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LILIT HARUTYUNYAN

**SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON: “NEW COMMUNITY” IN
LEBANON’S CONFESSIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM**

***Abstract:** The paper analyzes the Syrian refugee crisis in neighboring countries, mostly in Lebanon. Syria’s neighborhood hosts currently about 5.5 million forcibly displaced Syrians who have fled the crisis since its onset in 2011. More than 3.4 million Syrians are registered in Turkey and around 2 million in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt (World Bank 2016). According to the UNHCR (2017), the small Lebanese state hosts today around 1.5 million registered Syrians, making it the country with the highest number of refugees per capita (Yasmin 2022). How has Lebanon’s political system dealt with the Syrian refugee issue and how have Syrian refugees – a new “non-core group”(Harris 2012) in Lebanon’s society – interacted with the state’s confessional configuration of power? How has Lebanon’s political system framed and accommodated an external “minority” in the context of a refugee-producing conflict and how has the political discourse constructed the issue of large-scale displacement?*

The conflict in Syria between the government of Bashar al-Assad and various other forces, which started in the spring of 2011, continues to cause displacement within the country and across the region. At the end of 2018, Syrians continued to be the largest forcibly displaced population, with 13.0 million people living in displacement, including 6,654,000 refugees, 6,184,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 140,000 asylum seekers (Ferris, Kirişci, Shaikh 2013; UN OCHA 2016).

***Keywords:** Syrian refugees, Lebanon, migration policy, integration, confessional political system, displaced persons*

Introduction

The conflict in Syria between the government of Bashar al-Assad and various other forces, which started in the spring of 2011, continues to cause displacement within the country and across the region. The refugee situation caused by the Syrian conflict is dire, and it has placed enormous strain on neighboring countries. Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt host massive numbers of Syrian refugees, and Syrians have been seeking protection beyond these countries in increasing numbers since 2011.

To unravel Lebanon's politics of accommodation towards the Syrian refugees and understand how this politics have played out, the paper focuses on the policy structures that the Lebanese state has set in place on the one hand, and how Lebanon's public and policy spheres have framed the Syrian refugee issue on the other. After providing a general overview of Lebanon's political system and its refugee politics, we tried to describe the Lebanese government's policy frame towards large-scale displacement from Syria. We review the key policies that the Lebanese government has adopted from 2011 until 2018.

By the end of 2014, an estimated 7.6 million people were internally displaced and 3.7 million Syrians had fled the country since the conflict began (UN Population Division and UNHCR; OCHA 2015). During 2014, more than one million Syrians were newly registered as refugees in neighboring countries, bringing the total number of registered refugees in the region to 3,688,402 by year-end. As large as the number of newly registered refugees is, in a sense it underestimates the current crisis as it excludes the 117,590 Syrians who were awaiting registration at the end of 2014 (UNHCR, 2015), and de facto Syrian refugees who were residing in the region but who were not formally registered or awaiting registration (Fakhoury and Lynn Abi 2018, 43-53).

The Syrian conflict has placed enormous strain on its neighboring countries, with Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan shouldering the largest burden. By the end of 2014, Lebanon, a country of approximately 4.8 million people before the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, hosted 1,2 million registered Syrian refugees, meaning that nearly one in every five people now living in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee (UN Population Division and UNHCR). As of December 31, 2014, Turkey hosted the largest Syrian population, with 1,5 million registered refugees; Jordan housed the third largest population with 622,865 registered refugees. In comparison, Iraq and Egypt accommodated a smaller yet substantial number of Syrians, hosting 228,484 and 137,812 registered refugees, respectively (Table 1).

Syrian refugees in Lebanon: politics of accommodation

Lebanon's system of politics is commonly framed as a power-sharing type of governance in which political offices and appointments are organized in accordance with confessional system. The legislature is divided between Muslim and Christian MPs, and the ruling cartel revolves around a tripartite structure, which consists of a Maronite president, a Sunni prime minister and a Shia speaker of parliament. The institutionalization of religious representation in political life has evolved into the most prominent feature of nation-building since the National Pact of 1943. Though the Lebanese Constitution and the post-war power-sharing

agreement (commonly known as the 1989 Ta'if agreement (Hiro 2003, 364-365) state that deconfessionalization is the ultimate goal, there has been so far no serious policy frame that sought to address Lebanon's transition from political confessionalism.

In the wake of Lebanon's fifteen-year old civil war (1975-1990), the politics of confessionalism have become more entrenched in societal and political spheres (Haddad 2009, 398-416; Sami 1999, 97-116). In the context of a highly "confessionalized" political culture, minority groups and their leaders have voiced concerns over the design of policies and electoral systems that would marginalize them or affect their political representation (Mehanna 2017). Policy changes that would tamper with the confessional balance of power have conjured in this regard fears of community survival. Adding to this, policy-makers have been concerned with the extent to which the settlement and potential naturalization of refugee communities – such as the Palestinians who have fled to Lebanon since 1948 – could impinge on the formula of confessional power sharing. In the context of regional conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the 2003 war in Iraq, Lebanon has refused to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and has refrained from developing an asylum apparatus that would give legal status to displaced persons. In 2011, the year that has seen the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, notwithstanding small-scale protests, Lebanese citizens have been hesitant when it comes to advocating for full-fledged regime change unlike their Arab counterparts at the time. Though the Lebanese state has not succumbed to what is commonly portrayed as the "Arab Spring", the Syrian war and its spillovers have had considerable effects on Lebanon. One of these effects is large-scale displacement from the neighboring country.

At the outset of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Lebanon adopted an "open-door" and "non-encampment" policy towards forcibly displaced Syrians (Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015–15, 2014). Though Lebanon has never developed a formal asylum policy, several instruments have regulated the state's interactions with displaced nationals from Syria. First, Syrians fell under the jurisdiction of domestic immigration law detailed in the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country, and the 1993 Agreement for Economic and Social Coordination between Lebanon and Syria which guarantees freedom of movement of people and goods between the two countries (Mufti 2014). While Lebanon is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it remains under the obligation of respecting the principle of non-refoulement and human rights principles embedded in the Constitution. Those instruments guarantee displaced persons their basic human rights (UNHCR 2015). Under the 1993

Syrian-Lebanese agreement, Syrians entering Lebanon would have to present valid documents after which they would be able to reside legally in Lebanon for half a year. Furthermore, they would have to pay a residency fee of \$200 (Human Rights Watch 2016). Consequences of arrest, prosecution or deportation await those who fail to renew their residency or who enter illegally (Reuters 2016; Clingendael Conflict Research Unit 2016)¹. Another instrument, which has regulated Lebanon's handling of the Syrian refugee issue, is the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon. Under this MOU, Lebanon grants the UNHCR permission to conduct registration, documentation and refugee status determination as well as offer refugee assistance. It enables Syrians to access basic services and constitutes a precondition for the UNHCR to assess protection needs (Saghieh and Frangieh 2014). Since Lebanon is not a country of asylum, the UNHCR certificate of registration falls short of granting legal refugee status to displaced nationals.

As the number of refugees had reached one million by spring 2014, the Lebanese government vowed to adopt more restrictive policy procedures towards refugees and to enforce stricter border management practices. In June 2014, the government released a policy statement declaring its intent to deny the entrance of Syrians who are coming from areas that do not border Lebanon, “rescind” refugee status from those who have entered Lebanon for economic purposes or who have since travelled back to Syria and returned to Lebanon (UNHCR 2015). The statement also encouraged the creation of camps inside the Lebanese-Syrian border.

As a result, 16,000 Syrians had their refugee status revoked by UNHCR upon the request of the government (Ibid). In October 2014, Lebanon's Crisis Cell, established in February 2014 to deal with the refugee issue, announced a new refugee policy that centered around the following pillars: curb refugee entry into Lebanon except for “exceptional humanitarian cases”, encourage Syrians to return their country or relocate to others, adopt stricter security measures, strengthen the capacity of municipalities to count refugees and practice “municipal policing”, soften the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities through a series of measures such as preventing refugees from illegal work and ensuring that refugee and development aid benefit both refugee and more disadvantaged Lebanese populations. Following the approval of the policy, the Cabinet adopted a series of regulations aimed at limiting the inflow of Syrian refugees and the pool of Syrians eligible for entry and renewal of residency in Lebanon. In May 2015, the

¹ Recent reports from Lebanon suggest mass arrests have been made, curfews imposed and vigilante-style attacks carried out against Syrian refugees.

UNHCR, at the request of the government, suspended all registration and started to “record” rather than “register” refugees with the aim of providing assistance and protection (Janmyr 2016, 58-78). Under the new regulations, as detailed in an Amnesty International Report “Syria: Pushed to the Edge: Syrian Refugees Face Increased Restrictions in Lebanon”, Syrians were expected to meet stringent criteria to fulfill one of the following visa categories: “tourism, studying, transiting to a third country, medical treatment, embassy appointment and a pledge of responsibility” (Amnesty International 2015). The mentioned visa category entails that a Lebanese guarantor would have to sponsor the stay of a Syrian national. One additional category, dedicated to the “displaced”, is reserved to “exceptional cases under humanitarian criteria” (Ibid). In April 2015, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) limited those exceptional cases to the following instances: unaccompanied children or children with a parent living in Lebanon, disabled persons with a relative in Lebanon, persons who need to be urgently treated in Lebanon, and persons to be resettled (UN Children’s Fund 2015). Like before, Syrians above the age of 15 had to pay a semi-annual renewal fee of \$ 200 to the General Security (GSO) (Janmyr 2016). Various reports show that the 2014 regulations have curbed Syrians’ freedom of movement within the country and have thrown displaced nationals into a “state of illegality”, impacting their access to services and healthcare. Many Syrians were not able to pay the registration fee or submit the required documents so that they can regularize their stay. Furthermore, the GSO applied across Lebanese localities changing procedures for admission and renewal of residency (Amnesty International 2015).

In the context of international pressure on Lebanon to improve its refugee practices and combine the refugee issue with a development strategy, Lebanon pledged during the 2016 Supporting Syria and the Region Conference in London to revamp its approach to the refugee issue by temporarily waiving residency fees and reducing the number of required documents to refugee residency (Brussels conference 2017). A year later, the GSO published a decision to waive the annual renewal fee for Syrians if they met certain conditions, namely, if they have registered with UNHCR prior to January 1, 2015 or if they were granted residency status through the UNHCR certificate once in 2015 or 2016 (Immenkamp 2017). The significant progress notwithstanding, international organizations such as Human Rights Watch noted that this policy failed to include all refugee categories such as Syrians who are not registered with UNHCR or those who have obtained residency by means of a Lebanese sponsor, as well as Palestinian refugees from Syria (Ibid). Moreover, it was reported that the application of these new procedures was not consistent. The absence of an official directive by the GSO, interruptions

in the registration process and contradictory practices have thwarted the implementation of the new policy (Ibid).

Syrian refugee issue in Lebanon: narratives of instability and insecurity

Lebanon's refugee policymaking has made sure to frame forcibly displaced Syrians as "temporary" guests in need of assistance in the frame of the neighboring conflict. Still, acquiring a sharper insight into how the Lebanese state has interacted with the Syrian refugee issue requires not only accounting for the policy instruments but also for the discursive framing through which public and policy spheres have portrayed Syrian refugees as a new "community" that is extraneous to Lebanon's confessional political system. An analysis of surveys, national opinion polls, and political statements reveal that the Lebanese population, the media and politicians have by and large framed Syrian refugees as a threat to Lebanon's prosperity, social cohesion and stability. Conducted in May 2013, a national opinion poll entitled "Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis" shows that most Lebanese perceived the Syrian refugee issue to be a threat to security and stability (Christophersen, Jing, Thorleifsson and Tiltnes 2013, 143-162). An analysis of two Lebanese newspapers, *As-safir* and *An-nahar* reveals furthermore that negative representations of the Syrian refugee issue have dominated the media discourse. Prevalent narratives represent the Syrian refugee presence as an economic burden, a terrorist menace to Lebanon's security as well as a threat to civil peace and its "fragile" confessional equilibrium (El-Behairy 2016). An additional narrative, which links refugees with the "re-ignition of a civil war", is rooted in the generalized belief that Palestinian refugee militarization was a contributing factor to the outbreak of the 1975 Civil war. Within this climate, parallels are drawn between the case of displaced Syrians and the "precedent" of the Palestinians during the Lebanese war (1975-1991).

Lebanon's political elite, various political factions also have associated Syrian refugees with economic strains, terrorism and insecurity. At the outset of Syria's conflict, it is worth noting that the two camps that have dominated Lebanon's political scene throughout the last decade, commonly known as "the March 8"² and "the March 14"³ Coalitions, have held conflicting positions towards the Syrian conflict. "The March 8" coalition flagged the perilous nature of the uprising and defended the Syrian regime. Conversely, "the March 14" Coalition

² "*March 8 Alliance*" coalition holds together Lebanon's pro-Syrian factions. The main forces are the Free Patriotic Movement, the Shii Hezbollah and Amal Movement.

³ "March 14 Alliance" refers to an anti-Syrian coalition of parties and independents. The Alliance has become one of the most significant political coalitions in Lebanon, and it includes Christian Maronite, Druze and Sunni Muslim leaders.

denounced the Syrian regime's clampdown on the protesters (Fakhoury and Lynn Abi 2018, 43-53). In the first years of Syria's conflict, parties such as the Sunni current and Hezbollah, called on the Lebanese population to deal with the Syrian refugee issue from a humanitarian angle. Still, as the Syrian conflict became protracted, and in the context of increasing threats that Islamist factions from Syria have posed on Lebanese ground, political parties across the spectrum soon converged to develop harsher stances towards displaced Syrians (IMF Country Report No. 17/20, 2017). In recent years, key themes in Lebanese political discourse that have gained salience in politicians' statements are conflict diffusion and Syrian refugee militarization. The former Minister of Education, Elias Bou Saab, has for example expressed fear over the infiltration of radical terrorists among refugee populations. Lebanon's former army commander, Jean Kahwaji, has warned that Syrian settlements could potentially provide refuge for militant groups (Davison 2016). Similarly, Hezbollah MP Mohammad Raad argued that radical factions were drawing on Syrian refugee camps to recruit individuals to fight in Syria. Since the balance of power in Syria started tilting in favor of the Bashar al Asad regime, additional policy debates that have gained currency relate to the rejection of Syrian refugees' naturalization and to calling for their repatriation. In April 2016, the UN published a report entitled "In Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants" calling on UN member states to multiply efforts for refugee resettlement (UN General Assembly 2016). The report argued that in cases where refugee return is not possible, refugee hosting states ought to provide refugees with a legal status and "examine where, when and how to afford the opportunity to refugees to become naturalized citizens". In Lebanon, policy-makers from various factions hurried to dismiss such a policy perspective. In a letter to Ban-Ki Moon, the UN Secretary General back then, Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil categorically rejected what he perceived as calls for the long-term settlement or naturalization of Syrians in Lebanon. He also called for their repatriation (Mencutek 2017, 1-45). In September 2017, Lebanon's current president Michel Aoun reaffirmed in his address to the UN General Assembly the state's categorical rejection of refugee naturalization. Arguing that the Syrian government has gained control of almost all its land and that the Lebanese state was unable to provide Syrian refugees with decent standards of living, he called for their rash repatriation and urged the UN to engage in developing refugee repatriation schemes instead of ensuring that refugees stay in camps (UN Assembly, UN News 2019). He also described any potential imposition of refugee naturalization on Lebanon as a "crime" against the Lebanese people. Similarly, in 2017, the leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces Party, Samir

Geagaa, remarked that in a context of increasing tensions between Lebanese and refugee populations – and now that “military operations” have abated – it was time for refugees to return (Haboush 2017).

The topics of naturalization and refugee integration have acquired throughout Lebanon’s history contentious and highly conflictual implications. Such themes have conjured the memories of the 1975 Civil War in which the militarization of Palestinian refugees and polarizing debates over their “implantation” (tawteen) are thought to have exacerbated intra Lebanese tensions (MacQueen & Baxter 2014, 51-69). The mass displacement of Syrian refugees to Lebanon has triggered similar fears of impending “political collapse and civil conflict” (Ibid). Indeed, against such a backdrop, several politicians have approximated the current situation of Syrians to the protracted situation of Palestinians. According to this narrative, Palestinian refugee militarization during the 1975 Civil War remains until now an “unsolved” and “contentious” matter. In the 2014 Berlin Conference on Syrian Refugees, Lebanon’s Foreign Affairs Minister Gebrane Bassil criticized the Berlin Declaration for focusing more on obligation of the host state rather than on increasing international assistance. He furthermore compared the Berlin Declaration to the Cairo Agreement of 1969 (Hiro 2003, 102) – which gave more autonomy to Palestinian groups in Lebanon and which some deem to have contributed to the outbreak of Lebanon’s Civil War and triggered the involvement of external actors in Lebanon’s conflict. In 2015, during a meeting with Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni, Bassil again drew implicit comparisons with the Palestinian refugee presence in Lebanon stating that birth registrations of Syrians conducted by UNHCR and the Lebanese Social Affairs Ministry are “a prelude to imposing a new settlement reality” in which displaced Syrians are resettled in Lebanon (Aziz 2015). In a statement to the newspaper *As-safir*, Lebanon’s president Michel Aoun drew more explicit comparisons between the Syrian and Palestinian refugee issues while condemning what he perceived as the role of the UN in pushing for the naturalization of Syrian refugees. He argued:

“They kept telling us that naturalizing the Palestinians in Lebanon is only a scarecrow until their presence after tens of years became a rooted reality. [...] No one told us how they were going to return to their homeland, and now I am afraid that our land might be stolen in front of our own eyes to be used in solving the crises of others at Lebanon’s expense” (Naharnet 2016).

Let us to argue that contending political camps have challenged this narrative. Different politicians have exploited the issue of Syrian resettlement for their political gains. The insecurity spillovers of Syria’s war on Lebanese ground

have reinforced the widespread assumption that the risk of refugee insurgency and militarization posed actual threats to national security of Lebanon. Since 2014, cross-border fighting between Lebanon's army and radical groups from Syria, mainly fighters from the Nusra Front⁴ and the Islamic State who tried to infiltrate the Lebanese borders through Arsal and Ras Baalbeck in North Bekaa intensified on several instances (Walsh 2017). In this context, Arsal, a Lebanese border town, which hosts "tens of thousands of Syrian refugees", and Islamist militants arose as a major "security concern" (Ibid). In August 2014, fighting erupted between the Lebanese army and factions from Syria in the town of Arsal, resulting in the death of 17 Lebanese security forces and the taking of 30 hostages. The episode, which was described as "one of the most serious spillovers" of Syria's conflict in Lebanon, ended with a ceasefire after which the Islamist militants retreated to "the outskirts of Arsal" (Human Rights Watch 2017). The following years of 2014-2017 saw the eruption of several incidents across the Lebanese-Syrian border including suicide bombings targeting the Lebanese army, the capture of militants from Syria, and the raiding of Syrian refugee camps by the Lebanese army. In August 2017, after several battles, the Lebanese Army launched an offensive to expel Islamist factions from the Jurud Ras Baalbek and Jurud al-Qaa region. During this offensive, Hezbollah launched, with the support of the Syrian army, attacks on the area from the Syrian side of the border – even though both sides – i.e. the Lebanese army and Hezbollah – have denied coordination (Ibid). Fighting ended with a ceasefire after which hundreds of fighters and their families left Lebanon and returned to the province of Idlib in Syria in exchange for the bodies of eight Lebanese soldiers captured in 2014 (Chulov 2017). Within this climate, according to the Municipality of Arsal, almost 10,000 out of the 60,000 Syrians in Arsal returned in 2017 to Syria (Human Rights Watch 2017). The return of Syrian refugees amid such conditions provoked contentious debates. According to Human Rights Watch, most refugees reported that they felt "pressured" to return due to the "harsh conditions in Arsal" including the inability to acquire legal residency, restrictions on mobility, and fear of arrests during army raids (Chulov 2017).

In spite of Lebanon's deteriorating security situation since 2014, clashes between Syrian refugees and Lebanese groupings have been seldom reported. Still, tensions have occasionally erupted, fueling anti-refugee sentiment and triggering fears of domestic polarization over the refugee issue. On July 18, 2017, after four Syrians detained by the Lebanese Army following a refugee camp raid had died, Syrian and Lebanese activists called for a demonstration in Beirut criticizing the

⁴ The Nusra Front is an Islamist rebel group fighting the Bashar al Asad regime.

harsh treatment of Syrian refugees on the part of the Lebanese government. No sooner was the refugee solidarity demonstration announced than some Lebanese groupings rushed to call for counter-protests in support of the Lebanese army. That day, the Lebanese Interior Minister, Nohad Machnouk, banned all protests, citing the necessity to preserve peace and security (Human Rights Watch 2017). The standoff resulted in a plethora of statements calling for the return of Syrian refugees.

Conclusion

Lebanon's politics of accommodation towards the Syrian refugee issue can be best described as "half-hearted". The Lebanese state and its various political factions have chosen a "half-hearted" refugee policy, flagging the manifold dangers that the integration and settlement of "displaced Syrians" would pose to Lebanon's political sociology. Lebanon's "half-hearted" refugee politics cannot be separated from the historical background of "nation-building" that the Lebanese state and society have embarked on. As Lebanese have not emancipated themselves from the politics of confessional representation that many consider the source of their divergences, their "nation-building" path has remained intricately tied to a politics of exclusion. This politics necessitate the framing of external "non-core" groups as a threat to the country's confessional balance, peace and coexistence of minorities.

While the legacy of Lebanon's confessional "nation-building" is crucial to understanding how Lebanon has dealt with the Syrian refugee issue, additional factors weigh in. Since 1976, Syria had been a major military player in Lebanon until the departure of Syrian troops in April 2005 in the light of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's slaying. Moreover, once the Civil War ended in 1990, the international community gave the Syrian regime green light to act as a "guardian" regulating Lebanon's domestic and foreign affairs. In the context of Lebanon's contradictory relations with Syria, public and policy spheres have rushed to politicize the Syrian refugee presence. In addition, the securitized framing of the Syrian refugee issue needs to be contextualized within Lebanon's political dilemmas and interest-based policy aspirations. In the context of Lebanon's model of politics, which encourages confessional rather than national agendas, Lebanese political factions have used the issue of Syrian refugees as an important item in their setting and political programming agenda. Christian parties such as the Free Patriotic Current and the Lebanese Forces have rejected the potential naturalization of Syrian refugees with a view of branding themselves as protectors of Lebanon's and regional minorities. Hezbollah has linked the issue of refugee militarization

with its broader geostrategic strategy to back the Syrian regime and defend Lebanon against the Sunni Islamist threat. Moreover, in an international context, which has lacked solidarity in refugee sharing, Lebanese policy makers' portrayal of the Syrian refugee presence as a burden has had strategic goals: confirm Lebanon's international position as a non-asylum country while extracting concessions from the international community in terms of aid.

Though a securitized refugee policy has prevailed, refugee representations within civic, public and academic spheres have not been monolithic. There is a plurality of "counter-narratives" that have contested the general view that Syrians pose a threat to Lebanon's security, civil peace and social cohesion (Muller 2017). Civic and community-based organizations in addition to knowledge-based communities have emerged as key challengers to the dominant portrayal of the refugee issue. In collaboration with international organizations, civil society have sought to alter the dominant securitized discourse, and expand on the narrative of peaceful coexistence and "trust building" between refugee and host populations (UNESCO Office in Beirut 2016). Academics have sought to generate "fact-based" knowledge to counter anti-refugee "inflammatory rhetoric", showing for instance that it is the Syrian war rather than Syrian refugee presence that have had a negative impact on Lebanon's economy. Such narratives have emerged as "counter public spheres" that have questioned the dominant view that refugees constitute a threat to Lebanon's economy and political sociology. They have however had no significant consequences on Lebanon's "asylum policy".

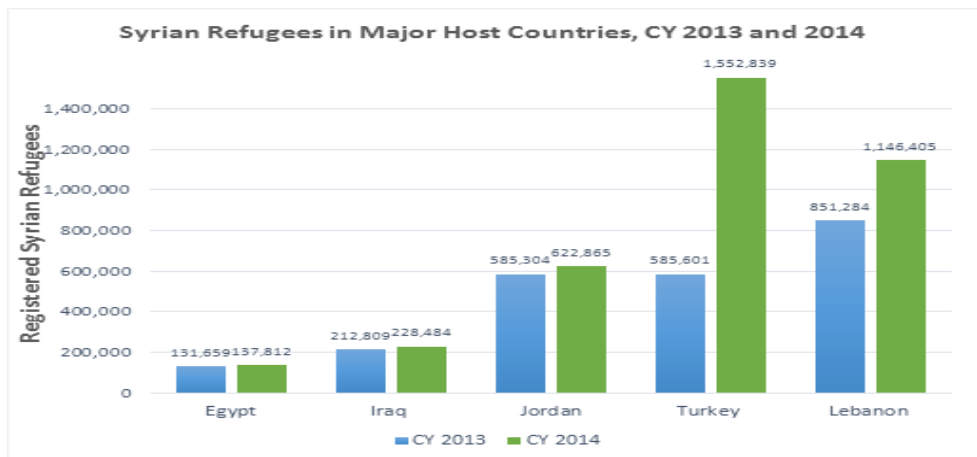


Table1. UNHCR. 2014. *Statistical Online Population Database*, data extracted December 15. www.unhcr.org/statistics/populationdatabase/; UNHCR 2015a.

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GRIGOR VARDANYAN

**RESHUFFLINGS WITHIN SYRIAN SECURITY SYSTEM IN 2019:
DETERMING POLITICAL MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES**

Abstract: *This study is aimed at firstly scrutinizing the reshufflings within Syrian security system in the first half of 2019, secondly to understand the internal and external motives and objectives of new appointments in security and intelligence departments. There are two research questions: 1. What were the key factors behind the decision of the Syrian authorities to conduct reshufflings within Syrian security system? 2. What were the main internal and external actors involving in the configuration processes within Syrian security elite? In the second half of 2019 Syrian authorities were lacking loyal and credible security system which was heavily eroded facing grave threats posed by external and internal state and non-state actors during the Syrian crisis. Analyzing the reshufflings within Syrian security system, discussing the real objectives of the changes, and given all the perspectives and thoughts of subject matter experts we draw our own perspective on the subject and make conclusions.*

Keywords: *Syrian security system, Syrian Air Force Intelligence, National Security Bureau, Fifth Corps, Alawites*

Introduction

The reshufflings within the Syrian security system in the first half of 2019 were the most large-scale since July 2012, when the headquarters of National Security Bureau was exploded by a suicide bomber and a number of high-ranking officers and heads of various security agencies were killed, and including Bashar Al-Assad's brother-in-law, then deputy chief of staff of Syrian Armed Forces Asef Shaukat, Minister of Defense Dawooud Rajiha and the adviser of Vice President Hasan Al-Turkmani (MacFarquhar 2012). This subject was observed and examined by researchers representing Near East Institute of Russian Federation Vladimir Akhmedov (Ahmedov 2019) and Yuri Sheglov (Scheglov 2019, Scheglov 2019). This research topic was examined by subject matter experts such as Alexander Decina and Katherine Nazemi from The Washington Post (Decina and Nazemi 2019). Authors, discussing the main motives of reshuffling in security system, are underlining that while Syrian authorities were trying to reestablish their sovereignty over the territories then under control of opposition groups, were facing grave threats posed by internal tense relations between different actors in security system caused by unhealthy competition among them and this badly challenged

authority's efforts made for reunification of the state. The struggle for local supremacy in some regions among state security actors morphed into violent and fierce clashes (Rajab 2019).

Different views of Subject Matter Experts

Referring to the topic Vladimir Akhmedov mentions that a number of Arabic publications and social networks spread news about large-scale transformations in Syrian security system. Syrian official sources did not confirm or deny this information. According to particular information sources all the changes were about key figures who worked for the Syrian Security System. The head of National Security Beuro Ali Mamlouk was resigned and appointed to Vice-President of Syria on National Security affairs. Ali Mamlouk was replaced by Muhammad Dib Zeytoun, who previously headed Counterintelligence Department of Syrian Armed Forces. The head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence general Jamil Al-Hassan also resigned and immediately retired. Hassan Jaudat Ismail replaced him in that position. Hussam Luka, the former head of the political security department at the Syrian Interior Ministry, became a new head of the Syrian Armed Forces Counterintelligence Department, who has been replaced by another general Nasser Ali. Major General Nasser Deeb has been declared as a new Chief of Criminal Investigation at the Syrian Interior Ministry replacing Safwan Issa (Ahmedov 2019).

The dismissal of the Head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Jamil Al-Hassan is of great interest to the observers. His tenure was extended for a year not a long time ago. This move was most probably connected to the failure of negotiations with the Israeli side through the Russian mediation in late June 2019. According to Syrian opposition sources, the Russian side challenged Jamil Al-Hassan suggesting him to choose between two alternatives, either he should accept all the Israeli demands regarding Iranian foothold in Syria thus continuing to hold his office one more year, or simply resign (al-Nahhas, Mamlouk 2019). The same sources insisted, that Russians were supporting the Israeli proposals according to which the Fifth Corps must be incorporated into Syrian Armed Forces, as well as special operations were to be carried out in order to withdraw Iranian militias and logistical capabilities. Jamil Al-Hassan not only rejected the Russian-Israeli suggestions, but also carried out a series of punitive actions against the population of Quneitra and Daraa regions trying to make them treat the Iranian military brotherly and accept them as allies (Ahmedov 2019). According to Vladimir Akhmedov, with the resignation of Jamil Al-Hassan, large-scale reshufflings launched in the top leadership of the Syrian security system and these shakes were implemented on the initiative of Russia and with the approval of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad. The resignation of major general Ali Mamlouk, head of National Security Bureau, was

the turning event in the midst of ongoing cleansing process taking place in the highest echelons of the Syrian security system (Ahmedov 2019). Official Moscow initiated changes in highest cycles of four major intelligence agencies of Syria in the first half of 2019. The list of officials subject to resignation was drafted by the Russian militaries and reported to the President Bashar Al-Assad at the end of June 2019. The latter was immediately followed by a close meeting with the participation of the Russians, a number of Syrian security high-ranking officers and heads of crucial security services were also present, including Ali Mamlouk. Russia was facing serious challenges when neutralizing Iranian supporters from Syrian security system. They were badly lacking of qualified, experienced and most importantly loyal officers who were well suited to new posts. Vladimir Akhmedov mentions that Russian sponsored changes were temporary and partial since Hussam Luka, Nasser Al-Ali and Hassan Ismail, who replaced ousted officers, could have never held senior position in Syrian security system without Moscow's backing. However, it is worth mentioning that almost three years after his appointment Hussam Luka as representative of Syria attended a summit of intelligence chiefs of Arab States held in Cairo in 2021 November 23 (Hanafi 2021). In our opinion this comes to prove that the latter's appointment was not temporary and he was enjoying full support of the Syrian political elite.

Key objectives of the Changes

This reshufflings coincided with a very complex and hard period of Syrian history, which according to a number of experts, was characterized by a certain deadlock in the political settlement of the Syrian crisis and growing controversies among its main movers and shakers (Scheglov 2019). Syrian authorities were guided by different considerations when carrying out reorganizations of the security system. Traditionally, at the beginning of each year various changes take place in the army leadership and security services of Syria. Usually, such changes are implemented by the authorities who try to reshape the centers of power according to domestic or foreign policy directives and priorities. Most of the time, the term of service of high-ranking officers were extended taking into account the situation in the country. For instance, during the last ten years, Bashar Al-Assad extended the term of office of Jamil Al-Hassan and Muhammad Dib Zaytoun. As for Hassan Ismail, his appointment may seem like a common promotion as he has been Jamil Al-Hassan's deputy for a long time. The appointment of Hussam Luka had the same nature, who served as deputy head of the Syrian Armed Forces Counterintelligence Department before being appointed the head of Political Security Department at the Syrian Ministry of Interior.

Despite the traditional nature of regular shakes in the army and security apparatus, which were largely based on loyalty to authorities, with the discussed changes President Bashar Al-Assad was sending political messages to internal and external powers involved in the Syrian conflict.

These appointments somehow shuffled also the religious structure of the top leadership of the Syrian Security apparatus. The nomination of Circassian Hussam Luka as the head of the most powerful Military Counterintelligence Department came to assert the above-mentioned claim. Naser Ali, the head of the political security department at the Ministry of Interior of Syria, was of a Sunni originated from Aleppo province. However, the most influential security system such as Air Force Intelligence Department remained under control of Alawites. General Nasser Deeb originating from Al-Assads' family village Qardaha, left the post of the deputy head of Political Security Department and became a new head of Criminal Security Department at the Ministry of Interior of Syria (Scheglovin 2019). We should not rule out that by undertaking realignments the Syrian authorities were aimed at keeping their iron grip on the army and special security services since their control over army was very fragile as a result of Russo-Iranian rivalry over power in Syrian security system. As already mentioned fierce clashes were orchestrated among various security departments and their respective armed units over the zones of influence. Iranian involvement in these processes was turning the competition even tenser. Iran has strengthened elite Fourth Armored Division at Maher Al-Assad's command providing them with combat service support of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and Lebanese Hizballah (Abdullah 2021). At the end of 2017 the Russians were very keen on containing various armed groups associated with different areas of responsibilities and for that reason they embarked on formation of a more combat effective force such as the Fifth Corps which not only included previous opposition armed groups but also pro-government militias. Despite the fact that the Fifth Corps was under the command of the Syrian Ministry of Defense, the servicemen of that special unit were receiving their salaries from the Russian command, who also was considered to be the combat support agency for them (Decina and Nazemi 2019):

Analyzing the nature of the reshufflings in Syrian security system Russian researcher Yuri Sheglovin concludes, that the most of these changes, especially promotions, referred those officials who were more interoperable with the Russian Intelligence Command in Syria. According to Sheglovin, the appointment of a new head of the Air Force Intelligence and the dismissal of the former chief is a matter out of Russia's interests. He insists, that Jamil Al-Hassan was dismissed not because of his disobedience to the Russian claims to fulfill the Israeli demands but rather as a common health reasons. Moreover, the commanding elite of the Air Force Intelligence always had community based structure. Both Jamil Al-Hassan and

Hassan Ismail were representing Alawite community and originated from Tartus province and considered to be members of inner cycle of Bashar Al-Assad. This meant that anticipating any real change in the actions of that security service was baseless and the new appointments in that institution should not be discussed in the scope of Russian political-military interests in Syria (Scheglovina 2019).

The Arab Weekly characterizes changes as cosmetic, mentioning that one Baathist officer replaced another Baathist and obviously both of them were Assadists. The author of the report then highlights, that Bashar Al-Assad embarking on this process revealed his political will to his close cycle and making obvious for the opposition he was stronger than ever before. He also tried to prove that he was still the most powerful player in Syria and once powerful heads of security system could be replaced with other officials, who were considered more loyal to the President Bashar Al-Assad (AW stuff 2019).

Conclusion

Analyzing the reshufflings within Syrian security system, and discussing the main internal and external motives as well as the real objectives of the changes, and given all the perspectives and thoughts of subject matter experts we may draw the following conclusions.

It was obvious, that new shifts within Syrian security system were triggered taking into consideration some internal and external factors. Inner Syrian motives of these changes were formed having as grand objective strengthening state authority of the President Bashar Al-Assad and guaranteeing its credibility. The state authorities most probably were making considerations regarding on the eve of new presidential elections in 2021 to have more credible and geopolitically resilient security system which had been facing internal and external challenges since its very existence of the Syrian Arab Republic. With launching and implementing transformations Syrian authorities pitched themselves as lesser evil, thus once more time making clear that there are no alternatives to their Baathist authority in Syria. External factors of reshufflings were due to meeting political-military interests of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the ground in Syria. A number of researchers thought that changes were definitely agreed with Russian side and aimed at implementing generation change within state security apparatus, and new appointees were the ones who were interoperable in cooperating with Russians. If we only debate reasons of the resignation of General Jamil al-Hassan, the head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence, it was connected with the latter's position on the Iranian presence in Syria, we most probably assume that his resignation met the demands of the Russian side to dismiss him. Considering this resignation in this way, we may conclude that the Syrian elite was implementing these changes with the logic of

limiting Iranian influence in the country and contrary to that increasing the Russian footholds. Syrian authorities were betting for both options depending on the geopolitical situation around Syria with very often changing approaches of external players and operative-tactical situation on the ground inside Syria.

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VERONIKA TOROSYAN

UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM WITHIN RUSSIAN EURASIANISM**

Abstract: *Eurasianism was first developed in the first half of the 20th century among Russian emigrants. It advocated a typology of human civilizations based on cultural uniqueness and claimed the equal importance of all cultures. The issue of nationalism was connected with the understanding of culture in the writings of the Eurasianists. They believed that all the peoples of the former Russian Empire should live together in the same State for ecological and cultural reasons, thus forming a common civilization. This is how the territory of the state was formed (whether it was called the Russian Empire, the USSR or Eurasia), which under any conditions had to maintain its integrity. In the meantime, Eurasianism alternatively saw society as having a “personality” and required special descriptive terms such as “folk personality”, “symphonic personality,” “aggregate personality”, “cultural organism” etc. Thus, the purpose of the article is to analyze the understanding of the concept of nationalism in the works of Russian Eurasianists, based on the definition given by the theorist Anthony Smith as it is fully compatible to demonstrate changes in the understanding of nationalism in their works and to answer the question: how nationalism was defined precisely in Eurasianism? The paper argues that nationalism, as explained in Russian Eurasianism, which encompasses ethnic and civil aspects of the Smith definition and subsequently evolved into the idea of a common civilization, has the potential for being used in multi-ethnic and multicultural society as a unifying instrument.*

Keywords: *Nationalism, Eurasianism, Russia, socio-political concept, multi-ethnic unity, “true” and “false” nationalism, cultural and political nationalism.*

Introduction

Nationalism has been studied by a number of scholars for decades. Anthony Smith was one of those, who gave utter definition of nationalism. According to Smith, nationalism regards to the population that sharing a common territory, common memory, myths, culture, economy, equal rights and duties for all its members (Smith 1991, 14). He specified nationalism as an ideological movement for accomplishing and maintaining the unity and identity of the community, which can be

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considered as a real or potential nation (Smith 1999, 37). Smith suggested that nationalism cannot be understood simply from a political point of view, as it is an equally "collective cultural phenomenon" associated with national identity. Smith distinguishes between civic nationalism, which focuses on the political and legal equality of its members, and "ethno-nationalism", which gives priority to the concept of community based on common origin, linguistic and cultural criteria (1991, 9). For Smith, the civic model of a nation is linked with territory. States have a well-defined territory and society has a united voice and political will that expresses common goals and political interests. Such a society expresses a set of values and common cultural traditions, feelings and ideas that unite people in their historical homeland. Cultural nationalism sees its problem in the preservation of local languages, traditional way of life, customs, etc., while political nationalism seeks first of all political autonomy or sovereignty. Smith has recognized that ethnic and civic types of nationalism can interact and merge over time. He acknowledges that, over time, most nationalist movements have demonstrated both of the above-mentioned forms (ibid).

When it comes to the notion of nationalism in Eurasianism, it becomes difficult to determine the correct definition or type for its description because it was constantly changing over time. Russian Eurasianism was a unique philosophical trend which emerged in the early 1920s among the Russian emigrants who settled in Europe and later became a socio-political movement. They published collective manifesto - "Eurasianism (formulation of 1927)", where they emphasized the main ideas of their movement. It can be divided into three historical periods: the early Eurasianism of the late Tsarist "Silver Age", which later became known as classical Eurasianism (Pyotr Savitsky, Nikolay Trubetskoy, Pyotr Suvchinsky, Konstantin Chkheidze, Lev Karsavin, Georgy Florovsky, Georgy Vernadsky and so on); Gumilevian Eurasianism of the Soviet era, and the contemporary neo-Eurasianism (Aleksandr Panarin, Aleksandr Dugin, Boris Erasov, Talgat Tadzhuiddin and so on). Classical eurasianists, like all Russian revolutionary thinkers, sought answers to questions about Russia's future and destiny through Eurasianism. They called for recognition of the danger of Russia's Europeanisation. They identified Russia with Eurasia, arguing that the country's geographical and cultural characteristics were typical of the entire continent. Lev Gumilev argued that the peoples of Eurasia are deeply interconnected: he stressed the importance of the Eurasian "super-ethnos" (Gumilev 2020, 20). To show the similarity between Russia and the whole of Eurasia, neo-Eurasianists attempted to present their own version of nationalism, which was based on two main components: common Eurasian culture and civilization that could unite all the people of Eurasia. The members of Eurasianism of different periods have their own description of nationalism, which was not always the same. It has evolved and changed over the decades. The issue of nationalism in Eurasianism can be classified

according to Smith's definition of ethnic and civic nationalism, which, intertwined, led to the idea of a common civilization. The idea of a common civilization was also reflected in the speeches of Russian politicians. The paper is unpacking nationalism within Russian Eurasianism by analyzing it and showing its evolution from 1920's to the present. Anthony Smith's definition will be used to study nationalism in Russian Eurasianism, as it is fully compatible to demonstrate changes in the understanding of nationalism in it. The paper argues that nationalism, as explained in Russian Eurasianism, which encompasses ethnic and civic aspects of the Smith's definition and subsequently evolved into the idea of a common civilization, has the potential for being used in multi-ethnic and multicultural society as a unifying instrument.

Ethnic (cultural) nationalism in Trubetskoy's articles

Smith noted that we see a growing role for cultural nationalism. For while the criteria for joining the world community of nation States were originally political sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction. However, they include a demonstration of cultural unity and solidarity and, preferably, some degree of cultural "uniqueness" over time (Smith 2010, 50). Cultural unity and solidarity were also, in the view of the Eurasianists, a key idea of "true" nationalism. Nikolay Trubetskoy, one of the founders of classical Eurasianism, published articles in the mid-1920s emphasizing the importance of cultural unity in Eurasian nationalism. He noted that there are no fully homogeneous peoples and cultures. On the one hand, every people include subgroups of a lower rank with its own cultural and linguistic specificities. On the other hand, it in turn enters into a broader cultural whole, encompassing several peoples (Trubetskoy 1927, 28). Trubetskoy supported the idea of "unity in diversity", which the Soviet ideology shared for many years. This means that in order to avoid separatism, different types of nationalism must be incorporated into a specific multi-layered structure. In other words, every citizen of Eurasia had to be aware not only of ethnic membership but also of Eurasian one, that is, to have a multilevel identity. Classical Eurasianists noted that positive moral values that elevated the human being spiritually and intellectually could only be created in a national-limited culture imbued with an ethnic spirit that facilitated individual mental activity. On the contrary, in a homogeneous human culture, logic, rational science and technology inevitably prevail over religion, ethics and aesthetics. In this culture he saw absolute evil, condemning mankind to the "secondary moral savagery" associated with the "godless" culture. That is why Trubetskoy criticized the European Romano-Germanic civilization, threatening to destroy cultural diversity and create a monotonous "internationalist" environment in its place. In that regard, he recalled the example of the Tower of Babel. From the very beginning he categorically rejected the concept of "one common human culture", which threatened the destruction of the native local

cultures (Trubetskoy 1921a).

Speaking of nationalism, Trubetskoy noted that there are two types of nationalism: true and false. Those two types he explained as follows “The man with the pronounced egocentric psychology unconsciously considers himself the center of the universe, the crowning of creation, the best and the most perfect of all beings. Of the other two beings, the one closest to him is more like him - better, and the one farther away from him - is worse. ... The Romano-German people, infused with this psychology, are building all their assessment of the world’s cultures on it. Therefore, two kinds of attitude to culture are possible for them: either the recognition that the highest and most perfect culture is the culture of the people to which the "evaluator" belongs (German, French, etc.) or the recognition that perfection is not only the crown of perfection, but the sum total... of the cultures related to it, created in the joint work of all the Romano-Germanic peoples” (Trubetskoy 1921a). Later he continued “a particular form of false nationalism should also be recognized as a form of cultural conservatism that artificially identifies national identity with some of the cultural values or forms of life already created in the past and does not allow them to be altered even then, when they clearly ceased to embody the national psyche satisfactorily. In this case..., as in the case of aggressive chauvinism, the living connection of culture with the psyche of its bearers at any given moment is ignored, and culture is given absolute importance independent of its attitude to the people: "not culture for the people, but people for culture". This again eliminates the moral and logical meaning of identity as a correlate of continuous national self-knowledge” (Trubetskoy 1921a). Eurasianists saw cultural diversity as the natural state of humanity to be preserved. For that reason, they strongly opposed modernization, which had led to cultural convergence and greater cultural homogeneity. According to Trubetskoy, "every culture is a constantly changing historical product of collective creativity of past and present generations of a given social environment, in which each individual cultural value is designed to meet the specific (material and spiritual) needs of the whole society or of the individuals who make up it" (Trubetskoy 1921a). He also noted that each culture has its own values and means of implementation, which include all products of human activity - norms, literature, technical applications, and so on. This is the group’s shared heritage as a bearer of culture. But at the same time, culture must erase differences between people, creating a single psychological type. It should be underlined that the most important part of the Eurasianism is the ethno-phylosophysical teaching of personality which is also described in the works of Trubetskoy. At the same time, the concept of the person is extended by introducing the categories of “private human” and “multi-human” person. The nation for Eurasianists is a special “human”, “symphonic” person capable of creating its own culture (Trubetskoy 1995, 105).

Summarizing the above, it can be seen that Trubetskoy invented the concept of a "multi-ethnic nation" (or multinational ethnicities), and Eurasian theory of culture in order to prove their point in national question and to avoid a multitude of its definitions. He had declined separatism and narrow ethno-nationalism, including Russian, rightly perceiving them as an obstacle for unity.

Civic (political) nationalism in Eurasianism

Smith's understanding of a nation demonstrates many of the elements that he assigned to the modern nation - public culture, common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members of society (Smith 1991, 14). These elements constitute the institutional framework of the civilian national State. The latter is usually based on civic ideology, which emphasizes the need to create, strengthen and continuously improve the national community and its institutions. This suggests that ethnic understanding of the nation will almost certainly be balanced by the rhetoric of civic nationalism. This kind of nationalism can also be seen in the works of Eurasianists. The other classical eurasianist K. Chkheidze, for instance, carried the idea of "state-continents" throughout his life, seeing precisely the enlargement of a state as the fundamental trend in the development of humanity and considering the USSR as the ideal of this kind of "pan-European state-continent." He was the first eurasianist who undertakes in-depth theoretical analysis of the problem of nationalism, based on the ideas of Trubetskoy. Chkheidze noted that state unity required a number of essential prerequisites, namely, geopolitical unity, unity of the ethnic system and cultural and historical unity. By geopolitical unity, he understood, first, territorial integrity and, secondly, the close relationship between cultural types and the natural environment. He viewed the ethnic system in a broad sense as multi-ethnic unity based on common cultural elements and inter-ethnic marriages, which gave rise to a natural tension between the ethnic components. It also gives an idea of close genetic relationships or common ancestry. According to the Eurasianism concept, Chkheidze identified a cultural nucleus with a spiritual (religious) sphere, which seemed to inspire the building of cultural unity even in a multi-confessional environment. Unlike other eurasianists, who were deeply religious people and viewed Orthodoxy as the central factor of Russian cultural life and one of the cornerstone for future Eurasian continent-country, Chkheidze admitted that unity could be built on atheism. Multi-ethnic cultural unity could be particularly strong if its individual components had common goals and objectives. Only on this basis could the "state organism" consisting of several nations emerge. This was the Eurasian approach to solving national problems in multi-ethnic states like Russia (Chkheidze 1926, 24). In his opinion, every citizen of Eurasia must be aware not only of his ethnic affiliation, but also of his (or her) Eurasian identity, that is, of his or her dual identity. In

Chkheidze's opinion, all the prerequisites for this existed in Russia, first and foremost unification as a central idea. For this reason, Russia represented an indivisible whole, and fate itself had ordained that it be a multinational state. In order to create the latter, every "nation" ought to be recognized as having a unique identity; all nations must receive equal status, and each of them must have its own government and ethnic territory within the confines of the single state. At the same time, each ought to recognize the "organic" ties with state unity and, developing their original cultures, religions, and notions of the past, avoid chauvinistic deviations (Chkheidze 1926, 25). Furthermore, "specifically Russian culture, supplemented with elements of the cultures of the other peoples of Eurasia, must become the base of the national (Eurasian) culture, which serves the needs of all of the peoples of Russia-Eurasia, without putting obstacles in the way of their national uniqueness. . ." (Evraziistvo, 8).

It should be noted that the Eurasianists appreciated the USSR's experience in nation building. According to their statement in the program document of 1927, in the national issue, they stand on the basis of the exercise of brotherhood of peoples within Russia-Eurasia. They recognize the existing federal system of the USSR as a means of implementing such a brotherhood, with the necessary elimination of the communist oppression that is now being imposed on it, preventing the full identification of the national identities of individual peoples of Russia-Eurasia. Not recognizing communist ideology as the basis of Soviet federalism, Eurasianists nevertheless noted: It must be emphasized that the beginnings of federation and autonomy are defended by Eurasians in Soviet rather than European terms (Novikova and Sizemskaya 1993, 223).

Thus, it becomes obvious that for the salvation of the integrity of the Russian Empire, Eurasianists developed an ideology to help promote the unity of the peoples entering into this state. According to Shnirelman, the principal components of this ideology were the conceptions of the closed geographic and cultural world of Russia-Eurasia, the hierarchical building of culture on principles of unification, the spiritual essence of culture, and ideological unity and at the same time an elitist separation of culture into "high" and "low." Its essence was not only the preservation of the all-Russian statehood, but also the support of the unified "high" culture based on the Russian language, "Russian" orthodoxy, created on the basis of Russia, subordinated to "low" local (non-Russian) cultures (Shnirel'man 2004, 13-14). By advancing of the powerful image of "Russia-Eurasia", the Eurasianists attempted to merge empire and nation.

Classical Eurasianism saw its problem in the preservation or restoration of the Russian Empire as a single political entity. The ideologists of Eurasianism considered that the task of the Russian people should not be limited to guaranteeing the right to self-determination of the nation, but should be broader: the Russian people should

perform a consolidating function in the State not only because of their number; it should unite the other peoples of Eurasia culturally. This is how the task was formulated in 1927: “It is the Russian culture, replenished with elements of the cultures of other peoples of Eurasia that should become the basis of a supranational (Eurasian) culture that would serve the needs of all peoples of Russia-Eurasia without constraining their national identities. Eurasianists set as their goal positive measures that promote the development of Russian culture in its supranational functions and foreign at the same time any shade of restriction and contraction of other national cultures” (Evraziistvo, 9). In all the work on the re-education of national identity, with the emphasis on the symphonic unity of the multi-ethnic Eurasian nation, the Russian people may have to exert their forces more than any other people of Eurasia. For, first, it, more than others, will have to contend with the old attitudes and points of view that built Russian national identity outside the real context of the Eurasian world and separated the past of the Russian people from the general perspective of the history of Eurasia. And second, the Russian people, who before the revolution was the sole master of the entire territory of Russia-Eurasia, and now is the first (in number and importance) among the Eurasian peoples, naturally should set an example to others (Evraziistvo, 9).

Since the identity of Russians in the USSR was primarily associated with Soviet ideology, most of them faced a crisis of identity in the collapse of the old system. The result was a demand for a new collective identity, in which nationalism played a role. In the mid-1990s, Eurasianism became one of the strongest currents of Russian nationalism, if not the strongest. It has renamed into neo-Eurasianism by its members as some points of this concept changed or dismissed. Like their interwar namesakes, most latter-day Eurasianists adhered to a non-ethnic definition of the nation. Political scientist and researcher Marlene Laruelle wrote that neo-eurasianist A. Panarin, for instance, warned that “the logic of ethnic sovereignty takes us back to pre-medieval times and jeopardises Eurasian unity” (Laruelle 2008, 96). He believed that the essence of Eurasia was not expressed in any ethnic complementarity, but in the general past of its peoples, the common State and, above all, the imperial will of a strictly political nature. A large State is above all a rejection of ethnocentrism and xenophobia and the development of the traditions of small peoples at the State level. Only the State is considered to have a national idea. Eurasian unity is expressed not in the cultural unity of the peoples living in the territory, but in the realism of the State that dominates the territory. Thus, to belong to the Russian nationalist movement is to remain faithful to the idea of a strong state. Political power must be ideological, that is, based on ideology (Laruelle 2009, 154).

Meanwhile, another neo-Eurasianist A. Dugin proclaimed the coming of ‘a new Eurasian stage in Russian history in which the traditional expansion of the historical

mission of the state will reach its final limits'; in this state 'the preservation of each and every people and ethnos will be regarded as a highest historical value' (Dugin 1999: 32, 134–5). In fact, the foundation of the project for the construction of the Russian civil nation is the work of his sole ideologist, Valery Tishkov, director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Unlike most of his Russian colleagues, Tishkov is a committed supporter of the constructivist approach and believes that nations are created by nationalists, not vice versa (Kolsto 2015, 6).

It should be underlined that nationalism places loyalty to the nation above all other forms of political and social loyalties. Nationalism not only makes the nation the focus of political loyalty but also insists that the nation is the only proper basis for the organization of any political activity. Thus the nation, made up of all the people who belong to it, can legitimately claim property, lives and any other sacrifice from its members to ensure the survival of the collective (Harrison and Boyd 2003, 156). Accordingly, as it can be seen, maintaining or restoring pan-Russian statehood remains a priority for today's neo-Eurasianists. Many Eurasian ideas derived from cultural concepts were widely used to support the country's political unity.

Thus, Eurasianism is a synthesis of political and ethnic nationalism, which formed the basis of the imperial idea. It is noteworthy that the neo-Eurasian approach ensured the realization of post-Soviet integration projects against nationalism, supporting the idea of peaceful and mutually advantageous coexistence of different nations (primarily Slavic and Turkic), cultures and religions. Moreover, this approach takes lessons from the past and focuses on cultural unification and the lifting of the importance of religions.

Common civilization as the cornerstone in Eurasian nationalism

As mentioned above, Smith has recognized that ethnic and civic types of nationalism can interact and merge over time. The result of this interconnection of ethno-civic nationalism in Eurasianism is the idea of creating a common Eurasian civilization, which can include the features of all existed nations in Eurasia. Classical Eurasianist Trubetskoy noted that ethnographically, the Russian people are not exclusively "Slavic". The Russians, together with the Finns and the Volga Turks, constitute a special cultural zone with links to both Slavism and the "Turanic" Orient, and it is difficult to say which of these links are stronger and stronger. ... In the folk character of the Russians there are certainly some points of contact with "Turanic East". ... The Russian national character, however, is quite different from both the Finno-Ugric and the Turkic, but at the same time it is strongly different from the national character of other Slavs. A number of traits that the Russian people especially value in themselves have no equivalent in Slavic moral form. The

inclination towards contemplation and adherence to the rite, which characterize Russian piety, are formally based on Byzantine traditions, but nevertheless completely alien to other Orthodox Slavs and rather connect Russia with a non-orthodox East” (Trubetskoy 1921b). It becomes clear that on the national issue, Eurasianists stand on the basis of the creation of common Russian-Eurasian civilization. It is Russian culture, replenished with elements of the cultures of other peoples of Eurasia that should become the basis of a supranational (Eurasian) culture that would serve the needs of all peoples of Russia-Eurasia, without constraining their national identities. Eurasianists aim at positive measures that promote the development of Russian culture in its supranational functions and are at the same time alien to any shade of restriction and contraction of other national cultures (Novikova and Sizemskaya 1993, 223-224).

The descendant of classical Eurasianism of the 1920s L. Gumilev based his philosophy on the concept of “ethnogenesis” and explained that civilizations are born, develop and perish like living organisms. Hence, civilizations are bound to time and place. According to Gumilev’s thinking, the nations in Eurasia are deeply interconnected: he stressed the meaning of a Eurasian “super-ethnos”, a civilization that compasses the nomadic peoples of the steppes and the Russians (Gumilev 1998, 38). Gumilev’s theories are held in high esteem in certain circles and, for example, the idea of the destructive West is widely cherished by Eurasianists as well as nationalists in contemporary Russia (Laine 2015, 17). According to his ideas, all integral nationalities of the Russian states, from Kievan Rus’ to Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation, are only either European or Asian (Baltic, Non-Russian Slavic, Tatar, Turkic). These ethnicities are related to each other via Russian language as well as the Russian state, such that it is not simply a political bond but an ethno-linguistic bond. This is the basis for Russia as a ‘traditionalist’ power, a non-European power and a Eurasian power. And it represents dialectic in appropriating Gumilev’s thesis of Central Asian empowerment and turning it into an ideology of Russian power. The work of Gumilev came across primarily as a revisionist rewriting of Russo-centric Eurasian history. His work as his body of historiography worked against a Russo-centric view of the history of the Eurasian continent. He agented the vast geography of the Eurasian steppe, from Eurasian Arctic to Kazakh desert. And he found the mark of landscape upon the development of peoples whose own development in turn shaped the historical institutions of first Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union (Kenderdine and Aidarkhan 2019, 3).

Neo-Eurasianists as well highlighted the idea of common Eurasian civilization. According to that idea, civilization seems to be the unity of place of development, population, historical, sociocultural and religious factors. Neo-urasianist A. Panarin, developing the views of Eurasianists, continued to call Russia a state-civilization, as

well as an Orthodox civilization. Moreover, Panarin noted that Russia as a civilization has never been ethnocentric and monogenic, but characterized by ethnic and religious tolerance (Panarin 2003). His ideas are close to the definition of nationalism which pointed the importance of creating a ‘world view’ –a set of coherent ideas and values that gives meaning to the past for a social group, explains the present, and offers a programme for possible future action (Harrison and Boyd 2003, 156). Panarin noted that a new powerful world-saving idea is needed for ensuring consensus of Orthodox and Muslim cultures within the common "super task" (Panarin 1995, 7) and he concluded that such an idea can be civilizational unification of people in Eurasia, based on common past.

It is important to note that all prominent eurasianists were deeply religious people and viewed Orthodoxy as the central factor of Russian cultural life and as the crucial spiritual resource for Russia’s moral rebirth in the aftermath of the revolutionary turmoil. For them, Orthodoxy was what created Russia’s ethnic/civilizational distinctiveness in the first place and gave Russians superior moral authority. Based on this perspective, “Russia-Eurasia” acquired a new meaning: as an “individuation” of Russian Orthodoxy that would ultimately nurture the culture of the entire Eurasian continent. The Eurasianists created the concept of “potential Orthodoxy”. According to that concept, the diverse peoples of Eurasia were seen to be “potentially Orthodox” (Bernsand and Törnquist-Plewa 2019, 44).

Neo-eurasianist A. Dugin suggests that there is no universal pattern of development or a global civilization and that no civilization should or even could be imposed on another (Dugin 2014a, 18). He endorses a “plurality of value systems” and holds that “every people and culture has its own intrinsic right to evolve according to its own logic” (ibid). Like the classic eurasianists, Dugin means that Russia-Eurasia has an original civilization (ibid). The Russian-Eurasian civilization has been formed by its distinct geographical location as well as by historical experiences. Dugin emphasizes the spatial formative factors, noting that the Russian unique civilization was formed by the need to control the vast steppe and wooden landscape (ibid.). It is based on European and Asian features (Dugin 2014a, 20). The Russian people are seen as the politically constitutive people within the broader Eurasian civilizational framework (Laruelle 2008, 139). Dugin uses both the terms Russian and Russian-Eurasian civilization to describe the shared civilization. The same is for definition of Eurasian culture. He says that the Russian-Eurasian culture has an inherent traditional social organization of society that should be strengthened (Dugin 2014a, 54). This traditional society is characterized by strong local communities with a high degree of self-regulation. The local communities are groups connected by a shared heritage, no matter national, social, economic, religious or ethnic differences. To preserve the originality of those communities, by Dugin called

“autonomies”, political power should be organized by a subsidiary principle, giving regulatory capacity to the community regarding all internal matters (Dugin 2014a, 64). This provides the foundation of the Eurasianist version of democracy, called demotism (also demotia). The local governance is complemented by a central government enjoying full political power over strategic resources, communications and military and foreign policy (Dugin 2014a, 63). Dugin stresses the role of Russian-Eurasian civilization and describes its characteristics as diametrically opposed to the features of Western culture. The role of traditional religion and spiritual development, as in case of classical Eurasianism, are stressed as important features of an original Eurasian culture. Religious unity is valued whereas schismatic and extreme deviations must be actively opposed (Dugin 2014a, 67). Dugin describes the ideals of the Western world as decadent, evil and as the causes of a coming catastrophe for humanity (Dugin 2014b, 101).

Thus, another core idea of Eurasianism became the creation of alliance between the Slavic and Turkic populations of Russia-Eurasia, an appeal to the common cultural and mental features of these peoples. According to Eurasianists, the main tool for the creation of a unity where the national and cultural diversities can be stressed is creation of a common Eurasian civilization. In this context civilization seems as a unity of place of development, population, historical, sociocultural and religious factors.

Eurasian nationalism in Russian politics

Official Russian political discourse in the late 1990s was replete with references to geopolitics and reflected some degree of geopolitical realism, of which the former foreign minister and prime minister, Yevgeni Primakov – who exhibited a pragmatic Eurasianist orientation to foreign policy – was representative (Rangsimaporn 2006, 373). The rise of geopolitical discourse in the Russian political life in both its liberal and nationalist versions was integral to broader conceptual shift from an ideology-permeated and mission-oriented foreign policy to an interest-driven one associated with diversification and pragmatism. The limits of pragmatism were clearly revealed in 1993 when a foreign policy shift required as its discursive legitimation both a new definition of geopolitics and recourse to classical post-revolutionary Eurasianism which in the hothouse political climate of the 1990s became a synonym of Russia’s geographic, strategic and worldwide cultural-political distinctiveness (Morozova 2009, 669).

To introduce the Eurasianist nationalism in pragmatic politics, one should pay attention to Putin’s speeches of the 2000s. Speaking at Gumilev University on October 10, 2000 in Astana, V. Putin stressed: “The charge that the Eurasian ideas carry is especially important today, when we are building truly equal relations

between the CIS countries. And in this way it is important for us to keep all the best that has accrued for centuries of civilizations both the East and the West” (Putin 2000). According to Putin, Eurasianism is a tradition of Russian political thought. It has long been rooted in Russia, and it acquires a completely new sound, especially in connection with intensification of integration processes in the post-Soviet space. On assuming the presidency in May 2012, Putin stressed that "the historical perspective of the state of our nation today depends on our ability to become leaders and center of attraction of the whole Eurasia" (Putin 2012). Putin’s speech suggests that Russia, as philosopher Konstantin Leontiev, whose ideas are largely confirmed by classical Eurasianists, has clearly expressed – has always evolved in “blossoming complexity” as a state-civilization reinforced by the Russian people, Russian language, Russian culture, Russian Orthodox Church and the country’s other traditional religions. It is precisely the state-civilization model that has shaped our state polity (Putin 2013). His programme to create economic union in Eurasia Putin bases on need to make a unity to save common features. It should be noted that this aim has evident similarity to Eurasianism’s formulation of 1927. Putin says: “The 21st century promises to become the century of major changes, the era of the formation of major geopolitical zones, as well as financial and economic, cultural, civilizational, and military and political areas. That is why integrating with our neighbours is our absolute priority. The future Eurasian Economic Union, which we have declared and which we have discussed extensively as of late, is not just a collection of mutually beneficial agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia” (Putin 2013). In this context it should be noted that the Soviet and Russian philosopher, political scientist, neo-eurasianist Aleksandr Panarin wrote that it is necessary to create a new unified civilizational space, where the unity and differentiation of the peoples constituting it as "self-worth diversity" should be ensured. This diversity, according to Panarin, is the basis of the common Eurasian civilization. The people of the post-Soviet area, having experienced the hardships of economic collapse and the horrors of ethnic strife, are gradually returning to the Eurasian identity and recognition of the existence of a common national destiny (Panarin 1996, 78).

Speaking on the topic of unity in diversity, Putin once expressed his desire for the realization of this concept, saying: “Civil peace and inter-ethnic harmony are not once created and for centuries frozen picture. ... This is the painstaking work of the state and society, requiring very delicate decisions, balanced and wise policies, capable of ensuring “unity in diversity”. Having recognized the multi-nationality of Russia, he notes the role and mission of the Russian people. According to him,

Russian people are state-forming - in fact of existence of Russia. The great mission of the Russians is to unite, to bind civilization. Emphasizing the peculiarity and uniqueness of the Russian people, he tries to show the openness and extranationality of the Russian identity through the universal concept of civilization. Thus, Putin argues: "We need a national policy strategy based on civic patriotism". Thus, two principles are reflected in the current national policy of the Russian Federation: 1) Russia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural society; 2) Russian people should play a special role in Russia, distinguishing them from other peoples. Putin condemned "through false talk about the Russians' right to self-determination". The Russians, he said, had long since self-defined, having created a multi-ethnic civilization, held together by the Russian cultural core. And as long as Russia continues to exist, the Russian people are state-forming in it (Putin 2012).

Former minister of Foreign Economic Relations of the Russian Federation and advisor to the president of the Russian Federation Sergey Glazyev, who is currently the Commissioner for Integration and Macroeconomics within the Eurasian Economic Commission, in his articles stressed the importance of having ideological basis for the economic cooperation: "There can be no strong state without state ideology. The absence of ideology makes it impossible to implement the strategy developed by the Russian Academy of Sciences for faster development, and without it the evolution of our economies is subject to the influence of external power centers, becoming their resource periphery. You need to become an independent center of power with your strategy of advancing development. And for this you need ideological clarity and certainty" (Glazyev and Kefeli 2022, 14). As an ideological basis for the EAEU he offers eurasianism and justifies his choice with the ideas of classical eurasianist Trubetskoy: "Arguing that a solid and permanent union is possible only if there is an ethnic (national) substrate, he [Trubetskoy] concludes that the national substratum of that state, which used to be called the Russian Empire, and now is called the USSR, can be only the whole set of peoples inhabiting this state, regarded as a special multi-ethnic nation and as such possessing its own nationalism" (ibid). Trying to answer the question: how can a sign of common historical destinies or common destiny of mankind be used in practical work on the development of Eurasian integration? Glazyev suggests: "On the basis of the notion of the single destiny of mankind, the basic principles of the formation of a new world economic order, which replaces the imperial, integral world economic system, are being built, recognizing the diversity of countries, respect the spiritual culture and political tradition of each of them, the use of violence is strictly limited by international law as well as the issue of world currencies and the use of any instruments of the world economy and politics. It follows from the above that integration into the new world economic order can be built solely on a voluntary basis, with mutual respect for national sovereignty and

recognition of national interests” (Glazyev and Kefeli 2022, 15). These examples presented above show that from the 1990’s to the present day, the ideas of Eurasianism were observed in Russian politics and some of its components, such as the idea of a common Eurasian civilization, was even used in President Putin’s speeches.

Conclusion

Completing the analysis of the issue of nationalism in Eurasianism, it can be concluded that it has the potential for being used in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, as it underlines the importance of both ethnic and civic components of nationalism. Eurasianism is a synthesis of political and ethnic nationalism. Trubetsky invented the concept of a "multi-ethnic nation" and Eurasian theory of culture. The neo-Eurasian approach ensured the realization of post-Soviet integration projects against nationalism, supporting the idea of peaceful and mutually advantageous coexistence of different nations, cultures and religions. Eurasianists have declined separatism and narrow ethno-nationalism, including Russian, rightly perceiving them as an obstacle for unity. Eurasianists identified Russia with Eurasia, arguing that the country’s geographical and cultural characteristics were typical of the entire continent. Eurasianists also developed an ideology to help promote the unity of the peoples entering into the state and brought the new civic explanation of the Eurasian nationalism. Many latter-day Eurasianists adhered to a non-ethnic definition of the nation. For example, A. Panarin believed that the essence of Eurasia was not expressed in any ethnic complementarity, but in the general past of its peoples, the common State and, above all, the imperial will of a strictly political nature.

The synthesis of political and ethnic nationalism in Eurasianism has developed a new concept - the idea of a common Eurasian civilization. This should not contradict to Eurasian nationalism but vice versa should empower it as the essential base of nationalism in Eurasianism was/is the underlined existence of the common past of Eurasian people. In this context civilization seems as a unity of place of development, population, historical, sociocultural and religious factors. This idea became the new cornerstone in the nationalist concept of neo-Eurasianism. The idea of a common civilization was also to a large extent manifested in Russian politics.

As it can be seen the definition of nationalism in Eurasianism has been constantly changing throughout its existence. The basic unchangeable component of Eurasian nationalism has been the shared geography of the people in Eurasia. This has been the main argumentation for pointing the importance of creation a common Eurasian nationalism which would include typological parts from civic (political) and ethnic (cultural) nationalisms. So, it can be described as another type of nationalism – a geographic nationalism.

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TURKEY'S EXPANSION IN EASTERN AFRICA: THE CASE OF SOMALIA

***Abstract:** The paper analyzes Turkish involvement in Eastern Africa by the case of Turkey-Somalia relations. The article represents how Turkey successfully went from providing humanitarian aid to taking control over the important infrastructures and locating own military base in Somalia. The research shows that the Turkish involvement in Somalia is mainly benefiting Turkey rather than Somalia, which does not possess enough resources to speak on equal terms with Turkey. The conclusions drawn from the research are the following: 1) Africa's role as a political theatre is gradually increasing, as more and more players are getting involved, 2) Turkey is getting actively engaged in Africa on its way to becoming a regional power, 3) The case of Turkish involvement in Somalia represents a "Turkish model" that can be offered to struggling states of Africa, i.e. large economic and political involvement in exchange for communication and military infrastructure 4) Somalia's case can become a motivation for other unstable countries in the region in search for a patron state.*

***Keywords:** Turkey, Somalia, Africa, Horn of Africa, Turkish Foreign Policy, World is bigger than five.*

Introduction

In last two decades, Africa, with its natural resources, quickly growing population, and open markets, has become a stage for many countries seeking political influence and economic expansion. In the last years, Africa has become a continent, where new powers such as China, Turkey, India, and the Gulf States are trying to challenge the traditional Western players of the region. Some of these new forces are attempting to establish relationships based on shared ideals, history, faith, and geography while offering new types of economic, political, and even military support. A good example of the aforementioned is Turkey, which is getting actively involved in the continent since 1998, when it adopted the "Africa Action Plan".

Ever since the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, Africa's significance for Turkish foreign policy increased drastically. Later in the late 2000s Turkish government under the leadership of Erdoğan adopted a more ambitious foreign policy, which by some is characterized as "neo-ottomanism", a concept which promotes the Ottoman past to be more politically involved in territories that were once under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. The ideology is reflected in

various aspects of Turkish politics. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a vocal proponent of the concept and frequently uses the term “Osmanlı Torunu” (descendant of the Ottomans) to describe modern day Turks (President Erdogan “Don’t these need an Ottoman slap?” 2013). In the last 20 years, Turkey is successfully paving its way to an economic, political, and even military presence in various former Ottoman territories in the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa.

Since 2002, Turkey's presence in Africa has grown significantly, with the number of embassies expanding from 12 to 43 as of April 2022, and trade volume greatly increasing from \$5.4 billion in 2002 to \$26 billion in 2021 (Orakçi 2022). Turkish NGOs and official institutions are also active on the continent, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has visited 33 of Africa's 54 countries, the most recent visit carried out in February 2022 (Gülşen 2022). Turkey maintains military presence in Mali, the Central African Republic, Libya, and Somalia, the first two as part of UN Peacekeeping mission. In Libya, Turkey has been directly involved in the civil war, deploying not only Turkish Armed Forces, but also Turkish-backed mercenaries from the Middle East.

The most active zone of Turkish involvement in Africa is the Horn of Africa Peninsula, also known as Somali Peninsula, which is composed of four countries: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. It has a strategic location, is situated near major sea trade lines, and borders Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Because of the maritime traffic, large ports, huge surrounding wealth, weapons trade, commerce crossing points, and the perils of piracy, the area has constantly been a hotspot for major powers. The political instability and continuous conflicts in the region are creating opportunities for involvement and power projection, which is the cornerstone of Turkish engagement in the area.

Turkey is also widely using anti-imperialist slogans to appeal to the region, actively promoting its “the world is bigger than five” motto in Africa as a tool for further involvement. “The world is bigger than five” is a political doctrine first voiced by Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan back in 2013 (Erbay 2020). It refers to the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, taking their veto right as the main target of the doctrine. Erdoğan describes the veto right as “veto threat”, claiming that the five countries use it for personal interests and veto resolutions concerning key topics. He holds that such state of affairs is unfair and deactivates the organization. Apart from voicing the doctrine in various platforms, Turkish leader went further and published a book titled “A Fairer World is Possible” in September 2021, where he heavily criticizes the UN and offers a reform to make it “more effective and fairer” (Erdoğan 2021). The doctrine is gradually becoming increasingly popular in Turkish leadership’s political lexicon, becoming more

appealing to those governments who may feel left out of the general decision-making process.

Turkey's Involvement in Somalia: Investing in the Infrastructure

The most active zone of Turkish involvement in Africa is the Horn of Africa Peninsula, more specifically The country is in a state of civil war since 1991 and has a semi-autonomous (Puntland) and a de facto independent republic (Somaliland) within its internationally recognized territories. Somalia also battles the al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group based in Somalia.

The beginning of contemporary Turkey-Somalia relations can be traced back to 1979, when Turkey opened an embassy in Mogadishu, only to be forced to close it down in 1991, when Somalia's civil war started, igniting a situation that is yet to be resolved. During the transitional government period in Somalia, Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan and the late Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed met during Africa Union (AU) summit in Ethiopia in January 2007, when Erdoğan encouraged his Somali colleague to present the government's needs to Ankara (International Crisis Group). Nevertheless, the offer was neither denied nor accepted. We can assume that the goal to secure a presence in the Horn of Africa region was already on the list for Turkey at that time, but an appropriate occasion and a cause were necessary not to be seen as foreign occupying force.

The 2011 Somalia Famine, a humanitarian catastrophe that caused the death of almost 260,000 people received special attention from Turkey, creating the desired occasion and the cause mentioned earlier. On 19 August 2011, during the holy month of Ramadan, a 200-person Turkish delegation led by Prime Minister Erdoğan and his family visited Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. He became the first non-African leader to visit Somali since 1993. The delegation also brought humanitarian aid, marking the beginning of Turkish "Humanitarian diplomacy" towards Somalia. Shortly after, Turkey reopened its embassy in Mogadishu, which had not been operating for around 20 years.

A week after Erdoğan's visit, an aid campaign was launched in Turkey which raised more than 200 million US dollars (Turkey raises \$201 million for Somalia 2011). During August and September, several Turkish ships arrived at the Mogadishu port bringing more than 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid (Kabakli 2011). In September 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan addressed the issue at the 66th General Assembly of the United Nations. He dedicated a significant part of his speech to Somalia and accused the UN of "being helpless in the face of today's problems" (United Nations General Assembly 2011).

In March 2012, Turkish Airlines started regular flights to Mogadishu, becoming the first major commercial airline to land in Mogadishu in more than 20

years. Among the passengers of the first flight was the then Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey Bekir Bozdağ (Somalia: Turkish Airlines begins flights to Mogadishu 2012).

Since 2013, Turkey has started investing in Somalia's infrastructure, laying the groundwork for future engagement. In January 2013, Favori LLC, a Kozuva Group company, announced plans to renovate and build a new Aden Adde International Airport facility in Mogadishu, as well as modernize other existing service facilities. The airport's existing 15-plane capacity, according to plan, had to be increased to 60 with a \$10 million renovation (A Turkish company will build an airport for Somalia 2013). On June 30, 2013, Favori LLC and Somalia's Ministry of Information, Post, Telecommunication, and Transportation agreed to rehabilitate the airport and oversee its day-to-day operations for 15 years (Financial Governance Committee of Somalia 2016).

In January 2015, Turkish president Erdoğan opened a new terminal at the Aden Adde International Airport with the Somali president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Erdoğan also dedicated the Somalia-Turkey Training and Research Hospital (previously known as Digfer Hospital), a 200-bed medical facility with a \$ 135.7 million operational budget during his visit (Karyağdı, Güder 2015). The hospital was concurrently renamed 'Erdoğan hospital' (Weekly Press Conference on the Progress of the Government 2015). The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency is working closely with the hospital to provide training programs for Somali experts, such as the "Allied Health Professionals Training Program Project" (TİKA Trains Allied Health Professionals in Somalia 2021).

Apart from the airport, Turkey is also in control of the operations of the Mogadishu port. Somalia's government approved Turkish Albayrak Group, a business with close ties to the ruling Justice and Development Party, to run Mogadishu port for a 20-year period on October 27, 2013. Despite the fact that the Somali Federal Parliament postponed the voting on the transaction in April 2014 (Somalia: Federal Parliament postpones vote on Seaport Management Deal 2014), the government delegated port operations to the Albayrak Group in September. According to the deal, 55 percent of the generated revenue would go to Somali authorities, while the remaining 45 percent would go to the company (Mogadishu port to Albayrak 2014). The arrangement was renewed in 2020, giving Albayrak Group 14 more years to operate the port (Mogadishu port to Albayrak Group for 14 more years 2020).

In June 2016, the largest Turkish embassy in the world was inaugurated by the Turkish President Erdoğan in Mogadishu. The complex has a territory of over 80.000 square meters and consists of seven buildings. According to the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the expenses for the construction of the embassy were \$ 65 million (Tepeli 2016).

In March 2018, Turkey and Somalia signed an agreement to rebuild Somalia's parliament building. The cost of the project was estimated at \$ 60 million. A second

agreement was reached between TIKA and the Somali Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation for the repair of a dam and water reservoirs in Middle Shabelle region of Somalia (Turkey to rebuild Somali parliament 2018).

In January 2020, Turkish president Erdoğan announced that Somalia has invited Turkey to explore for oil in its waters (Erdogan says Somalia invited Turkey to explore for oil offshore 2020), however, no developments have followed as of May 2022.

Aside from investments, Turkey also provides significant donations to Somali, the amount of which exceeds \$ 117 million only in the last six years (Tokyay 2021). The latest donation agreement was signed on 1 July 2021 and entered into force on 4 August 2021. According to the agreement, Turkey provides a \$ 30 million donation to Somali, which will be paid in monthly installments of \$ 2.5 million (Official gazette 2021). In Turkey, the decision was met with major discontent, as at that time Turkey was battling the worst wildfires in its history, with more than 1,700 square kilometers of forest burnt (Akgül 2021) and nine casualties (Ocak 2021). Turkey was unable to handle the fires by itself, as various countries sent airplanes, helicopters, and firefighting personnel to help. The opposition criticized the government's donation decision, saying that the funds could have been used for battling the fires (Tokyay 2021). Such management of funds in such tough time is a perfect demonstration of Somali's political and strategic value for Turkey.

In addition to investments, Turkey is also actively using soft power as a tool for further expansion in the country. Turkey provides scholarships for Somalian students to study in different universities of Turkey. As per the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, 1092 Somalian students have received Turkish scholarships since 1992, with the number of scholarships for 2019-2020 academic year being 98 (Relations between Turkey and Somalia). Current Minister of Justice of Somali Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur has also benefited from Turkish scholarship programs, graduating from Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences (Dhaysane 2022).

Turkiye Diyanet Foundation, a state foundation operating under the Directorate of Religious Affairs, restored and restarted the Sheikh Sufi Imam Hatip High School in Mogadishu in 2012. As of 2018, 500 children are studying in the school, with Turkish language included in the course (Awel 2018).

Besides education, Turkey is also actively using one of the main tools of its soft power – soap operas. According to Al Jazeera, Turkish films have surpassed Hollywood and Bollywood films in Somalia, becoming more popular (Mohamed 2018).

From Investment to Military Cooperation

Apart from humanitarian aid and investments, military cooperation is also an important part of Turkey-Somalia relations. On 13 April 2012, governments of two

countries signed a military training cooperation agreement, by which Turkey started training Somalian soldiers and officers (Official Gazette 2012), which they received in various educational facilities of Turkish Armed Forces.

Years of serious investments, considerable humanitarian aid and substantial support produced desirable result. The biggest Turkish overseas military facility in the world, Turksom, was launched in September 2017 by the Prime Minister of Somalia and the Chiefs of General Staff of Turkey and Somalia. The Turksom Military Training Base, located in southern Mogadishu, spans 400 acres, and is able to host up to 1500 trainees at a time. \$50 million was reportedly spent to establish the base [Turkish military base built in Somali was opened! 200 Turkish soldiers will be deployed in the base 2017]. The intergovernmental forces of the base carry the name “African Eagle”. In December 2017, the first batch of 200 troops graduated, signaling the start of the process (Sayraç 2017). As of January 2021, the number of troops trained by Turkey is estimated to be about 2000, according to accessible sources (Nkala 2021).

Apart from Turksom, Somalian Special Forces also receive three-month special training at Counter-Terrorism Training and Exercise Center in Isparta, Turkey. It is noteworthy that the training process is fully in Turkish, and prior to the training, soldiers pass an intensive language course. Their training is no different from those of Turkish soldiers. Video published by Turkish state-run TRT Haber shows Somalian soldiers performing commands in Turkish and taking the “Commando oath” of the Turkish army. Two main contingents trained by Turkish side are Gorgor (Eagle) elite forces and Haramcad (Cheetah) Police Special Operations Battalion (Nor 2021).

Turkey also provides military equipment to Somalia, such as Turkish MPT-76 assault rifles (Order for mass production of 45,000 Turkish MPT-76 assault rifles 2017) and Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected ‘Kirpi’ military vehicles (Dhaysane 2021). In December 2021, Somali allegedly received its first group of Bayraktar Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) (Somalia Receives Bayraktar drones from Turkey 2021), which is yet to be confirmed or denied by the authorities as of May 2022.

The Questionable Side of Turkish Involvement in Somalia

Although the self-proclaimed humanitarian mission of Turkey in Somalia was viewed in a highly positive light in 2011, following years have brought a list of justified suspicions and concerns regarding the Turkish involvement in the country. Guled Ahmed from the Middle East Institute states that in Somalia “Turkey has evolved from friend to foe, trade partner to trade protectionist, state builder to outright spoiler.” (Ahmed 2021).

Turkish companies who took over the management of key infrastructures of Somalia via no bid contracts, have been allegedly involved in criminal practices such

as bribery, human and labor rights abuse as documented by 2016 U.N. monitoring report (United Nations Security Council 2016). The companies have also been suspected in artificially inflating their expenses to make more profit for the company itself and less for the state.

Albayrak Group, which is in charge for the operations of Mogadishu port since 2014, announced a 70% salary cut for workers days after taking over the management of the port, causing the workers to protest and voice their concerns. According to Yusuf Warsame Afrah, then the Chairperson Mogadishu Port Workers Union, Albayrak were also “attempting to replace some of the current employees with others hired directly by the company” (Moalim 2014). A major scandal emerged in 2017, when two Turkish managers of the company fled the country after rape allegations by a female employee of the port (Somalia: Two Turkish Bosses Flee Country As Sex Scandal Involving Somali Female Employees Exposed 2017). Nordic Monitor also accused Albayrak of corruption, holding that since the company took over the management of the port, “corruption and bribery have become more widespread, and the port has functioned as the main gate of the corrupt system” (Turkish Embassy in Somalia promotes Erdoğan-allied corrupt business group Albayrak 2019). Albayrak is also allegedly artificially inflating the expenses, reporting \$2.7 million per month in revenue as compared to the \$6 million revenue the port had prior to Albayrak taking over (Ahmed 2021).

Favori LLC, which manages the Mogadishu International Airport since 2013, has reportedly violated its contract by collecting unauthorized payments that should have gone to the Somali Civil Aviation and Meteorology Authority (SCAMA). As per the U.N. report, Favori “is deducting salary taxes as expenses and has also been making use of a depreciation deduction at up to \$300.000 per month” (United Nations Security Council 2016). Furthermore, the company has been accused a of continuous violations of human and labor rights. A detailed report made by the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) provides numerous examples of rights abuse, such as disregard for national laws, excessive working conditions without compensation, absence of feeding and transport support to workers, deterioration of workers’ health concerns etc. (Favori’s Abundant Abuses: Working in Unsafe and Unfair Conditions 2021). The report also supports the claim that various high-ranking officials of the country are bribed by business class tickets and free holiday opportunities in Turkey in exchange for their non-intervention in the situation.

Another concern regards the trade between countries. Although the bilateral trade between Turkey and Somalia grew along with the political relations, the increase is very much one-sided. In 2010, Somalia exported \$1.36 million in commodities to Turkey in 2010, while importing \$4.8 million (Ahmed 2021), a trade deficit which was controllable. As of 2020, Somalia’s export to Turkey has reached

\$4.67 million (“Somalia | Turkey,” Observatory of Economic Complexity), while Turkish exports skyrocketed, reaching \$264 million (“Turkey| Somalia,” Observatory of Economic Complexity), exceeding the 2010 number by nearly 55 times. It can be inferred that the Somalia-Turkey trade expansion is not two-sided, meaning that the situation is beneficial for only one side, and cannot be counted as a positive development in the bilateral relations.

Another serious problem concerns the military cooperation. Turkey provides Somali army with weapons and ammunition mainly produced by Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKEK), a Turkish state-owned entity. The differences between the Turkish ammunition and the traditional ammunition of the Somali National Army (SNA) can create difficulties with integration. For example, Turkish MPT-76 assault rifles come with 7.62×51mm NATO ammunition (Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation), while the AK-47, the standard weapon of SNA (Mumin 2022), and comes with 7.62×39mm ammunition (AKM (AK-47) Kalashnikov modernized assault rifle, caliber 7.62mm. Also, by providing Turkish weapons, Turkey creates a new market for MKEK and other companies, thus making SNA always “come back for more”.

Turkish-trained Somali forces, which receive their training in Turkish military traditions and in Turkish language, are becoming bearers of the ideas of Turkish military, becoming a political base for Turkey in Somalia. Although the main purpose of Turkish-trained Somali forces was to fight the al-Shabaab, there are reports claiming that these forces are involved in internal political affairs. In February 2021, Turkish-trained Somali special forces known as Gorgor allegedly attacked civilians who were protesting pro-Turkish President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed’s (also known as Farmaajo) term extension (Sheikh 2021). In the same month, another Turkish-trained unit, Haramcad police forces attacked journalists who were trying to report gunfights in the street (Haramcad police brutally attack journalists covering al-Shabaab attack in Mogadishu 2022). Months later, Haramcad police forces raided Mustaqbal Radio station and confiscated equipment (Mohammed 2021). A May 2021 BBC report also states that Turkish-trained soldiers created a strong polarization in the army, which causes a political and military crisis in the structure (Kasapoğlu 2021).

In January 2019, Nordic Monitor reported that Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MİT), allegedly delivered \$600,000 to the al-Shabab terrorist organization in Somalia through a former Gitmo (Guantanamo Bay detention camp) detainee (Bozkurt 2019). Although it is unknown whether the claim is true or not.

Overall, it is safe to claim that Turkish involvement has had a positive effect on its general image, however, it is more of a one-sided deal in Turkish favor, and the price that Somalia is going to pay for the support is yet to be known.

Significance of Somalia for Turkey

Somalia became a stepping stone for Turkish involvement in the Horn of Africa region, creating a base for possible future expansion. It is important to understand, why Somalia is a good option for Turkey, and why Turkey can be a desirable option for local countries in search for a sponsor.

Somalia has a strategic location, bordering the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden and is close to the Middle East, giving Turkey an additional leverage opportunity in the MENA region. Maintaining presence in Somalia is also a tool for Turkey to contain its regional rival Egypt in the continent. Somalia possesses unexplored natural resources, potential exploration of which can change the context drastically. In addition, Somalia is a new market with young population, which provides new opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs.

Turkey, on its part, is becoming more and more popular in the region for numerous reasons. First, Turkey has a unifying factor with numerous African countries, which most of the other players' lack – Islam. Turkey positions itself as the potential leader of the Islamic world and represents a successful example of combination of Islam and democracy with all its defects notwithstanding. Unlike several other players, Turkey has had historical positive relations with the region. In Somali's case, it is the history of cooperation within the Ottoman Empire and the Adal Sultanate against the Abyssinians and Portuguese back in 16th century. Turkey has a “clean record” in the region and has no colonialist past as compared to the Western European players. They also have a record of successful defenses of its and its allies' political and military interests in the near past effectively promoting it in the international arena. As a final point, Turkey's “World is bigger than five” motto can be appealing to Africa, which is not presented in the UN Security Council.

Conclusion

Turkish involvement in Somalia brings a new “Turkish model”, which may be replicated in other African states with dire social and political conditions. In this model, Turkey offers economic and political support, investments, promotion in the international arena in exchange for communication and military infrastructure. It can be reaffirmed that as Africa becomes a political arena involving traditional, as well as new powers in the region, Turkey is also getting actively engaged, especially in the Horn of Africa region, securing not only political, but also military presence as part of its “neo-ottomanism” ideology. Apart from Middle East and Europe, political, economic, and military expansion to Africa is a sine qua non for Turkey to accomplish its geopolitical ambitions in the MENA region. Having military bases abroad is not only a necessity for geopolitical objectives but is also a matter of international status.

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Workshop

Armenia-Turkey: lessons and realities

The workshop, held on March 7, 2022, at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, was devoted to the ongoing Armenian-Turkish negotiations to discuss the factors underlying the fourth attempt to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations. Invited scholars, experts and former diplomats shared with their observations. The researchers tried to answer the questions - What lessons can Armenia draw from its 30-year experience of normalization of relations with Turkey? What scenarios can Armenia explore in the current phase of normalization?

Summarizing and combining the key realities of the current Armenian-Turkish process, the speakers have identified the following points:

1. If, after 13 years, Turkey has once again decided to try to normalize relations with Armenia, it has clearly defined goals and a deep strategy to achieve them, especially given the marked increase in Turkey's involvement in our region and its policy of expansion.
2. Turkey, especially in the context of the changes in the situation in the region as a result of the 2020 Artsakh war and the obvious weakening of Armenia's position, will not "grant" to Armenia anything. Any move from Turkey will have a clear price. Turkey will not make a decision unless it gets what it needs. This creates much more unfavorable starting conditions for Armenia.
3. Therefore, in Turkey's view, this is the most appropriate time to normalize relations with Armenia in accordance with its own interests. Deriving from this logic, it is possible that Turkey will make every effort to solve all the problems of interest to it, which mainly relate to the historical past, the risks arising from the worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide, the de jure restoration of the Armenian-Turkish border with Armenia, etc.
4. Despite the fact that as a result of the war most of the territory of Artsakh came under the control of Azerbaijan, Turkey publicly declares its support for all the positions of Azerbaijan on the Artsakh conflict, stressing that Ankara is discussing any issue, related to the normalization of Armenia – Azerbaijani relations with Baku. To all this is added the question of the "Zangezur corridor", and the Turkish side has repeatedly stressed the need

to open it through Armenia. These are issues that Turkey can also raise during the negotiations.

5. It should be emphasized that Armenia does not intend to link the settlement of the Artsakh conflict with Armenian-Turkish relations. Although Turkey will continue to press Armenia in this regard.
6. The Turkish side, in view of the previous 3 attempts at normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, this time is more prepared and determined to achieve results. Turkey has demanded and obtained the consent of Armenia that, this time, unlike previous attempts, the talks be conducted without mediators. For the first time, Turkey publicly declared that it was ready for negotiations without preconditions. Why? Because it is in Turkey's interest that the negotiation process begin and take place.
7. Turkey's president Erdogan is also directly involved in this process, which further underlines the importance of achieving the desired outcome in the negotiations and the seriousness of Turkey. Turkey's upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2023 could play an additional role in this regard from a domestic policy perspective.
8. Therefore, if Turkey logically seeks to seize the opportunity and get the maximum benefit from Armenia, Armenia's main objective should be to use all possible leverage and diplomatic flexibility, to separate the issues of establishing relations and opening the border from the historical and related issues of Azerbaijan. To invite the Turkish side to discuss all other issues in the context of the established relations. It is difficult to say how realistic this is and whether Turkey will be willing to follow such logic.
9. In Turkey, especially in the regions bordering Armenia, there is a strong negative attitude towards Armenia and Armenians, which was formed under the influence of many years of propaganda, overcoming which is a long-term task. Therefore, this in turn may cause risks in the case of the possible opening of the Armenian-Turkish border and interaction between the two nations.
10. Armenian side values the process more than the result. It is wrong to present the process as the result. Armenian authorities should clearly define what is

in our interest if it wants to continue in the process. Now Armenia's task is to gain time and strengthen its position in the negotiation process.

11. It is necessary to try to normalize relations on the following principle: settlement now, reconciliation after. It is necessary to exchange diplomatic notes, to have diplomatic representation. It is possible that the Turkish side will try to actively use soft power tools to deepen the talks and soften the red lines of Armenia, which again follows the logic of maximizing.
12. The proposed opening of the border, in turn, may cause economic risks for the Armenian market, which need to be agreed upon in order to take systemic measures. The importance of the economic component in Armenian-Turkish relations should also be taken into account. The Armenian market is small. Turkey has a rich experience when it comes to dominating various markets. If the Armenian-Turkish border is opened, the negative trade turnover will be apparent. The textile industry in Armenia has developed significantly over the past eight years, but it cannot compete with the Turkish market. Therefore, opening the Armenian-Turkish border in this case will lead to the reduction of jobs in the textile industry of Armenia.

Conference

Gulf Arab countries and the Armenian communities: current trends and issues

On July 4, 2022, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA organized an international conference. Leading researchers from the Gulf countries (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar), Institute of Oriental Studies NAS RA, Yerevan State University and V. Brusov State University made presentations during the conference.

Why exactly the Arab Gulf countries?

1. As a result of the transformation processes taking place in the Arab world since 2011, also called «Arab Spring», some leading Arab countries, such as Syria, Iraq, and partly also Egypt, were forced to focus on internal political developments, which led to a rebalancing of power in the Middle East. The Arab States of the Gulf region have taken a more active role in regional developments.

2. In various Arab countries of the Gulf region, there are quite active and viable communities in which the analysis and discussion of existing realities, problems and possible challenges caused by regional events, are important from the point of view of the security environment of the Republic of Armenia and the stable development of the Armenian communities in the Gulf region.

3. In recent years, the visit of various statesmen of the RA to a number of Arab countries of the Gulf region (UAE, Qatar, Kuwait) and the expansion of opportunities for cooperation between Armenia and these countries in a number of spheres: economy, education, science, innovative technology etc., needs more focused discussion and a vision of cooperation for the coming years.

The purpose of the conference was to engage diplomatic and academic circles to discuss, on the platform of scientific diplomacy, the role of the Arab Gulf countries at the international and regional processes at the current stage, the possibilities of cooperation between Armenia and the Arab countries of the Gulf region, as well as the development trends of the Armenian communities in these countries, existing problems and challenges.

The conference was attended by a number of diplomats: Ambassador of Armenia to Tunisia and Morocco, first Ambassador of Armenia to the UAE H.E. Dr. Arshak Poladian, General Consul of Armenia in Erbil Mr. Arshak Manoukian, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Republic of Armenia and Georgia H.E. Mr. Bahaa El Din Bahgat Dessouki, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Syria to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Nora Arisian, Chargé d' Affairs of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Ahlam Rashid al-Salami,

Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Suhailan M. Khaleel Al-Jubori, as well as representatives of various State agencies of RA.

In his speech “Tolerance and coexistence of ethnic minorities in the UAE”, Ahlam Rashid al-Salami, Chargé d'affaires Chargé d' Affairs of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Ahlam Rashid al-Salami spoke about the state policy, cooperation and coexistence of ethnic minorities, including Armenians, in that country.

The topics of the conference reports discussed the features of the formation of Armenian communities in a number of Gulf Arab countries, current trends and existing problems of their development, and presented the activities of the main spiritual, secular and educational community structures. Special attention was paid to the peculiarities of development of relations between Armenia and the Arab countries of the Gulf region and possible vectors of activation. The challenges posed by the transformations in the Middle East, including the Gulf region, have also been addressed since 2011. Such challenges have a negative impact on the Armenian communities of the region.

The tendencies of perception of Armenia and Armenians in Arabic-speaking social networks during the Artsakh war in 2020 were especially noted. It was mentioned that research made in the Arabic language media space shows that the Artsakh conflict is generally presented as a conflict between the two countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Arabic-language press spoke from a more neutral position. It was stressed that the content of user accounts activity in social networks allows to conclude that this conflict is perceived as a struggle between Muslims and Christians.

A separate topic of discussion was the question of identity transformations in the Armenian communities of the Gulf region in the contemporary period. Reference was made to the ongoing efforts to preserve Armenians in Armenian communities resulting from internal migration in Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries. Although they resemble the traditional Middle East diaspora, the diaspora in the Gulf region is somewhat different, influenced by internal and external geopolitical processes. In the Armenian diaspora, along with the difficulties of preserving the Armenians, interest in Armenia has increased to a certain extent in recent decades, which is beneficial from the point of view of preserving the Armenians. Among the many identities in the modern world, Armenian identity continues to dominate among members of the ruling Armenian communities of the Gulf region and the majority of people of Armenian descent. It is a fact that the awakening of the Armenian identity is directly related to the attractiveness of

Armenia.

The reports included in the second session of the conference considered the Gulf region within the framework of international and regional transformations. The conference discussed a number of issues related to the Turkey's penetration and military activism in the Gulf regional security sub-complex, issues related to the development of relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia at the current stage, the peculiarities of relations between China and the Arab countries of the Gulf region, the perceptions of Kurds in the Gulf region, as well as issues related to the Arab States of the Gulf region, problems related to the instruments of the soft power policy and its manifestations.

The Conference concluded with a discussion summarizing the presentations and suggestions. Several thematic topics related to the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, security environment and relations with the diaspora were highlighted, which could become an important basis for the forthcoming academic and applied discussions.

The conference was multidisciplinary. It was organized by the department of Arab countries of Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, in cooperation with the departments of International Relations and Turkish Studies of the same institute. The conference was widely covered in the Arab and Armenian media of the RA and Armenian diaspora.

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