. We won!". While I realized right away that she was talking about the Velvet Revolution, I could not believe it. Only a day prior, on April 22, Pashinyan and Sargsyan met to 'negotiate' in front of tens of journalists -- talks that ended in a matter of minutes with Sargsyan storming out of the room saying: "You've learned nothing from March 1; and if you don't change your tone and come to the legal field, you'll bear full responsibility [for the consequences]. The choice is yours" (on March 1, 2008, 10 people were killed when police violently dispersed an opposition campsite in the Freedom Square, Yerevan, Armenia, after 2008 presidential elections).² After the meeting, Pashinyan was arrested. How, in just a matter of hours after those failed 'negotiations,' did Sargsyan resign without any attempt to use violence towards the protestors?

¹ Roth, Andrew. 2018. *Shock as Armenia's prime minister steps down after 11 days of protests*. The Guardian

² Epress.am. 2018. *Serzh Sargsyan Threatens Pashinyan With March 1 to Make Him Stop Fighting*

Armenians were euphoric -- everyone was full of hope. The initial joy and satisfaction from the victory was truly breathtaking. I went back to Armenia in May 2018, only a few weeks after Serzh Sargsyan's resignation. My own overexcited mind might have been playing tricks with me, but the Armenian air felt lighter, people were smiling more and seemed happier. Every single Armenian I talked to did believe that we were living at a turning point in Armenian history. It seemed like the 'dark days' of Armenia were left behind. People trusted Nikol Pashinyan.

International polling in October 2018 concluded that 82 percent of Armenians were in support of Pashinyan's performance, more than 80 percent of Armenians were optimistic about the country's future, and 72 percent felt they could directly influence decisions made by the government.³ Nonetheless, it seems like Pashinyan's support has been declining throughout his two years in the office. According to the International Republican Institute (IRI), in October 2018, 41 percent of Armenians viewed the 2018 change of the government "very positively", however that number dropped to 28 percent in May 2019.⁴ The change of attitude that is even more concerning is that while only three percent of respondents viewed the change of the government "very negatively" in October 2018, in May 2019 the number rose to ten percent.⁵

Armenia's geopolitical situation is highly complicated -- it is in unfavorable relations with two out of four bordering countries, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is an ongoing worry as well as Russia's grip on Armenia constrains the country from forming new political alliances.

³ Jennings, Ray Salvatore. 2019. *Upgrading U.S. Support for Armenia's Postrevolution Reforms*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

⁴ Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Poll shows high, but declining, support for Armenian government*. Eurasianet.org

⁵ Ibid.

Armenia does not have a free will when it comes to making decisions -- the abovementioned conditions regularly dictate the next steps that the Armenian government has to undertake.

The focus of this thesis is the Velvet Revolution that took place in April 2018. This is a rather new political development, hence one should be careful when analyzing it, as Nikol Pashinyan's government is relatively new and they were inherited with highly corrupt, poverty-ridden, oligarchic post-Soviet state. When Pashinyan began his march from Gyumri to Yerevan on March 31, 2018, no one truly had high expectations regarding the outcome of it. Every Armenian, during their lifetime, has seen many political activists that went on hunger strikes, organized seat-ins and tent cities, blocked streets, etc., however, none of those actions had successful outcomes. It is still mind-blowing, how, despite all odds, the Velvet Revolution had a successful outcome that led to a new era in Armenian history.

This thesis explores the impacts of the Velvet Revolution on Armenia and Armenians as the change of the government does not necessarily guarantee positive outcomes for the country and its citizens. The question this thesis will strive to answer is: *To what extent did Armenia's domestic issues and foreign relations improve after the Velvet Revolution? Why the Velvet Revolution emerged and was it truly successful?*

It is rather hard to respond to the proposed questions as there is no one correct answer. In order to evaluate the level of success that Pashinyan's cabinet achieved one needs to explore what were the conditions before the Velvet Revolution and how they changed after it. Additionally, to understand how this movement came to be, it is essential to explore the factors that led to the emergence of the Velvet Revolution. The short answer to the proposed question

is that certain aspects of domestic and foreign relations did improve, however, it is evident that Pashinyan was not able to carry out all his promises yet. Additionally, May 8, 2020, marks only the second anniversary of Pashinyan's governance, which is a rather short time period from a political perspective.

Chapter 1 explores the notion of Color Revolutions and establishes the framework in which Color Revolutions will be analyzed. This chapter consists of three parts: the first part discusses what Color Revolutions are and how one might try to understand them. A framework is established for understanding the use of phrases like 'success cases' and 'failed cases' of Color Revolutions and what those entail. The second part of the chapter discusses similarities that have been spotted between all the cases of Color Revolutions. Three similarities that will be explored are fraudulent elections, youth movements, and Western influence. Lastly, eight cases of Color Revolutions are presented, after which the case of the Velvet Revolution is discussed. This chapter will provide the reader with necessary background information for understanding Color Revolutions and some of their distinct characteristics.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the external factors that led Armenia and Armenians towards the Velvet Revolution. The three main focuses of this Chapter are Democratic Diffusion and Linkage/Leverage, the role of the West and Western NGOs, and the role of Russia when it comes to Armenia's decision-making process. Democratic Diffusion and Linkage/Leverage create a theoretical framework through which one can understand how democracy and democratic values, ideals, policies, etc. spread or what kind of obstacles can prevent those from spreading. When it comes to the West, it is proven that it usually has a very strong influence on the outcome of Color Revolutions. What was the West's approach to the Velvet Revolution?

The most important external factor for Armenia is Russia as Armenia's dependency on Russia is almost alarming. Why Russia did not stop the Velvet Revolution from happening? Why Putin allowed Serzh Sargsyan to step down?

Chapter 3 focuses on the domestic problems that Armenia faced, which ultimately led the country towards the Velvet Revolution. While Armenia faces many domestic problems -- anything from poverty and unemployment to distrust in the government -- this chapter focuses on oligarchy, poor living conditions, electoral fraud, and dissatisfied youth. Those four specific aspects were chosen as electoral fraud and dissatisfied youth are central issues to any Color Revolution, while an oligarchy and poor living conditions culminate in themselves many of the issues that citizens of Armenia are faced with.

Chapter 4 explores what happened in Armenia after the Velvet Revolution. This chapter takes an extensive look into the power struggle that followed the Velvet Revolution, how Armenia's foreign relations changed under Pashinyan's government, and what domestic improvements were implemented by Pashinyan. Some of the trials discussed in this chapter are ongoing, and several events examined happened only a few weeks ago, hence one can only analyze what happened and predict possible outcomes.

Armenia is an extremely interesting but complicated case study to examine as there are several dilemmas one is faced with when looking into it. For example, historically, Armenia always had extremely close ties with Russia which interfered with the creation of better relations with the European Union. Around thirty year-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to Nagorno Karabakh is another dispute that seems like is impossible to solve.

Armenia's deeply rooted traditions and oligarchic domination seem incompatible with having a democratic and fair government. Will Nikol Pashinyan's government be able to develop Armenia and improve people's lives despite all those complications that are on their way?

Chapter 1: Exploring Color Revolutions

In the mid-2000s worldwide media coined the term *Color Revolution* to refer to the widespread demonstrations and revolution attempts in Eastern Europe and Balkans. The term itself is rather ambiguous -- it “is stronger in terms of imaginary and connotations than on descriptive or analytical accuracy”⁶. *I define Color Revolutions as nonviolent uprisings in post-Soviet states that emerged after fraudulent elections.*

There is no singular definition or agreement on which revolutions are considered Color Revolutions and which are not: the classical understanding of the notion argues that resistance movements in the post-Soviet countries and the Balkans are Color Revolutions, while others expand the scope of the definition and include movements in the Middle East (including Arab Spring) and a few Asian countries. It is also highly debated which revolution was the first Color Revolution; some scholars like David Lane go as far back as Portugal’s “Revolution of the Carnations” of April 1974, which was in fact a military coup rather than a Color Revolution.⁷ Others believe that the “Yellow Revolution” in the Philippines (February 1986) was the first Color Revolution because it was the first non-violent uprising in the contemporary world. However, most of the scholars that study Color Revolutions agree that the “Bulldozer Revolution” of October 2000 in Yugoslavia marked the beginning of the Color Revolutions.⁸

Literature divides Color Revolutions into two groups – ‘successful cases’ and ‘failed cases’. This distinction refers to the outcome of the revolution -- if the old government was

⁶ Mitchell, Lincoln. 2012. *The Color Revolutions*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press. Page 7

⁷ Lane, David. 2009. ‘*Coloured Revolution*’ as a *Political Phenomenon*. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. Vol. 25 N2-3. Page 114

⁸ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 3

replaced with the new one, the revolution was successful, if the existing government remained in power, then the revolution was unsuccessful. This division does not consider the long-term effects of the events. This project will explore eight different countries where Color Revolutions took place. Those countries are Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Armenia (2003/2004/2018), Ukraine (2004/2005), Kyrgyzstan (2005), Azerbaijan (2005), Belarus (2006), and Russia (2011/2012). According to the above-mentioned distinction, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia (2018) are ‘successful cases’ of Color Revolutions (change of government), while Armenia (2003/2004), Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia are considered to be ‘failed cases’ (old government prevailed).

Bulldozer Revolution (Serbia)	2000	Successful
Rose Revolution (Georgia)	2003	Successful
Armenia	2003/2004, 2008	Failed
Orange Revolution (Ukraine)	2004/2005	Successful
Tulip Revolution (Kyrgyzstan)	2005	Successful
Azerbaijan	2005	Failed
Belarus	2006	Failed
Russia	2011/2012	Failed
Velvet Revolution (Armenia)	2018	Successful

When one further explores ‘successful cases’ of Color Revolutions, it becomes evident that terming those revolutions successful is rather unsuitable. The new government, for various reasons, becomes unable to carry out its promises -- in some cases, the new government is not as democratic as it was expected, in others’ corruption and nepotism remain prevalent. Marc Morje Howard notes that the “civil society in these countries had been declared rather dead than alive by most scholars”.⁹ Gerlach argues that the empirical evidence shows an endless cycle of authoritarian regimes in countries where the Color Revolutions “succeeded”¹⁰ and that revolutions were simply “setting of opportunity structures for ousting the leader, and forecasts a never-ending sequence of hybrid regimes without explaining how the rather predictable cycle could be terminated”.¹¹

In the early 1990s, democratization was a general trend in Southeastern and Central European countries. Nonetheless, for most of the post-Soviet countries this was not the case, as many of them became less democratic during the same time period.¹² Way and Levitsky, however, do emphasize the fact that Southeastern and Central Europe have a rather democratic past while some incorrectly assume that post-Soviet countries, historically, have never been democratic.

Way and Levitsky connect democratization patterns to the Western *leverage*, which is the “governments’ vulnerability to external pressure” and *linkage* to the West that is “the

⁹ Howard, Marc Morjé. 2003. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

¹⁰ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 31

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Way, Lucan & Levitsky, Steven. 2007. *Linkage Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide*. East European Politics and Societies. V. 21. Page 49

density of a country's economic, political, organizational, social, and communication ties to the West".¹³ Central/Southeastern Europe has always enjoyed "dense geographic, social, economic, communication, and intergovernmental ties"¹⁴ with Western Europe, which has strengthened democratic forces. On the other hand, post-Soviet states, even after the collapse of the USSR, preserved strong ties with the Kremlin, which allowed Russia to retain its influence on those countries. Simply put, the West is associated with democratic change, while regional powers like Russia and China are associated with promoting and pushing towards authoritarian stability. While Western powers and Non-Governmental Organizations occasionally try to influence and 'democratize' post-Soviet states, Russian influence remains strong, which discourages the West from providing more support to those countries.¹⁵ The strong ties to Russia are not always a choice made by those countries: those countries' linkages and leverages to Russia are simply too strong and it is extremely difficult to break that pattern. In the case of Armenia, Russia is Armenia's most powerful ally, which results in a huge power imbalance in the relationship between the two states.

Is it a Color Revolution?

One might ask, what similar traits all those Color Revolutions share? One of the first similarities that stands out when researching Color Revolutions is the fact that all of them emerged after major fraudulent elections. When the electoral fraud is extremely obvious, people start to believe that if it did not occur, election results would have led to a different

¹³ Ibid. Page 50

¹⁴ Ibid. Page 55

¹⁵ Ibid.

outcome -- having another president or another political party would have gained a parliamentary majority. Way and Levitsky mention that election vote fraud can be very severe and “may deprive the opposition of up to 10 percent of the actual vote”.¹⁶ Major electoral frauds, however, increase the chance of large-scale protests as according to Tucker: “major electoral fraud provides an obvious focal point for action”.¹⁷ The scale of the protests allows people not to worry about individual punishments but rather hope for and focus on a positive outcome. Beachain and Polese additionally note that historically, elections have been a rather advantageous time to demonstrate with a hope to achieve a change, as they provide “a rare opportunity to mobilize and demonstrate with relative impunity, as international observers are usually present”¹⁸.

Joshua Tucker¹⁹ has his own explanation of why Color Revolutions emerge after fraudulent elections. When people have strong grievances against the government, addressing them can have high costs and low chances of success. Hence, citizens decide not to move forward with addressing those grievances. Electoral fraud, however, changes those calculations drastically and encourages citizens to protest, because if electoral fraud occurred, challenging it can mean a complete change of the government. Therefore, the outcome of protests, if successful, can be very valuable. Regime change is not an easy outcome to achieve -- in some of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Tucker, Joshua. 2007. *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. Perspectives on Politics. Vol. 5, No. 3. Page 541

¹⁸ Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. 2010. *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. London&New York: Routledge. Page 7

¹⁹ Tucker, Joshua. 2007. *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. Perspectives on Politics. Vol. 5, No. 3. Pages 535-551

these countries, the ruling elite was in power for decades, and “elections have become events designed simply to legitimize the existing governments rather than to choose leaders”²⁰.

Another similarity that all Color Revolutions have is the important role that the Youth Movements played in a change-making process. Students usually become core activists of the movement -- this is the case for every Color Revolution, however, generally speaking, youth leads the majority of protests in the world.²¹ Especially in successful cases of Color Revolutions, youth movements were able to become large in scale: “Otpor [in Yugoslavia] developed an extensive non-hierarchical network of activists in the regions. By the time of Presidential election, the social movement had more than 70,000 members in 130 branches across the country”.²² Pora in Ukraine had more than 35,000 regular members, while Kmara in Georgia had around 3000 members at the peak of the group’s activity, and Zubr in Belarus established its presence in 152 towns.²³ In Azerbaijan, which presents a failed case of Color Revolution, different youth groups attracted around 100 participants each and mainly operated in the capital city of Baku.²⁴ Former Otpor activist said: “You cannot defeat the government by imposing sanctions on it or outspending it. But you can accomplish it by gaining numbers”.²⁵

While numbers are important, the choice of tactics used by the youth organizations is critical as tactical innovation can catch authorities off guard and have a stronger impact than

²⁰ Way, Lucan & Levitsky, Steven. 2007. *Linkage Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide*. East European Politics and Societies 21. Page 49

²¹ Nikolayenko, Olena. 2009. *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance* (Working Paper). Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. Page 4

²² Ibid. Page 14

²³ Ibid. Page 12

²⁴ Ibid. Page 13

²⁵ Ibid. Page 14

familiar protest tactics.²⁶ For example, Otpor came up with two campaigns: “campaign Gotov Je! (He’s Finished) to expose weaknesses of the incumbent government and campaign Vreme Je! (It’s Time) to boost voter turnout”.²⁷ Former Otpor activist mentioned: “We realized that we shouldn’t fight against the consequences of Milosevic’s regime. We had to fight against the source of all the problems – Milosevic himself. We decided that we would put all the blame on Milosevic”.²⁸ Youth movements that originated after Otpor took inspiration from them and used their tactics. For Kmara, Otpor was the most recent example of non-violent resistance and they incorporated many of Otpor’s tactics. However, unlike Otpor, they did not focus on two campaigns simultaneously because they did not have enough time for that. After some time, governments become familiar with the tactics that youth movements use, hence those movements need to become increasingly creative to be able to surprise the regime with something unexpected.

The third similarity between cases of Color Revolutions is the involvement of the West and Western NGOs. In the cases of Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, “ties to the West and pro-democracy assistance via endorsements, training and funding of the opposition, as well as international media coverage all played a crucial role”.²⁹ Gerlach argues that while positive outcomes might have occurred even without Western influence, the “scale, vigor, and outcome” would have not been the same.³⁰ American-sponsored NGOs, and in particular George Soros and his Open Society Foundations, are regularly mentioned when discussing Color

²⁶ Ibid. Page 7

²⁷ Ibid. Page 14

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. “*Color Revolutions in Eurasia*”. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 16

³⁰ Ibid.

Revolutions. Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian newspaper) noted, "Russian political analysts are fond of referring to divisions of the Soros Foundation and Carnegie Center that 'force democracy' all over the world".³¹ In Russia, it was a widespread idea that due to Pora being modeled on Serbia's Otpor and Georgia's Kmara, the Orange Revolution was imported from the United States through Serbia and Georgia.³² The Western sponsors either outright finance revolutions or offer their support to youth movements by mentoring them and teaching revolutionary tactics. Governments that were prone to undergoing Color Revolutions, started implementing harsh laws towards Western NGOs. The new NGO law in Russia (December 2005) significantly impeded the activities of civil society and restricted funding from abroad, while justifying those actions with the need to prevent the possibility of a Ukraine-style electoral revolution in Russia.³³

Case Studies

This thesis considers the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia (2000) as the first case of the Color Revolution in the post-Soviet space. Many more revolutions followed the Bulldozer Revolution; however, the main ones that are considered to be Color Revolutions in the relevant literature are the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004/2005), and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). Some scholars like Julia Gerlach³⁴,

³¹ Tucker, Joshua. 2007. *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. Perspectives on Politics. Vol. 5, No. 3. Page 539

³² Ibid.

³³ Silitski, Vitali. 2010. *Survival of the fittest: Domestic and international dimensions of the authoritarian reaction in the former Soviet Union following the Colored Revolutions*. Elsevier: Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol.43 Page 342

³⁴ Ibid.

Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik,³⁵ Donnacha Beacháin and Abel Polese³⁶ also view events in Armenia (2003/2004, 2008, and 2013), Azerbaijan (2005, 2008, and 2013), Belarus (2006 and 2010) and Russia (2011/2012) as attempted and failed cases of Color Revolutions. The newest addition to this family of Color Revolutions is the Velvet Revolution that happened in Armenia in 2018, which is the central focus of this thesis.

Bulldozer Revolution

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) is a complex grouping of diverse nationalities and religions that at times had differing priorities and positionings. In the 1990s, Yugoslavia consisted of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and Vojvodina.³⁷ Furthermore, Yugoslavia hosted a wide array of religions like Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. The collapse of Yugoslavia was especially violent, accompanied by civil wars and ethnic conflicts that left established countries politically and economically imbalanced and weakened. In 1992, Serbia and Montenegro, the only two countries that agreed to remain united, created the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which also included autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo. The situation in FRY was very tense, especially because of the war in Kosovo.³⁸ Slobodan Milosevic, the president of the FRY,

³⁵ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press

³⁶ Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. 2010. *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. London&New York: Routledge

³⁷ Finlan, Alastair. 2004. *The Collapse of Yugoslavia 1991–1999*. Osprey Publishing. Page 13

³⁸ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 4

lead the country to hyperinflation, “an unemployment rate of almost 40 percent,”³⁹ and involved it in different conflicts with neighboring states to distract citizens from the domestic problems. The early presidential elections were scheduled for September 24, 2000, and Milosevic only gave eight weeks’ notice to the other presidential candidates.⁴⁰ It is widely assumed that this was done in order not to give opposing parties enough time to campaign and effectively participate in elections -- Milosevic’s position and support group was not as strong as it once was. The Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research of the Institute of Social Sciences in University of Belgrade conducted an opinion poll on August 3-11, 2000, on the eve of the 2000 Presidential elections, and “58 percent of the surveyed Serbs agreed with the following statement, ‘Milosevic leads the country into disaster only to remain in power.’”⁴¹

The opposition’s candidate was Vojislav Kostunica, who was the founder of the Democratic Party in 1989, Democratic Party of Serbia in 1992, and was a member of Parliament from 1990 until 1997.⁴² He had no ties to Milosevic or the West, was not associated with Communism, stood for Moderate Nationalism, and campaigned for FRY’s integration into the international arena.⁴³ Kostunica was leading the polls, and this gave rise to protests in Montenegro and Kosovo. Therefore, the Bulldozer Revolution is associated with Serbia rather than with FRY. Both Milosevic and Kostunica claimed victory; however, the Federal Election Commission called for a second ballot arguing that no one candidate has gotten the majority of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nikolayenko, Olena. 2009. *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance* (Working Paper). Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. Page 10

⁴² Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 4

⁴³ Ibid. Pages 4-5

votes. As a response to this, the opposition called for a general strike and boycott, which gave rise to widespread demonstrations that started on September 27. While the Supreme Court annulled the election results on October 4 and called for a re-run, protests and anti-Milosevic movements became too strong and widespread to be ignored. The opposition put forward the deadline of October 5 by which Milosevic was supposed to leave the office. The culmination of all those events happened in the evening of October 5, when around half a million demonstrators gathered in front of the government buildings and Radio Television of Serbia, which was seen as the embodiment of Milosevic's regime's propaganda, and eventually occupied them. Velimir Ilic, who was the mayor of Cacak, arrived to the protest in a bulldozer and Ljubisav Dokic, an unemployed bulldozer operator, used Ilic's vehicle to storm the Radio Television of Serbia's building.⁴⁴ Neither police nor security forces intervened during those events and Kostunica addressed people from the balcony of the Belgrade City Hall. On October 7, Slobodan Milosevic resigned from the president's position while recognizing Kostunica's victory in the elections.⁴⁵

Rose Revolution

Similar to Serbia, Georgia was weakened after gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 because of bloody civil wars and ethnic conflicts as well as a "state [was] prone to informal and criminal networks, corruption, and powerful non-transparent informal institutions".⁴⁶ Poverty and corruption were growing, while nepotism was strongly rooted in the

⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 5

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 7

country -- former president Shevardnadze's family and allies controlled up to 70 % of the country's economy.⁴⁷ In the years 2000 to 2003, both domestic and international support of Eduard Shevardnadze declined drastically:⁴⁸ in August 2003, "only 11 percent of the population approved of Shevardnadze's job performance".⁴⁹

On November 2, 2003, parliamentary elections took place during which Shevardnadze's and his 'For New Georgia' party's main opposition was Mikhail Saakashvili and his party, the 'United National Movement' (UNM). Saakashvili situated himself as a pro-Western and anti-Russia candidate who would fight against corruption and nepotism. Less than halfway through the vote count, Georgia's Central Elections Committee (CEC) had announced that president Shevardnadze and his party 'For New Georgia', was leading in the polls with 21.32 percent of votes, while Saakashvili and his party received 'only' 18.08 percent.⁵⁰ However, "the results from exit polls and parallel voter tabulation showed an opposite tendency: 26.60 percent for Saakashvili and 'only' 18.92 percent for Shevardnadze"⁵¹. On November 20, the CEC officially announced Shevardnadze's victory which gave rise to large-scale protests and rallies. On November 22, 2003, the inauguration of parliament was scheduled; however, during the event, Saakashvili and his supporters accompanied by CNN cameras stormed the building and disrupted the inauguration. After consulting with "Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and his

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 155

⁴⁹ Nikolayenko, Olena. 2009. *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance* (Working Paper). Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. Page 10

⁵⁰ Companjen, Françoise. 2010. *Georgia in The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge

⁵¹ Ibid.

foreign minister Igor Ivanov, Shevardnadze resigned and left for Moscow”.⁵² Saakashvili won the presidential elections on January 4, 2004, by receiving 96 percent of votes and served as the president of Georgia until 2013.⁵³

Orange Revolution

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine took place after the 2004 presidential elections. Leonid Kuchma, who ruled the country since 1994, could not participate in the 2004 elections because of the two-term limit that is set in the Ukrainian Constitution; however, he backed presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich who was the leader of the ‘Party of the Regions’. The opposition established a coalition called ‘Power to the People’, whose Presidential candidate was Viktor Yushchenko. Yanukovich was pro-Russia and was backed by Kuchma and Russia, while Yushchenko was rather pro-Western and was backed by Western NGOs and Western powers. While 26 candidates were on the ballot, on the election day, October 31, 2004, the presidential race quickly narrowed down to Yushchenko and Yanukovich. During the first round of the election, both candidates received around 41 percent of the votes,⁵⁴ while during the second round “Yanukovich won by a slim margin of 49.42 percent to 46.69 percent”.⁵⁵ This result was viewed by many as fraudulent and gave rise to demonstrations that culminated in the Orange Revolution. This outcome was not surprising for Ukrainians as “over 70 percent of those polled in 2003 did not believe there would be free and fair elections in 2004”.⁵⁶ Huge

⁵² Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 8

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 11

⁵⁵ Mitchell, Lincoln. 2012. *The Color Revolutions*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press. Page 49

⁵⁶ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 125

protests erupted in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in the center of Kyiv, where during the height of protests around 1,000,000 people participated.⁵⁷ This huge national movement led to Kuchma demanding a re-run of elections and the Supreme Court backing Kuchma's request. This time, Yushchenko won by receiving 55 percent of votes while Yanukovich received 44 percent.⁵⁸ Yanukovich tried to appeal election results; however, the Supreme Court rejected his appeal, and Yushchenko was inaugurated on January 23, 2005.

Tulip Revolution

The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan shared similar characteristics with the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the main one being that the parliamentary elections became the catalyst behind removing the president from the office. Askar Akayev was the president of Kyrgyzstan since 1990. Under his rule, Kyrgyzstan became extremely corrupt and his family and allies gained immense economic and political influence.⁵⁹ In 2003, Akayev introduced some constitutional changes that made it harder for the opposition to compete for power during elections. However, on February 27, 2005, 27,400 candidates ran for 75 seats during the first round of Parliamentary Elections and only 35 candidates won outright, which led to the second round of elections on March 13.⁶⁰ According to international observers, while the elections "were the most competitive in the country's history [they] still failed to meet international standards".⁶¹ Unlike other instances of Color Revolutions, demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan broke

⁵⁷ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 11

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 170

⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 174

⁶¹ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 13

out in various cities, rather than just the capital. Uprisings in some cities (for example, in Jalalabad, Osh) turned violent, were suppressed by the military and security forces, and resulted in the deaths of several participants. On March 22, as a sign of protest, only two-thirds of the new parliament members agreed to swear the oath to the constitution during the first parliamentary meeting. On March 24 over 10,000 protestors gathered in Bishkek, where the crowd broke into the White House, after which Akaev fled to Uzbekistan and then to Russia.⁶²

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan faced mass protests after the fraudulent 2005 parliamentary elections. The Aliev family, first Heidar Aliev and later his son Ilham Aliev, governed the country for years (since 1993). Through strict control of the economy and media, they gave rise to corruption and nepotism. Both Alievs led the 'New Azerbaijan Party' (YAP). Before the 2005 Parliamentary Elections, multiple opposing parties created coalitions to compete with the 'New Azerbaijan Party', however, in Azerbaijan, the opposition had no voice as well as protest attempts and media were brutally suppressed. When elections were announced to be fraudulent, despite civic groups' and youth movements' involvement, large scale mobilization was not achieved: "only approximately 15,000 people gathered out of a population of approximately 2,100,000 in

⁶² Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 175

the capital and 9,500,000 in the country”.⁶³ Similar protest attempts occurred in 2013 when Aliiev ran and won his third term, however, those protests did not lead to any change as well.

Belarus

Belarus is known as the “‘last dictatorship in Europe’ and the ‘hotspot of Soviet nostalgia’”.⁶⁴ Alexander Lukashenko has served as the president of Belarus since 1994: he amended the constitution to allow himself to run for the office indefinitely. Lukashenko consolidated power by “‘establishing formal personal control over all key state institutions, inter alia by abolishing the autonomy of local and regional governments’”.⁶⁵ The opposition was harshly oppressed, and the government controlled every aspect of life. In 2006, for the first time since 1994, Lukashenko faced a relatively unified opposition that was represented by two candidates: Aliaksandr Milinkevich and Aliaksandr Kazulin. Protests erupted when it was announced that Lukashenko won the elections by receiving 80 percent of the votes -- up to 20,000 protesters joined the demonstration.⁶⁶ Protests were harshly oppressed, and Lukashenko remained in the president’s cabinet.

Russia

Parliamentary Elections took place in Russia on December 4, 2011, and Presidential Elections took place on March 4, 2012. Vladimir Putin has served as Russia’s president since 1999. According to the Russian constitution, a president can only serve two consecutive terms,

⁶³ Cheterian, Vicken. 2010. *Azerbaijan*. in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge. Page 107

⁶⁴ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 20

⁶⁵ Silitski, Vitali. 2005. *Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus*. Journal of Democracy. Vol. 16 N4. Page 85

⁶⁶ Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 22

which led Putin towards building an alliance with Dmitri Medvedev in 2008, during whose presidency Putin served as the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. In 2012, it was announced that Medvedev would step back in favor of Putin. During the 2011 Parliamentary Elections, “according to the Central Election Commission, four parties met the threshold of 7 percent, and ‘United Russia’ [Putin’s party] won more than 49 percent of the votes”.⁶⁷ Protests broke out after the Central Election Commission rejected “almost 90 percent of the claims for irregularities on December 10, 2011”.⁶⁸ While Putin’s re-election in 2012 did not necessarily worsen the protests that started happening after the Parliamentary Elections, it was another event that made people angry and made them lose trust in Putin. Those protests remained non-violent until May 2012; however, they were violently ceased after June 2012.⁶⁹

Armenia

Armenia is one of the oldest countries in the world, however, it has been systematically conquered by many countries and empires (Greeks, Byzantines, Mongols, Ottomans, Russians, etc.), so the history of Armenian independence is very patchy. During the 3500 years of written history, Armenian borders and forms of governance underwent through many changes. During the reign of King Tigranes the Great (140 – 55 BC), the country became, for a short time, the strongest state to Rome's East.⁷⁰ Armenians and many historians refer to Armenia as ‘sea to sea

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 23

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Manaseryan, Ruben. 2007. *Տիգրան Մեծ՝ Հայկական Պայքարը Հռոմի և Պարթևաստանի դեմ, մ.թ.ա. 94–64 թթ.* [Tigran the Great: The Armenian Struggle Against Rome and Parthia, 94–64 B.C.] (in Armenian). Yerevan: Lusakan Publishing. Page 13

Armenia' during those years as the kingdom extended from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The First Armenian Republic was established on May 28, 1918, after not having independence for around 1000 years; however, this newfound independence had a very short life. After the Armenian Genocide, the country was extremely weakened and had a very small population of around 1.3 million people. It is generally agreed that this republic came to an end by the late 1920s after it was conquered by the Soviet Red Army. The Second Republic of Armenia, which is the one that still exists today, was established on September 21, 1991, after Armenia declared its independence from the USSR.

Armenia has a strong tradition of mass protests, which proves to be an important characteristic when it comes to successful or failed cases of Color Revolutions. In the 1980s, protests erupted in Yerevan concerning the Nagorno Karabakh question and its reunion with Armenia; later, in the 1990s, more demonstrations took place regarding Armenia's dissolution from the Soviet Union. Even before the rise of Color Revolutions in the 21st century, Armenians were challenging election results through mass protests and demonstrations. In 1996, former defense minister Vazgen Manukyan led mass protests challenging president Levon Ter-Petrosian and demanding the re-run of elections.

Mikayel Zolyan⁷¹ describes the Armenian political system as an "imitated democracy," where de jure democratic institutions are in place although de facto, all of those institutions are ruled by the elites themselves and they do not hesitate to use those resources to their advantage. In 2003, Stepan Demirchyan led mass demonstrations that sought to challenge the

⁷¹ Zolyan, Mikayel. 2010. *Armenia in The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge

presidency of Robert Kocharyan and fraudulent election results.⁷² While technically, the economy was on the rise since the 1990s, “most benefits from the economic growth were concentrated in the hands of a tiny part of the population” and big businesses were controlled by oligarchs with close ties to the government and Kocharyan himself.⁷³ The first round of elections occurred on February 19, 2003, and “the Central Electoral Commission announced that two candidates, the incumbent Kocharyan (with 49.48 percent of the votes) and Demirchyan (28.22 percent of the votes) would continue the struggle for the president’s post”.⁷⁴ The second round of elections took place on March 5, 2003, and Kocharyan won by receiving 67.52 percent of the votes.⁷⁵ International monitoring agencies viewed those elections as highly fraudulent and below the level of international standards. However, Kocharyan took the office, and the Constitutional Court did not cancel the election results.

The presidential elections of 2008 brought another wave of unsettlement and protests to Armenia. Then prime minister Serzh Sargsyan was one of the presidential candidates, although he was a member of the same party as Robert Kocharyan; this meant that if Sargsyan won the election, no changes would be made in Armenia. Sargsyan won the elections, which were recognized as highly corrupted. He served two five-year terms as a “highly unpopular president”.⁷⁶ Protestors once again took the streets after the 2008 presidential election to “protest fraud and call for new elections”.⁷⁷ Protests lasted for 12 days and “were brutally

⁷² Gerlach, Julia. 2014. “*Color Revolutions in Eurasia*”. Springer Briefs in Political Science. Page 17

⁷³ Zolyan, Mikayel. 2010. *Armenia in The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge. Page 91

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Cooper, Marc. 2018. *Armenia’s Revolution: A Flickering Light in a Darkening Europe*. The Nation (thenation.com)

⁷⁷ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. “*Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*”. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 195

broken up by the police and troops of the Interior Ministry”.⁷⁸ Eight people died and 400 were wounded as a result of those events.⁷⁹ Similar to 2003 demonstrations, they were peaceful; however, this one got shut down violently.

During Sargsyan’s presidency, the country was crumbling -- oligarchs were getting richer while for the regular people, unemployment and poverty rates were increasing. By the end of Sargsyan’s 8-year presidency, Republicans proposed to make a constitutional change which transferred executive power from the president to prime minister. A referendum took place in December 2015. The referendum turnout was minimal (51 percent) and the changes were passed with 66 percent of the vote.⁸⁰ While the opposition claimed that the elections were fraudulent and protests once again broke out, these demonstrations soon died down and the changes were adopted. Before the referendum, Sargsyan promised that he would not run as a Prime Minister, as his two terms as the President were coming to the end. Yet, he did not keep his promise and was the only candidate from his party that was nominated; as Sargsyan’s party had the majority in the Parliament, he was elected as the Prime Minister of Armenia. This constitutional change was a loophole for Sargsyan to stay in power for longer and continue to deepen inequalities -- making the rich even richer and the poor poorer.

Nikol Pashinyan is an activist and journalist who has always been interested and involved in politics. Pashinyan had played a key role in the post-election protests in 2008. He was blamed for organizing mass protests, for which he was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to

⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 196

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Iskandaryan, Alexander. 2018. *The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: How to Lose Power in Two Weeks*. Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization. Published: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University. Vol. 26, N4. Page 473

seven years in prison. He was released in 2011 as part of the general amnesty. However, even after his arrest, he was always very critical towards Sargsyan and his government.

After it became evident that Serzh Sargsyan will be elected as Armenia's next Prime Minister, on March 31, 2018, Pashinyan formed the 'Take a Step' initiative in the framework of which he "set out on a protest march from his hometown [Gyumri] toward the capital of Yerevan, 120 miles away".⁸¹ He started his journey only with few people following him. During his march, Pashinyan stopped in the small towns, met with people who live there, listened to their problems and concerns. During the nights, he slept outside in a tent while feeding himself and his followers with food that people from the nearby towns would bring for him. Pashinyan showcased his whole journey through Facebook Lives. He would update his Facebook followers about his current location, where he will be stopping for the night, and what are his upcoming moves. On April 13, 17 days after the beginning of Pashinyan's march, he and his 150 followers reached Yerevan. There they were met with the Yerevan-based civil society group 'Reject Serzh'.⁸² Pashinyan's movement became rather popular by the time he reached Yerevan -- the number of his followers were in thousands and growing. The first mass demonstration took place on the evening of April 13, after which some of the protestors staged a sit-down in France Square, downtown Yerevan, which continued for a few days.⁸³

Round-the-clock demonstrations continued until Serzh Sargsyan's resignation on April

23. While Pashinyan was the main leader of the revolution, the movement was highly

⁸¹ Cooper, Marc. 2018. *Armenia's Revolution: A Flickering Light in a Darkening Europe*. The Nation (thenation.com)

⁸² Lansky, Mariam & Suthers, Elspeth. 2019. *Armenia's Velvet Revolution*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 30, No. 2. Johns Hopkins University Press. Page 92

⁸³ Hovhannisyan, Ani. 2018. *Armenia's "Velvet Revolution" – A Chronology*. Hetq.am

decentralized: during those 10 days of mobilization, many smaller-scale protests and mass actions took place all over Armenia. People took initiative and protested in many creative ways -- be that by blocking the street with a piano and giving a Jazz concert, at a certain time each evening banging on pots and pans, giving dance lessons in the streets, blocking the streets by parked cars or strollers, or simply creating and sharing memes.^{84 85} The movement did not have a central location or a tent city, which made it harder for the government to target demonstrators.⁸⁶

Similar to the other cases of Color Revolutions, young people played a critical role in this movement. The youth was able to combine traditional demonstration methods such as chanting slogans and blocking roads with new technologies -- most of the meetings were organized in a matter of minutes through social media.⁸⁷ Many students and high schoolers were involved in the Velvet Revolution. They organized walkouts from classrooms, skipped classes to protest, or simply took protests to their own educational institutions.

On April 17, when Serzh Sargsyan was officially elected as Armenia's Prime Minister, Pashinyan announced the beginning of the non-violent Velvet Revolution -- "mass demonstrations, rallies, street closures paralyze the capital of Yerevan for days".⁸⁸ Pashinyan was able to mobilize tens of thousands of demonstrators -- a number that is unheard of in Armenia. On April 22, at 10 am, after being unable to ignore continuity and rising numbers of

⁸⁴ Amiryan, Tigran. 2018. *Culture of Protest: the Symbols of Armenia's Velvet Revolution*. The Calvert Journal

⁸⁵ Lansky, Mariam & Suthers, Elspeth. 2019. *Armenia's Velvet Revolution*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 30, No. 2. Johns Hopkins University Press. Page 93

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Civilnet.am. 2018. *Armenia's Velvet Revolution: A Timeline of Key Events*

the demonstrators, Sargsyan agreed to meet with Pashinyan in Marriott Hotel in the Republic Square. However, the 'negotiations' ended in a few minutes without reaching an agreement. On their way out of the hotel, Pashinyan and two other deputies that have been visible and vocal leaders of the Velvet Revolution -- Ararat Mirzoyan and Sasun Mikaelyan -- were taken into custody.⁸⁹ However, due to the decentralized nature of the Velvet Revolution, the protests continued and on the next day, on April 23, Pashinyan, Mirzoyan and Mikaelyan got released from detention while Serzh Sargsyan resigned from the role of the Prime Minister of Armenia.

The Velvet Revolution truly was a turning point in Armenian history. As it has been demonstrated, the struggle for a political change was ongoing for more than ten years, however, the Republican Party of Armenia and their party leaders were able to survive throughout all those political events. It came as a shock not only to Armenians but to the world that Pashinyan was able to manage the unthinkable -- peacefully overthrow the regime that has been in power for more than a decade.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2: External Factors that Caused the Velvet Revolution

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the Armenian Velvet Revolution of 2018, was not unique in its kind -- many similar revolutions happened all over Eastern Europe since the early 2000s. When one thinks of revolutions and how they come to be, the first reason that comes to mind is the internal struggles that the country faces -- be that corruption and unjust government, economic hardships, etc. Chapter 3 of this thesis will focus on the internal struggles that Armenia was facing before and during the Velvet Revolution happened. This Chapter, however, focuses on the external forces that were affecting Armenia in this specific time that made the Velvet Revolution possible.

Most of the literature that focuses on the Color Revolutions, puts the biggest emphasis on internal factors that push people to take over the streets and protest, however, external factors can both enable as well as prevent revolutions from happening. Hence, it is important to consider those as well and try to understand their role in the Velvet Revolution when one wants to have the full picture of it. For this thesis, the three external factors chosen for further consideration are the geographic location of Armenia and how that makes the country more susceptible to revolutions, Russian influence, and Western influence (mainly western NGOs). Those specific factors were chosen after conducting a careful analysis of other Color Revolutions -- specifically Bulldozer, Rose, Orange and Tulip Revolutions -- as specifically those factors carried prevailing importance in the success of those uprisings. Additionally, when one investigates failed cases of Color Revolutions, it becomes evident that those factors played a huge role in those cases as well.

Democratic Diffusion and Modular Action

Democratic diffusion theory argues that “democratic ideas and norms spread across borders: the more democratic states in the region, the more likely an authoritarian state is to become democratic.”⁹⁰ Democratic Diffusion theory is rather descriptive: Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik define diffusion as a “process wherein new ideas, institutions, policies, models or repertoires of behavior spread geographically from a core site to other sites.”⁹¹ This spread can happen within a country or across borders. To put diffusion into the framework of Color Revolutions, one can argue that the diffusion of democratic ideas, norms, policies, etc. took place in Eastern Europe/Post-Soviet space. Bunce and Wolchik argue that the electoral model of democratization was developed and applied in states like Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia from 1996 to 1998, after which this model was embraced and implemented by opposition groups and citizens in states like Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.⁹² Diffusion does not happen automatically: it is a conscious effort by groups and people to bring changes that are happening in one country to their own countries. Diffusion requires knowledge of new developments, commitment to work towards bringing certain developments to the country as well as values and interests that would direct those groups and people towards diffusion.⁹³ Diffusion can happen through unofficial sources as well as through more organized ways. Scholars tend to highlight three specific methods through which democratic diffusion occurs:

⁹⁰ Vanderhill, Rachel. 2017. *Active Resistance to Democratic Diffusion*. Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 50, No. 1. Page 43

⁹¹ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2006. *International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions*. Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 39, No. 3. Page 286

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

demonstration effects (or emulation), learning, and purposive action.⁹⁴ Vanderhill describes demonstration effects (or emulation) as the informal processes by which ideas spread across borders through actors that find situations in both states rather similar and find appeal in proposed changes.⁹⁵ Another important characteristic of diffusion is that groups learn different techniques from one another and they take lessons from successes and failures of other groups: “learning is a process where actors find tactics, strategies, or frames used elsewhere to be helpful for achieving their own goals.”⁹⁶ Last but not least, diffusion can happen through more formal “purposive” ways, whereby certain groups actively seek and work towards spreading ideas they believe in. Vanderhill describes three ways in which the democratic diffusion mechanism occurs: “direct, interpersonal networks (relational); indirect, impersonal connections, such as through the spread of ideas by means of the media; mediated networks, where a “third actor” connects pro-democracy activists in different countries.”⁹⁷

The proposed definition of Democratic Diffusion Theory has two distinct components: location and regime type. A majority of scholars argue that the biggest variable for democratic diffusion is the physical or geographic location -- countries that have closer proximity to each other have higher chances to be affected by this ‘diffusion’. Harvey Starr specifically mentions that “many governmental transitions were not random nor free from the regional context - geographic or otherwise - within which they took place.”⁹⁸ Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge

⁹⁴ Vanderhill, Rachel. 2017. *Active Resistance to Democratic Diffusion*. Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 50, No. 1. Page 43

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Starr, Harvey. 1991. *Democratic Dominoes: Diffusion Approaches to the Spread of Democracy in the International System*. The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 35, No. 2, Democracy and Foreign Policy: Community and Constraint. Sage Publications. Page 371

introduce the idea of “neighbor emulation” which is “a tendency for neighboring countries to converge toward a shared level of democracy or nondemocracy” (Brinks’ and Coppedge’s study finds that “neighbor emulation” is significant).⁹⁹ Brinks and Coppedge through their study find strong support for the argument that countries tend to become more like their geographic neighbors over time due to ‘diffusion’.¹⁰⁰ However, countries that are in a region where democratic governments are the majority have higher chances of becoming democratic. Additionally, as the number of democracies rises in the world, there are more chances for those countries that turned democratic to stay one for a longer-term.¹⁰¹ The main reason why neighboring countries tend to have similar regimes is the assumption that countries tend to get rewarded when their regimes are similar to their neighboring countries regimes’.¹⁰² Those rewards can vary -- better relations with neighbors, trade, more investments, higher regional security, etc. Brinks and Coppedge further argue that a bigger gap in the level of democracy between neighboring countries will put higher levels of pressure on the less democratic country to become more democratic.¹⁰³ Studies also have shown that close geographic proximity allows more spontaneous forms of diffusion, be that through interactions between citizens of different countries, economic and business exchanges, or cultural ties.¹⁰⁴ Those forms of democratic diffusion happen “without any collaboration, imposition, or otherwise programmed effort on

⁹⁹ Brinks, Daniel & Coppedge, Michael. 2006. *Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy*. Comparative Political Studies. Sage Publications. Vol. 39 No 4. Page 464

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Page 465

¹⁰² Ibid. Page 466

¹⁰³ Ibid. Page 467

¹⁰⁴ Lankina, Tomila & Libman, Alexander & Obydenkova, Anastassia. 2016. *Authoritarian and Democratic Diffusion in Post-Communist Regions*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 49, No. 12. Page 1602

the part of any of the actors.”¹⁰⁵ While those spontaneous diffusion mechanisms might not be an end in themselves, they can serve as initial triggers that can lead to democratic change.

It seems like a no brainer that location matters -- being in a region where change and revolutions take place does affect people’s actions and aspirations. Diffusion can have a great effect on how masses start seeing and reacting to the existing government -- people’s attitudes might change to the extent to which people are willing to take actions against the autocratic or unfair regime. Once people start seeing how their neighboring countries are becoming more democratic, and the possible positive impacts that democratic change is having on those citizens’ lives, people become more willing to fight for democracy as they see how rewarding the prize can be and what is the most important, that the change is possible. If one assumes that “popular opinion toward a political regime matters for regime survival, a change in popular perception can bring about regime change.”¹⁰⁶

While most of the emphasis is on location, some scholars argue that Democratic Diffusion has higher chances to spread between countries that have similar regime types. Edward Goldring and Sheena Chestnut Greitens argue that “tactics that work against a regime of one type will have a higher chance of success if they are applied to other regimes in the same regime-type category.”¹⁰⁷ Goldring’s and Greitens’ argument is that even if protests do spread along geographic lines, regime type is the main determining factor of whether protests will turn into something bigger and eventually lead to democratization or they will have no substantial

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Vanderhill, Rachel. 2017. *Active Resistance to Democratic Diffusion*. Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 50, No. 1. Page 43

¹⁰⁷ Goldring, Edward & Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2020. *Rethinking Democratic Diffusion: Bringing Regime Type Back In*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 53 No.2. Page 321

effect. The explanation that Goldring and Greitens provide for their argument is that different regimes have different structures, mechanisms and tools with which they combat demonstration/revolution attempts and those mechanisms make them either susceptible or resilient to change. This leads to the argument that when protestors take ideas and inspiration from other groups, it is more likely for those ideas to work in a country that has a similar regime type to the country where the change happened because each regime has different levels and points of vulnerability and this vulnerability based on regime type does affect whether democratic diffusion is successful or not.¹⁰⁸ Protestors will demand regime change, however, a breakdown will only occur if the regime is vulnerable to transition -- be that lack of will or capacity to diffuse protests. Some regimes will try to come to an agreement with their citizens which will allow them to stay in power while others will use force to stop protests altogether. Based on this logic, if a change of regime was able to happen in one authoritarian state there is a high probability that those tactics would work in other authoritarian states as well. Goldring's and Greitens' study shows that "similar regime autocratic breakdown is positive and statistically significant at 99% confidence"¹⁰⁹ which means that "autocratic breakdowns among similar autocratic regimes have a positive effect on the likelihood of autocratic breakdown."¹¹⁰ In other tests conducted during this study "the positive and statistically significant effect of Similar regime autocratic breakdown holds at least at 99% confidence"¹¹¹ which further showcases the importance of this variable. While Goldring and Greitens in their study do not find geographic

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Page 329

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Page 336

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Page 340

proximity as important as other studies do, they go as far as assuming that the geographic proximity variable is insignificant. However, they also argue, if one assumes that geographic proximity is important, one can also assume that “the effect of regime type on breakdown is particularly strong when countries are closer to each other.”¹¹²

Diffusion theory by no means explains the initial reasons for the emergence of revolutionary ideas, however, that is not this theory’s goal -- it is supposed to explain why revolutions tend to spread. Different studies give different reasons for Democratic Diffusion; however, location and similar regime types are two of the main arguments presented in this theory.

Mark Beissinger introduces the idea of Modular Action which is an action that is based on “the prior successful example of others -- a model being, in one of Webster’s definitions, ‘an example for imitation or emulation’.”¹¹³ When the notion of modularity is applied to collective action (demonstrations, revolution attempts, etc.), one thinks of “borrowing of mobilizational frames, repertoires, or modes of contention across cases.”¹¹⁴ Color Revolutions are great examples of Modular Action, as prior successful examples inspire people to act and make a change. Moreover, each revolution creates a framework that has been borrowed by the next revolutionaries in line: “each successful democratic revolution has produced an experience that has been consciously borrowed by others, spread by NGOs, and emulated by local social movements, forming the contours of a model.”¹¹⁵ One can understand this notion best when

¹¹² Ibid. Page 330

¹¹³ Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

looking into how during Color Revolutions, youth groups, which were the main engines of change, were trained and taught by each other. Otpor, the Serbian youth group that played a central role in the Bulldozer Revolution, traveled all around the world and taught local groups how to organize democratic revolutions. Otpor activists trained Kmara activists, the youth group in Georgia that organized the Rose Revolution, a few months before the revolution, and continued mentoring them during the Rose Revolution itself. Otpor members trained Kmara members in techniques of non-violent resistance and as one of the founders of Kmara noted, Otpor was “a huge source of inspiration for the group.”¹¹⁶ Pora, the youth movement in Ukraine that was in charge of the Orange Revolution, was influenced by both Otpor and Kmara. Fourteen Pora leaders were trained by Otpor members at the Center for Non-Violent Resistance in Serbia on how to “organize a movement, motivate voters, and develop mass actions.”¹¹⁷ In Kyrgyzstan, a youth group named Kelkel modeled their form of resistance based on the experience of Otpor and Pora after several Kyrgyz young people were in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution as election observers.

Modular Action is incentivized by the prior success of other groups as well as by the gains one would receive by being associated with a successful example.¹¹⁸ Prior successful examples normally raise the probability of action in other states as actors in those states have more hopes of successful outcomes. After each successful case, there is an even higher probability of more actions being taken by different groups in different states: “within modular democratic revolution cross-case influence is not only identified with accelerated movement

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

formation, but with an increased probability of action as well.”¹¹⁹ Actors who were successful in making a change are often more than willing to share their experience and knowledge with other groups partly because of ideological reasons -- they truly believe that what they did was correct and the best option for their country and citizens. Otpor, Kmara and Pora created international consulting centers where they promote democratic values and train ‘future changemakers’ in the spirit of modular revolution. Mark Beissinger argues that the spread of modular action is not random; usually it is “shaped across space and time by certain pre-existing structural conditions.”¹²⁰ Goldring and Greitens mention that recent studies in political science show that “connectivity rather than geography, proximity and contiguity”¹²¹ can be accounted for much of the spread of democratization movements, which supports Beissinger’s model of Modular Action. Modular Actions become possible by the sense of interconnectedness across different actors, which is produced by “common institutional characteristics, histories, cultural affinities, or modes of domination.”¹²² This allows groups in different countries to draw parallels across states and feel much more interconnected, which suggests that success in one country can be mimicked in other ones as well.

All of these theories come to establish one fact -- location matters. Geographically, being situated in an area where revolutions happen, increases the chances of the state having a

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Goldring, Edward & Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2020. *Rethinking Democratic Diffusion: Bringing Regime Type Back In*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 53 No.2. Page 333

¹²² Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2

revolution itself. Demonstrations do not arise out of nowhere and they do spread across borders, be that by certain mechanisms or purely because of geographic proximity.

Linkage and Leverage

One cannot write about the Color Revolutions and not touch bases on Western and Russian influence on the region. The region itself is highly complicated because of history, demographic making, and weak state formations. While historically, many states in this region have strong connections to Russia, Western countries are putting more and more attention and effort into influencing those states. In some cases, those efforts are successful, while in others, Russian influence remains the dominant power concerning the state.

Lucan Way and Steven Levitsky put a lot of emphasis on linkage and leverage as they argue that those are essential components in understanding how countries are interconnected. Leverage is the government's vulnerability to external pressure while linkage is the "density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of trade and investment, people, and communication) between particular countries."¹²³ Way and Levitsky explore countries' linkage and leverage to the United States and the West, however, the same concepts can be applied to the linkage and leverage of other parts of the world (Russia). Both linkage to and leverage by the West should be high for a country to transition to

¹²³ Levitsky, Steven & Way, Lucan. 2006. *Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change*. Comparative Politics. Vol. 38, No. 4. Page 379

democracy. If there are high leverage and weak linkage or vice versa, there are lower chances for democratization.¹²⁴

Tomila Lankina, Alexander Libman and Anastassia Obydenkova in *Authoritarian and Democratic Diffusion in Post-Communist Regions* argue that European Union aid enhances regional democracy, as having “the effect of countering external autocratic influences that work through Soviet-era interregional economic ties.”¹²⁵ Powerful autocratic countries like Russia and China are able to dissuade countries from becoming democratic through strong economic ties and other forms of leverage.¹²⁶ For example, the Russian market is extremely important for almost all Post-Soviet states’ national economies (the only exceptions being Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Georgia): “25% to 45% of exports of Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, and 8% to 25% of exports from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, and Lithuania are targeted at the Russian market.”¹²⁷

Western NGO-s

Western countries as well as the United States have been highly involved in Color Revolutions and promoting democratization and Western values in Eastern Europe and the Post-Soviet space. The US government has spent around \$41 million promoting anti-Milošević

¹²⁴ Way, Lucan & Levitsky, Steven. 2007. *Linkage Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide*. East European Politics and Societies. V. 21. Pages 48-66

¹²⁵ Lankina, Tomila & Libman, Alexander & Obydenkova, Anastassia. 2016. *Authoritarian and Democratic Diffusion in Post-Communist Regions*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 49, No. 12. Page 1600

¹²⁶ Ibid. Page 1603

¹²⁷ Ibid. Page 1606

civil society groups like Otpor before the Bulldozer Revolution.¹²⁸ The Global Nonviolent Action Database states that the United States “had given \$15 million to independent media in Serbia while spending \$1 billion in the form of cruise missiles and other weapons to fight Milosevic.”¹²⁹ Similarly, the US government spent \$65 million promoting democracy in Ukraine during and after the Orange Revolution.¹³⁰ Most of this money was transferred to Ukrainian NGOs that played a central role in the Orange Revolution through third party NGOs.¹³¹ For example, USAID gave millions of dollars to the Poland-America-Ukraine Cooperation Initiative (PAUCI) (initiative administered by Freedom House), which relocated those funds to numerous Ukrainian NGOs.¹³² It is generally believed that since the 2000s, the United States developed a more aggressive approach towards the democratization efforts of Post-Soviet space. This has to do with the growing conflict between the Bush administration and Post-Communist governments like those in Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and Uzbekistan regarding foreign policy and internal human rights practices.¹³³ In October 2004, President Bush signed the Belarus Democracy Act through which the US assisted movements in Belarus, the goal of which was to overthrow the Lukashenka regime.¹³⁴ Kmara, on the other hand, received \$350,000 from the local branch of the Soros Foundation as well as Kmara and other opposition groups received financial and organizational support from the National Democratic Institute.¹³⁵ Moreover, the movement in Georgia was

¹²⁸ Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2

¹²⁹ Global Nonviolent Action Database. *Serbians overthrow Milosevic (Bulldozer Revolution), 2000*. Swarthmore College

¹³⁰ Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

supported by the US as well: in May 2005, Bush traveled to Tbilisi where he praised the Rose Revolution and suggested that other states in the Caucasus and Central Asia should see this movement in Georgia as an example and inspiration.¹³⁶ Otpor, one of the first successful pro-democracy groups able to conduct a revolution, was strongly sponsored by the US government and Western NGOs (especially monetarily); they traveled all around the world and trained local groups on how to organize revolutions and revolt against autocratic governments.

George Soros' Open Society Foundations is the main organization that keeps coming up when one researches the West's and Western NGOs' influences on the Color Revolutions. Open Society Foundations is the world's largest private funder of groups that work towards justice, democratic governance and human rights.¹³⁷ For over three decades, the Open Society Foundations have had expenditures of more than \$15 billion.¹³⁸ George Soros and his foundation are especially disdained by authoritarian governments -- "The Soros Foundation, for instance, no longer operates in Belarus, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan because of growing hostility from host governments."¹³⁹ In 2018, Open Society Foundations closed its office in Budapest, Hungary, and moved it to Berlin, Germany as Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban's government became more and more hostile towards the foundation. This is especially notable as George Soros himself is Hungarian and, what is even more anticlimactic, in 1989 Orban studied in Oxford with a scholarship from the Soros Foundation. The president of the Open Society Foundations, Patrick Gaspard, explained his relocation by saying: "The

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Open Society Foundations. *Who We Are*. www.opensocietyfoundations.org

¹³⁸ Open Society Foundations. *Financials*. www.opensocietyfoundations.org

¹³⁹ Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2

government of Hungary has denigrated and misrepresented our work and repressed civil society for the sake of political gain, using tactics unprecedented in the history of the European Union It has become impossible to protect the security of our operations and our staff in Hungary from arbitrary government interference.”¹⁴⁰

Nikol Pashinyan, during his victory speech on April 23, 2018, used revolutionary language while pushing back against insinuations of foreign interference -- "It's a pure Armenian Velvet Revolution," Pashinyan announced.¹⁴¹ There is no solid proof that the Velvet Revolution was sponsored by the West, however, there is no proof that it was not either. Open Society Foundations' Armenian office director Larisa Minasian put out multiple statements denying the Soros Foundation having any connection to the Velvet Revolution and Nikol Pashinyan. Open Society Foundations supports numerous NGOs in Armenia that work in the field of human rights and women's rights, and that organize anti-corruption and election monitoring campaigns as well as other initiatives that are supposed to hold the government responsible for its actions. Those organizations and their leaders did have an important role in contributing to the success of the Velvet Revolution and many of the leaders of those NGOs hold high-level positions in the new government.¹⁴² This leads to much speculation regarding Soros shaping the outcome of the Velvet Revolution and being involved in it through local NGOs, especially when it is well-known that this has been the tactic used during other Color Revolutions. Over the past two decades, Open Society Foundations has given about \$53 million

¹⁴⁰ Open Society Foundations. 2018. *The Open Society Foundations to Close International Operations in Budapest*

¹⁴¹ Eckel, Mike. 2018. *A 'Color Revolution' In Armenia? Mass Protests Echo Previous Post-Soviet Upheavals*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

¹⁴² Massispost.com. 2019. *Who Are "Soros's Men" in Armenia?*

in grants to a multitude of Armenian NGOs and individuals. The money has been spent on hundreds of projects in areas that include education, human rights, judicial reforms, and media.¹⁴³

George Soros' name keeps resurfacing during political debates in Armenia, specifically by the cabinet members of the ex-president and prime minister Serzh Sargsyan and his political supporters. They portray Soros and his foundation as an outside agent that tries to interfere with the regular course of life in Armenia, change the culture, and impose values that are not 'Armenian'. One of the biggest allegations that anti-Soros groups and individuals are using against the foundation is that 'Soros Network' is trying to get same-sex marriage legalized in Armenia.¹⁴⁴ Armenia is inherently a country that is homophobic and puts a high value into the 'traditional family' model. Speculating that an organization promotes LGBTQ rights is an effective method for discrediting it in Armenia, as it is almost given that the public will turn against the organization in that case. It was argued that same-sex marriage is trying to be passed through ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).¹⁴⁵ Gender rights and domestic violence is another 'hot topic' in Armenia that has been systematically overlooked and forbidden to talk about. Victim blaming and domestic violence, toxic masculinity and traditional gender norms are embedded in Armenian society, and it is not surprising that the signing of the Istanbul Convention faced so much backlash. However, the catch here is that the Istanbul Convention was signed in January 2018 by the previous government (Serzh Sargsyan's

¹⁴³ Sahakian, Nane. 2020. *Soros Foundation In Armenia Decries 'Smear Campaign'*. Azatutyun.am

¹⁴⁴ Grigoryan, Armen. 2019. *"Armenia First": Behind the Rise of Armenia's Alt-Right Scene*. Opendemocracy.net

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

government), which means that if the Soros Foundation perpetrated the signing of the convention, it would be logical to assume that Sargsyan and his cabinet were associated with the Soros Foundation as well. For example, Eduard Sharmazanov, a former Republican public official who is now a member of Armenia's opposition, "refutes the convention as 'contradictory to our set of values... there must be no alternative to the traditional family model',"¹⁴⁶ however Sharmazanov was a government official when the convention was signed and he had nothing to say against it back then.

Vitali Balasanyan, a long-standing government official, in his exclusive interview to LIVEnews.am in October 2019, officially announced that the Soros Foundation had connections to Velvet Revolution, however, he refused to provide specific evidence.¹⁴⁷ Balasanyan believes that the Velvet Revolution was a project organized by outside actors and it was by no means a people's movement. Once again, however, one needs to consider where Balasanyan stands in the political spectrum -- he is fully against Nikol Pashinyan and his new government, and he believes that Pashinyan unlawfully took over the government and put Armenia on the route of destruction. This is one of the classic cases where an association with the Soros Foundation is seen as something negative and destructive.

In this thesis, the Soros Foundation and its connection to the Velvet Revolution are not necessarily seen as something negative. Organizing a revolution is not an easy process -- one needs both knowledge and money to be able to do that. In all the successful cases of Color Revolutions interference from outside had a fairly large role in the success of the movement. As

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Live News. 2019. *Վիտալի Բալասանյանի բացառիկ հարցազրույցը LIVEnews.am-ին*. Youtube.com

it has already been mentioned, there is no proof that the Soros Foundation, the United States, or any other international actor had any involvement and contribution in the Velvet Revolution. However, when one looks into other cases of Color Revolutions (both successful cases and failed attempts) it seems highly possible that the West played a role in this revolution as well.

Russia

After the collapse of the USSR, Armenia was in a position where a quick choice of allies should have been made. Being a small country surrounded by neighboring states that pose a threat to its well-being and integrity is not a position that any country wants to find itself in. One of the first nationalistic movements that were advocating for the dissolution of the Soviet Union and state independence started in Armenia, which also led to generally negative feelings towards what ended up being the Russian Federation in Armenia. Regardless, the first presidents of Armenia and Russia -- Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Boris Yeltsin -- from the get-go have had good relationships with each other as well as shared similar visions of how the two countries should develop in the future.¹⁴⁸ Yeltsin was envisioning Russia's future as a more democratic country with strong Euro-Atlantic integration.¹⁴⁹ This led Armenia to believe that renewed ties with Russia meant ties with the West as Russia was seen as a continuation of it.

It is impossible to analyze Armenian internal politics as well as its external relations with other states, without talking about Nagorno Karabakh, which is a small, unrecognized, de facto

¹⁴⁸ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 6

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

independent state in the South Caucasus. While Nagorno Karabakh has a long history, what is relevant for this thesis is that in 1921 the Bolsheviks promised Armenia Nagorno Karabakh, Nakhchivan and Zangezur, while at the same time to please Turkey they promised them Nagorno Karabakh and Nakhchivan (Zangezur would go to Armenia). Bolsheviks chose to keep their promise to Turkey and on July 7, 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established within the Azerbaijan SSR. For some time, relative peace was established and while there was tension between Azeris and Armenians regarding Nagorno Karabakh, the situation was rather manageable. On February 13, 1988, demonstrations started to emerge in Stepanakert, the capital city of Nagorno Karabakh, which were directed towards the demand for unification with the Armenian Republic. A few days later mass demonstrations emerged in Yerevan, Armenia as well. This led to an ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which at times led to direct clashes, deaths and displacement of the local population. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno Karabakh declared itself an independent republic, however, it is not recognized by any other state. A ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reached on May 12, 1994. Even after the ceasefire clashes between the two sides are not rare. The biggest reemergence of conflict happened in April 2016, when a four-day war broke out between Armenia/Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

In 1993, Turkey closed its borders with Armenia in solidarity with Azerbaijan, which was followed by an economic blockade, which was supposed to push Armenia towards making concessions on Nagorno Karabakh.¹⁵⁰ Two out of four borders with neighboring states are

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

closed for Armenia (borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan) which puts Armenia in an especially vulnerable position. Armenia was in desperate need of an ally that would be able to protect it and side with Armenia when it came to regional conflict, especially if an even bigger fallout with Turkey happened. In 1995, to solidify Armenian-Russian relations, a military agreement ratified the deployment of Russia's military base in Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city after Yerevan, for 25 years.¹⁵¹ In 2010, a renewed agreement extended Russia's lease of the base until 2044.¹⁵² In 2015, the two countries created an integrated air-defense system as well as a Joint Group of Forces, launched in 2016.¹⁵³ Throughout the years, Armenia got more and more dependent on Russia economically as well as had to rely on Russia for increased security, which allowed Russia to hold a dominant position in Armenian-Russian relations and follow its own agenda that at times came to the expense of Armenia. From 2002 on, Russian Federation and state-affiliated companies started a series of equity-for-debt swaps and gradually acquired "strategically critical Armenian assets, including in telecommunications, railways, and electricity and gas distribution networks",¹⁵⁴ which allowed Russia to have an even tighter grip on Armenia. It is important to mention that similar types of debts were forgiven by Russia for states like Syria, Iraq, Cuba, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵⁵

While Armenia clearly has close ties with Russia, relations with other countries and especially Western Europe tried to be maintained as well. While Russia itself has rather close

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Page 7

¹⁵² Mgdesyan. Arshaluys. 2014. *Россия - Армения - Азербайджан: оружейный баланс в условиях политического дисбаланса*. Regnum.ru

¹⁵³ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 10

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 8

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

connections to Turkey and Azerbaijan (which throughout the years became tighter), they felt unease “with Armenia’s foreign policy of complementarity, whether in relation to expanding ties with the West or pursuing closer cooperation with Iran”.¹⁵⁶ It is important to explore Russia’s relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan as those two countries present the biggest threat to Armenia’s and Nagorno Karabakh’s safety. Russia and Turkey share a common sense of discontent towards the West -- “the Russian–Turkish rapprochement gave each a degree of leverage vis-à-vis the US and the EU”.¹⁵⁷ Russia and Turkey started using the language of ‘strategic partnership’ once economic and political ties between those two countries grew and became stronger in the Black Sea region. When it comes to Azerbaijan, Russia is specifically interested in its strategically important location and energy reserves. It would be rather disadvantageous for Russia if Azerbaijan created stronger ties with the West, hence Russia supplies arms to Azerbaijan to retain its control in the region as well as to make Azerbaijan dependent on Russia when it comes to new arms. Ongoing Nagorno Karabakh conflict constantly pushes Armenia towards purchasing arms to stay competitive during the conflict, and Armenia’s main arms supplier is Russia, which sells arms to Armenia with relatively low prices. However, while Russia presents itself as Armenia’s main ally when it comes to defense, from 2000 onward, Russia has been supplying arms to Azerbaijan as well -- “Russia provided 55 percent of Azerbaijan’s and 96 percent of Armenia’s arms imports between 2007 and 2011. By 2015, its share of Azerbaijan’s arms imports had risen to 85 percent”.¹⁵⁸ While Russia presents increased arms sales to Azerbaijan as simply an economic endeavor, it is worrisome for

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 9

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Armenia to see closer collaboration between those two countries. In 2014, ex-president Serzh Sargsyan, during one of his interviews mentioned that while it is discomfoting for Armenians that their main strategic partner is selling arms to Azerbaijan, he is hopeful that if Armenia will need Russia's help in protecting its borders Russia will do what is right and step in to protect and side with Armenia.¹⁵⁹ However, Armenia does understand that for Russia keeping its influence over the region is a top priority, hence, when it comes to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Russia will refrain from fully fulfilling its obligations towards Armenia. The argument has been presented that Russia should ensure that a relatively equal number of arms is sold to both countries, in order to keep the balance in the region¹⁶⁰ as the United States and European Union mainly forgo selling arms to Armenia or Azerbaijan in line with an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) voluntary embargo.¹⁶¹

In July 2010, Armenia and the European Union started negotiations over an Association Agreement which also included the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA). Negotiations lasted around 3 years -- the technical talks with the EU were concluded in July and the agreement was supposed to be signed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania in late November.¹⁶² Everything supposedly was set in stone regarding EU-Armenia Association Agreement, until September 3rd when the Kremlin's website put out a statement that declared Armenia joining the Eurasian Economic Union instead of signing the EU

¹⁵⁹ Mgdesyan, Arshaluys. 2014. *Россия - Армения - Азербайджан: оружейный баланс в условиях политического дисбаланса*. Regnum.ru

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 10

¹⁶² Gardner, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia chooses Russia over EU*. Politico.eu

alternative.¹⁶³ The Kremlin announced that “The presidents reaffirmed the focus of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the further development of economic integration in the Eurasian territory ... In this context, Mr. Sargsyan said Armenia had decided to join the Customs Union and take the necessary practical steps to subsequently participate in the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union”.¹⁶⁴ Vladimir Putin and Serzh Sargsyan met in August 2012 and had a discussion regarding Armenia’s possible involvement in the customs union of Russia, followed by meetings in December 2012 and March 2013, however, no public announcements were made and supposedly no concrete outcome was reached.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, some Armenian political leaders including then Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian, “continued to argue that Armenia cannot join the Russian-dominated trade bloc because it has no common border with any of its member states”.¹⁶⁶ This unexpected change of events came as a surprise to EU officials as Sargsyan did not communicate with them anything regarding Armenia’s decision on joining Eurasian Economic Union. Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt Tweeted: “Seems as if Armenia will break talks on free trade agreement with EU and integrate with Russia instead. U-turn”.¹⁶⁷ Serzh Sargsyan on his part announced that this is not a rejection of EU and Armenia is still ready to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in November (without Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA)): “This decision is not a rejection of our dialogue with the European institutions. During recent years, Armenia, with the support of European partners held a number of important institutional reforms. And today's

¹⁶³ Rettman, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia to join Russia's Union, surprises EU*.Euobserver.com

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Danielyan, Emil. 2013. *European Integration Unlikely To End Armenia's Alliance With Russia*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Gotev, Georgi. 2013. *EU Loses Armenia to Russia's Customs Union*. Euractiv.com

Armenia, in this sense, is considerably a more effective and competitive state than years ago. We intend to continue these reforms also in the future”.¹⁶⁸ EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule however announced that the Association Agreement can only be signed in conjunction with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA): “the agreement on a deep and comprehensive free trade area is part of the Association Agreement. It is a single document, and one cannot be separated from the other”.¹⁶⁹ While some EU officials concluded that Armenia’s 2013 U-turn on the EU Association Agreement simply showcased once again “Armenia’s inherent pro-Russian stance and that the EU should move on,”¹⁷⁰ one should look further into Armenia’s situation during that time period and at how Russia directly or indirectly warned Armenia against signing the EU Association Agreement.

In April 2013, while Armenia was in close negotiations with the EU, “Russia’s Gazprom monopoly raised the gas price by 50 percent. The gas tariffs for Armenian households rose by only 18 percent last month as the Armenian government pledged to subsidize the rest of the price hike”.¹⁷¹ Armenia is dependent on Gazprom for its gas supplies, which highly restricts the Armenian government during negotiations.¹⁷² This sharp rise of gas prices would have put Armenia in a very vulnerable position, where around 30 percent of the population lives under the poverty line as an increase in gas prices would lead to a general increase in prices. After Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union, gas prices for Armenia were once again

¹⁶⁸ Rettman, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia to Join Russia's Union, Surprises EU*. Euobserver.com

¹⁶⁹ Asbarez.com. 2013. *EU Will Not Sign Agreement with Armenia, Commissioner Says*

¹⁷⁰ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia’s Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 14

¹⁷¹ *Gas Price Reduced as Armenia Joins Customs Union*. 2013. Asbarez.com

¹⁷² Grigoryan, Marianna. 2013. *Armenia: Could a Gas Price Hike Have Political Implications?* Eurasianet.org

decreased to the initial price. Armenia's then Energy and Natural Resources Minister Armen Movsisyan announced: "now that Armenia has decided to join the Customs Union Armenia's natural gas price will depend on domestic gas prices in Russia".¹⁷³ This is an outstanding example of how Russia utilizes its advantages to achieve its objectives, which in this case were to prevent Armenia from creating a closer alliance with the European Union.

Another worry that Armenia had that served as a reason for joining the Eurasian Economic Union was the tense relations with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh. As already mentioned, Russia is the top arms provider for Armenia and while it has always sold arms to Azerbaijan as well, in 2013, "a shipment of heavy weapons worth nearly US\$ 1 billion to Azerbaijan"¹⁷⁴ was conducted. While this was clearly alarming news to Armenia, the Armenian government was hesitant in criticizing Russia, as close defense cooperation with it is essential to Armenia. In July 2013, the same month as a US\$1 billion heavy weaponry shipment to Azerbaijan took place, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, who was Russia's ambassador to Armenia until March 2013, cautioned the Armenian government that they are risking to alienate Russia if they sign the Association Agreement with the EU.¹⁷⁵ Ergo, one can argue that joining the Eurasian Economic Union had a security rationale and as Serzh Sargsyan said: "when you are part of one system of military security it is impossible and ineffective to isolate yourself from a corresponding economic space".¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ *Gas Price Reduced as Armenia Joins Customs Union*. 2013. Asbarez.com

¹⁷⁴ Grigoryan, Armen. 2013. *Armenia Chooses Customs Union over EU Association Agreement*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

¹⁷⁵ Danielyan, Emil. 2013. *European Integration Unlikely To End Armenia's Alliance With Russia*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

¹⁷⁶ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 3

While the rise of gas prices and huge arms sales to Azerbaijan were the main two actions that Russia took during this period, numerous Russian politicians, analysts, political scientists and others warned and indirectly pressured Armenia against creating closer ties with the European Union. Andrey Yepifantsev, a Russian analyst, went as far as announcing that “the forthcoming association deal could lead Moscow to withdraw its security guarantees to Armenia and become more supportive of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict,”¹⁷⁷ which Armenia simply cannot afford. Michael Kambeck, founder of the European Friends of Armenia noted that “... [the] U-turn [by Sarkisian] was not a free choice”.¹⁷⁸ The Armenian population and political analysts viewed Sargsyan’s decision as rather forced -- becoming a signatory of the Eurasian Economic Union meant that the Armenian government is giving up their control over the state’s sovereignty, especially in a realm of foreign policy decision making.¹⁷⁹

Russia has always been cautious regarding any political moves Armenia makes, both internally and externally. For example, in 2015, the Electric Yerevan movement was launched (June 17, 2015 – September 11, 2015) in response to a hike in electricity prices. This development was the result of mismanagement by Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA),¹⁸⁰ which was owned by Russian Energy Company Inter RAO UES.¹⁸¹ On June 17, a decision was made “to increase electricity tariffs from the beginning of August by more than 16 percent,”¹⁸² which for citizens of a poverty-ridden country like Armenia is a huge burden. ENA has

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Gardner, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia Chooses Russia Over EU*. Politico.eu

¹⁷⁹ Grigoryan, Armen. 2013. *Armenia Chooses Customs Union over EU Association Agreement*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

¹⁸⁰ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia’s Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 20

¹⁸¹ Avedissian, Karena. 2015. *The power of Electric Yerevan*. Opendemocracy.net

¹⁸² Demytrie, Rayhan. 2015. *Armenia Energy Protests: Electric Atmosphere in Yerevan*. BBC News

accumulated debt due to overpaying suppliers and contractors as well as because of internal corruption that took place in the company. Director of the ENA, Yevgeny Bibin, did publicly admit mismanagement of the company, however, when he was invited to a meeting by the Armenian Regulatory Commission to explain tariff hikes and defend himself against corruption allegations, he did not even attend the meeting.¹⁸³ While those protests were not specifically against the Russian government, many of the protesters did hold anti-Russian attitudes. Electric Yerevan was organized by a small number of young people and was shared and promoted through social media. Armenia has a strong culture of protests and demonstrations; however, the activist networks were rather informal and did not have strong foundations because there were no NGOs and social movement organizations that had strong participation in mobilization efforts. Protests were rather peaceful -- protestors were able to take over and block one of the main avenues in Yerevan, Baghramyan Avenue, which leads to the Armenian president's residence. The number of protestors varied from a few hundred to a few thousand at any time of the day. The situation became rather tense when in the early hours of 23 June protestors were brutally dispersed by the police using water cannons. More than 200 people were arrested, including journalists who were treated rather brutally -- their cameras and phones were smashed, they were beaten up.¹⁸⁴ However, this only sparked the protests further and even more people started to partake in those protests. It is not clear whether Russia had anything to do with this brutal effort to breakdown the protests, yet the Kremlin saw external involvement in this movement as well and "saw a third-party plot agitating for a Maidan-style

¹⁸³ Avedissian, Karena. 2015. *The Power of Electric Yerevan*. Opendemocracy.net

¹⁸⁴ Demytrie, Rayhan. 2015. *Armenia Energy Protests: Electric Atmosphere in Yerevan*. BBC News

revolution”.¹⁸⁵ This was also the narrative that Russian journalists who were covering the protests were advancing. Participants of Electric Yerevan were especially unhappy with the Russian media’s coverage -- Armenian blogger Izabella Abgaryan noted that “Our growing mistrust towards the Russian media is their own fault They are comparing this protest to Ukraine's Maidan, they are saying that protesters are armed, it's a complete lie”.¹⁸⁶

Armenians have always had strong ties to Russia. It is not uncommon to hear Armenians saying that Russia is Armenia’s biggest ally and supporter. The Soviet nostalgia is still very much so prevalent among older Armenian citizens, however, what is notable is that the new generation of Armenians is rather pro-Western, and “Putin’s Russia is increasingly perceived to be hindering democratic processes within Armenia”.¹⁸⁷ Some would argue that this is not the case for all the young people and that is correct -- Armenia’s and Russia’s history goes back for centuries and most of the younger generation was raised in households that still have close emotional and cultural ties to Russia. Armenians do believe that they share similar values and norms with Russia, which is not the case when they think of the European Union. Some Armenians are worried about losing their culture if Armenia gains closer connections with the European Union and ‘Independence Generation: Youth study 2016’ showcases this in their data -- 18.5 percent completely agree, 38.9 percent mostly agree, 32.2 percent mostly disagree and 10.4 percent completely disagree that Strengthening ties with the EU will endanger Armenian

¹⁸⁵ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia’s Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 20

¹⁸⁶ Demytrie, Rayhan. 2015. *Armenia energy protests: Electric atmosphere in Yerevan*. BBC News

¹⁸⁷ Minasyan, Sergey. 2013. *Russian-Armenian Relations: Affection or Pragmatism?* PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 269. Page 3

national-traditional values.¹⁸⁸ The sample size and methodology that this study uses has its flaws which leads me to take their exact data findings with a grain of salt, however, it can help establish general attitudes. The same study cites a 2014 survey according to which “51 percent of the population in Armenia think that the country should strengthen its foreign political ties with both Europe and Russia, 34 percent believe that ties should only be strengthened with Russia, and just 4 percent believe that ties should only be strengthened with Europe”.¹⁸⁹ In both of the surveys, it is notable that a majority of respondents are more pro-Russian rather than pro-EU. Nonetheless, contrary to the ‘Independence Generation: Youth study 2016’, ‘Analytical Center on Globalization and Regional Cooperation’ which conducted surveys in several Armenian cities and towns, come to a different outcome in their study. This study concludes that around 59 percent of those who were surveyed connected Armenia’s future to the European Union, while merely 34 percent considered Russia Armenia’s ally, and 78 percent gave a negative opinion on Armenia rejecting the Association Agreement with the EU in 2013.¹⁹⁰ Caucasus Barometer published a study in 2017 called ‘Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic Issues in the South Caucasus Countries’ which includes data from 2011 to 2017. One of the questions in the study was “Which country is currently the main friend of Armenia?” and during all the years the country that was ranked number 1 was Russia. However, in 2011, 80 percent of those surveyed chose Russia, while in 2012 that number was 79 percent, in 2013 – 84 percent, in 2015 – 74 percent, and eventually in 2017 the number dropped to 64

¹⁸⁸ Mkrtichyan, Artur & Vermishyan, Harutyun & Balasanyan, Sona. 2016. *Independence Generation: Youth study 2016 – Armenia*. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) Armenian Office in cooperation with the Faculty of Sociology of Yerevan State University. Page 85

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Page 75

¹⁹⁰ Grigoryan, Nelly. 2017. *Armenian Public Overviews Its Attitude Towards Russia*. Aravot.am

percent.¹⁹¹ This data showcases a clear drop in Armenians' attitudes and trust towards Russia. While the first two studies do show relative support towards Russia, there is no information regarding how that number has changed throughout the years. The last study mentioned does show a steep decline in the popularity of Russia amongst Armenians during a specific time period. What is also notable is the fact that a big drop in the data occurred after 2013, when Armenia joined Eurasian Economic Union and it was at an all-time low in 2017 which is right before the Velvet Revolution. There can be numerous reasons why Armenians' have less sympathy and trust towards Russia -- it can be anything from globalization and changing values which align better with EU norms and values to distrust towards Russia because of the actions they took over the years. Stepan Grigoryan, president of 'Analytical Center on Globalization and Regional Cooperation' suggests that The Four Day War between Nagorno Karabakh/Armenia and Azerbaijan, in April 2016, was the main reason for the Armenian public's opinion change regarding Russia: "In Armenia, Russia's reputation has rather dropped – it sells weapons to Azerbaijan, we did not receive real support during April War. The authorities tell this as well. This reality could not skip having consequences. This is the reason why the public is for alternatives".¹⁹² This can explain the sharp decline in the numbers in 2017.

Russia is heavily involved in Armenia and Armenian politics, so, a question arises -- why did Russia not step in to stop the Velvet Revolution? Vladimir Putin and Serzh Sargsyan were on good terms and any disturbance in the Armenian political system can potentially have a

¹⁹¹ Caucasus Barometer. 2017. *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries*. Caucasus Research Center - Armenia

¹⁹² Grigoryan, Nelly. 2017. *Armenian Public Overviews Its Attitude Towards Russia*. Aravot.am

negative effect on Russian influence both in Armenia and in the region. There is no one correct answer that will explain Putin's inactivity -- realistically, it is a mix of different factors.

To begin with, Nikol Pashinyan's rhetoric during the revolution was mainly focused on internal issues rather than external ones. He did not side ideologically with either Russia or with Europe. While Pashinyan has criticized Armenia's extreme dependency on Russia in the past, he was rather cautious about not triggering Russia's fear of the Color Revolutions, and called the Velvet Revolution "the first mass movement in the post-Soviet space in the last 20 years that is not associated with any foreign power".¹⁹³ The Kremlin on its end spoke positively about the Velvet Revolution, while Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov "called the political crisis 'exclusively an internal affair' of Armenia and ruled out any Russian interference".¹⁹⁴ The Kremlin additionally restated several times that they do not draw parallels between the Ukrainian Orange Revolution and the Armenian Velvet Revolution.¹⁹⁵

Another line of argument regarding Russia's relatively passive approach to the Armenian revolution is that unlike Ukraine and Georgia, Armenia has never showcased any interest in becoming a NATO member state.¹⁹⁶ Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is a post-Soviet security block. Joining NATO would be incompatible with Armenia's membership in CSTO, which is the only South Caucasian member republic of the organization. Robert Kocharyan, the second president of Armenia, determined that "joining NATO would affect Armenia's relations with neighboring countries and would barely improve

¹⁹³ Atanesian, Grigor. 2018. *What Does Turmoil in Armenia Spell for Russia?* The Moscow Times

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Reuters. 2018. *Kremlin: We Don't Regard Turmoil in Armenia as Ukraine-Style Revolution.* The Moscow Times

¹⁹⁶ Saradzhyan, Simon. 2018. *Why Hasn't Putin Intervened in Armenia Yet?* The Moscow Times

its national security”.¹⁹⁷ The decision to even consider joining NATO can potentially hurt Armenia’s relations with Iran as well. It appears, that Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan hold the same beliefs as Kocharyan did. On December 10, 2018, Pashinyan said: “We have relations with NATO, which are linked with peacekeeping missions, including in Kosovo and Afghanistan. And we will continue this cooperation. But we are not seeking to obtain NATO membership. We are a member of the CSTO”.¹⁹⁸ Another reason why Armenia cannot join NATO is the fact that Turkey is a NATO member state and “following the closure of the Armenian–Turkish border in 1993, the hypothetical door to NATO membership was shut”.¹⁹⁹ Allegedly Turkey portrayed a negative image of Armenia as “Russia’s ‘puppet’” among other NATO states.²⁰⁰

Another reason for Russia’s non-engagement could have served the scale of protests. Protests were massive and included people from all walks of life -- young and old people, students and professionals, people that live in Yerevan and small towns all over Armenia. If Sargsyan tried to violently break down those protests a massive amount of violence would have been required. Additionally, Armenia has a diaspora of 10 million, which increasingly got more disapproving of Sargsyan’s politics and policies throughout the years. By the end of Sargsyan’s rule, he was highly unpopular, and Russia simply did not want to be associated with a Prime Minister whose reputation is extremely damaged and who used such a massive force and violence to stay in power. Anahit Shirinyan explains: “Russia’s calculus was clearly based on its unwillingness to support an unpopular government and further damage its image in the eyes of

¹⁹⁷ Malek, Martin. 2008. *NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks*. Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. Vol. 7, No. 3. Page 31

¹⁹⁸ TASS: Russian News Agency. 2018. *Armenia is Not Seeking NATO Membership, Says Acting PM*

¹⁹⁹ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia’s Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 15

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Armenian society. Had it interfered; this could have turned the massive display of ‘people power’ against Moscow”.²⁰¹

There can be many other possible explanations for why Russia decided not to interfere in Armenia, which is a rather unprecedented move, considering Russia’s intervention during other Color Revolutions. Another line of argument emphasizes the fact that in the other cases of Color Revolution -- especially in Georgia and Ukraine -- the West and the US had a relatively strong presence on the ground, which was not the case in Armenia. If Russia interfered with the revolution that could have provoked a reaction from the West, which would have not been a favorable outcome for Russia.²⁰² Additionally, it can be argued that “any heavy-handed Russian response would have likely harmed Russia’s standing within Armenia and triggered greater instability,”²⁰³ which would have not been an ideal outcome as Armenia does have significance for Russia.

The safest hypothesis would be that Russia was convinced that Pashinyan would continue having strong ties to Russia and would not cross the line with Armenia’s involvement with the European Union. Some analysts believe that Serzh Sargsyan resigned because the Kremlin gave him the ‘green light’ to do so, as well as the Kremlin ‘allowed’ Pashinyan to become the new Prime Minister of Armenia.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ibid. Page 20

²⁰² Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of Power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe After the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Souleimanov, Emil & Barbashin, Anton. 2018. *Moscow’s Role in Armenia’s Revolution*. The Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst

Chapter 3: Internal Factors that Caused the Velvet Revolution

The Velvet Revolution emanated largely due to discontent at the previous government and internal hardships of the country and population, which led to the revolution having a strong domestic focus.²⁰⁵ This chapter explores domestic factors that led to the emergence of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia. The factors explored, are the ones that came up in almost all successful and failed cases of Color Revolutions. However, the factors chosen were also highly important in the context of Armenia, as they have proven to be some of the most pressing issues that the citizens of Armenia have faced and still face today. The factors discussed in this Chapter are fraudulent elections, poor living conditions, oligarchy, and dissatisfied youth. Many of these factors are interrelated and in combination create an atmosphere of anger and anti-government/ruling elite sentiments. Additionally, all those factors create a web of issues that is extremely hard to tackle as the systems that were in place had been so since the emergence of the new Republic of Armenia in 1991. Grievances that people faced made them keen to protest and demand a better life, especially when thousands of people were doing so.

Electoral Fraud in Armenia

Electoral fraud is one of the main factors that can lead to the emergence of a Color Revolution. Literature related to this topic states over and over the importance of this factor as all the Color Revolution cases emerged after a fraudulent election (be that presidential or

²⁰⁵ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

parliamentary election). Chapter 1 demonstrated this -- in the cases of Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, people took over the streets and protests became much more intense after elections -- which according to the people were unjust -- took place. Electoral fraud itself might not cause a huge uproar; however, accompanied by other societal issues and unhappiness towards the existing government, victory of the same party or individual can become the last necessary piece for starting a revolution.

In September 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia experienced relatively free elections (high participation rates, no severe violations at the polls). However, that was the first and last time in the history of the new republic when elections were just. In 1996, Levon Ter-Petrossian was re-elected. Nonetheless, at this time, his re-election was a result of manipulation by security forces.²⁰⁶ In 1998, after the resignation of Ter-Petrossian, Robert Kocharian was elected as president. Those elections were recognized as “neither free nor fair”²⁰⁷ by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The rule and regime that Kocharian established remained dominant in Armenia until the 2018 Velvet Revolution. This is a key component in analyzing failed cases of Color Revolutions in Armenia in 2003/2004 and 2008, as well as the Velvet Revolution in 2018 because those networks that Kocharyan created gave rise to most of the issues that galvanized people to go out to the streets and protest.

²⁰⁶ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 190

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Kocharyan had a stronghold over the military and security forces that favored his regime. Furthermore, his network of relatives and friends controlled most of the country's economy. In 2003, when it was time for Kocharian to get re-elected, "the regime used widespread fraud, as well as intimidation of and violence against the opposition."²⁰⁸ Similarly, in 2008, Kocharian's chosen successor, Serj Sargsyan, was elected in another highly fraudulent election. There was no hope towards fair elections amongst Armenians: "public opinion polls in August 2006 and January 2008, funded by USAID and sponsored by IRI, found that few Armenians believed that the elections would be free and fair."²⁰⁹ The OSCE recognized that in 2008, elections were neither fair nor free and many reports of electoral frauds were received. For example, the chairman of the polling station 9/31 in Yerevan had been arrested on suspicions of falsifying voting results. The chairman of the commission, Eduard Aghajanyan, his deputy, commission secretary, and commission members "included obviously false and distorted data in the protocol on the results of voting and confirmed it with their signatures."²¹⁰ This is just one example of electoral fraud, however many more of those occur during any given election in Armenia.

In 2015, then president Serzh Sargsyan proposed a constitutional change, the main effect of which would be changing Armenia's existing Semi-Presidential system to the Parliamentary Republic. On October 8, the National Assembly voted to put the proposal to a vote. The referendum took place on December 6 -- turnout was minimal (51 percent) and the

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 193

²¹⁰ *Armenian electoral commission head arrested on suspicion of fraud*. 2008. BBC Monitoring Central Asia

changes were passed with 66 percent of the vote.²¹¹ This referendum and its passing were highly controversial as it was widely believed that this whole constitutional change was a loophole for Sargsyan to stay in power for even longer after his second 4-year term as a president was coming to an end. An OSCE report about this referendum stated that the election was “tainted by credible information about vote-buying, and pressure on civil servants and employees of private companies to vote for the ruling party.”²¹²

An ongoing source of electoral fraud in Armenia is the passive voter registration system based on the state population register maintained by the police. This means that citizens of Armenia do not need to register before elections to take part in them, as all the electoral lists are organized by the police. While it is argued by the police that they put effort into trying to make the voter lists as accurate as possible, voter lists every year include “an unduly high number of registrations at some addresses and deceased people”.²¹³ This was the case during the 2015 referendum. Also, those voter lists included names of people who, during the time of the referendum, were living abroad and would not be able to participate in elections. A survey carried out by the Compass Research Centre (Gyumri-based research center) found a surplus of 845 voters at a polling station in one of the villages’ in the Kotayk region during the 2015 Constitutional Referendum.²¹⁴ Other findings of electoral fraud include 218 ‘citizens’ sharing the same first and last names and dates of birth, while 37,339 ‘citizens’ dates of birth

²¹¹ Iskandaryan, Alexander. 2018. *The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: How to Lose Power in Two Weeks*. Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization. Published: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University. Vol. 26, N4. Page 473

²¹² Amnesty International. 2018. *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018*. Page 78

²¹³ OSCE/ODIHR Referendum Expert Team. 2015. *Republic of Armenia: Constitutional Referendum*. OSCE. Page 1

²¹⁴ Avedissian, Karena. 2015. *No, thanks. Armenia's opposition rallies against referendum*. TheGuardian.com

were nowhere to be found.²¹⁵ Compass researcher Karen Petrosyan also found great inconsistencies in voter lists for Gyumri (the second-largest city in Armenia): three in ten presented addresses on the polling lists did not exist at all while in case of addresses that did exist, three in ten registered citizens age 80 and over were dead by the time of the referendum.²¹⁶ During the same election, at polling stations, OSCE observed the vote-counting process during which “serious problems included interference and intimidation by proxies of supporters of the ‘Yes’ campaign leading to alteration of the actual vote results”²¹⁷ (the ‘Yes’ campaign was in support of president Sargsyan and of Armenia becoming a Parliamentary Republic). Citizen observers, opposition groups, and media reported allegations of widespread irregularities, interference, and intimidation in the voting and counting process throughout the country.²¹⁸ While those findings sound shocking and unreal, this is rather standard for elections in Armenia. These kinds of irregularities make people upset and cause their faith in the government to waiver – people do not feel represented by ‘elected’ officials and do not believe that they will act on behalf of regular citizens’ interests. This kind of mass dissatisfaction is another push for these people to take matters into their own hands and take over the streets to make a change.

There is no one explanation of why fraudulent elections lead to the emergence of social movements and specifically Color Revolutions. However, as it was demonstrated in Chapter 1, this is a key element when it comes to mobilization of the population. This was one of the main,

²¹⁵ Epress.am. 2015. *Survey Finds Inaccuracies in Voter Lists Ahead of Constitutional Referendum in Armenia*

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ OSCE/ODIHR Referendum Expert Team. 2015. *Republic of Armenia: Constitutional Referendum*. OSCE. Page 2

²¹⁸ Ibid.

constant factors that was present during all the successful and failed cases of Color Revolutions. Beachain and Polese note that “elections are considered propitious occasions to inspire protesters, partially because they sometimes provide a rare opportunity to mobilize and demonstrate with relative impunity, as international observers are usually present”.²¹⁹ Joshua Tucker²²⁰ has his own explanation of why Color Revolutions emerge after fraudulent elections -- when people have strong grievances against the government, addressing them can have high costs and low chances of success. So, citizens decide not to move forward with addressing those grievances. Electoral fraud, however, changes those calculations drastically and encourages citizens to protest because if electoral fraud happened, then challenging it can mean a full change of government. Thus, the outcome of protests, if successful, can be very valuable. As presented above, in all the cases of successful Color Revolutions, the old regime was overthrown and the opposition leader became the new president such that the overarching and valuable goal was achieved.

The next subsection of this Chapter will touch upon Oligarchy as it is another important factor in determining why people would be willing to demonstrate and go against the government and power. In post-Soviet spaces, oligarchy plays a central role in the government, economy and retains extensive control over almost any aspect of life in a given country.

²¹⁹ Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. 2010. *“The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures”*. London&New York: Routledge. Page 7

²²⁰ Tucker, Joshua. 2007. *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. Perspectives on Politics. Vol. 5, No. 3. Pages 535-551

Oligarchy

In the 1990s, Armenia went through a series of transformations and challenges: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, declaration of independence, and last but not least, the war in Nagorno Karabakh with Azerbaijan. In May 1990, during Parliamentary elections, the Armenian National Movement (ANM) Party came to power. This was a time when Armenia was going through the most difficult period of the planned economy's collapse: the country was suffering from a shortage of goods, blockade of land transport, and Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov's confiscatory money reform²²¹. This unstable situation, where people on top had leeways to accumulate huge amounts of wealth by selling arms during the Nagorno Karabakh war or simply stealing from the government, led to the creation of oligarchy in the 1990s and 2000s. This transitional situation, when everything collapsed and was supposed to be built almost from the scratch, allowed people to surpass the law, carry out illegal endeavors and allowed a small subset of the population to collect huge amounts of wealth in a very short span. These events had a long-lasting impact and heavily shaped Armenia's future both economically and politically, and eventually resulted in the emergence of the Velvet Revolution in 2018.

The term 'oligarchy' stems from the Greek word ὀλιγαρχία which is composed of ὀλίγος (oligoi, "few") and αρχία (arkhein, "to rule")²²² – the rule of the few. However, this definition is rather broad and does not provide a full understanding of the concept. There is no one

²²¹ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 12

²²² Indridason, Indridi. 2008. *Oligarchy*. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. William A. Darity, Jr. Vol. 6. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA. Pages 36– 37

definition of oligarchy is and it is rather difficult to define the scope of it. How much power (“rule”) should that “few” have to be considered an oligarch?

Different political scientists have different understandings of what oligarchy is. However, for this thesis, a more general understanding of oligarchy will be considered -- specifically, one established by American political scientist Jeffrey A. Winters in his book *Oligarchy*²²³. Winters defines oligarchs as those who keep large material resources under their control, through which they protect or enhance their wealth and social position.²²⁴

Nonetheless, it is important to also consider the geographic location of the country when speaking about oligarchy there. Oligarchy in Armenia should be considered and understood through a post-Soviet lens, as the influence of the Soviet Union was and still is prevailing in Armenia. In the post-Soviet space, “the word ‘oligarch’ is primarily used in reference to wealthy people (mainly the dollar billionaires) who have good relations with the president.”²²⁵ Oligarchs in Armenia are individuals who hold exceptional financial power (especially compared to most of the Armenian population) and quite often a monopoly of power over a particular economic sphere.²²⁶

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the war in Nagorno Karabakh created opportunities for corrupt individuals to accumulate large amounts of wealth, privatize and create monopolies over different spheres. Armenia lacks both natural resources (especially oil

²²³ Winters, Jeffrey. 2011. *Oligarchy*. Cambridge University Press: USA

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Nazaretyan, Hovhannes. 2018. *Who is Considered an Oligarch? Are There Oligarchs in Armenia?*. Fip.am (Fact Investigation Platform)

²²⁶ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 11

and gas)²²⁷ and a developed land transport infrastructure (two out of four borders with neighboring countries are closed)²²⁸. During the Soviet-era, Armenia's manufacturing sector, which comprised the vast majority of the economy, was closely tied to the Russian economy such that factories would produce one specific part which would later be shipped to Russia for assembly. This meant that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, all the existing factories closed and many people were left without job opportunities as Armenia itself was not capable to support all those industries itself. It might seem that this kind of economic situation would not allow for the creation of oligarchic structures. However, "oligarchy in Armenia formed through connections with the existing geopolitical situation, particularly, the Nagorno Karabakh war and to the blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan."²²⁹ Oligarchic structures started developing around exports and imports; especially during wartime, huge monetary streams passed through different power structures of Armenia – the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and state agencies that controlled the transportation (both on land as well as Zvartnots International Airport).²³⁰ Due to limitations imposed by the blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, a key group of people, supported by those ministries (usually based on personal relationships with those individuals) took monopolistic control over the most important shipping routes, as the blockade left a very limited number of shipment routes available to Armenia.

The rapid rate of privatization after the collapse of the Soviet Union concentrated almost the entirety of Armenia's national wealth within the hands of 45–50 families that

²²⁷ Global Energy Network Institute. 2002. *An Energy Overview of the Republic of Armenia*

²²⁸ *Armenia's Transport Outlook: Transport Sector Master Plan*. 2011. Asian Development Bank. Yerevan, Armenia

²²⁹ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 14

²³⁰ Ibid.

controlled 54–70 percent of the country’s national wealth.²³¹ In 2007, former prime minister Hrant Bagratyan estimated that 55 percent of Armenia's GDP is controlled by 44 families (this number potentially is smaller as many of those families are related to each other).²³² To put this in context, during the same period, in Russia, 40 families controlled 16 percent of GDP and in the United States, 400 families controlled 10 percent.²³³

When Robert Kocharyan was elected in 1998, it became apparent that one of his main priorities was to “take an active part in the economic and financial processes in the country through his men”.²³⁴ During Kocharyan’s presidency, the creation of favorable conditions for medium and small businesses was slowed down and later, essentially blocked. Kocharyan’s clan and friends quickly started to privatize big enterprises (for example, the mining industry), and “the government started to take part in the privatization and large-scale commercial transactions.”²³⁵ Many political scientists and researchers such as Gayane Shaghoyan believe that Armenia is a country ruled by oligarchs and that those tight-knit oligarchic ‘clans’ have great control over politics; those ‘clans’ became the main political unit that held all the power.²³⁶ Proof of this is the election of Serzh Sargsyan in 2008: he had a close alliance with and connections to Robert Kocharyan and his ‘clan’, and Sargsyan’s ‘clan’ had rule over different parts of the economy including alcohol and tobacco. However, a differentiating factor of Sargsyan’s ‘clan’ was the massive investments they made in politics and media: “90 percent of

²³¹ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 13

²³² Khachatryan, Haroutiun. 2007. *Competitive Edge: The Pitfalls of Monopolies, and the Challenges of a Business-Influenced Parliament*. Armenian General Benevolent Union (agbu.org)

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 15

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid. Page 12

Armenian mass-media was controlled by the president's [Sargsyan's] son-in-law, Mikayel Minasyan."²³⁷ Furthermore, this control meant that there existed a monopoly in the market of advertising, with full control of the main "public" TV channel *H1* by the government.

One of the biggest monopolies in Armenia is the market of sugar that is fully controlled by Salex Group enterprise, belonging to businessman and oligarch Samvel Aleksanyan.²³⁸ While official sources state that at least 22 other enterprises are involved in the sugar industry, the numbers show it all: in 2007, 61,544 tons of sugar were imported to Armenia, 58,000 tons of which were imported by Samvel Alexanyan from Brazil.²³⁹ This makes Alexanyan's share in the sugar industry 95 percent – a clear monopoly. Other than the sugar industry, Fleetfood, another company belonging to Alexanyan, dominates the import of butter and ethanol.²⁴⁰ Aleksanyan is also the owner of numerous businesses, the main one being a network of supermarkets called Yerevan City that can be found all over Armenia. This supermarket network took the business from many small and medium-sized businesses and grocery stores, which further created hardships for smaller businessmen. Aleksanyan was also a member of The Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), led by ex-president Serzh Sargsyan and during his short-term as prime minister, Alexanyan held a seat in National Assembly. Another example can be seen in the cement industry that is controlled by two monopolist businessmen, Gagik Tsarukyan and Mikael Baghdasarov.²⁴¹ While having a monopoly over a certain industry or product is not unlawful,

²³⁷ Ibid. Page 17

²³⁸ Khachatryan, Haroutiun. 2007. *Competitive Edge: The Pitfalls of Monopolies, and the Challenges of a Business-Influenced Parliament*. Armenian General Benevolent Union (agbu.org)

²³⁹ Khachatryan, Stella. 2018. *Մենաշնորհի դեմ կայաքարեն այն օրինակացներով...* (tr. *Fighting monopoly by legalizing it?*). Mediamall.am

²⁴⁰ Khachatryan, Haroutiun. 2007. *Competitive Edge: The Pitfalls of Monopolies, and the Challenges of a Business-Influenced Parliament*. Armenian General Benevolent Union (agbu.org)

²⁴¹ Ibid.

the government suppressing active participation in the economy by medium or small businesses (be that by intimidation or creation of unfavorable business opportunities) is against the law.

There has not been much research conducted on Armenian oligarchy. However, few available sources (e.g. Nelson Shahnazaryan's 2012 book *The Meaning and Strategies of a Nation's Development*) argue that these oligarchs have no long-term vision and sense of responsibility for the country's future.²⁴² Shahnazaryan further argues that "oligarchic businesses are short-termed, based on continually renewed oral agreements (which increases their chaotic nature and makes it impossible to work out a long-term strategy), have a cartel character and are attached to the political system, especially at the higher levels of government."²⁴³ Many of those oligarchs, due to their close relations with the ruling elite, or their status as members of the ruling elite themselves take advantage of tax loopholes, illegal business advances, and close-knit connections with each other. This imposes a threat to the country's stability and economic development. Monopolies in different industries result in high prices (even on basic commodities like sugar and butter) that make the burden on regular citizens even heavier, especially in a country like Armenia that suffers from high unemployment and poverty rates.

Anders Åslund argues that "for the very rich, politics is foremost a means to further their business interests."²⁴⁴ In Armenia, the line between business and politics is rather blurry:

²⁴² Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 12

²⁴³ Ibid. Page 15

²⁴⁴ Åslund, Anders. 2005. *Comparative Oligarchy: Russia, Ukraine and the United States*. CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research. Warsaw, Poland. Page 8

in 2007 “at least 25 of Armenia’s 131 Members of Parliament are businessmen or are known to own a controlling stake in lucrative businesses.”²⁴⁵ In 2009, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessed that the Armenian economy is entering a new phase of ‘zero-growth’.²⁴⁶ This means that Armenia will face “declining revenue, dwindling investment and an end to even the mirage of economic growth that the previous government so effectively used to hide its political shortcomings.”²⁴⁷ For oligarchs, their main priority is not the benefit of the country, but rather the defense and multiplication of the wealth they own. Armenia, and its citizens’ benefit and prosperity is not the main priority of these oligarch-politicians.

The situation in Armenia is not unusual for the region and specifically for countries that went through either successful or failed attempts of Color Revolutions. In Azerbaijan, oligarchy and ‘clan’ relations were formed around many industries, specifically the oil industry by the Aliiev clan. In Georgia, during Shevardnadze's presidency, oligarchic structures were formed around different businesses and the transit industry. Similarly, Russian politics and economy are greatly influenced by oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky, Mikhail Prokhorov, and Roman Abramovich as well as the Armenian oligarch in Russia, Samvel Karapetyan. While researching cases and attempts of Color Revolutions in these countries, the literature finds that Oligarchy and people’s anger towards these structures played a huge role in the emergence of nationwide movements (more about this in Chapter 1). Hence, this further validates the argument that Oligarchy did have a role in the emergence of the Velvet Revolution.

²⁴⁵ Khachatryan, Haroutiun. 2007. *Competitive Edge: The Pitfalls of Monopolies, and the Challenges of a Business-Influenced Parliament*. Armenian General Benevolent Union (agbu.org)

²⁴⁶ Giragosian, Richard. 2009. *Weathering the Storm: A Commentary on Armenia’s Oligarchs*. Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS). Policy Forum Armenia (pf-armenia.org)

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Oligarchy advances material inequality that creates political inequality²⁴⁸ - the power of an individual is determined by their financial situation and oligarchs are on the top of that hierarchy. While, in Armenia, most of the oligarchs had close ties with the ruling party, theoretically if one has money, their problems can be resolved regardless of their party affiliation. After the Velvet Revolution, while some oligarchs were investigated and were taken into custody for a few hours, all actions against them were a light slap on a wrist rather than something with serious consequences. This further proves that the oligarchy, to some extent, has power over the government, which makes them feel untouchable.

Oligarchy is a structure that is deeply rooted in current Armenian society and politics. On October 18, 2018, prime minister Nikol Pashinyan during one of his rally's announced that there are no more oligarchs in Armenia. This created huge uproar and dissatisfaction as one of the richest men and oligarchs in Armenia, Gagik Tsarukyan, still holds considerable power in Armenia. He is the president of the National Olympic Committee, and his Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) is the second-largest party in the Parliament with 26 seats. American-Armenian historian and political scientist Simon Payaslian calls Tsarukyan "the richest and most famous member of the ruling oligarchy in Armenia."²⁴⁹ Tsarukyan made most of his capital under Kocharyan's presidency and was one of his biggest business partners. Tsarukyan has business interests in gas stations, the agrarian sector, food, alcohol, construction materials, and is also an exporter.²⁵⁰ Tsarukyan also owns large-scale businesses in Eastern Europe, the Middle East,

²⁴⁸ Winters, Jeffrey. 2011. *Oligarchy*. Cambridge University Press: USA, Page 4

²⁴⁹ Nazaretyan, Hovhannes. 2018. *Who is Considered an Oligarch? Are There Oligarchs in Armenia?*. Fip.am (Fact Investigation Platform)

²⁵⁰ Petrossyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54. Page 17

and former Soviet countries.²⁵¹ US Ambassador to Armenia John Evans, in WikiLeaks' declassified secret document in 2006, described Tsarukyan as an "influential oligarch with business interest in various fields."²⁵²

On the next day, October 19, Pashinyan tried to elaborate on his previous statement and clarify what he meant: "I am saying that the power of the few in Armenia has collapsed and that the people's power, meaning your power, has been established. This doesn't mean that the people who were formerly called oligarchs ceased to exist, but it is their status that has ceased to exist. This is the reason that I say – there is no oligarchy in Armenia, the power of the many, the people's power is established in Armenia."²⁵³

It is important to understand that this oligarchic structure affects every aspect of life in Armenia. In many instances, oligarchs are able to make decisions that will serve their wants and needs without considering the situation in Armenia and what is best for the Armenian people. Poverty rates are extremely high in Armenia; however, these oligarchs are able to go on luxury vacations, own summer houses on beaches, accumulate massive amounts of wealth, and own many businesses. It is therefore unsurprising that people will get angry about this inequality and unfairness. Much research has been done in this regard, and it was found that in general, governments listen to the rich more than to the poor.²⁵⁴ Yet, in a country like Armenia, where most of the wealth is in the hands of one small subgroup of people, the government is fully

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Nazaretyan, Hovhannes. 2018. *Who is Considered an Oligarch? Are There Oligarchs in Armenia?*. Fip.am (Fact Investigation Platform)

²⁵³ Kocharyan, Stepan. 2018. *Pashinyan heralds end of oligarchy era in Armenia*. Armenpress.am

²⁵⁴ Gilens, Martin. 2005. *Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness*. Public Opinion Quarterly. Vol. 95, N 5 Special Issue. Pages 778-796

ruled and controlled by them. Armenia has a rather strong tradition of demonstrations and protests and this issue came up more than once during different movements and protests.

This kind of Oligarchic structure and economic inequality leads to poor living conditions - a topic that will be explored in the next subsection.

Poor Living Conditions in Armenia

As has been discussed earlier, poor living conditions (high poverty rates, unemployment, a weak welfare state, etc.) can be a reason behind the emergence of civil unrest all around the world and especially in countries where Color Revolutions took place. As a newly independent country, Armenia is still battling the outcomes of the Soviet Union's collapse, because of which many factories were closed, and industries and workplaces disappeared. The Global Economic Crisis of 2009 hit Armenia dramatically and "the drastic decline of the economy of Armenia was followed by a sharp rise in poverty".²⁵⁵ While starting from 2010 the level of poverty was decreasing, in 2014, still 30 percent of Armenians lived below the poverty line, which meant that every three Armenians out of ten lived in a household where the income was less than 40,264 AMD/month (around 80 USD).²⁵⁶ The poverty rate saw a steady decrease: in 2017, such that 25.7 percent²⁵⁷ of the population lived below the national poverty line.

²⁵⁵ Gevorgyan, Astghik. 2018. *Poverty in Armenia*. Ampop.am

²⁵⁶ World Bank. 2015. *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia - Main Outcomes of 2014 Household Integrated Living Conditions Survey*

²⁵⁷ Asian Development Bank. *Poverty in Armenia*.

There are different layers to poverty and to differentiate between them, the World Bank divides people who live in poverty into three different groups: the poor, the very poor, and the extremely poor. The poor are defined as those with consumption per adult equivalent to or below the upper total poverty line; the very poor are defined as those with consumption per adult equivalent to or below the lower total poverty line, whereas the extremely poor or the undernourished are defined as those with consumption per adult equivalent below the food poverty line.²⁵⁸ In 2014, Armenia's population was around 2,912,000, and out of that, 900,000 were poor, 330,000 very poor, and 70,000 extremely poor.²⁵⁹

In 2014, poverty rates in Armenia were fairly similar both in urban (30 percent) and rural (29.9 percent) areas.²⁶⁰ Yerevan, the capital city, had the lowest poverty rate in the country -- 25.2 percent.²⁶¹ This difference between Yerevan and other cities, big or small, is easily observable: Yerevan hosts all the Governmental Offices, Non-Governmental Organizations, Institutes, and other offices and organizations, while other cities lack any of that activity, which increases the unemployment rates in those cities as well as decreases job opportunities. In 2014, 63.6 percent of the poor, 13.6 percent of the very poor, and 67.9 percent of the extremely poor were urban residents. However, Yerevan had the lowest percentage of the very poor – 9 percent.²⁶² The reported unemployment rate in Armenia is 16 percent, although it is estimated that the true number is around 30 percent.²⁶³ The welfare system in Armenia, when

²⁵⁸ World Bank. 2015. *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia - Main Outcomes of 2014 Household Integrated Living Conditions Survey*

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Denning, Sarah. 2017. *Three Causes of Poverty in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

it comes to unemployment benefits, is minimal, and so a large percentage of unemployed people decide not to go through the process of filing paperwork and do not get registered. The average job search duration is 20 months, and in cities other than Yerevan it can be much longer. Currently, one-fourth of jobs in Armenia are low-paying jobs; the Armenian labor market is strongly lacking middle-income positions. Salaries in Armenia are extremely low and positions that would have paid well are still dramatically underpaid here – “the proportion of employed population below \$1.90 purchasing power parity/day in 2017 is 1.4 percent.”²⁶⁴ The average monthly salary in Armenia is 55,000 Armenian Dram, which is roughly 115 USD.²⁶⁵ While the cost of living in Armenia is not as high as in other more developed countries, 115 USD is not enough to live in Armenia, especially in Yerevan. This led to a huge migration of population elsewhere: around 14 percent of Armenians found employment overseas.²⁶⁶ Over the last 4 years, the population in Armenia decreased by 6 percent and a big part of that decrease was due to high migration rates.²⁶⁷ 78 percent of migrants are males and 22 percent are females,²⁶⁸ which further shows that a lot of migration is due to lack of employment in Armenia as it is mainly males who migrate for work-related issues. The main migration destination is Russia, because of visa-free entry and comparably easy steps that need to be taken to be formally employed there. However, some also migrate to Eastern Europe, post-Soviet Baltic States, the United States and the Middle East. In 2017, due to migration, the

²⁶⁴ Asian Development Bank. *Poverty in Armenia*.

²⁶⁵ Mekhitarian, Sareen. 2019. *10 Facts About Living Conditions in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

²⁶⁶ Denning, Sarah. 2017. *Three Causes of Poverty in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

²⁶⁷ Babloyan, Ada. 2018. *Youth-focused and Gender-sensitive Labour Market Research in Armenia*. Media-Model LLC. Yerevan, Armenia. Page 36

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Page 38

population declined by 2002;²⁶⁹ this number means that in 2002 more people left Armenia permanently to settle in another country than people who returned to Armenia or moved to Armenia permanently.

In 1988, a devastating earthquake occurred in the city of Gyumri that took 25,000 lives. While more than 30 years have passed, some parts of Gyumri still look like an image from 1988 and it seems like life has stopped there. Many people who were left homeless because of that earthquake still do not have their own homes and live in dorms or single rooms. Many buildings, especially outside of Yerevan, do not have heating or cooling systems, so residents rely on burning wood as their source of heat. The overwhelming majority of apartment buildings (over 50 percent), specifically outside of Yerevan, are due for renovations that will make them more earthquake resistant and energy-efficient.²⁷⁰ This further shows how big the divide is between the rich and poor in Armenia – while Oligarchs enjoy their mansions, some people do not have heating during the winter and have not been able to get a house 30 years after the 1988 earthquake.

Low living standards, low salaries, high poverty rates, and a weak welfare state – all of these are important reasons that can lead to people uprising. These are issues that directly affect people's lives. When looking at different interviews with protestors during the Velvet Revolution those are themes that come out very often and are of central importance for protestors. The next subsection focuses on similar issues, but it specifically looks into struggles that young people face, as they were the leading force of the Velvet Revolution.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Mekhitarian, Sareen. 2019. *10 Facts About Living Conditions in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

Dissatisfied Youth

The Velvet Revolution, as any other Color Revolution, was led and organized by the youth – high school students, university students, young professionals. Everyone had their fair share in this movement. Chapter 1 explored Youth Movements in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and other countries where Color Revolutions took place and it is very clear that youth movements had a lot to do with the success of the civil uprising and mobilization. In all those countries, young people had initial grievances that became catalysts for them to get to the streets and organize. In Armenia, the youth face many different issues. However, the most relevant one for this movement is the fact that finding employment and self-development opportunities in Armenia is rather hard and young people constantly feel the need to emigrate to Europe or the United States to have good prospects for the future. Because of corruption and oligarchy, many people cannot get into positions that they deserve to be in just because they do not have relatives or people they know, and/or enough money for bribes to get accepted into those positions. Young people, fairly so, feel like the troubles they are facing are the fault of the government and oligarchy. Ms. Petrosyan, one of the participants of protests during the Velvet Revolution, said: “Our government is outdated and that we needed to change it.”²⁷¹

According to data from the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, the employment rate of youth, aged 15-29, is 33.5 percent, while the unemployment rate is 30 percent.²⁷² The rest of the youth is considered economically inactive which means they are not

²⁷¹ MacFarquhar, Neli. 2018. *Behind Armenia's Revolt, Young Shock Troops From the Tech Sector*. The New York Times

²⁷² Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. 2018. *Labour market in the Republic of Armenia*

employed. However, they are not actively seeking employment either (36.5 percent). Most of the economically inactive population is female, as in Armenia, culturally, the woman is the one who takes care of the household chores and children. Therefore, even after higher education females are the ones who stay at home and do not use their degrees. “The highest unemployment rate is reported among youth aged 20-24 years-old.”²⁷³ While finding a job is not an easy task in Armenia, one’s chances are getting even slimmer based on where they reside – “the smaller the place of permanent residence, the more likely it is to become unemployed.”²⁷⁴ According to the responses to *Youth-focused and Gender-sensitive Labour Market Research in Armenia*, conducted by Media-Model LLC in 2018, “two in five young unemployed respondents have been looking for work for more than one year.”²⁷⁵ Young people in bigger cities applied and got rejected from jobs at a higher rate than youth living in smaller cities and villages. This is simply connected to the lack of workplaces and opportunities in rural locations. Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, has the biggest number of opportunities available, while even Gyumri, the second-largest city of Armenia, does not have even half of what Yerevan has to offer.

One of the biggest issues for employed youth is dissatisfaction regarding their educational degree/professional capabilities and the job they have.²⁷⁶ It is not uncommon to see young people with an undergraduate level of education working in the service industry or having extremely low-paid positions. Another big issue that young people face is a “lack of

²⁷³ Babloyan, Ada. 2018. *Youth-focused and Gender-sensitive Labour Market Research in Armenia*. Media-Model LLC. Yerevan, Armenia. Page 40

²⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 13

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Page 14

potential in professional and career growth.”²⁷⁷ This might be an even bigger concern for the youth because it is not unusual worldwide for recent graduates to work low paid jobs entry jobs or have a temporary or part-time job in a different industry from what they have studied. However, not having possibilities in the future for growth, development and a well-paid position is an important concern and issue that leads to high numbers of migration from Armenia, especially for Armenian youth. Half of the respondents of *Youth-focused and Gender-sensitive Labour Market Research in Armenia* expressed a desire to change their workplace because of dissatisfaction with it.²⁷⁸ “Only around a half of young workers are in occupations that match their level of education (53.7 percent) compared to workers who work in occupations for which they are overeducated (33.6 percent) or undereducated (12.7 percent).”²⁷⁹

The 4-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan for Nagorno Karabakh further deepened dissatisfaction with the government, especially among the youth. Armenians kept hearing over and over how poor living conditions, a weak welfare state, and lack of investments in different sectors is a necessary sacrifice to have a strong army. However, once the war erupted, news started circulating that “soldiers lacked basic items like bullets and medical kits.”²⁸⁰ It became even more evident how much money and resources were stolen by the government and oligarchy – “The government ate everything that was supposed to be used to

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 17

²⁸⁰ MacFarquhar, Neli. 2018. *Behind Armenia’s Revolt, Young Shock Troops From the Tech Sector*. The New York Times

supply the army”²⁸¹ said 24-year-old Samvel Mkrtchyan, another participant in the Velvet Revolution.

As already mentioned, dissatisfied youth played a big role in all the cases of Color Revolutions. In recent years, the Armenian youth have been especially active politically -- Electric Yerevan, Dem Em, 100 Dram, Mashtots Purak are all movements that were organized by the youth regarding different issues that Armenia was facing. The scope of those protests was wide: Electric Yerevan was a movement against an increase in electricity prices, 100 Dram was about an increase in public transport prices. Mashtots Purak was about preserving a public park from becoming a shopping center. The youth was active in different spheres. When it came to the Velvet Revolution, young people saw it as the perfect opportunity to change the government in hopes that their future will become more prosperous and secure under the leadership of Nikol Pashinyan.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Post-Velvet Revolution Armenia

After Serzh Sargsyan stepped down, Karen Karapetyan became the acting Prime Minister of Armenia. He was the Mayor of Yerevan from 2010 to 2011 after which from September 2016 to April 2018 he served as a Prime Minister and was succeeded by Serzh Sargsyan. He was also a long-standing Gazprom official, holding senior executive positions, which gave Russia some degree of comfort after Sargsyan's resignation, as through having leadership roles in Gazprom, Karapetyan enjoyed the backing of the Kremlin.²⁸² Pashinyan was extremely unhappy with the choice of the acting Prime Minister who was a member of the Republican Party. He demanded the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) to renounce its power following the resignation of Sargsyan. Pashinyan announced: "The HHK and [acting Prime Minister] Karen Karapetian are trying to wrest the victory from the people. We will not allow that".²⁸³ Pashinyan once again took over the streets while being supported by his followers. This uproar began right after Pashinyan's and Karapetyan's scheduled meeting got canceled due to Karapetyan rejecting preconditions set by Pashinyan.²⁸⁴ Pashinyan's key demands were to appoint 'people's candidate', that is Pashinyan himself, as interim Prime Minister as well as to hold snap parliamentary elections.²⁸⁵ Karapetyan told journalists that while he is not opposed to holding a snap election, he believes that "their date and modalities

²⁸² Danielyan, Emil. 2018. *Pashinian Insists On 'Transfer Of Power'*. Azatutyun.am

²⁸³ Aslanian, Karlen. 2018. *Protests Resume In Yerevan*. Azatutyun.am

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

must be agreed by Armenia's leading political forces by consensus".²⁸⁶ Pashinyan's response to this was the same as always: mobilizing his followers and taking over the streets.

On May 2, 2018, Pashinyan was the only candidate running for the role of the Armenian Prime Minister as the Republican Party of Armenia did not put forward a candidate of their own. However, Pashinyan was unable to secure the necessary number of votes in the Parliament to become the new Prime Minister. Out of 105 National Assembly members, only 45 voted for Pashinyan when he needed at least 53 votes for victory.²⁸⁷ Pashinyan was able to secure all the votes from Yelk Alliance (Pashinyan's party) that had 9 seats, The Tsarukian Alliance with 31 seats, and all but one vote from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) with 7 seats.²⁸⁸ However, the Republican Party of Armenia, which held the majority of the seats (58 seats) in the National Assembly, did not vote for him. Only one of the Republican Party deputies, Felix Tsolakian, voted for him.

After this defeat, Pashinyan once again called upon his followers to take over the streets, blockade key transport routes, for students to protest by skipping classes and joining demonstrations instead. Pashinyan described his defeat as an 'insult to the people' and urged the Republican Party to "Get sober [before] it's too late, because your behavior could cause a political tsunami".²⁸⁹ Pashinyan knew that his biggest strengths are his followers and people's

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Azatutyun.am. 2018. *Pashinian Not Elected Armenian PM*

²⁸⁸ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Calls For General Strike After Parliament Rejects Him As Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

²⁸⁹ Dw.com. 2018. *Parliament vote falls short for Armenia's protest leader*

almost blind trust in him, so he knew that this would be the best way to demonstrate his power.

According to Armenia's Constitution, when the Parliament is unable to choose a Prime Minister during the first meeting, the second round of vote should take place in a week. If the Parliament fails to appoint a Prime Minister, it should be automatically dissolved, and new elections should be called.²⁹⁰ On May 8 Parliamentary voting Pashinyan got elected as a Prime Minister in a 59 to 42 vote.²⁹¹ Thousands of his supporters, at the Republic Square, were in ecstasy. Pashinyan said: "I am in a working mood, there is no sense of euphoria, just work to do. If we were able to do the impossible, that means we will be able to do the difficult".²⁹²

After being elected as a Prime Minister, Pashinyan had five days to choose cabinet members and 15 to submit his government program to Parliament for approval.²⁹³ However, it will be hard for Pashinyan to pass any legislation that the Republican Party disagrees with because they still hold the majority of the seats in the Parliament. Additionally, the Republican Party still holds the power to block Pashinyan's proposed cabinet and/or his government program.²⁹⁴

Pashinyan was indeed in a 'work mode'. He took over the office with storm -- different highly placed officials lost their positions and new ones took those over. For example, on May

²⁹⁰ Azatutyun.am. 2018. *Pashinian Not Elected Armenian PM*

²⁹¹ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Formally Appointed Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

²⁹² MacFarquhar, Neil. 2018. *He Was a Protester a Month Ago. Now, Nikol Pashinyan Leads Armenia*. The New York Times

²⁹³ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Formally Appointed Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

10, only two days after Pashinyan's appointment, the President of Armenia, Armen Sargsyan, dismissed the Chief of Police of the Republic of Armenia Vladimir Gasparyan and the Director of the National Security Service of the Republic of Armenia Georgy Kutoyan, due to Pashinyan's recommendations.²⁹⁵ The next 12 months and even more were filled with dismissals, resignations, arrests, and new appointments. It is not in the scope of this project to conduct a deep dive into those political events as that can be a project in itself, however, it is important to mention that almost all of the key governmental positions underwent leadership changes at least once if not multiple times in a span of months. Pashinyan largely was enjoying people's approval, especially at the beginning of his governance, however that does not mean that there were not people who were unhappy by the changes that he was making. As early as on May 17, few different groups were taking over the streets once again, but this time they were protesting against Pashinyan and his orders, not with him. Pashinyan, in his usual manner, went on Facebook Live and encouraged protestors to be patient with the government.²⁹⁶ He further said that he took over the streets as he and his followers did not believe that Armenia has a responsive government, however, the situation is different now.²⁹⁷

City Council elections in Yerevan, on September 23, 2018, were the first major test of Pashinyan's and his Party's political strength. This election was triggered by, Yerevan's then-mayor, Taron Margaryan's resignation on July 9, after holding that position since 2011.²⁹⁸ Although Margaryan did not specify the reasons for his resignation, from May 2018 to July 2018

²⁹⁵ Stepanyan, Ruzanna. 2018. *Վլադիմիր Գասպարյանն ու Գեորգի Կուտոյանն ազատվեցին զբաղեցրած պաշտոններից*. Azatutyun.am

²⁹⁶ Aslanyan, Karlen. 2018. *Փաշինյանը կոչ արեց դադարեցնել բողոքի գործողությունները*. Azatutyun.am

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ EVN Report. 2018. *Yerevan Municipal Elections 2018*

numerous calls were made urging him to resign. Pashinyan's My Step block received 81 percent of the votes, followed by Gagik Tsarukian's Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) and the Luys Alliance, which got 7 percent and 5 percent of votes respectively.²⁹⁹ The Central Electoral Commission announced that "of the 848,343 eligible voters in Yerevan, 370,323 voted in the Yerevan City Council elections on September 23, or 43.65 percent".³⁰⁰ In comparison, the voter turnout during May 2017 Municipal Elections was 40.99 percent.³⁰¹ According to Armenia's Electoral Code, these three forces will become the new City Council -- Prosperous Armenia Party with five mandates, Luys Alliance with three mandates, and My Step Party Alliance with 57 mandates.³⁰² This allowed My Step Alliance to secure their candidate, Hayk Marutyan, as the City Mayor. Though Marutyan graduated from the Yerevan State Engineering University, he made a name for himself as an actor, comedian and screenwriter. He became politically active during the 2013 demonstrations against the public transportation fare increase and was relatively vocal in his criticism of Sargsyan's cabinet. However, he became particularly politically active during the Velvet Revolution, when he was one of the first supporters of Pashinyan. This appointment was faced with the criticism of many, as people decided that due to his background, Marutyan is not fit for the position.

The biggest challenge that Pashinyan and his cabinet were facing was the fact that they were a Parliamentary minority. To achieve his goal of Snap Parliamentary elections, Pashinyan resigned from the role of Prime Minister in mid-October 2018. He was successful in convincing

²⁹⁹ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian PM Pashinian's Bloc Takes Landslide Election Victory In Yerevan*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

³⁰⁰ EVN Report. 2018. *Yerevan Municipal Elections 2018*

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

his opponents not to nominate a candidate for the role of the Prime Minister, the outcome of which, according to Armenian Constitution, is snap elections. This was a very calculated move as Pashinyan was entirely sure that My Step Alliance would win the majority of the seats, and he would be elected as Prime Minister again.

Pashinyan's calculations were correct -- My Step Alliance block received 70.4 percent of the votes on December 9, 2018 snap elections.³⁰³ The Prosperous Armenia Party won 8.3 percent of the votes while the Bright Armenia Party was in third place with 6.4 percent.³⁰⁴ The former ruling Republican Party of Armenia received only 4.7 percent of the votes which did not secure them a spot in the Parliament because according to the Constitution party needs to receive at least 5 percent of the votes to enter the Parliament.³⁰⁵ Additionally, according to the Constitution, 30 percent of seats in the Parliament should go to the opposition parties, which left My Step Alliance with 88 seats out of 132, Prosperous Armenia with 26 seats, and Bright Armenia with 18 seats.³⁰⁶ Now Pashinyan had a majority in the Parliament and he could easily pass legislations.

Pashinyan was criticized for calling snap Parliamentary elections as he did not give Parliament a chance to reform electoral laws, however, it seems like this did not specifically bother neither Russia nor the EU.³⁰⁷ The factor of Russia is specifically important, as Armenia is highly dependent on the Kremlin and Putin. While analysts have argued that Pashinyan

³⁰³ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Pashinian Alliance Scores 'Revolutionary Majority' In Landslide Armenian Win*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Krzysztan, Bartłomiej. 2018. *Armenia elections and their aftermath*. New Eastern Europe

³⁰⁷ Hoellerbauer, Simon. 2019. *Armenia and the Velvet Revolution: The Merits and Flaws of a Protest-based Civil Society*. Foreign Policy Research Institute

followed all the rules not to trigger a negative response from Russia, it is still rather surprising that Russia did not question the constitutional legality of the regime change as they did in Ukraine.³⁰⁸ After Pashinyan's initial victory on May 8, 2018, Putin congratulated Pashinyan hoping that cooperation between the two countries will: "promote stronger, friendly, and allied relations between our countries and partnership within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization".³⁰⁹ Pashinyan was known to the Kremlin as a political opposition member during Serzh Sargsyan's presidency and an avid opponent of the Eurasian Economic Union, hence Pashinyan from the get-go felt the need to ensure the Kremlin that Armenia will remain in the Union and no shifts will occur in Armenia's geopolitics and strategic orientation.³¹⁰

While Pashinyan enjoys the widespread approval of his supporters, there are many questions yet to be answered by him. During the election campaign, My Step Alliance focused its campaign around Pashinyan, and their policy proposals were rather unclear.³¹¹ Pashinyan mentioned as his goals to fight against corruption and improve Armenia's economic situation, however, it is not clear what Pashinyan's goals are beyond those two vague statements or how he will achieve them. In February 2019, Pashinyan's government adopted a Five-Year Plan that included goals such as "fighting corruption, overturning the inordinate market share and commodity-based cartels of the previous oligarchic system, and establishing a more level

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Formally Appointed Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

³¹⁰ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³¹¹ Hoellerbauer, Simon. 2019. *Armenia and the Velvet Revolution: The Merits and Flaws of a Protest-based Civil Society*. Foreign Policy Research Institute

playing field for business. The country is also faced with troubling poverty, with one in three Armenians living below the official poverty line”.³¹²

Pashinyan’s block holding majority power in the Parliament and Yerevan City Council as well as Pashinyan being the Commander-in-Chief of the Armenian Military makes it rather hard to hold him or his government accountable for their actions. Armenia has a long history of one-party rule -- this was the case during Kocharyan’s and Sargsyan’s presidencies, and Pashinyan’s term is no different. The Bright Armenia Party and its leader Edmon Marukyan, were initially part of My Step Alliance, which means that the third opposition party in the Parliament is ideologically aligned with Pashinyan and hardly challenges him or his proposed legislations. There are no checks and balances in place that truly hold Pashinyan accountable. Journalists, that try to keep him in check, face harsh reactions from him and his government, hence Pashinyan has rather unfavorable relations with the media, especially when the media is critical of his actions.³¹³

One of the main initial criticisms that Pashinyan was faced with was regarding his appointments of some of the key political figures. One notable feature that they all share is the fact that they all are relatively young and inexperienced. For example, Diaspora minister Mkhitar Hayrapetyan was 27 years old during the time of his appointment, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan and Pashinyan's chief of staff Eduard Aghajanyan were both 29.³¹⁴ It

³¹² Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³¹³ Hoellerbauer, Simon. 2019. *Armenia and the Velvet Revolution: The Merits and Flaws of a Protest-based Civil Society*. Foreign Policy Research Institute

³¹⁴ Atanesian, Grigor & Jardine, Bradley & Kucera, Joshua. 2018. *After 100 Days, What's New in the "New Armenia"?* Eurasianet.org

can be argued that Pashinyan's team is too inexperienced to handle the challenges that Armenia is facing, especially when it comes to foreign policy and complicated relations regarding Nagorno Karabakh. Anahit Shirinyan, a Yerevan-based fellow at the British think tank Chatham House, explained that Pashinyan tends to prefer "loyalty more than bringing in established professionals, and after the election they will be under more scrutiny".³¹⁵ This analysis can be supported by the fact that almost all the newly appointed ministers and high ranking officials were with Pashinyan during the Velvet Revolution, some of them marched with him from Gyumri to Yerevan and had established close relations with him. However, as time goes by, more and more analysts express disapproval when it comes to Pashinyan's appointments. Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, the editor of the commentary website blognews.am, said that he is still not unsure whether "[Pashinyan] is good but he has a bad team," or "both Pashinyan and his team are a catastrophe and pose a threat to national security".³¹⁶ He further said: "That Nikol's team is a natural disaster is already an axiomatic fact, so I want to believe that we are dealing with the first option".³¹⁷ Others however argue that all the officials under Sargsyan's regime were extremely corrupt, so having relatively inexperienced politicians that hold good values is more important.³¹⁸ While values that politicians hold are indeed important, Armenia as a country is in a position that any political mistake can lead to frightful outcomes, hence having experienced high-ranking officials is as important as the values they hold.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

International Relations

The sphere of foreign relations proves to be the “Achilles heel” of the new Armenian government, as neither Pashinyan nor his relatively young cabinet has much knowledge or experience in the sphere.

It is widely assumed that Color Revolutions lead to countries gaining closer ties with Europe and steering away from Russia. This might have been the case for Georgia and Ukraine, both of which signed Association Agreements together with a Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Area (DCFTA) in 2014, which became effective in 2016 and 2017, respectively. While neither of those countries are NATO member states, they both actively seek membership. What about Armenia?

Russia

In 2013, Armenia opted out of signing an Association Agreement with the EU and instead became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia. As Chapter 2 explored in detail, this decision made by Armenia was not a simple one -- circumstances that Armenia was put in did not allow the Armenian government to make any other decision. Russia conducted huge arms deal with Azerbaijan, which was a clear sign to Yerevan that “Russia’s South Caucasus policy (premised on a strategic alliance with Armenia) could change should Armenia’s further integration with the EU materialize”.³¹⁹ Frozen conflict over Nagorno

³¹⁹ Directorate-General for External Policies. 2017. *EU Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan*. European Parliament Policy Department. Page 5

Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan is one of the most prominent and ongoing challenges that Armenia has to face. Additionally, this conflict actively shapes both internal and external decisions that Armenia has to make, as “maintaining the conflict status quo and protecting the Nagorno-Karabakh de facto government”³²⁰ is highly important to Armenians and Armenia. When it comes to Karabakh, there is a certain acceptable language, norms and single narrative that must be maintained. Armenia’s identity is highly connected to the need to maintain Nagorno Karabakh’s independence and ethnic Armenian essence as well as keeping the Lachin Corridor which connects Armenia to Nagorno Karabakh.³²¹ While there is an argument that strong relations between Armenia and the West “will provide a more advantageous platform for engagement on the long-running conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh”,³²² Armenia is still highly reliant on Russia’s support. Vladimir Zharikhin, deputy director of the Institute for the Commonwealth of the Independent States, which is part of the Russian Academy of Sciences, says: “Armenia is in a complicated geopolitical situation, but the bottom line is that it doesn't have many alternatives given that it is locked in [a frozen] war with Azerbaijan over [the Armenian-populated territory of] Nagorno-Karabakh, and has NATO member Turkey on its other border, it needs Russia and is not likely to change its geopolitical position no matter who comes to power”.³²³

³²⁰ George, Julie. 2019. *Territory versus Reform Success: Why Reformers Are Better Positioned in Georgia than in Armenia*. Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo No. 566. Page 2

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Jennings, Ray Salvatore. 2019. *Upgrading U.S. Support for Armenia’s Postrevolution Reforms*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

³²³ Weir, Fred. 2018. *Armenia is having a 'color revolution.'* So why is Russia so calm? The Christian Science Monitor

Signing an Association Agreement together with a Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Area with the EU would have affected Armenia's economy in a much more positive way than the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) did. EAEU was already highly divided upon Armenia's entrance as Kazakhstan and Belarus were frustrated with Russia's hegemonic policies and tried to use Armenia's membership in the EAEU to increase their bargaining power.³²⁴ Armenia did not gain many advantages from joining the Union either. Armenia does not border any of the member states, and the only member state that Armenia has major trading ties with is Russia, and even that became more prominent only after joining the Union, as initially Armenia's number one trade partner was the European Union.³²⁵ In 2018, the European Economic Union (Russia and the rest of the states) constituted 26 percent of Armenia's foreign trade, while the European Union's share was 25 percent.³²⁶ However, when one looks closer to Armenia's trade with EAEU states, it is immediately noticeable that Russia is Armenia's primary trade partner: "in 2017, a meagre 0.7 percent of Armenia exports went to Belarus, while 0.1 percent went to Kazakhstan and virtually none of them went to Kyrgyzstan".³²⁷ This once again showcases that Armenia is highly dependent on Russia when it comes to economic relationships. Additionally, Western sanctions against Russia and the devaluation of the Ruble made this economic partnership even more disadvantageous for Armenia.³²⁸ Furthermore, in 2020, some initial

³²⁴ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 18

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 18

exemptions from the higher EEU tariffs will expire, which will affect around 800 types of Armenian goods and products.³²⁹

It seems like not much has changed in Armenia – Russia relations after Nikol Pashinyan became the new Prime Minister of Armenia. “During the first year in his new capacity, Pashinyan had five meetings with the Russian president: on May 14, June 13, September 8, and December 27 of 2018, as well as on June 6, 2019”.³³⁰ Additionally, from November 2018 on, a multitude of bilateral meetings took place between Armenia and Russia on levels like “parliamentary commissions, intergovernmental committees, commissions on military-technical issues, and discussions between various agencies”.³³¹ In February 2019, Pashinyan’s government went as far as sending a humanitarian mission to Syria, a suggestion that was rejected by Serzh Sargsyan earlier.³³² The Kremlin has been asking its military allies for years to support Russia’s mission in Syria, however, Armenia is the first one who took up Russia’s offer. The Armenian Ministry of Defense put out a statement emphasizing the non-combat nature of Armenia’s involvement: “The Armenian specialists will carry out humanitarian activities, connected with demining, anti-mine education, and providing medical assistance in Aleppo, exclusively outside areas where military activities are being conducted”.³³³ This has been a rather unexpected move by the pro-Western cabinet of Pashinyan.

³²⁹ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³³⁰ Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2019. *Deciphering Armenia – Russia relations after the “Velvet Revolution”*. New Eastern Europe

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Armenia sends military deminers and medics to support Russian mission in Syria*. Eurasianet.org

³³³ Ibid.

One of the biggest setbacks that the Kremlin and Yerevan faced was the rise of gas prices in 2019. Prices went up by 10 percent -- from \$150 to \$165 per thousand cubic meters.³³⁴ This came as a surprise to Armenia as the government was in talks with Russia regarding a reduction of gas prices since November 2018. After Pashinyan's and Putin's meeting in Moscow on December 27, Garegin Baghramyan, Armenia's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources announced: "Of course, we are holding talks on reducing the tariff, but I am unaware of Russia's proposals. The best result for us must be to reduce the tariff".³³⁵ Eduard Abrahamyan, a London-based analyst of Armenia, suggests that this price increase is "symptomatic of how the Kremlin is exploiting Armenia's acute dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, using gas supply as a political instrument to put pressure on the Pashinyan-led government".³³⁶ This once again showcases that Armenia is not in a bargaining position, as Russian-owned Gazprom is the main importer of gas. Armenia does import natural gas from Iran in a barter arrangement -- Armenia exchanges its surplus electricity for gas -- however, the level of Iranian gas imports is incomparable to Russian -- 500 million cubic meters compared to roughly 2 billion cubic meters annually.³³⁷ Also, Russian gas has better quality. However, gas prices did not increase for the domestic consumers, as the government "persuaded the Russian-owned gas distribution network in Armenia to absorb the new cost".³³⁸ Gas prices remained the same for the domestic consumers in 2020, however on March 31, 2020 information got circulated that Gazprom

³³⁴ Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Russia Raises Gas Prices for Armenia in the New Year*. Eurasianet.org

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³³⁸ Ibid.

Armenia is planning to start the process of negotiations on July 1, 2020, regarding possible change in gas prices.³³⁹

Russia is Armenia's number one trading partner; arms, gas and electricity supplier; as well as the primary destination for Armenian labor migrants, creating rather unequal relations between Russia and Armenia. Over time, it became noticeable to both the Armenian government and population that the relationship between the two countries "had become less of a partnership and decidedly one-sided".³⁴⁰ Armenia is clearly dependent on Russia; however, Armenia is also a key state of interest for Russia. Armenia allows Russia to have a strong foothold and ally in the Caucasus as well as Russia has its military base in Gyumri, Armenia. Russia highly utilizes Armenia's unfavorable position in the region as it is clear to Russia that unlike Ukraine and Georgia, Armenia cannot detach itself from Russia.

European Union

Negotiations on the new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) were opened in 2015³⁴¹, which is an alternative to Association Agreement that Armenia did not sign in 2013. This was then president Sargsyan's attempt to restore relations with the European Union. CEPA is the 'lighter' version of an Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Area (DCFTA). While DCFTA and AA have distinct political and economic elements to it, CEPA is mainly political. CEPA was signed in 2017 and was developed

³³⁹ Armeniasputnik.am. 2020. *Ինչ է սպասվում Հայաստանին գազի գնի հարցում. փոխվարչապետը փակագծեր է բացում*

³⁴⁰ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³⁴¹ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 22

within the general framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative launched in 2009.³⁴² The agreement came into force in June 2018, while the CEPA implementation roadmap was finalized and approved in June 2019.³⁴³ Signing CEPA was a significant step for Armenia, given the previous circumstances and drawbacks that Armenia had with the EU. The key areas of cooperation based on the agreement are “education, justice reforms, support to SMEs, and energy efficiency”.³⁴⁴

CEPA is not an economic union, which decreases its power to mainly political symbolism, however, the agreement might eventually allow Armenia to get closer to the EU. Based on current relations with the EU, one should not expect increased help regarding security issues, the Karabakh conflict, or relations with Turkey.³⁴⁵ The Velvet Revolution, from the European perspective, showcased “a vindication of core European values thanks to the successful application of non-violent tactics and unusually disciplined and coordinated ‘people power’ rallies and demonstrations”.³⁴⁶ However, not much has changed in EU-Armenia relations after Pashinyan became a Prime Minister. The two main initiatives that Armenia and the EU are working on is the EU-Armenia Aviation agreement and attempts at visa liberalization.

On November 24, 2017, Armenia and the European Union signed the Common Aviation Area Agreement.³⁴⁷ It is estimated that this agreement will bring an additional 87,000

³⁴² Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2019. *Deciphering Armenia – Russia relations after the “Velvet Revolution”*. New Eastern Europe

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ European Commission. 2017. *International aviation: Armenia*. Ec.europa.eu

passengers and generate more than €16 million in the first five years.³⁴⁸ This agreement will guarantee higher connectivity between Armenia and EU member states, lower fares for travelers as well as will create more jobs and income. As Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc said: "Today we are further delivering on our ambitious aviation strategy by taking our aviation relations with Armenia to the next level. This agreement will not only improve market access, it will also contribute to the highest safety, security and environmental standards. This is good news for European and Armenian travelers and businesses".³⁴⁹ While the agreement was signed during Sargsyan's presidency, the benefits of the agreement became evident to the public after Pashinyan's cabinet came to power. Armenia obtained agreements with RyanAir and WizzAir, European low-cost airlines that provide cheap flights to and from Armenia, to extend their routes to and from many European countries and cities.

Visa liberalization means that Armenian passport holders will be able to travel to Schengen Zone countries visa-free for 90 days within a 6-month period. Armenia and the EU signed the Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership on October 27, 2011, in Luxemburg, which was a key step towards developing cooperation in the area of mobility.³⁵⁰ In February 2012, talks on Visa Facilitation and a Readmission Agreement between the EU and Armenia began. An agreement on the Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas was signed on December 17, 2012, and the Readmission Agreement on April 19, 2013, entering into force on January 1,

³⁴⁸ European Commission. 2017. *Aviation: EU concludes negotiations with Armenia for a new aviation agreement*. Ec.europa.eu

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Israylyan, Nikolay & Grigoryan, Stepan. 2018. *EU and Armenia on the Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas*. New Eastern Europe

2014.³⁵¹ While talks are ongoing, Armenia still has to reach a point where its citizens will be able to access the Schengen Zone with no visa restrictions. Nonetheless, there are high hopes that Visa Liberalization will be reached either by the end of 2020 or early 2021. Both Ukrainian and Georgian nationals gained visa-free access to Schengen Zone countries in 2017 and 2016 respectively. Armenia hopes that the Velvet Revolution showcased that Armenia is inclined towards democracy and European values. According to Pashinyan, lowered numbers of Armenian asylum seekers in Europe should improve Europe's trust towards Armenian nationals. According to official EU statistics "there were 1,815 first-time Armenian asylum applicants in the EU in the first half of this year, down from 2,475 in the same period of 2018. The number of such asylum requests stood at 3,250 in the first half of 2017".³⁵²

Pashinyan's cabinet is also working towards deepening relations with individual EU states. In October 2017, Yerevan hosted the 17th summit of la Francophonie, which deepened Armenia's already strong ties with France.³⁵³ In 2018 and 2019 Prime Minister Pashinyan and Angela Merkel exchanged official visits, which gave new strength to Armenia's relations with Germany.³⁵⁴ Pashinyan and Merkel had their third meeting in February 2020. In October 2019, Armenia and Germany held an economic forum, which according to Angela Merkel "ushered in a new vector in German-Armenian relations".³⁵⁵ Germany is interested in creating a corridor between the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea, which will further develop the region's and

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Harutyunyan, Sargis. 2019. *EU Official Cites Key Hurdle To Visa-Free Travel For Armenians*. Azatutyun.am

³⁵³ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 22

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. *"The economic forum of October ushered in a new vector in Armenian-German relations" - Nikol Pashinyan, Angela Merkel address mass media representatives*

Armenia's economic ties to Europe.³⁵⁶ Merkel also mentioned the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, saying: "High on the agenda of today's discussion is the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We will have to work hard and long in order to have a breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations".³⁵⁷

While it was anticipated by some that after the Velvet Revolution, Armenia will instantaneously become closer to Europe, that did not happen. The Velvet Revolution did not get the vocal Western support that the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine did. This might be linked to the limited Western engagement in the region in general and in Armenia in particular. As for the US and EU, "the region is secondary to relations with Russia, Turkey and Iran, and its issues have largely been a sideshow in the context of the higher-profile policy challenges presented by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan".³⁵⁸ Additionally, Azerbaijan is an oil-rich country, which is another factor that European countries have to consider before backing Armenia in a controversial conflict like Nagorno Karabakh.³⁵⁹ This creates further skepticism towards the West when it comes to cooperation and security matters like the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh which makes Armenia lean towards Russia when it comes to choosing an ally.

³⁵⁶ Azadian, Edmond. 2020. *Armenia Emerges from Political Isolation*. The Armenian Mirror-Spectator

³⁵⁷ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. "The economic forum of October ushered in a new vector in Armenian-German relations" - Nikol Pashinyan, Angela Merkel address mass media representatives

³⁵⁸ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 13

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

Nagorno Karabakh/Turkey/Azerbaijan

Feasibly there were no improvements in the Karabakh question or relations with Turkey/Azerbaijan. In September 2018, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders reached an agreement to decrease tension on the border and re-establish a military hotline.³⁶⁰ The agreement was respected until June 2019, when several casualties took place. Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev met in January and March 2019. The two foreign ministers had meetings in January, April, and June 2019, however, those meetings led to no breakthroughs.³⁶¹ In the same manner, peace talks mediated by the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) proven to be ineffective specifically because neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan are willing to change their demands.³⁶² The 4-Day War in 2016 between Armenia and Azerbaijan further deepened Armenians' nationalistic feelings towards the state and hardened Armenia's stance on keeping Karabakh intact. Furthermore, the new Armenian government argued that the only possible solution for long-lasting peace talks will be returning the Nagorno Karabakh's government to the negotiation table.³⁶³ Azerbaijan firmly rejected this suggestion. Pashinyan also made public statements announcing that districts captured from Azerbaijan in 1993 and 1994 are not up for discussion, while Sargsyan's government did offer Azerbaijan the captured zones in return for formal recognition of Nagorno Karabakh.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2019. *Deciphering Armenia – Russia relations after the “Velvet Revolution”*. New Eastern Europe

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 4

³⁶³ Jennings, Ray Salvatore. 2019. *Upgrading U.S. Support for Armenia's Postrevolution Reforms*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

There are also multiple organizations in Armenia whose main goal is to maintain Karabakh's de facto status and to ensure that the government is committed to Karabakh's independence. The most prominent one is the Yerkrpah Union of Volunteers that was established by Nagorno Karabakh war veterans. Their mission is "was to keep the war spirit alive amidst the stalemated conditions and help integrate war veterans into society".³⁶⁵ In 2016, a group called Sasna Crer (Daredevils of Sassoun), took over a police station and held some of the police officers hostage. The group was demanding then-president Sargsyan's resignation. The group called his stance on the Karabakh question "defeatist" after the Russian press leaked materials proving that Moscow pressured "the Armenians to make concessions to come to a peace agreement in Karabakh".³⁶⁶

Relations with Turkey are stagnant as well and will remain so as long as Armenia demands recognition of the Armenian Genocide and Nagorno Karabakh. Turkey and Azerbaijan are long-standing allies, hence Azerbaijan enjoys Turkey's support in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Between 2008 and 2010, Barack Obama's administration put a lot of pressure on Turkey to open the border and normalize relations with Armenia, however, this had limited results and not many advances were made.³⁶⁷ During the same years that the US was pushing Turkey towards the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, Russia was supportive of that initiative as well. The Kremlin, however, also backed Azerbaijan when it used its influence in regional energy relations to pressure Turkey into abandoning the reconciliation.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ George, Julie. 2019. Territory versus Reform Success: Why Reformers Are Better Positioned in Georgia than in Armenia. Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo No. 566. Page 4

³⁶⁶ Ibid. Page 5

³⁶⁷ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 16

³⁶⁸ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 8

Additionally, one can argue that normalization of relations with Armenia is not one of Turkey's top priorities, as their main focus, especially in 2019/2020 is Syria and the Kurds, relations with the United States as well as Turkey's ongoing economic downturn.³⁶⁹ It is safe to say that no improvements can be expected in Armenian-Turkish relations anytime soon.

Iran/Georgia/China

One of the most significant changes in international relations that Pashinyan's government is implementing is the creation of closer ties with countries like Iran, Georgia and China. This is a significant change in Armenia's foreign policy that has the potential to free Yerevan from the ongoing Russia-EU dilemma. Additionally, Iran and Georgia are the only two bordering states with which Armenia has good relations -- those states are key gateways for Armenia to the 'outside world'.

Iran has always been strategically important to Armenia, however, Pashinyan's government is trying to take Armenia's partnership with Iran to new heights. In 2019, Pashinyan had an official visit to Iran, while Iran's President Hassan Rouhani visited Armenia to take part in the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council session on October 1. Iran is the only gas supplier to Armenia besides Russia and Iran expressed an interest in expanding the volume of the 'Gas-for Electricity' program.³⁷⁰ Armenia initiated the construction of a third high-voltage transmission line that is supposed to be completed in 2020. This would connect the Armenian and Iranian

³⁶⁹ Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2019. *Deciphering Armenia – Russia relations after the “Velvet Revolution”*. New Eastern Europe

³⁷⁰ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Nikol Pashinyan, Hassan Rouhani discuss broad range of issues on bilateral agenda*

power grids which will allow Armenia to triple its electricity supplies to Iran.³⁷¹ This can possibly lead to the lessening of Armenia's dependence on Russian gas, however, both previous and current Armenian governments mention that Russia's gas is cheaper. Additionally, it is hard to imagine that Gazprom will allow any other company to take a lead in supplying Armenia with gas and possibly lose its monopoly and market dominance. During the 2019 meeting, Nikol Pashinyan announced that Armenia is ready to be a transit country for Iranian gas, which can further expand economic ties and cooperation between the two countries.³⁷² Rouhani further mentioned the possibility of "joint efforts in railway communications, high technologies, customs, science and tourism".³⁷³ In December 2017, Iran and Armenia established a free-trade zone in Meghri, a bordering region with Iran, which was supposed to bring together "Iranian, European, US, EAEU and Chinese businesses to benefit from Armenia's preferential trade regimes and links with third parties".³⁷⁴ Pashinyan and Rouhani discussed the implementation of Meghri Hydro Power Plant which is supposed to "boost capital investments and trade turnover via the free trade zones".³⁷⁵

In 2018, Iran signed an agreement to join a free trade zone with Eurasian Economic Union countries. Armenia did have a big role in guiding Iran towards this decision as well as it will serve as an important transit platform for Iran to reach other EAEU countries. The free trade zone will be in effect for four years and will grant Iran tariff concessions on more than 500

³⁷¹ Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations

³⁷² Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 24

³⁷³ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Nikol Pashinyan, Hassan Rouhani discuss broad range of issues on bilateral agenda*

³⁷⁴ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 24

³⁷⁵ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Nikol Pashinyan, Hassan Rouhani discuss broad range of issues on bilateral agenda*

items.³⁷⁶ This agreement has the potential to further trade between Armenia and Iran, which will provide Armenia with more diversity in trading partners.

Worsened relations between the United States and Iran can potentially create complications for Armenia. John Bolton, during his visit to the Caucasus in 2018, suggested Armenia join the United States in its efforts to isolate Iran.³⁷⁷ It is highly unlikely for Armenia to accept this suggestion, as worsened relations between those two countries can severely damage the key national interests of Armenia. On October 1, 2019, during a Pashinyan-Rouhani meeting, Pashinyan reassured the Iranian President that Armenia will remain committed to close relations with Iran despite US sanctions against Teheran: “Our position is that our relations with Iran must be beyond geopolitical influences as much as possible because we are neighbors and have many common interests and we need to cooperate for many more centuries and millennia”.³⁷⁸

With strong cultural ties and close geographic proximity, Armenia and Georgia maintained functional relations throughout the years, however bilateral ties have never been particularly strong between these two countries. Georgia, like Iran, does have strong strategic importance to Armenia, as it serves as a gateway for Armenia’s imports and exports and is the only land route that connects Armenia to Russia.³⁷⁹ Pashinyan demonstrated his interest in strengthening ties with Georgia by making it his first official visit destination in May 2018.

³⁷⁶ Tasnim News Agency. 2019. *Iranian President to Visit Armenia for EAEU Summit*

³⁷⁷ Ohanyan, Anna. 2018. *Armenia’s Democratic Dreams*. Foreignpolicy.com

³⁷⁸ Azatutyun.am. 2019. *Iranian President Again Offers Closer Ties To Armenia*

³⁷⁹ Konarzewska, Natalia. 2020. *Armenia Seeks Re-Energized Ties with Georgia*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

During Pashinyan's visit to Georgia in March 2020, Pashinyan and Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia discussed possibilities of expanding trade and economic cooperation, projects in transport, energy and other sectors, and creating transit potential between the two countries.³⁸⁰ Georgia and Russia are in the midst of ongoing talks regarding open communications via Abkhazia and South Ossetia and if those prove to be successful, a planned Iran-Armenia railway for transporting Iranian gas might become economically viable.³⁸¹ While there are no concrete projects in the works between these two countries, a possible partnership can prove to be beneficial to both sides.

Armenia and China have had friendly relations since the early 2000s, however, ties between them became stronger in 2017, when China showcased its interest in Armenia in a symbolic manner by building a new Embassy building in Armenia, which is the second-largest Chinese Embassy in the post-Soviet area.³⁸² In order to further showcase friendly relations between the two countries, from January 19, 2020, Armenia and China mutually lifted visa requirements for the citizens of the two states.³⁸³ Since 2012, Chinese aid to Armenia has totaled \$50 million.³⁸⁴ In September 2017, Armenia acquired military aid worth \$1.5 million from the Chinese government.³⁸⁵ Armenian and Chinese diplomats have penned cooperation agreements for agriculture, energy production, infrastructure development, and even military assistance.³⁸⁶ Additionally, China is Armenia's third-largest trade partner after Russia and the

³⁸⁰ The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. *Prime Minister Arrives in Georgia on Official Visit*

³⁸¹ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 24

³⁸² The Armenian Mirror-Spectator. 2019. *China's Xi Sees Closer Ties With Armenia*

³⁸³ Xinhua. 2019. *Armenia, China to lift visa requirements in January*. Chiandaily.com.cn

³⁸⁴ The Armenian Mirror-Spectator. 2019. *China's Xi Sees Closer Ties With Armenia*

³⁸⁵ Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House. Page 24

³⁸⁶ Elliott, Raffi. 2019. *Is Armenia Playing a Dangerous Game with China?* The Armenian Weekly

European Union. The Chinese government pledged to help Armenia with its Covid-19 outbreak and as recently as April 2020 Armenia received aid from China. There is huge potential for cooperation between Armenia and China, as it can prove to be beneficial to both sides. China is increasingly showcasing interest in the region and Armenia can potentially be an ally for China. As for Armenia, closer ties with China (especially in the military sphere) might be seen as less of an issue for Russia, which does not see China as threatening to the extent as the West does.

Governmental Actions

One of the first areas that Pashinyan and his government started working on immediately was corruption, which led to multiple arrests and dismissals. The current government launched a corruption investigation into government-linked oligarchs, which was highly supported by Armenians as they were truly tired of all the corruption that was taking place.³⁸⁷ Transparency International ranked Armenia 105 out of 180 countries in terms of perceived corruption.³⁸⁸ Armenia's National Security Service president Artur Vanetsyan on May 19, 2018, only days after being appointed to the position, told journalists that as early as later in May corruption cases will be uncovered and names will be published.³⁸⁹

One of the first targets of Pashinyan's new government, when it came to tax invasion, was Samvel Aleksanyan. Chapter 3 provides an extensive description of all his assets and

³⁸⁷ Ohanyan, Anna. 2018. *Armenia's Democratic Dreams*. Foreignpolicy.com

³⁸⁸ Hoellerbauer, Simon. 2019. *Armenia and the Velvet Revolution: The Merits and Flaws of a Protest-based Civil Society*. Foreign Policy Research Institute

³⁸⁹ Tamrazyan, Hrayr. 2018. *ԱԱԾ տնօրեն. Այս ամիս արդեն կլինեն կոռուպցիոն բացահայտումներ, կհրապարակվեն անուններ*. Azatutyun.am

monopolies that he controls. Armenia's National Security Service claimed that "Samvel Aleksanyan's Alex Holding group colluded with the former leadership of the State Revenue Committee to run a tax scam in the country's largest food supermarket chain owned by it".³⁹⁰ The tax evasion was committed through selling hundreds of products in the Yerevan City Supermarket Chain through 461 small firms that were registered under the names of Aleksanyan's employees and their family members.³⁹¹ According to the Armenian laws, small businesses (annual turnover of up to \$237,000) are exempt from profit and value-added (VAT) taxes and are only required to pay 'turnover tax' that is 2 percent of their revenue.³⁹² The rate for VAT is set to 20 percent. National Security Service estimated that since the end of 2016, Aleksanyan managed to escape paying \$15 million in VAT payments.³⁹³ On August 1, 2018, State Revenue Committee announced that "the liabilities of the company have been fully restored".³⁹⁴

One of the most shocking and loud cases was the arrest of Manvel Grigoryan, who is a well-known retired army general and former Armenian deputy defense minister.³⁹⁵ He was arrested on June 16, 2018, by the National Security Service (NSS) at his home in Vagharshapat. Initially, he was arrested and detained under Article 235 (part 2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia that is 'Illegal acquisition and possession of firearms and ammunition by a group of persons'.³⁹⁶ However, only in a matter of few hours, Pashinyan announced via

³⁹⁰ Asbarez.com. 2018. *Known Oligarch's Company Accused Of Tax Fraud*

³⁹¹ Jam-News.net. 2018. *Large Network of Armenian Supermarkets Dodging Taxes for Years*

³⁹² Asbarez.com. 2018. *Known Oligarch's Company Accused Of Tax Fraud*

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Badalian. Naira. 2018. *The company of oligarch Samvel Aleksanyan paid off with budget, paying about \$ 11 million*. Arminfo.info

³⁹⁵ Hetq.am. 2018. *Etchmiadzin: Manvel Grigoryan and Artur Asatryan Arrested on Illegal Arms Charges*

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

Facebook Live that “Manvel Grigoryan's arrest is connected with the suspicion that he has been involved in embezzlement and stealing of aid for the April war”.³⁹⁷ Grigoryan was accused of stealing food that has been sent to soldiers during the 4-Day April War to feed the exotic animals (tigers, bears and ostriches) in his private zoo. Additionally, NSS announced that “a number of classic and contemporary cars, several motorcycles and snow mobiles, were found” in addition to “18 antitank rockets, 20 mortars, 21,589 rounds of various caliber ammo, a variety of explosives, 79 rifles and 39 pistols with factory markings and 12,300 rounds of ammunition”.³⁹⁸ This created a huge uproar all-over Armenia. Grigoryan’s court case is still ongoing at the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction on the charges of illegal possession and storage of weapons and ammunition, embezzlement of 101,232,917 AMD, evasion of 1,228,176,342 AMD taxes, misuse of 1,225,003,300 AMD state funds, and the organization of misappropriation of 37,101,100 AMD worth property accompanied with extortion.³⁹⁹

However, the arrest that became the most explosive one was the one of Armenia’s second President Robert Kocharyan. Kocharyan was initially arrested on July 28, 2018, and was charged with responsibility for the March 1, 2008 case for “overthrowing the constitutional order”.⁴⁰⁰ 2008 protests took place after the presidential elections and those protests were brutally dispersed on March 1 resulting in 10 deaths (8 protestors and 2 policemen). After two weeks Kocharyan was discharged due to a court ruling that he had immunity during those

³⁹⁷ News.am. 2018. *Pashinyan: There Are Doubts that Manvel Grigoryan Stole Aid of Schoolchildren During April War*

³⁹⁸ Hetq.am. 2018. *Manvel Grigoryan's "Hidden Assets": Law Enforcement Uncovers Mini Arsenal and Supplies Destined for Armenian Troops in "Four Day War"*

³⁹⁹ Mamulyan, Araks. 2020. *Manvel Grigoryan Released from Detention on Medical Grounds*. Hetq.am

⁴⁰⁰ Jam-News.net. 2019. *Ex-President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan arrested for third time*

events.⁴⁰¹ After this ruling, the case was sent to the Court of Appeals which on December 7, 2018, decided to re-arrest Kocharyan.⁴⁰² In addition to his initial charges, in February 2019, Kocharyan was charged with receiving a bribe of 927 million drams (around \$3 million).⁴⁰³ After that arrest Kocharyan was released on bail on May 18, 2019, however, he was back behind the bars on September 20, 2019, after Judge Anna Danibekyan denied the appeal for bail for the ex-president.⁴⁰⁴ Kocharyan's lawyers argued that there is no reason for him to be under the arrest throughout the whole investigation process as Kocharyan "has never interfered with the case, and has not evaded participation in the trial or investigation".⁴⁰⁵ After the motion has been denied, Kocharyan's lawyer Hayk Alumyan announced that Danielyan's decision was a result of pressure from Pashinyan's government.

Kocharyan and Pashinyan are long-standing nemeses. Pashinyan was one of the main organizers of the 2008 demonstrations which eventually led Pashinyan to being sentenced to seven years in prison for organizing mass disorders. Kocharyan argues that this ongoing political trial is a vendetta against him and that the court has been biased against him.⁴⁰⁶ Kocharyan also blames Pashinyan for the events of March 1: "Today's prime minister is directly responsible for the March 1, 2008, mass disorders and of course he is trying to rewrite history".⁴⁰⁷ Kocharyan's trial is still ongoing and it is unclear how it will end.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Jam-News.net. 2019. *Court denies bail for Armenian ex-president*

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Mejlumyan, Ani. 2019. *Former Armenian president Kocharyan arrested for the third time*. Eurasianet.org

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

Pashinyan's anti-corruption campaign focused on two distinct issues: tax evasions and bringing criminal charges against former officials that were connected to March 1, 2018 events.⁴⁰⁸ However, concerns are growing regarding Pashinyan's and his cabinet's motivations behind those actions as this campaign seem selective and rather politicized. However, Anahit Shirinyan argues that "the dual campaigns against corrupt businesses and former officials have been savvy political moves. Pashinyan's government needs to demonstrate quick results, and fighting systematic tax avoidance, embezzlement and misuse [of public funds] is one way to do it".⁴⁰⁹ Armenians were indeed satisfied with the anti-corruption campaign, as those oligarchs and ex-government officials were shamelessly corrupt and it can be argued that they are responsible for the fact that 30 percent of Armenians live in poverty. Ruben Carranza, who ran the Reparative Justice Program at the International Center for Transitional Justice, argues that Pashinyan's actions are a response to his supporters' expectations, however, he also believes that the campaign is not simply an act of revenge.⁴¹⁰ Some believe that another goal of Pashinyan when it comes to the anti-corruption campaign is to attract investments from abroad. During the Business Summit in St. Petersburg, on July 27, 2018, Pashinyan announced that due to the campaign "all kinds of obstacles have been eliminated" for foreign investors.⁴¹¹

Some of the positive changes that were experienced under Pashinyan's government are the rise of minimum wages and pensions. In November 2019, the minimum wage rose by 23

⁴⁰⁸ Atanesian, Grigor & Jardine, Bradley & Kucera, Joshua. 2018. *After 100 days, What's New in the "New Armenia"?* Eurasianet.org

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

percent -- from AMD 55,000 to AMD 68,000 (about \$142).⁴¹² The change will affect about 57,000 public officers and 130 employees in the private sector.⁴¹³ Salaries of certain professions were increased as well: for example, from September 2019, teachers' salaries rose by 10 percent, however, this increase will not have a major impact as "[teachers'] average salary is lower than the minimum consumer basket per person".⁴¹⁴ From January 1, 2020, pension's increased as well, by a minimum of 10 percent.⁴¹⁵ While those increases in salaries and pensions are helpful and appreciated, people still have a hard time meeting the ends with the salaries and pensions that people receive in Armenia.

It is important to mention that Pashinyan's government indeed fulfilled some of its promises when it comes to the domestic sphere. \$105,000,000 has been restored to the budget as a result of cracking 346 corruption and tax fraud schemes (currently there are 20,361 ongoing criminal cases).⁴¹⁶ Tax revenues collected in Armenia's budget increase by \$1.063.000.000 or 43.6 percent in 2019 compared to 2017.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Ghazanchyan, Siranush. 2019. *Armenia to raise minimum monthly salary*. Public Radio of Armenia

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ News.am. 2019. *Economist: Armenian teachers' salary raise won't have major impact*

⁴¹⁵ Armenpress.am. 2019. *Pensions to increase by 10% in Armenia starting from January 1, 2020*

⁴¹⁶ Eureporter.co. 2020. *What has changed in #Armenia a year after the revolution?*

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

This research presents a comprehensive analysis of the Republic of Armenia before and after the Velvet Revolution. Events of April 23, 2018, changed the lives of Armenians and drastically altered the direction the country was heading towards. The rule of the Republican Party of Armenia was interrupted after 17 years of unlimited power and control.

Pashinyan's cabinet is young, idealistic, and inexperienced. Armenia is a country that faces numerous challenges, both on a domestic level and internationally. It is a poverty-ridden country that lacks natural resources, is landlocked, is in a highly complicated geopolitical situation, that affects areas like trade, foreign policies, and relations. Domestic improvements, especially economic ones, are highly connected to external factors, and in the case of Armenia, those factors are constraints to Armenia's development.

Nagorno Karabakh is a factor that is impossible to ignore, and that shapes many of the domestic policies as well as decisions when it comes to international relations. Armenia needs Russia's support to continuously protect Karabakh's borders, as Russia sells arms to Armenia. However, close ties to Russia does not allow Armenia to follow other countries' steps that went through Color Revolutions and create closer ties with the West. The clearest example of this is when Armenia became part of the Eurasian Economic Union instead of signing the Association Agreement with the EU. This was not an independent choice made by Armenia -- through series of direct and indirect warnings, Russia pushed Armenia towards joining the Union.

European Union, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic and less supportive during the Velvet Revolution, than it was during other cases of Color Revolutions. The reason for this might be the general perception of Armenia that the West has -- they see Armenia as a country that is closely connected with Russia. After the Velvet Revolution, Armenia did receive EU's approval, however, most likely ties between Armenia and the EU will remain on similar levels as they were before the Velvet Revolution.

Armenia should continue to deepen its relations with China, Iran, and Georgia. Having those countries as allies and partners can potentially diversify Armenia's market relations and open it up for new opportunities.

When it comes to domestic changes, Pashinyan's government did crack on corruption and tax evasions, and while this deserves praise, those actions did not necessarily improve people's living conditions. Poverty and unemployment rates are constant, even after the rise of salaries and pensions, people have a hard time getting by.

The Velvet Revolution succeeded because people were extremely disappointed in Armenia's government and the direction towards which the country was heading. 30 percent poverty rate, unpunished corruption, artificially high prices because of monopolies in the market, unemployment -- all of those became reasons behind people's willingness to go out and protest. Additionally, people felt lied to by Sargsyan when he broke his promise of not running for the role of Prime Minister. This thesis argues that as big or small as they may be, improvements became noticeable right after the Velvet Revolution. To a certain extent, people have newfound trust in the government and that their voices can be heard. Pashinyan and his

cabinet are still highly inexperienced and lack the skills that are needed for managing a country like Armenia, however fully discrediting Pashinyan's government would be rather naïve.

References

- Amiryan, Tigran. 2018. *Culture of Protest: the Symbols of Armenia's Velvet Revolution*. The Calvert Journal
- Amnesty International. 2018. *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018*
- Armeniasputnik.am. 2020. *Ինչ է սպասվում Հայաստանին գազի գնի հարցում. փոփոխարչապետը փակագծեր է բացում*
- Armenpress.am. 2019. *Pensions to increase by 10% in Armenia starting from January 1, 2020*
- Asbarez.com. 2018. *Known Oligarch's Company Accused Of Tax Fraud*
- Asbarez.com. 2013. *EU Will Not Sign Agreement with Armenia, Commissioner Says*
- Asbarez.com. 2013. *Gas Price Reduced as Armenia Joins Customs Union*
- Asian Development Bank. 2011. *Armenia's Transport Outlook: Transport Sector Master Plan*. Yerevan, Armenia
- Asian Development Bank. *Poverty in Armenia*
- Aslanian, Karlen. 2018. *Protests Resume In Yerevan*. Azatutyun.am
- Aslanian, Karlen. 2018. *Փաշինյանը կոչ արեց դադարեցնել բողոքի գործողությունները*. Azatutyun.am
- Åslund, Anders. 2005. *Comparative Oligarchy: Russia, Ukraine and the United States*. CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research. Warsaw, Poland
- Atanesian, Grigor & Jardine, Bradley & Kucera, Joshua. 2018. *After 100 days, What's New in the "New Armenia"?* Eurasianet.org
- Atanesian, Grigor. 2018. *What Does Turmoil in Armenia Spell for Russia?* The Moscow Times
- Avedissian, Karena. 2015. *The Power of Electric Yerevan*. Opendemocracy.net

- Avedissian, Karena. 2015. *No, Thanks. Armenia's Opposition Rallies Against Referendum*. TheGuardian.com
- Azadian, Edmond. 2020. *Armenia Emerges from Political Isolation*. The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
- Azatutyun.am. 2019. *Iranian President Again Offers Closer Ties To Armenia*
- Azatutyun.am. 2018. *Pashinian Not Elected Armenian PM*
- Babloyan, Ada. 2018. *Youth-focused and Gender-sensitive Labour Market Research in Armenia*. Media-Model LLC. Yerevan, Armenia
- Badalian, Naira. 2018. *The Company of Oligarch Samvel Aleksanyan Paid Off With Budget, Paying About \$ 11 Million*. Arminfo.info
- BBC Monitoring Central Asia. 2008. *Armenian Electoral Commission Head Arrested on Suspicion of Fraud*
- Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. 2010. *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. London&New York: Routledge
- Beissinger, Mark. 2007. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 5, No. 2
- Brinks, Daniel & Coppedge, Michael. 2006. *Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy*. Comparative Political Studies. Sage Publications. Vol. 39 No 4. Pages 463-489
- Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2006. *International diffusion and postcommunist electoral revolutions*. Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 39, No. 3. Pages 283-304
- Bunce, Valerie & Wolchik, Sharon. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Caucasus Barometer. 2017. *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries*. Caucasus Research Center – Armenia

Cheterian, Vicken. 2010. *Azerbaijan*. in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge

Civilnet.am. 2018. *Armenia's Velvet Revolution: A Timeline of Key Events*

Companjen, Françoise. 2010. *Georgia* in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge

Cooper, Marc. 2018. *Armenia's Revolution: A Flickering Light in a Darkening Europe*. The Nation

Danielyan, Emil. 2018. *Pashinian Insists On 'Transfer Of Power'*. Azatutyun.am

Danielyan, Emil. 2013. *European Integration Unlikely To End Armenia's Alliance With Russia*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

Demytrie, Rayhan. 2015. *Armenia Energy Protests: Electric Atmosphere in Yerevan*. BBC News

Denning, Sarah. 2017. *Three Causes of Poverty in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

Directorate-General for External Policies. 2017. *EU Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan*. European Parliament Policy Department

Dw.com. 2018. *Parliament Vote Falls Short for Armenia's Protest Leader*

Eckel, Mike. 2018. *A 'Color Revolution' In Armenia? Mass Protests Echo Previous Post-Soviet Upheavals*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

Elliott, Raffi. 2019. *Is Armenia Playing a Dangerous Game with China?* The Armenian Weekly

Epress.am. 2015. *Survey Finds Inaccuracies in Voter Lists Ahead of Constitutional Referendum in Armenia*

Epress.am. 2018. *Serzh Sargsyan Threatens Pashinyan With March 1 to Make Him Stop Fighting*

- Eureporter.co. 2020. *What has changed in #Armenia a year after the revolution?*
- European Commission. 2017. *International Aviation: Armenia*. Ec.europa.eu
- European Commission. 2017. *Aviation: EU Concludes Negotiations With Armenia For a New Aviation Agreement*. Ec.europa.eu
- EVN Report. 2018. *Yerevan Municipal Elections 2018*
- Finlan, Alastair. 2004. *The Collapse of Yugoslavia 1991–1999*. Osprey Publishing
- Gardner, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia Chooses Russia Over EU*. Politico.eu
- George, Julie. 2019. *Territory versus Reform Success: Why Reformers Are Better Positioned in Georgia than in Armenia*. Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo No. 566. Pages 1-6
- Gerlach, Julia. 2014. *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*. Springer Briefs in Political Science
- Gevorgyan, Astghik. 2018. *Poverty in Armenia*. Ampop.am
- Ghazanchyan, Siranush. 2019. *Armenia to Raise Minimum Monthly Salary*. Public Radio of Armenia
- Gilens, Martin. 2005. *Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness*. Public Opinion Quarterly. Vol. 95, N 5 Special Issue. Pages 778-796
- Giragosian, Richard. 2009. *Weathering the Storm: A Commentary on Armenia's Oligarchs*. Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS). Policy Forum Armenia
- Giragosian, Richard. 2019. *Paradox of power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution*. European Council on Foreign Relations
- Global Energy Network Institute. 2002. *An Energy Overview of the Republic of Armenia*
- Global Nonviolent Action Database. *Serbians Overthrow Milosevic (Bulldozer Revolution)*, 2000. Swarthmore College
- Goldring, Edward & Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 2020. *Rethinking Democratic Diffusion: Bringing Regime Type Back In*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 53 No.2. Pages 319–353

- Gotev, Georgi. 2013. *EU loses Armenia to Russia's Customs Union*. Euractiv.com
- Grigoryan, Armen. 2013. *Armenia Chooses Customs Union over EU Association Agreement*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
- Grigoryan, Armen. 2019. *"Armenia first": behind the rise of Armenia's alt-right scene*. Opendemocracy.net
- Grigoryan, Marianna. 2013. *Armenia: Could a Gas Price Hike Have Political Implications?* Eurasianet.org
- Grigoryan, Nelly. 2017. *Armenian public overviews its attitude towards Russia*. Aravot.am
- Harutyunyan, Sargis. 2019. *EU Official Cites Key Hurdle To Visa-Free Travel For Armenians*. Azatutyun.am
- Hetq.am. 2018. *Etchmiadzin: Manvel Grigoryan and Artur Asatryan Arrested on Illegal Arms Charges*
- Hetq.am. 2018. *Manvel Grigoryan's "Hidden Assets": Law Enforcement Uncovers Mini Arsenal and Supplies Destined for Armenian Troops in "Four Day War"*
- Hoellerbauer, Simon. 2019. *Armenia and the Velvet Revolution: The Merits and Flaws of a Protest-based Civil Society*. Foreign Policy Research Institute
- Hovhannisyan, Ani. 2018. *Armenia's "Velvet Revolution" – A Chronology*. Hetq.am
- Howard, Marc Morjé. 2003. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Indridason, Indridi. 2008. *Oligarchy*. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. William A. Darity, Jr. Vol. 6. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA
- Iskandaryan, Alexander. 2018. *The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: How to Lose Power in Two Weeks*. Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization. Published: Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, The George Washington University. Vol. 26, N4. Pages 465-48

- Israylyan, Nikolay & Grigoryan, Stepan. 2018. *EU and Armenia on the Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas*. New Eastern Europe
- Jam-News.net. 2018. *Large Network of Armenian Supermarkets Dodging Taxes for Years*
- Jam-News.net. 2019. *Ex-President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan arrested for third time*
- Jam-News.net. 2019. *Court denies bail for Armenian ex-president*
- Jennings, Ray Salvatore. 2019. *Upgrading U.S. Support for Armenia's Postrevolution Reforms*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Khachatrian, Haroutiun. 2007. *Competitive Edge: The Pitfalls of Monopolies, and the Challenges of a Business-Influenced Parliament*. Armenian General Benevolent Union
- Khachatryan, Stella. 2018. *Մենաշնորհի դեմ կապաքարեն այն օրինակացնելը՞վ...* (tr. *Fighting monopoly by legalizing it?*). Mediamall.am
- Kocharyan, Stepan. 2018. *Pashinyan Heralds End of Oligarchy Era in Armenia*. Armenpress.am
- Konarzewska, Natalia. 2020. *Armenia Seeks Re-Energized Ties with Georgia*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
- Krzyszczan, Bartłomiej. 2018. *Armenia Elections and Their Aftermath*. New Eastern Europe
- Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Poll Shows High, but Declining, Support for Armenian Government*. Eurasianet.org
- Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Armenia Sends Military Deminers and Medics to Support Russian Mission in Syria*. Eurasianet.org
- Kucera, Joshua. 2019. *Russia Raises Gas Prices for Armenia in the New Year*. Eurasianet.org
- Lane, David. 2009. *'Coloured Revolution' as a Political Phenomenon*. Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics. Vol. 25 N2-3. Pages 113-135

Lankina, Tomila & Libman, Alexander & Obydenkova, Anastassia. 2016. *Authoritarian and Democratic Diffusion in Post-Communist Regions*. Comparative Political Studies. Vol. 49, No. 12. Pages 1599–1629

Lanskoy, Mariam & Suthers, Elspeth. 2019. *Armenia's Velvet Revolution*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 30, No. 2. Johns Hopkins University Press. Pages 85-99

Levitsky, Steven & Way, Lucan. 2006. *Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change*. Comparative Politics. Vol. 38, No. 4. Pages 379-400

Live News. 2019. *Վիտալի Բալասանյանի բացառիկ հարցազրույցը LIVEnews.am-ին*. Youtube.com

MacFarquhar, Neil. 2018. *He Was a Protester a Month Ago. Now, Nikol Pashinyan Leads Armenia*. The New York Times

MacFarquhar, Neli. 2018. *Behind Armenia's Revolt, Young Shock Troops From the Tech Sector*. The New York Times

Malek, Martin. 2008. *NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks*. Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. Vol. 7, No. 3. Pages 30-51

Mamulyan, Araks. 2020. *Manvel Grigoryan Released from Detention on Medical Grounds*. Hetq.am

Manaseryan, Ruben. 2007. *Տիգրան Մեծ՝ Հայկական Պայքարը Հռոմի և Պարթևաստանի Ղեկ, Վ.թ.ա. 94–64 թթ. [Tigran the Great: The Armenian Struggle Against Rome and Parthia, 94–64 B.C.]* (in Armenian). Yerevan: Lusakan Publishing

Massispost.com. 2019. *Who Are "Soros's Men" in Armenia?*

Mejlumyan, Ani. 2019. *Former Armenian president Kocharyan arrested for the third time*. Eurasianet.org

Mekhitarian, Sareen. 2019. *10 Facts About Living Conditions in Armenia*. The Borgen Project

Mgdesyan. Arshaluys. 2014. *Россия - Армения - Азербайджан: оружейный баланс в условиях политического дисбаланса*. Regnum.ru

Minasyan, Sergey. 2013. *Russian-Armenian Relations: Affection or Pragmatism?* PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 269

Mitchell, Lincoln. 2012. *The Color Revolutions*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press

Mkrtichyan, Artur & Vermishyan, Harutyun & Balasanyan, Sona. 2016. *Independence Generation: Youth study 2016 – Armenia*. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) Armenian Office in cooperation with the Faculty of Sociology of Yerevan State University

Nazaretyan, Hovhannes. 2018. *Who is Considered an Oligarch? Are There Oligarchs in Armenia?* Fip.am (Fact Investigation Platform)

News.am. 2018. *Pashinyan: There are doubts that Manvel Grigoryan stole aid of schoolchildren during April war*

News.am. 2019. *Economist: Armenian teachers' salary raise won't have major impact*

Nikolayenko, Olena. 2009. *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance* (Working Paper). Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

Ohanyan, Anna. 2018. *Armenia's Democratic Dreams*. Foreignpolicy.com

Open Society Foundations. *Financials*. [Opensocietyfoundations.org](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org)

Open Society Foundations. 2018. *The Open Society Foundations to Close International Operations in Budapest*

Open Society Foundations. *Who We Are*. [Opensocietyfoundations.org](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org)

OSCE/ODIHR Referendum Expert Team. 2015. *Republic of Armenia: Constitutional Referendum*. OSCE

- Petrosyan, David. 2013. *Oligarchy in Armenia*. Caucasus Analytical Digest. N. 53-54
- Poghosyan, Benyamin. 2019. *Deciphering Armenia – Russia Relations After the “Velvet Revolution”*. New Eastern Europe
- Rettman, Andrew. 2013. *Armenia to Join Russia's Union, Surprises EU*. Euobserver.com
- Reuters. 2018. *Kremlin: We Don't Regard Turmoil in Armenia as Ukraine-Style Revolution*. The Moscow Times
- RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Calls For General Strike After Parliament Rejects Him As Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty
- RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian Protest Leader Formally Appointed Prime Minister*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty
- RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Armenian PM Pashinian's Bloc Takes Landslide Election Victory In Yerevan*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty
- RFE/RL's Armenian Service. 2018. *Pashinian Alliance Scores 'Revolutionary Majority' In Landslide Armenian Win*. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty
- Roth, Andrew. 2018. *Shock as Armenia's Prime Minister Steps Down After 11 Days of Protests*. The Guardian
- Sahakian, Nane. 2020. *Soros Foundation In Armenia Decries 'Smear Campaign'*. Azatutyun.am
- Saradzhyan, Simon. 2018. *Why Hasn't Putin Intervened in Armenia Yet?* The Moscow Times
- Shirinyan, Anahit. 2019. *Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty*. Chatham House
- Silitski, Vitali. 2005. *Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus*. Journal of Democracy. Vol. 16 N4. Pages 83-97

Silitski, Vitali. 2010. *Survival of the Fittest: Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions*. Elsevier: Communist and Post-Communist Studies. Vol. 43. Pages 339-350

Souleimanov, Emil & Barbashin, Anton. 2018. *Moscow's Role in Armenia's Revolution*. The Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst

Starr, Harvey. 1991. *Democratic Dominoes: Diffusion Approaches to the Spread of Democracy in the International System*. The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 35, No. 2, Democracy and Foreign Policy: Community and Constraint. Sage Publications. Pages 356-381

Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. 2018. *Labour Market in the Republic of Armenia*

Stepanyan, Ruzanna. 2018. *Վլադիմիր Գասպարյանն ու Գեորգի Կուտոյանն ազատվեցին գրադեցրած պաշտոններից*. Azatutyun.am

Tamrazyan, Hrayr. 2018. *ԱԱԾ տնօրեն. Այս ամիս արդեն կլինեն կոռուպցիոն բացահայտումներ, կհրապարակվեն անուններ*. Azatutyun.am

Tasnim News Agency. 2019. *Iranian President to Visit Armenia for EAEU Summit*

TASS: Russian News Agency. 2018. *Armenia is Not Seeking NATO Membership, Says Acting PM*

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator. 2019. *China's Xi Sees Closer Ties With Armenia*

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. *“The Economic Forum of October Ushered in a New Vector in Armenian-German Relations” - Nikol Pashinyan, Angela Merkel Address Mass Media Representatives*

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Nikol Pashinyan, Hassan Rouhani Discuss Broad Range of Issues on Bilateral Agenda*

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. 2020. *Prime Minister Arrives in Georgia on Official Visit*

Tucker, Joshua. 2007. *Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions*. *Perspectives on Politics*. Vol. 5, No. 3. Pages 535-551

Vanderhill, Rachel. 2017. *Active Resistance to Democratic Diffusion*. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. Vol. 50, No. 1. Pages 41-51

Way, Lucan & Levitsky, Steven. 2007. *Linkage Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide*. *East European Politics and Societies*. V. 21. Pages 48-66

Weir, Fred. 2018. *Armenia is Having a 'Color Revolution.'* *So Why is Russia So Calm?* The Christian Science Monitor

Winters, Jeffrey. 2011. *Oligarchy*. Cambridge University Press: USA

World Bank. 2015. *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia - Main Outcomes of 2014 Household Integrated Living Conditions Survey*

Zolyan, Mikayel. 2010. *Armenia in The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*. ed. Beacháin, Donnacha & Polese, Abel. London&New York: Routledge

Xinhua. 2019. *Armenia, China to lift visa requirements in January*. Chiandaily.com.cn