The foreign policy behaviour of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan

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I hereby certify that this material, which I submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abbreviation List

AA: Association Agreement

AGBU: Armenian General Benevolent Union

ANCA: Armenian National Committee of America

ARF: Armenian Revolutionary Federation

BP: British Petroleum

BTC: Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization

CU: Customs Union

DCFTA: Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

EaP: Eastern partnership

EEU: Eurasian Economic Union

ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy

EU: European Union

FSU: Former Soviet Union

GD: Georgian Dream

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NK: Nagorno-Karabakh

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PCA: Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

SOCAR: State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic

TANAP: Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline

TAP: Trans-Adriatic Pipeline

UAR: Union of Armenians of Russia

UES: United Energy Services

UN: United Nations

UNM: United National Movement

WTO: World Trade Organization

Abstract

This thesis considers the South Caucasian Countries as small states but also as states with agency in foreign policy who seek to mitigate the asymmetry between themselves, the West and Russia. This thesis argues that these states can resort to strategic narratives, as proposed in their official state foreign policy discourses, in order to influence their self-projection vis-à-vis these greater external players. This dissertation is based around the assessment of two case studies of foreign policy activity per country, one chosen from the domain of (relatively) traditional or "hard" foreign policy concerns around security and trade and a second from the so-called softer range of foreign policy activity. In the case of Armenia, the focus is on the withdrawal from the European Union Association Agreement talks and on the strategic use of the Armenian diaspora. In the case of Azerbaijan, the study focuses on the state's energy strategy and on its public diplomacy strategy. In the case of Georgia, the PhD explores the 2008 war and the quest for visa liberalisation in the Schengen area.

The methodology follows an approach of triangulating a detailed reconstruction of the events with political speeches from key government figures and expert interviews. In this way, publicly available foreign policy choices, public government discourses and expert interviews provide different lenses through which to look at the same events, seeking to reconstruct both foreign policy objectives and state self-projection vis-à-vis the external environment. It also offers an opportunity to explore "discursive omissions" – the absence of public discourse on issues that must have been of concern – allowing some tentative analysis of non-tangible elements, such as non-action in cases of disparity of strength between small and great powers.

The work concludes that in all three cases under analysis the states pursue active foreign policy goals and preferences, which can be analysed through their public discourses, even though each state is constrained by a challenging external environment. Additionally, in spite of the peculiarities of each South Caucasian country, they share some common features in their general attitude towards the EU and Russia, namely the desire for further cooperation with the former and a common, if differentiated, fear of the latter. Finally, this thesis contributes to the study of small states and their strategic behaviour by highlighting the strategic use of political speeches. In particular, it shows how all three countries use political discourse as a strategic tool aimed at an external audience. It also emerges that, even though the study was limited to public discourse, a

conscious articulation of different messages around some characteristics of the various external "state audiences" can be observed.

Introduction: Lilliputians dealing with Gulliver – Understanding foreign policy behaviour towards greater powers. A South Caucasian Perspective

This thesis analyses the foreign policy behaviour of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia vis-à-vis the West and Russia. More conceptually, it looks at the way these three small states use strategic narratives, projected in their official state foreign policy discourses, to navigate the situation of asymmetry in relation to the aforementioned external interlocutors. Notably, while these three countries have different capabilities and alignments they all need to deal with Moscow and Western actors such as the EU and the US. In addition to assessing the specificity of each country, the thesis will explore whether common foreign policy patterns and dynamics can be observed. Therefore, not only does this thesis shed light on the dynamics of the South Caucasus but it also proposes an original approach to the analysis of the strategic narratives of small states, with these strategic narratives analysed not only in terms of content but also in terms of 'political implicatures'[1].

The South Caucasian region, understood here as a geopolitical region of independent states,[2] came into existence after the collapse of the USSR. In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union generated a sudden multitude of new independent actors, some located in continental Europe, such as the Baltics, and others located in the proximity of the Middle East and Asia, such as the South Caucasian States. The political trajectories of the post-Soviet countries soon started to diverge, ranging from the successful Euro-Atlantic integration of the Baltic States to the rigid isolationism of Turkmenistan.[3] As will be illustrated, the South Caucasian states fall within the middle of this spectrum: Georgia with its unrequited EU and NATO aspirations, Azerbaijan with its multi-vector foreign policy and Armenia with its partnership with/dependency on Russia. While the external choices of the *South Caucasian countries* are acknowledged as varying across states, the approach of both Russia and the EU *towards* the South Caucasian region has often been analysed in a collective fashion. In other words, whereas the region is often seen as a geopolitical bloc dealt

[1] This expression, borrowed from Van Dijk (2005), will be clearly explained in Chapter 2.
[2] All these three states achieved independent statehood between the end of the First World War and the Soviet invasion.
[3] While all the three Baltic countries have successfully integrated into the EU and NATO, Turkmenistan is classified by Freedom House (2016) as a "Consolidated Authoritarian Regime" [Freedom House 2016. *Nations in transit: Individual country reports*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016].

with by external powers, studies on the foreign policy of *each of these countries* tend to downplay the regional commonalities

While there is no consensus in labelling Russia as an aspiring regional hegemon,[4] it has been argued that, once again due to historical legacies, Moscow considers the South Caucasus and Central Asia to be its own 'backyard' (German 2012a; German 2009; Kanet, and Homarac 2007) or 'sphere of influence' (Abushov 2009). Since the early 1990s, the Kremlin has been wary of the actions of the West in the South Caucasus (Antonenko 1999; Kubicek 1999; McNeill 1997). This attitude has become even more pronounced under Vladimir Putin's leadership (Trenin 2007). In this regard, some analysts (Bugajski 2010; Suny 2010; Sherr 2009; Trenin 2009) have interpreted the Russian intervention in Georgia, in August 2008, as a muscular discouragement of any possible NATO ambition in the area. The "special interest" of Russia has not prevented some cooperation between NATO and *all* the three countries under analysis. Notably, the South Caucasian states have provided troops to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.[5] Additionally, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are part of the "Eastern Partnership" (EaP), launched by Brussels in 2009. Notwithstanding Brussels being often described as a "normative power" (Diez and Pace 2011; Forsberg 2011; Manners 2008; Zimmermann 2007; Sjursen 2006), at present technical issues, such as food and safety regulations and migration management, represent the bulk of the cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partners (Delcour 2016; Loda 2017; Loda 2016; Delcour and Wolczuk 2015; Ademmer and Börzel 2013). While some literature (Dias 2013; Averre 2009) refers to some competition between Moscow and Brussels in the region, it is here considered more appropriate to talk about different preferences, modalities of action and goals. As stated by an EU Diplomat in Armenia: "*We do not compete with Russia as we do not sell weapons"*[6]. This focus on the approaches to the region of prominent actors has prompted comments about the South Caucasian countries being predominantly treated as pawns rather than as proactive foreign policy agents (De Waal 2011a; Suny 2010).

Aside from the aforementioned studies, most of which concern great powers exercising influence over smaller peripheral actors, some research has dealt specifically with the foreign policy of each

[4] While Suny (2010) argues that this is the case, de Waal (2011a) considers that, over the years, Russia has transitioned into a post-imperialistic phase.
[5] As per January 2017, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia contribute 121, 94 and 870 units respectively to the "Resolute Support Mission" (RSM) in Afghanistan.[NATO . 2017. "Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures", January, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_01/20170126_2017-01-RSM-Placemat-new.pdf (Accessed on 2017, January 30)].
[6] Interview with a Member of the European Delegation in Armenia, Yerevan, (2015, 3 June).

of these countries, offering the following findings. Georgia has been consistently oriented towards integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures (German 2015; Kakachia and Minesashvili 2015; MacFarlane 2015; Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014). This choice seems to stem from both identitarian and pragmatic considerations: clear self-perception as a European country and scepticism regarding the asymmetric forms of cooperation proposed by Russia (German 2015; Jones and Kakishvili 2013). Armenia engages in a close relationship with Moscow, sometimes characterised by some domination of the big brother over the small one (Giragosian 2014; Galstyan 2013; Mirzoyan 2010, 53; Minassian 2008). Additionally, Armenia's foreign policy has often been guided by the principle of complementarity, which entails interacting with multiple partners without challenging the primacy of the Russian vector (Mirzoyan 2010, 52). Azerbaijan has been said to implement a multi-vector foreign policy (Mammadov 2016; Makili-Aliyev 2013; Strakes 2013), based on strategic interest rather than on ideological affinities, and to pursue geopolitical balance and national independence (German 2012b, 144). These considerations also hold true for important economic choices. While the relationship with Russia, previously extremely difficult (Kuzio 2000), has significantly improved in the last decade, the European continent remains the main market for Azerbaijani oil and gas. Notwithstanding the robustness of the aforementioned studies, they could be complemented by an attempt to identify where there are some common foreign policy patterns observable across the three countries. This is not an easy task since, as will be explained in Chapter 1, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict prevents any form of noticeable cooperation. Nonetheless, their common geographic location means that these states interact with the same set of external actors, Moscow and Brussels included.[7]

Wivel (2016), in his analysis of the foreign policy of Georgia, considers the interaction of Tbilisi with the *modern* Russia and the *post-modern* European Union to be crucial. According to Wivel (2016), the different nature of these external actors conditions the approach of Georgia to each of them. In addition to providing further evidence about the Georgian case, this thesis will explore this direction of enquiry in the cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan also. In other words, the approach of Tbilisi, Baku, and Yerevan towards Russia and the West will be assessed. While adopting a common analytical framework, this work is aware that the three countries have different domestic structures, economies, belief settings and capabilities. On the other hand, they have similar

[7] All three South Caucasian countries interact with other regional players, first and foremost Iran and Turkey. Even though these latter states are occasionally mentioned in the empirical chapters, including them systematically in this analysis goes far beyond the possibilities of this thesis. A future piece of research analysing the foreign policy of the South Caucasian countries towards Ankara and Teheran would, however, certainly complement the findings of this thesis.

historical legacies, face comparable geostrategic challenges and are all relatively small countries. Given this, and without expecting to produce any "grand South Caucasian foreign policy theory", this work hypothesises some common elements. Beyond the specificity of the case study, with all the three countries under analysis being small states that deal with prominent external actors, this work sheds light on issues like size, asymmetry and strategies to mitigate such asymmetry.

In order to investigate these issues, the core question of this thesis is the following:

How do the South Caucasian countries navigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West[8] *and Russia?*

From this core question, a set of related sub-questions arise: How can asymmetry be understood? How does it vary across the different cases? How does the specific nature of Russia and the West influence the foreign policy behaviour of each South Caucasian state? Are there any shared dynamics to observe? Do the patterns of amity and rivalry play a role? What is the relationship between smallness and strategic behaviour?

In order to find answers to these questions, the thesis develops as follows. In Chapter 1 previous studies on foreign policy and small states are reviewed. Chapter 2 discusses the agency of small states, their resort to strategic narratives and the concept of 'political implicatures' in the case of corporate actors. Chapters 3 to 5 are devoted to the assessment of the manner in which each South Caucasian country attempts to navigate the situation of asymmetry posed by the West and Russia. In more practical terms, two case studies per country will be dealt with. These draw primarily on an analysis of official public discourse on foreign policy, supplemented by some media analysis, along with official and expert interviews conducted in the region. Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the contributions of this thesis, articulated on three levels, namely: (i) providing original insights into each of the South Caucasian countries, (ii) outlining some common regional patterns, and (iii) making considerations on the study of the foreign policy of small states.

[8] In the specific assessment of the case studies, the "West" refers either the US or the EU (or the two together). Even though they are undisputedly different actors, the commonalities they share (democratic traditions, affluence and normative authority) allow them to be analysed under the same analytical lens. This point is further elaborated in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 1: Foreign Policy and Small States in Context – Back to the Literature

Investigating the way Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan navigate their condition of asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia requires some reflection on a number of issues, namely: What is foreign policy? How can be it studied? What does size mean in international relations? How do size and asymmetry play out in the South Caucasian region? What contributions can this analysis make?

This chapter, which aims to provide some solid background to the objectives of this thesis, choses to offer a broader review of foreign policy, touching upon domestic, systemic and cognitive approaches to the issue. After reconciling some of these aspects, the focus shifts to small states and then to the constitutive features and the leeway for agency of these states. Finally, these elements are discussed in the context of both the South Caucasian region and the general implications for the study of the foreign policy of small states.

What is foreign policy?

The first challenge in the study of foreign policy is provided by the daunting task of finding a suitable definition. Even though it can be conceived of as a sub-category of international relations, foreign policy touches upon multiple aspects such as preferences, strategies and outcome. For example, engaging with the Euro-Atlantic orientation of Georgia involves choices, rounds of negotiations and tangible results. Thus, over the years several definitions of foreign policy have been provided. Hermann (1990, 5) defines foreign policy as a "*problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers (or their representatives) directed toward entities outside the policymaker's political jurisdiction*". On a similar note, Wallace (1991, 65) defines foreign policy as "*whatever governments do in dealing with foreign governments*". In an effort to emphasise the main properties of foreign policy, Rosenau (1968) claims that a goal-oriented nature is what distinguishes foreign policy from the broader ensemble of interactions taking place at international level. Similarly, Arnold Wolfers (1965) points out the mistakenness of considering any potential international outcome as an objective of foreign policy; the acceptance of the related costs marks the difference between a foreign policy goal and a generic aspiration. As Henry Kissinger

summarises: "*Foreign policy is the art of establishing priorities*".[9] In addition to searching for a definition of foreign policy, thinkers have sought to understand how foreign policy can be studied. Waltz (1996) maintains that it is not possible to formulate a theory of foreign policy without falling into the trap of reductionism. Just as economic theories are meant to explain regularities in the behaviour of rational economic agents (and not to deal with their unit-level properties), in the same way a theory of international relations must be a *beautifully simple* construction in order to help the scholar to orientate his/her investigations in the complexity of the real world (Waltz 1996, 56). In other words, according to Waltz (1996), no foreign policy theory can be formulated without including some properties of the parties involved. Thus, while a convincing foreign policy grand theory has not been outlined yet, various approaches, ranging from quantitative-positivistic (Amorim Neto and Malamud 2015; Wang 1999) to critical studies (Doty 1993; Campbell 1992), have been attempted.[10] Additionally, some sub-specifications, such as the foreign policy of small states, have been introduced.

In efforts to divide the bulk of the pertinent literature into two broad categories, most studies deal with foreign policy by looking either at the domestic elements involved or focusing on the "state actor" in the international system. More specifically, domestic-centred approaches consider elements such as decision-makers, decision-making processes and state-society relationships. In turn, internationally-centred approaches, which often resort to the concept of "corporate identity" (Wendt 1999, 197), tend to look at elements such as international relations predictions, state preferences and state identity. Additionally, as will be clearly outlined in a later dedicated section, various works have attempted to reconcile the domestic and the external levels. For example, Hanriender (1967, 972) considers that: "*Foreign policy goals are circumscribed both by internal-motivational-psychological phenomena and by external-operational contingencies*". Similarly, Frentz (2010, 31) provides the following definition of foreign policy: "[the] *capacity to make and implement policies abroad which promote domestic values, interests and policies*". At a more practical level, Mouritzen and Wivel (2012) analyse the Russo-Georgian war using, within a subsidiary logic, different analytical levels: whenever the international system fails to provide a satisfactory account for what is happening, internal dynamics are looked at. In an analogous way, Amorim Neto and Malamud (2015), in their attempt to find an explanation for the foreign policy behaviour of three South American countries, assess that the one explanatory level is not suitable

[9] Kissinger, H. 2014. Henry Kissinger: To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end. *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html?utm_term=.0abfd5f0912b .

[10] The proposed list of works must be considered illustrative rather than exhaustive.

for all the three cases. While the Brazilian and Mexican dynamics can be analysed at a systemic level, the Argentinian dynamics require a domestic outlook.

This work considers that both domestic and international elements come into play during foreign policy making. However, as a multi-case analysis requires some scope delimitation, the research question suggests the adoption of an internationally-focused analytical angle. For this reason, the intra-cabinet discussions and the role of domestic groups will not be specifically dealt with. Even though a detailed account of domestic dynamics lies outside the capacity of this piece of research, some domestic processes, such as the nature of the Azerbaijani elites or the tone of the public debate in Georgia, will occasionally emerge. Henceforth, even though this work will mostly treat the countries under analysis as corporate agents, it is deemed appropriate to review a broad range of approaches to foreign policy.

Foreign policy: domestic-focused approaches

This thesis labels as "domestic approaches to foreign policy" those studies that emphasise how, rather than being ascribable to a "unitary state actor", foreign policy goals and strategies are the product of internal process such as intra-elite bargaining, state-society relationships and the sets of preferences of decision-makers. In an attempt to label this phenomenon, Braveboy-Wagner (2008, 4-5) uses the term “intermestic” to illustrate that there is no clear-cut border between these two dimensions. For example, issues such as welcoming refugees and economic arrangements are likely to have both a domestic and an international dimension (Braveboy-Wagner 2008, 180). Discussing the impact of internal preferences on foreign policy choices, Mintz (2004) argues that foreign policies options involving excessive domestic political costs are directly ruled out even if convenient from a systemic point of view.

Mintz and DeRouen Jr (2010) define foreign policy decision-making as: “*The choices individuals, groups, and coalitions make that affect a nation’s actions on the international stage*". A well-known approach in this direction is proposed by Allison (1969) who, problematising the US blockade after the displaying of Soviet missiles in Cuba, outlines three models of decision making: those of the "Rational Actor", "Organisational Behaviour and "Governmental Politics". The first of these model postulates the existence of a rational and perfectly-informed single actor carrying out an effective cost-benefit analysis while the second considers that the decision-maker, rather than being capable of assessing all the possible options, faces some constraints of limited time and information. This concept, used also in economic studies, is generally referred to as "bounded

rationality". Finally, the third model conceptualises decision-making as a bargaining process among different state agencies. Under these analytical lenses, foreign policy choices are the result of intra-state competition in which, rather than seeking the "maximum common good", different actors compete to advance their own particular interests. Notwithstanding its evident intellectual merits, Allison's (1969) work (especially as concerns the third model), has received some criticism over time, for example as missing out on some nuances of policy making. In an attempt to fill the conceptual gaps of the bureaucratic model, some works engage with possible variations at cabinet level (Hagan et al. 2001; Hermann and Hermann 1989; Rosati 1981). For instance, Hagan et al. (2001) try to differentiate between political traditions and political systems. For example, it is suggested that the presence of established decision-making rules and the presence of veto-right holders as discerning variables in the decision-making process be considered. Furthermore, some works (Hermann and Hermann 1989; Rosati 1981) emphasise the presidential role by factoring his/her personality into the decision process. More precisely, they suggest the primacy of the top decision-maker in urgent situations and a more active role for intermediate cadres in less exceptional circumstances. Additionally, they postulate a direct relationship between the president's interest in foreign policy and his/her personal direction: the greater the president's own interest in foreign policy, the fewer bureaucratic and social actors that are involved.

Notwithstanding the contributions of these works, there is no consensus on the possible inclusion of non-political actors in the process of foreign policy making. For example, Ikenberry (1988), departing from the aforementioned pluralistic approaches to decision making, argues that the executive, although subject to many societal and bureaucratic influences, is still able to act as a unitary actor. These considerations, which concern states of democratic traditions, have the merit of flagging the differences between countries and/or styles of leadership. For example, when analysing western democracies, there are significant differences to be observed between the American foreign policy making process and its European equivalent. The same can be said about the foreign policy making processes of different EU countries. Furthermore, when focusing solely on the US experience, striking elements of discontinuity can be observed from one president to the next. A telling example is provided by the differences between Johnson's preference for collective decisions and Nixon's almost solitary management of external action (Rosati 1981). In addition to studies on democratic systems, there is some (limited) research dealing with decision-making processes in authoritarian countries. For instance, Quansheng (1992), describing the Chinese institutional evolution from Mao to Deng and beyond, outlines the shift from horizontal authoritarianism, characterised by a tremendous degree of personalisation and arbitrariness to

vertical authoritarianism that while still preserving the non-democratic and high-centralised nature of decision-making admits competing interests among Politburo members. Looking at non-democratic Western regimes, Jack Snyder (1991), considers that foreign policy strategies result from the aggregation of disparate interests that, as a result of continuous favour exchanges, are elevated to the level of state interest. More broadly, some studies remark upon the relationship between the nature of the domestic regime and foreign policy behaviour.

In addition to the aforementioned points, Allison's (1969) approach has also been criticised for not paying attention to the cognitive and cultural elements embedded in the process. In fact, while Alison's (1969) models outline a plurality of actors competing for influence in the setting of the state agenda (Moravcsik 1997), no account is provided of the origin of those preferences (Hollis and Smith 1986). Looking at the link between decision-making and cognitive elements, some studies try to depart from the "rational actor model" which, inspired by a microeconomic "*homo economicus*", assumes a rational and goal-oriented "*homo politicus*". A possible way of adding some behavioural complexity to the analysis of human decision-makers consists in emphasising psychological dynamics at the cabinet level. Ripley (1995), analysing how the decision was taken in 1968 to re-direct the conduct of the Vietnam War, considers that the influence that Clark Clifford (Robert McNamara's successor as US Secretary of Defense) enjoyed over his peers was due to his thorough understanding of political rituals. In a similar manner, Johnson and Tierney (2011, 7), reflecting on the ongoing dynamics in play when the decision to wage war is being evaluated, state that once that the involvement in the conflict is perceived as irreversible the decisional mindset shifts from "deliberative" to "implemental". Broadening the cognitive dimension, some studies look at how values and beliefs may affect foreign policy making. In some cases, it has been argued that that, in order to understand foreign policy behaviour, it is of particular importance to look at the background and early formative experiences of leaders. For example, Wittkopt et al. (2008, 494) postulate a link between the respective backgrounds of Wilson, Kennedy and Kissinger and the foreign policy preference setting of each. Similarly, some connection might be assumed between Mikheil Saakashvili's Western education and the rapid deterioration of the relationship with Moscow under his presidency (Rice 2011). Other works dealing with cognitive elements do not focus specifically on the role of a single decision-maker but instead on a more collective dimension. An early and well-known attempt to furnish a cognitive explanation of foreign policy is constituted by George's (1969) "operational code", a theoretical instrument aimed at assessing the role of beliefs in foreign-policy formation. The "Operational Code" incorporates both philosophical issues, such as reflections about the *political*

universe, and political ones, like interrogatives about goal selection. Another theoretical proposal is offered by Levy (1994), who examines the effect of "lessons learned" and historical analogies on foreign-policy behaviour at the elite level.

This section shows that domestic dynamics and political bargains can provide some insight into foreign policy dynamics. However, as suggested by the research question, the main research objective of this thesis consists of systemic interactions. Therefore, it requires the focus to be predominantly on the implementation, rather than the formation, of state strategies and goals. Notwithstanding this conceptual specification, and the consequent analytical choices, the reader must be aware that treating states as corporate actors does not mean the disavowal of the role of domestic players. For example, while Chapter 3 deals with the limited intervention of the United States in the Russo-Georgian war, there is an implicit awareness that this decision is the result of a discussion. As Condoleezza Rice (2011) reports in her memoirs of her career, the US executive at the time discussed the possibility of confronting Russia over Georgia, ultimately agreeing on the unreasonableness of this approach. Additionally, and probably more importantly, throughout the chapters some domestic dynamics emerge. For example, the prominent role played by the Azerbaijani presidential family in the implementation of public diplomacy seems to reflect the nepotistic tendencies of the country. In an analogous manner, the post-2012 partial normalisation of the Russo-Georgian relationship is related to the recent blossoming of 'neutral parties'[11]. In brief, while domestic dynamics are not the predominant research focus of this thesis, they nonetheless occasionally emerge. In light of this, this chapter argues that no well-grounded conceptual choice can be made without a solid understanding of this analytical level, not only empirically but also theoretically. In order to make this foundation more robust, and before discussing corporate foreign policy agency in more depth, the next section will review the relationship between regime type and foreign policy making.

Foreign Policy and Regime Type

In the process of looking at the relationship between foreign policy and domestic elements, instead of focusing on the decision-making processes emphasis is put here on the linkage between domestic political systems and certain foreign policy courses.

Henry Kissinger (1966) deems this aspect particularly relevant to the outcome of external interactions since similar regimes tend to share the same "rules of the game". When thinking about

[11] Refer to Chapter 4 for an explanation of this term.

how regime type can affect external behaviour, the "Democratic Peace" approach is the most popular (Levy 1988). According to Levy (1988), democracies do not fight each other and, moreover, are less prone to initiating war than other types of regimes. Rather than presenting this as a theory, Levy (1988) considers the observation that democracies refrain from fighting each other to be an extremely robust empirical pattern. A possible explanation for the peaceful nature of democracies is that authoritarian rulers may initiate conflicts in order to divert popular attention from domestic issues. Such behaviour is not a prerogative of determined regimes but since non-(free and fairly) elected leaders cannot legitimate themselves as the expression of the popular will, they may be particularly tempted to resort to aggressive patriotic symbolism to try to fill this legitimacy gap and thus to prevent domestic threats (Levy and Vakili 1992). Bueno da Mesquita et al. (1992) also consider foreign policy as functional in a leader's desire to stay in power. Looking at specific dynamics, they observe that autocrats are likely first to consolidate their domestic power and then to embark on bellicose adventures. In this way, by the time a war is waged, domestic competitors cannot find a "window of opportunity" in which to change the status quo. In addition to the attitude towards peace and war, the relationship between "autocratic legitimacy" and alliance strategies has also been analysed. McGlinchey (2012), reflecting on the cases of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, notices how the rulers, perceiving a progressive erosion of internal legitimacy, adopted clear pro-US external policies hoping to gain an external ally who would have an interest in maintaining their control of power. David (1991) considers that wherever the ruling elites face a legitimacy deficit they are likely to pursue an "omnibalancing" alliance policy aimed at favouring not the interest of the state but rather their political survival. Barnett and Levy (1991), examining the case of Egypt's alignments between 1962 and 1973, concludes that a regime that fears being overthrown tends to rely on external alliances even when long-term calculations would advise otherwise. Notwithstanding the different dynamics observed, all these works share a crucial point, which is that whenever autocrats consider their permanence in power to be in jeopardy they look to the international environment in order to counter this risk.

"Autocratic legitimacy" has also been discussed with reference to public opinion in non-democratic contexts. Hagan (1989) hypothesises that states characterised by cohesive regimes and vulnerable oppositions are less constrained in implementing their preferences on the international arena than other types of countries. It has also been noted that incautious behaviour on the international arena is not cost-free; unless the authoritarian ruler is exceptionally able to silent all other actors, mostly through extreme repression and/or co-optation, audience costs must be taken into account (Weeks 2008). In an attempt to specify the way in which autocrats are constrained by

their audience, Miller (1999) considers their main interest not to be in the support of the whole population but rather in their "supporting ruling coalition", i.e., those segments crucial to their maintenance in power (Morgan and Bickers 1992). For example, in oil-rich Azerbaijan[12] clannish-traditional institutions and power networks play a relevant role in the governance structure of the country (Guliyev 2005).

Even though this thesis does not focus on different political regimes, consideration of this issue is nonetheless necessary as the three countries under analysis experience different levels of democracy.[13] In 2013 Freedom House classify Georgia as a transitional government, Armenia as a Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime and Azerbaijan as a Consolidated Authoritarian Regime[14]. This leads to some variation in the in-country dynamics and, conversely, in the quality of the material analysed in the thesis. For example, while the local Georgian and Armenian press features some debate, the media environment in Azerbaijan is considerably more controlled. In sum, while their different regime types will not be specifically dealt with, an understanding of the different political traditions is crucial to the study of foreign policy making in the South Caucasus.

Towards a corporate state agency

The very title of this thesis, "The Foreign Policy Behaviour of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan", attributes some agency to states. This section, in considering the crucial importance to this thesis of the personification of the state actor, will explore some approaches to this reification.

As stated by Wendt (1999, 10), the modern international system relies entirely on the idea of "corporate agency". In fact, while international law attributes a legal personality to states, scholars of international relations often personify countries. More precisely, state corporate agency contends *"that states* [can be conceived of as] *real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs, and intentionality"* (Wendt 1999, 197). Even though this conceptualisation is relatively recent, the personification of states is a consolidated practice, clearly observable in the written production (and behaviour) of key American foreign-policy makers during the Cold War years (Wittkopt et al. 2008, 494). George Kennan's "long

[12] Franke et al. (2009) refer to Azerbaijan as a rentier state since natural resources, rather than taxation, are the principal source of state revenue.

[13] Rather than postulating a dichotomous distinction between democracies and autocracies, it is more correct to perceive these two categories as the extreme poles of a continuum and to consider the existence of a grey area of mixed regimes between these poles (Goertz and Mazur 2008: 30).

[14] Freedom House 2013. *Nations in transit: Individual country reports,* https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2013 .

telegram" to the US Department of State from Moscow in 1946 provides an illustration of this. By sending the telegram, Kennan (1946), who at the time was the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, urged his government to be sharper in its dealings with Moscow. He emphasised the view that because the Soviet state was founded on an ideological contraposition of capitalism there was no room for any genuine long-term cooperation. Similarly, Henry Kissinger (1966), reflecting on the nature of the different regimes, considered that there existed a contraposition between bureaucratic-pragmatic societies and ideological societies.

Holsti (1970) considers that some predictions about states' foreign policy choices can be made by observing their "national role". He borrows the concept of role, defined as the type of behaviour deemed as appropriate for an individual having a given position, from behavioural studies. Such a construction is transposed into international relations as "national role", which is shaped by internal and external factors. The possible international role types are the following: Revolutionary Leader, Bloc Leader, Balancer, Bloc Member, Mediator, Non-aligned, Buffer, Isolate and Protectee (Holsti 1970, 255). Additionally, further sub-specifications are postulated. An alternative approach for identifying the (corporate) self-understanding of "state personification" consists in looking at foreign policy behaviour and societal features simultaneously. Rosenau (1970), exploring the possibility of constructing a theory of comparative foreign policy that would go beyond the peculiarities of the single case study, introduces the concepts of adaptive and misadaptive foreign-policy behaviour. The former refers to the capacity to adapt to changes in the international environment, thus preserving the *"essential structure of society within acceptable limits"*, while the latter indicates a failure to do so. Notwithstanding the originality and innovativeness of the proposal, this ambitious project has some limitations, such as the failure to specify the nature of the "essential structure of society" and to prove that it empirically exists (Stephens in Smith 1981). Moreover, the proposed categories are difficult to operationalise (Braveboy-Wagner 2007, 10) and are vague and more suitable for an ex-post classification than for ex-ante previsions (Smith 1981).

In spite of this criticism, successive pieces of research have tried to postulate a connection between societal shared assumption and foreign policy behaviour. Of these, Political Culture represents one possible approach. This term, coined by Almond (1956, 396), refers to the "*particular pattern of orientation to political action*" that varies to some degree in each political system. Almond (1956) argues that Political Culture is not the direct expression of a specific political system and society. Moreover, while the concept might be related to culture, it is not a perfect equivalent for it. Elkins and Simeon (1979, 127-128), who consider this concept simultaneously fascinating and

confusing, say that acting according to a given political culture means conforming to certain rules of the game. In a similar fashion, Johnston (1995, 45) observes that this concept has been generally operationalised as a set of assumptions about *"the orderliness of the political universe, the nature of causality, principal goals in political life, the relative value of risk-acceptant versus risk-averse strategies, who belongs to the political community, what types of events, actions, and institutions are political, and the trustworthiness of other political actors".* These elements combine to delimit the acceptable types of behaviours and, additionally, to render alien alternative institutions and ideologies. As stated by Fawn (2003, 4), political culture is similar to ideology but is distinguished from it by being *"more broadly based among a population"*. Even though the concept of political culture does not specifically belong to the realm of foreign policy analysis, some studies have developed in that direction. Examples include several studies on the foreign policy behaviour of Germany (Duffield 1999; Berger 1996 in Lawson 2006, 409) and Japan (Berger 1996 in Lawson 2006, 409) after the Second World War, behaviour that is not explainable in term of geopolitical interests and relative capabilities. As can be inferred from this case study selection, ideational studies mostly concern cases not conforming to realpolitik precepts. Disagreeing with the use of political culture mostly in "residual explanation", Johnston (1996), in his analysis of the Maoist legacy in successive decades of Chinese foreign policy, advocates for the ideational investigation not only of deviational cases but also of those cases consistent with realist predictions.[15] In this way, the external choices of a country are not explained solely by theoretical assumptions but also complemented by an assessment of the national strategic culture. Similarly, Barnett (1999), who classifies Israeli foreign policy behaviour as being consistent with the predictions of realism,[16] considers the Oslo Accords to be the product of the temporary cultural space created *at that time*. Within that specific cultural-identitarian framework, the peace process and some territorial compromise with the Palestinians emerged in line with Israeli interests and national identity.

While the works mentioned above generally focus on a set of beliefs, ideas and shared assumptions, other studies pay attention to the particular relationship between foreign policy,

[15] It must be kept in mind that, contrarily to some over-simplistic interpretations, realism is not a purely warmongering doctrine. Instead, it simply postulates that the use of force is strictly subordinated to state interest. In this regard, it is interesting to look at "War with Iraq is not in America's National Interest" (Art et al. 2002); in September 2002, on the wave of the discussion about the utility of the war against Iraq, a group of realist scholars of international relations bought an advertisement page of the *New York Times* and expressed their opposition to the intervention since it was not in the interest of America.

[16] Currently, most realist thinkers postulate the necessity of introducing some unit-level variables such as perceptions and civil-military relations (Lawson 2006, 408). For example, Kaufmann (2005), criticising the pessimistic vision of the human nature embedded in Morgenthau's (1948) work (and arguing that it stems from the author's early experiences), calls for a middle-ground realism, which incorporates elements such as shared values and regime type.

discursive representations and the reifying dynamics stemming from these. The conceptual foundation of this intellectual stream lies in the fact that state identities are conceived of not as fixed but rather as mutable over time (Larsen 2014; Campbell 1992). Therefore, the process of differentiation between Selfness and Otherness is a crucial component of "*ongoing identity discourse*" (Kassianova 2001, 8). In an attempt to conceptualise this phenomenon, Larsen (2014, 370) terms as *"actorness"* the *"construction of the We in a given political context"*. In this regard, the role of language and shared discourses has received considerable attention. Doty (1996), examining the discursive representation of North-South relations, reflects on the usual binary opposition between concepts such as "developed/underdeveloped", "core/periphery" and "advanced industrial/less developed". According to Doty (1996), these dichotomies are neither natural nor inevitable but rather are arbitrary representations, fostering the reproduction of consolidated power dynamics. Reflecting on the relationship between words, reification and agency, several works (Milliken 1999; Weldes 1998; Weldes 1996) examine the way in which certain narratives, produced initially by human agents, become shared concepts and representations. Milliken (1999) introduces the expression "*elite's regime of truth*" to indicate how political elites, through discursive practices, legitimise some modalities of action and therefore isolate others. Similarly, Weldes (1998; 1996) considers that political actors, in an attempt to represent the role of the state vis-à-vis the external environment, elaborate – and successively share – a broad narrative around the state, its positioning and its mission. In this way, even though material elements combine to define the range of possibilities, discursive practices are nonetheless crucial in attributing meaning to these. The Cuban missile crisis offers an example of this. Although the facts themselves (i.e. the Soviets placing the rockets) are not disputable, Weldes (1996) observes that framing the facts as a direct threat to the American interest was one particular choice among many possibilities. In Campbell's words, danger does not: "*exist independently of those to whom it may become a threat*" (1992, 1). Therefore, rather than being an objective element, threats are the result of discursive production and reproduction. While these works have the merit of highlighting the constitutive properties of narrative, they may occasionally overlook the relevance of material elements. As pointed out wittily by Wendt (1999, 56) "*whether our discourse says so or not, pigs can't fly*". Additionally, while the relationship between discursive representations and reification potential is often assumed as almost universal, it is safe to assume that the processes undergone in the foreign policy-making of the United States, as analysed by Campbell (1992), are not entirely applicable to smaller and more constrained actors such as the South Caucasian Republics.

Recapitulating, this sub-section shows that corporate agency is a complex concept that involves issues such as the conception of Selfness and Otherness and that can be approached in many different ways. In this regard, Chapter 2 will propose the concepts of corporate agency and audiences. While this thesis does not open up the "black box" of the state, and therefore does not deal with the origins of foreign policy behaviour, it is fully acknowledged that the states under analysis are more than strategic players. In this regard, it is argued that future studies with a more cognitive approach could complement the findings of this thesis.

Reconciling domestic and international

The previous pages summarise some of the main foreign policy angles and approaches, ranging from the analysis of intra-cabinet debates to identitarian elements at the state level. Rather than being mutually-exclusive explanations, the points mentioned above can complement each other in the assessment of foreign policy processes and dynamics. In other words, rather than debating which analytical level wields the superior explanatory power, scholars of foreign policy could see these approaches as supplemental rather than concurrent.

The following works offer some examples of the combination of domestic and international elements. Gustavsson (1999) argues that once that a transformation in a state's conduct of foreign policy occurs it can affect both international and domestic factors. In some cases, it can even contribute to the triggering of a new process of foreign policy change. For example, it has been posited that there is a relationship between the fact of Armenia being encircled by hostile powers and the consolidation of an authoritarian regime (Mirzoyan 2010, 30; Simão 2010, 9). Similarly, Gourevitz (1978) states that even though foreign policy is also a systemic product it would be completely misleading to talk about systemic determinism. This conceptual framework has been adopted for the analysis of complex case studies. For instance, when dealing with the Irish (Doyle 2012) or Israeli (Rynhold 2007) peace processes, it has been pointed out that even though the system has allowed events to happen it does not account for specific developments. Similarly, while Mikhail's Gorbachev "New Thinking" is related to the military and economic pressure exerted on the Soviet Union, material elements alone do not explain why no other course of action, such as intensifying repression, was chosen. Additionally, tangible assets alone do not explain why this solution was not proposed years before, at the beginning of the Soviet decline (Wendt 1999, 129).

In an attempt to account for this multi-levelness, Frieden (1999) argues that while state actors prefer certain outcomes, in order to talk about strategy formation the impact of the external environment must also be attentively considered. Therefore, theoretical confusion can derive from the inability to distinguish strategies from preferences. Putnam (1988), who conceptualised foreign policy as a two-level game, suggests that foreign policy processes and outcomes result from the entanglement between the domestic and the international spheres. An example of this is provided by the Bonn Summit in 1978, led by the United States, Germany and Japan. Putnam (1988, 428) argues that while these particular decisions were the product of international negotiations (i.e. if acting purely unilaterally, the various leading countries would have chosen differently), the existence of domestic supporting factions represented a crucial precondition. Applying both systemic and internal elements to a complex case study, Mouritzen and Wivel (2012) propose a multilevel analysis of the main processes and dynamics characterising the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. More specifically, they conduct their analysis by firstly adopting a systemic approach and then resorting to state-level and unit-level approaches to fill the remaining analytical gaps.

While the specific ratio between external and domestic elements can be assessed only through detailed case-study analyses, the scholarship has attempted to postulate foreign policy models that are inclusive both of systemic constraints and internal dynamics. In the early days of the discipline, Rosenau (1966, in Neack 1995, 216) suggested a pre-theory of foreign policy that hypothesises that some explanation for a country's foreign policy choices stems from the following attributes: level of development, size and political system. These attributes are combined into eight ideal-types, for example the United States (large, developed, open), the Netherlands (small, developed, open), and Ghana (small, underdeveloped, closed). Instead of suggesting a certain foreign policy behaviour for each of these ideal-types, Rosenau's pre-theory conclusion does not go beyond suggesting the need for further research (1966, in Neack 1995). While no relevant study has confirmed Rosenau's intuition (Neack 1995), other studies have investigated the link between state attributes and foreign policy behaviour. In this regard, a proposal comes from several neoclassical realist thinkers (Mastanduno, Lake and Ikenberry 1989) who, in an attempt to formulate an explanation inclusive of both systemic assumptions and internal variables, postulate foreign policy as being mainly driven by a state's position in the international system and, more specifically, *"by its relative material power capabilities"* (Rose, 1998, 146). Following this approach and on foot of the exploration of certain hypotheses, Mastanduno, Lake and Ikenberry (1989), propose several foreign policy patterns. For example, they contend that domestically and

internationally weak states, like the newly-independent African States, aim primarily for internal extraction and external validation (i.e. recognition) while decentralised and powerful states, like the United States, generally pursue external extraction. All these models, which consider state preferences as stemming from capabilities, attribute remarkable importance to material assets. By contrast, constructivist thinkers argue about the substantial meaninglessness of mere capabilities, which have no connotation in and of themselves (Lebovic 1985). They should, therefore, be analysed in light of the context (Wendt 1995). An example of this would be that it can be said that five North Korean missiles represent more of a threat to a Western public than do one hundred British ones (Wendt 1995).

In spite of these limitations, the approaches of Rosenau (1966, in Neack 1995) and Mastanduno et al (1989) suggest that the international room for manoeuvre of a state can be *somehow* linked to features such as strength and weakness. Without resorting to strict categorisation, such a statement is in line with the concluding remarks of the previous section, which questioned the applicability of the one single analytical lens to extremely different actors, such as the United States and the South Caucasian republics. However, the operalisation of concepts such as international stature is not immediate. In order to further explore this direction, the next section will be devoted to small states and their foreign policy since, has already been hinted at, broad categories have limited explanatory power. A notable example of this is that foreign policy making in democratic countries can hardly be said to apply in the case of their authoritarian counterparts. Similarly, the challenges and opportunities faced by great powers and small states are remarkably different. Looking specifically at small states, the next section will outline the lack of a standard definition or consolidated research approach. In an effort to overcome this gap, some studies have suggested applying consolidated foreign policy approaches to the study of small states. In his study of the former Yugoslavia, Kovacevic (2016) argues for the importance of looking at ideational elements such as identities, discourses and traditions. In a different vein, Gigleux (2016) recommends paying more attention to the role of human decision-makers while Bailes et al. (2014) consider that, in the study of small states, processes of decision making remain largely under-investigated. Recapitulating, small states and foreign policy must be understood not as strictly hierarchically ordered, with the latter dominating the former, but rather as complementing each other. This element of overlapping between domestic and international elements will emerge throughout this thesis. For example, Chapter 4 will show that the connection between visa-free regimes and electoral results appears to be functional for both geopolitical goals and domestic

imperatives. Similarly, Chapter 5 will illustrate that maintaining acceptable ties with Russia also affects favourably the continuity in power of an incumbent leadership.

As suggested at various points throughout this chapter, this broad foreign policy overview is needed to indicate that the main focus of this work, namely strategic narratives in international relations, is not a stand-alone element but rather a smaller component of a broader picture. In addition to representing a conceptual background of which the researcher should be aware, aspects such as regime types, domestic peculiarities and cognitive level will occasional emerge in Chapters 3 to 5. The next pages are devoted to an in-depth investigation of a crucial common property of the three states of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan: their smallness vis-à-vis the West and Russia.

Small states and conceptualisation issues

The literature has pointed out the importance of studying small states. Keohane (1969, 310) argues that: "*If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant*". Similarly, Kassimeris (2009) points out that small states are fully-fledged members of the international system and therefore they deserve proper attention. There is also the consideration that – contrary to popular wisdom, which equates smallness to weakness – many small states have successful economic records (Griffith 2014, 61). In a nutshell, as stated by Cooper and Shaw (2009, 4): "*Small States in the twenty-first century cannot be seen simply as structurally weak Lilliputians in a system controlled by the big and strong*". It follows that, while some degree of overlapping is frequently observable, small states are not necessarily the same as weak states (Neumann and Gstöhl 2004, 4). Furthermore, even cases characterised by a remarkable disparity of strength cannot be properly understood without a deep assessment of all the parties involved. In line with these considerations, this work argues for the necessity of studying small states not as mere pawns in a bigger game but instead as active subjects of foreign policy. This section therefore discusses the nature of small states and their constitutive properties.

While there is little denial of their empirical existence and the sharing of *some* common features (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 4-5), the scholarship does not agree on a single definition of small states (Crowards 2002). Even though there is some consensus on small states not featuring as leading actors, they are often residually conceptualised as neither big nor mid-sized states (Neumann and Gstöhl 2004). Rothstein (1968, cited in Hey 2003) labels as small those states whose security depends on external guarantees while Keohane (1969, cited in Hey 2003)

associates small size with the insignificant impact of their unilateral action in the international system (and, consequently, with the necessity to cooperate with others in order to advance their interests). More broadly, small states have often been considered as price takers in a market dominated by big actors, the actual price makers (Baldacchino 2009, 26). To provide some context to these assumptions, it should be noted that this focus on the "hard dimension" of security and vulnerability has been influenced by global dynamics such as globalisation and bipolar competition, that nowadays have lost their preponderance (Bailes and Thorhallsson 2013). In the attempt to give some objective measurement for smallness, some conceptualisations have focused on quantifiable factors such as territorial size, population or GDP (Croward 2002). However, these variables have proved to be of limited utility in the comparison of substantially different states (Wivel et al. 2014, 7-8; Steinmetz and Wivel 2010). Additionally, this positivistic/comparative approach leaves out *sui generis* advantages and disadvantages. For example, notwithstanding the small population and size of Cyprus, the country is located in a remarkably strategic position (Melakopides 2010, 161). On the other hand, the territorial issues in the South Caucasus as well as with the related security concerns combine to characterise the specific smallness of these states. In light of the necessity for a more suitable conceptualisation of small states, Thorhallsson (2006) proposes a multidimensional operationalisation of size. More precisely, he considers that the size of a state can be established through its *action capacity* and *vulnerability*, which in turn are determined by the following categories: (1) fixed size, (2) sovereignty size, (3) political size, (4) economic size, (5) perceptual size and (6) preference size. In this way, not only material aspects but also cognitive aspects are considered. Additionally, it allows size to be thought of as a composite and sometimes uneven element. This is in line with several empirical studies. For example, in the early 2000s the European Union was defined as an "*economic giant, political dwarf*" (Medrano 2001, 155). Another theoretical approach consists in conceptualising smallness as relational and considering a small state as "*the weak part in an asymmetric relationship" (*Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 6). Similarly, Knudsen (2002, 184) argues that: "*A small state can be any state in a relationship of marked inferiority of power vis-à-vis another state*". While these definitions could be applicable to a large number of cases, they have occasionally been criticised for lacking conceptual limitation (Crandall and Varov 2016).

In the attempt to provide an explanation for the lack of consensus on what small states are, the next paragraphs will look at the development of the discipline over time and at the elusive meaning of smallness.

Small states: Why they are an elusive concept?

The limited scholarly agreement on what small states are is partially imputable to the fact that while the topic has been in academic vogue during particular historical moments, such as decolonisation or the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Kassimeris 2009, Neumann and Gstöhl 2004), it has been much less popular in periods such as the 1980s, when political-economic issues received exceptional attention (Braveboy-Wagner 2010, 6). Furthermore, the relationship between small and great global powers has tended to be the subject of investigation to a greater degree than have internal dynamics and regional dimensions (Jourde 2007). For example, some pieces of research examine the foreign policy of small states through the quantitative analysis of voting alignments in the UN General Assembly (Hey 2003, 203). Finally, while in the 2000s extensive literature was published on small European states, much less attention was given to their extra-European counterparts (Wivel 2016).[17] In addition to the knowledge gaps mentioned above, in empirical analysis small states do not display the tendency to group together on the simple basis of their similar size. Notably, even though small EU states tend to flirt with one another, geographic proximity seems to serve as a more powerful aggregating factor than size. Regional groups within the EU provide a powerful example of this. Whereas both the Benelux Union and the Baltic States (B3) are composed of small states only, the Visegrád Group (V4) is composed of three small or mid-sized countries (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) and a big country (Poland). Additionally, even though the single Visegrád countries have cooperated with other (mostly small) partners, these collaborations were mostly issue-driven and did not trigger new forms of permanent partnership (Törő et al. 2014).

Similar considerations hold true for other international organisations. Notwithstanding the tendency of Less Developed Countries (LDC) to act in a united fashion in the UN General Assembly[18] (Iida 1988), there is no formal group explicitly constituted on the sole basis of size[19] (MacKay 1969 in Patience 2014). This empirical evidence is not counterintuitive, as countries like the Netherlands and Dominica have remarkably different past histories and external preferences (Neack 1995, 202). The difficulty in problematising smallness is also related to the

[17] Ping (2005, 1) makes a similar observation about the study of middle powers by arguing that the bulk of the literature focuses on Western States.

[18] Currently, all the UN agencies, including UNEP, UNDP, UNCTAD, as well as the World Bank, recognise the sub-category of small island developing states (Baldacchino 2009, 25). As the very name suggests, more sub-specifications are added to smallness.

[19] There is not anything like a regional group or a common-purpose-group (like, for example, the "Coffee Group"). However, research on middle powers has found that they generally have similar diplomatic behaviour and that they typically vote in the same way in the UN General Assembly (Henrikson 2005, 67).

need to think of it in a spatial and temporal context. Such an observation can be applied to a wide range of regions. For example, Nepal, which totals roughly 15 million inhabitants, is dwarfed by its large neighbours China and India while Fiji, with less than one million citizens, play a relatively important role in the pacific area (Peterson 2006, 734). Additionally, states can assume different sizes within the framework of different relationships. For example, Romania can be seen as a big vis-à-vis Moldova and small vis-à-vis Russia. Similarly, Denmark can be conceived as bigger than the Baltic countries but smaller than most NATO members (Wivel et al. 2014, 9). In addition to varying according to the particular relationship context, state stature changes with the evolution of historical contingencies. While Iceland was unable to be admitted to the League of Nations due to its small size (Peterson 2006, 735), because of the exigencies of successive Cold War strategic, in 1949 Iceland, even though not having a standing army, was among the NATO founding members. Notwithstanding this foundational role in NATO, it was 1964 before Reykjavík was included in the UN while Luxemburg ranks among this latter organisation's founding members (Simpson 2014, 170-171). On the other hand, Cuba, thanks to the ideological elements embedded in its relationship with the Soviet Union, was able during many decades of the Cold War to secure a high level of arms transfers. However, after 1990 Cuba saw its privileged relationship with Russia dissolve without finding a suitable replacement (Sweijs et al. 2014).

In summary, both theoretical end empirical obstacles render problematic the conceptualisation of small states. On the one hand, objective criteria have limited utility in defining small states. On the other hand, smallness is a relative concept, the meaning of which changes according to geography, specific relationships and historical moments. This complexity plays a role in the study of the external relations of the South Caucasus. For example, even though both Armenia and Azerbaijan are small states, the energy resources of the latter suggest that there is a difference in their smallness. Similarly, the dynamics between Russia and the West might be such as to redefine the stature of Georgia, which has often self-represented as a "normative pivot". In other words, whereas "non-large" size might be a shared property of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, the remarkable differences among them, paired with the relevant role of contingency, make a clear-cut categorisation complex. As the next chapter will clarify, in spite of their almost inexistent regional development, all these countries can be classified as small states due to their disparity of strength vis-à-vis Russia and the EU and also due to their discursive self-projection.

Smallness: making it less elusive?

While fully acknowledging the complexity outlined in the previous section, some attempts to conceptualise smallness and its properties have been proposed. The following pages will present the following: a sub-specification of size (i.e. differentiation between small and medium powers), a discussion on the role of development and an outline of possible external orientation, namely hiding and binding.

One possible way of overcoming the conceptual broadness of smallness consists in including some sub-specification of size. While neither Sweden nor Armenia are big powers, putting them in the same basket yields limited analytical effectiveness. Thinking of size more as a spectrum rather than as a defined category, some authors (Ungerer 2007; Kehoane 1969, 396) introduce the category of "middle powers"[20], which can be understood as: "*States that are neither great nor small in terms of international power, capacity and influence, and demonstrate a propensity to promote cohesion and stability in the world system"* (Jordaan 2003, 165). While their size does not determine particular foreign policy behaviour, the scale of their diplomatic, military and economic capabilities could nonetheless provide some indication of their possible external action (Ungerer 2007). More specifically, some theoretical approaches consider that middle-size stature can originate either from a particularly relevant regional role, from the possibility to exercise a stabilising function or from the chance to engage in "niche diplomacy"[21] (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1994, in Patience 2014). However, as these considerations do not translate into unanimous categorisations, the shallowness of contemporary mid-power specification has been the subject of argument (Cooper 2011; Ping 2005, 3). For instance, consulting different sources, it is possible to find references to Norway as either a small state (Knudsen 1990), a medium-sized one (Patience 2014) or a "humanitarian superpower" (Henrikson 2005, 83). Similar observations have been made about Japan, South Africa and other regional powers (Cooper 2011). Azerbaijan may represent another dubious case, as its demography, economic size and energy assets substantially exceed those of its neighbours. However, since the goal of this thesis is to investigate the way in which these three countries cope with the West and Russia, the undisputable asymmetry between Baku and these latter actors confirms the correctness, for the purpose of this analysis, of conceptualising Azerbaijan as a small state. Additionally, and once again in the context of public

[20] Another possible sub-category is constituted by microstates.
[21] This term was coined by Gareth Evans, former Foreign Minister of Australia. More specifically, he hinted at the benefits of specialising in specific diplomatic issues rather than engaging confusedly with a large number of issues (Henrikson 2005, 67).

diplomacy, the final aim does not seem be the obtaining of middle power status but, less ambitiously, gaining international sympathy in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Departing from these sub-specifications of size, some studies have attempted to differentiate among small states on the basis of their level of development. Examples are provided by studies on developing states that, often because of some legitimacy deficit and an abundance of domestic threats, have as a foreign policy goal the maintenance in power of the ruling elite (Barnett and Levy 1991, David 1991, Hey 2003, Larson 1994). Hey (2003), aware of the difficulties involved in outlining general rules of foreign policy behaviour for small states, considers that more significant insights can be achieved by taking into account the type of regime and the level of development. For instance, elites from small, poor and authoritarian states are more likely to be focused on their own particular interest rather than on that of the state. Including some extra variables, Neack (1995) outlines that, in an attempt to insulate a particular socio-economic context, numerous studies deal specifically with Pacific democracies. Similarly, Briguglio (1995) constructs an index to measure the economic vulnerability of small island developing states. Larson (1994), reflecting on Waltz's (1979) assumption of states as natural balancers, argues that this proposition is not universally true for the elite of weak countries that, instead of aligning on the basis of systemic-equilibrium calculations, tend to ally with those foreign powers that might favour their continuity in power.

In an attempt to provide some account of the agency of small states, two ideal types of behaviour have been introduced: hiding and binding. Looking at small states in a historical perspective, Steinmetz and Wivel (2010, 9-10) observe that until the end of the Second World War small states reasonably feared the expansionist aims of bigger powers. To avoid becoming a target of these expansionist tendencies, they tended to comply with the agenda set by more prominent actors and shied away from international quarrels. However, Cold War dynamics made this strategy increasingly costly. For this reason, the bulk of the Western European states became increasingly interested in binding, a term that describes the setting up of international institutions in order to mitigate the structural advantage of great powers. The idea of binding has often influenced, either implicitly or explicitly, the study of small states within the EU. In this regard, it has been contended that the EU provides some corrective mechanisms for the stature disparities among its members. Wivel (2010; 2005) observes that even though small EU states accept some inequalities in decision-making they can nonetheless resort to tactics, such as coalition building, in order to maximise their influence on selected issues. For example, small Eastern states have often acted in unity in favour of eastwards-oriented programmes such as the Eastern Partnership. Aside from the

formal and informal mechanisms of decision-making within the EU, it has been observed that the mere fact of membership in the EU (and NATO) is likely to have an empowering effect on small states. For example, the Baltic States, which joined the leading Western institutions out of fear of Russia, soon collaborated in order to influence the policies of Brussels towards their post-Soviet neighbours. By virtue of their EU membership, the Baltics were able to mitigate their vulnerability and to "punch above their weight" (Lamoreaux and Galbreath 2008). Similarly, even though EU membership has posed some challenges such as demographic losses, "*the Baltic States have moved beyond the 'post-Soviet' label to normalise their position as EU and NATO member-states*" (Galbreath et al. 2008, 135). Considering the benefits associated with joining the EU, Melakopides (2010, 169) introduces the concept of "small powerhood" to denote the opportunity of gaining international prestige through the adoption of soft-power strategies. In other words, within the framework provided by Brussels, small states get the opportunity to raise their profile and perform international actions such as mediating amid multilateral tensions (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 219). These considerations suggest that, regardless of the effectiveness of their strategic choices, small states are better positioned within the framework of supranational institutions than they are outside.[22] However, to state that membership of this kind of institution represents an important sub-specification of smallness does not imply any form of foreign policy determinism. For example, despite both Ireland and Denmark being EU members, the former has opted for military neutrality while the latter is fully integrated into NATO (Goetschel 1998, 8).

In a similar fashion, whereas the terms hiding or binding might suggest a dichotomous choice, the experience of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia shows that the dynamics involved are more complex. More specifically, none of these countries is a NATO or EU member and even though all of them interact with these institutions their positions on possible membership are radically different. In a nutshell, Azerbaijan pursues a sort of multilateral foreign policy and is not interested in membership in formal organisations. Georgia, in spite of its voiced interest in joining NATO and the EU, is not likely to be included in any of these organisations in the near future (which makes Tbilisi an unsuccessful binder). Turning to Armenia, this countryis part of CSTO and the Eurasian Union. However, due to the very substantial influence of Moscow within these organisations, they cannot be defined as truly multilateral (Dreyer and Popescu 2014; Popescu 2014). The assessment of the South Caucasian experience, which is situated somewhere between the European and the extra-European world, could contribute to a coherent debate on small states

[22] Without entering into the specifics, this work argues that small states like Switzerland and Iceland, which are not EU members but are part of the EEA and/or Schengen, can for the purpose of this study be likened to small EU member states.

and their coping strategies. New research on non-Western experiences has recently emerged, dealing with cases such as North Korea (Grzelczyk 2016), Asian forms of cooperation (Chong 2014) and some African countries (Styan 2016; Taylor 2014). However, there is still a need for more organised debate. By bringing to the fore the role of strategic narratives, this work aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of both small states and South Caucasian dynamics. To understand this latter point, its specific regional dimension must be discussed.

Small States, Foreign Policy and Regional Dimension: defining the relationship

The previous section has pointed out that differentiating between small EU states and small extra-EU states does not provide sufficient conceptual specification. Acknowledging the validity of this point, some reference to regional elements must be introduced. As demonstrated by previous studies on Caribbean and Pacific states, which face specific security issues, the meaning of smallness has a context-related component (Bailes et al. 2014, 27). In the words of Bailes et al. (2014, 41): "*We may expect small states in different regions to have different security profiles and priorities, explicable inter alia by geopolitical differences*". A similar point is made by Kovacevic (2016, 111), who observes that the study of small states is often plagued by an over-emphasis on global dynamics and, conversely, by having limited attention paid to regional ones. Therefore, for the purpose of studying Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the political and geographic context of their smallness must be outlined. In this regard, their extremely-limited level of regional cooperation stands out. This lack of cooperation seems to be hindering the foreign policy of these three countries, since small states engaging in cooperative dynamics might be expected to be better positioned than small countries at odds with their neighbours. As pointed out by Archer (2014, 97), since the end of the Second World, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) have benefited from their ability to act as a "security community". Similarly, the positive cooperation record between the three Baltic countries seems to have contributed to their remarkably quick path towards integration into the EU and NATO (Wivel et al. 2014, 20). When considering cases of states not fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, the Balkans offer some scope for reflection. Notwithstanding the need for further regionalism in the area, it should be noted that over the years EU and NATO perspectives have been critical triggers for the strengthening of cooperative regional dynamics (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014). In spite of these positive patterns of regional cooperation, there are some cases to be noted as having developed in a different direction. One such example is that of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) countries, which, with the exception of the Baltics, have shown little in the way of cooperation

ability (Wivel et al. 2014, 21). Within this negative picture, the South Caucasian experience is described as particularly unfruitful, as: "*Attempts at regional security cooperation in South Caucasus that could serve as alternatives to either the Western alliance or closer cooperation with Russia have been virtually non-existent*" (Lupu Dinesen and Wivel 2014, 159). Considering the relevance of this "non-regional cooperation" for the case studies under analysis, the next pages will review the Caucasian regional dimension and its potential foreign policy implications.

As already hinted at, regional integration between Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is of such a low degree that the appellation of 'region' can be considered a negative one in this context (German 2012a, De Waal 2010), where neighbours are mainly considered as sources of threat rather than as potential partners for cooperation. Some authors even wondered whether the regional dimension should be thought of as "externally imposed" by outside powers, namely Russia and the West, rather than as generated by local dynamics (Mirzoyan 2010, 177). In this regard, the South Caucasian area is often considered to be the product of "regionalisation through external conceptualisation", as effected mainly by Moscow during (and partially after) the Soviet era, rather than due to significant cooperative internal dynamics. In the experience of the post-Soviet republics, the common Soviet legacy has appeared to hinder rather than to foster a process of regionalisation among the newly-independent states. This was due to the fact that the Soviet republics were mainly used to dealing with the centre for the allocation of resources and thus were and are more inclined to think about cooperating with external actors rather than with each other (De Waal 2013). Far from being an exception, the South Caucasus is not the only case of exogenous regionalisation; the Middle East and the Balkans also went through some dynamics of external conceptualization. Notably, the region now known as the "Middle East" was thus labelled by an American naval officer, Captain Mahan, in 1902 (Davison, 1960, 667). Additionally, colonial powers have often drawn borders in area irrespective of the preferences of the indigenous populations. The most notorious example of this is the Sykes-Picot secret agreement, signed in 1916 by England and France. Turning to more recent dynamics, the term "Western Balkans" was officially coined by EU bureaucrats in 1999 (although used in some documents since 1996) and includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Greece, while geographically belonging to the area, has been excluded due to its longstanding EU membership while Bulgaria and Romania were not included due to their solid membership prospects (Delevic 2007), which were later successively achieved.[23]

[23] Obtained in 2007.

Even though limited intra-state cooperation represents a normal pattern in the post-Soviet experience (Wivel et al. 2014, 21), the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan virtually precludes any development in this regard. This is also affected by the fact that local elites have a stake in maintenance of the status quo (Özkan 2008). However, this does not exclude the existence of shared regional features at grassroots level. In that regard, De Waal points out how the people of the Caucasus, in spite of resentment and war-torn legacies, share cultural practices such as similar wedding and funeral ceremonies and generous hospitality standards (de Waal 2013). These elements acquire relevance when it is considered that regions can be characterised by a wide range of patterns and dynamics (Hettne, Inotai, and Sunkel 1999, xv in Simão 2013, 275; Fawn 2009; Hettne 2002). Hettne (2002, 327-328) contends that various regional systems can be characterised by different degrees of "region-ness": regional spaces, complexes, societies, communities or institutionalised polities, according to the circumstances. While most of these patterns imply some degree of voluntary cooperation, the first two levels refer, respectively, to a purely geographical dimension and to the concept of a "security complex", characterised by self-contained security dynamics (Buzan, Waever and Wilde 1998). Moreover Hettne (2002, 331) considers that, under certain circumstances, shared cultural practices can be understood as constitutive elements of region-ness. For example, in early 1300s it was possible to talk about Europe as a region, since the upper classes shared "cultural practices" such as attendance at the same universities. A parallel can be drawn with Armenia and Azerbaijan where, in spite of the conflict between them, some shared cultural features remain. For example, given that both the elites and the ordinary citizens, now bitter enemies, used to live side-by-side during Soviet times, many Armenian refugees are still fluent in the Azerbaijani language (de Wall 2010). Additionally, considerably Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities live today in Georgia.

Having spelled out these considerations, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate by adding a more systemic outlook. In this regard, while regional cooperation remains limited, all these three states have to deal with Moscow and the West. Wivel (2016, 1) considers that "*that the strategic options of small states are dependent upon how much action space they are allowed by other states, in particular the great powers, in their close vicinity*". In proposing a conceptualisation that goes beyond a case-by-case approach, Wivel (2016) postulates a relationship between the action space allowed by the other states and the fact of these external states being either modern, post-modern or post-colonial. Leaving aside post-colonial considerations, within these categories modern refers to traditional Weberian states while post-modern, a term not necessarily used to refer to state actors, refers to players characterised by multi-governance dynamics and cross-

border networks. In light of these premises, Wivel (2016) argues that the foreign policy behaviour of Georgia is heavily influenced by the interaction with a "modern" Russia and a "post-modern" EU. This work considers that this argument is applicable to a certain extent to Armenia and Azerbaijan. In other words, all three South Caucasian countries have to deal with the same external great powers, with nature of each of these powers characterised by distinctive traits. While interacting with the same interlocutors does not suffice in conferring a regional dimension, comparable foreign patterns and coping strategies may nonetheless be identified.

Even though Wivel (2016) refers to Russia and the EU, this work deems it more appropriate to refer to Russia and the West. As argued at various points of this work, South Caucasian policy makers, when mentioning the West, generally refer to an unspecified mix of Europe, the EU, NATO and the Western word in general.[24] For this reason, even though some sub-chapters refer to the EU, this thesis on the whole prefers to refer to "Russia and the West".

South Caucasus, structural asymmetry and strategic behaviour

In light of this literature review, it can be said that engagement with the research question:

"*How do the South Caucasian countries navigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia?"*

involves consideration not only of the three states and the region as a whole but also of the foreign policy, smallness and dynamics stemming from these. That is, all these three countries are significantly smaller than their external counterparts. Taking this into account, this thesis aims at providing a multi-level contribution. In addition to outlining a detailed account of the foreign policy behaviour of the South Caucasian states, it provides a broader, pertinent reflection on the meaning of smallness and the related coping strategies.

In terms of contribution to the knowledge of this geographic area, this piece of research proposes a foreign policy angle that looks at the three countries as foreign policy subjects rather than as foreign policy objects. This sentence does not suggest that Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have never been studied as proactive international actors, with endogenous preferences and red lines. For example, part of the insolubility of the "frozen" conflicts is ascribable to the uncompromising

[24] Kakhishvili (2016, 166) argues that in Georgian political discourse references to the West refer to a loose mix of actors (for further information, see Chapter 4 of this thesis). In light of systematic analysis of recent political discourse, the same can be said to hold true in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

attitude of the belligerent parties (de Waal 2010). Furthermore, specific examples demonstrate the indisputable foreign policy agency of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. For instance, Cornell (2000) outlines how nationalistic Georgian rhetoric in the early 1990s severely contributed to the outbreak of separatist conflicts. Looking at more recent events, in the aftermath of the Georgian war not even Armenia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states (Berryman 2010). However, these findings are the result of separate studies, conducted with different methods, theoretical approaches and analytical scope. On the other hand, even though the foreign policies of the South Caucasian countries have generally been analysed *separately*, external powers have often been depicted as adopting a *cohesive approach* towards the region. For instance, various studies highlight the role and preferences of Russia. Notably, the territorial conflicts, which broke out in the immediate post-independence periods, were "frozen" only when Moscow, in exchange for Georgia and Azerbaijan joining the CIS, took an active role and sent its own "peacekeepers"[25] to the disputed territories. Henceforth, Russia has been described as imposing itself as a *regional arbiter* (Abushov 2009). Currently, even though Moscow is trying to promote a softer image of itself in the region, its policies are mainly reinforced by “hard means” like military might and economic coercion (Abushov 2009, Wilson and Popescu 2009). Without claiming any ambition of producing a "grand theory", this thesis considers that the current body of knowledge could be complemented by a more comprehensive attempt to analyse the foreign policies implemented by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This does not involve postulating the existence of common regional policies, since the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict prevents the development of such common policies, but rather adopting the same analytical framework for the study of all three countries. As the next chapter will outline more clearly, this thesis treats all three South Caucasian republics as small countries dealing with bigger external actors through the use of strategic narratives.

In consideration of the need for a more comprehensive approach to the foreign policy of the South Caucasian states, this thesis reflects on the meaning of smallness in that specific region. As has emerged from the previous section, even though Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are three small states located in the same area, their degree of “region-ness” is remarkably low. At the same time, they all interact with Russia and the West, powerful external actors that are extremely different from each other. This provokes questions about possible common patterns and dynamics. In an attempt to further elaborate this point, this chapter builds upon Wivel’s (2016) analysis, which

[25] The expression is presented here between quotation marks since the Russian conception of peacekeeping, which does not involve neutrality and the consent of the partiess, is entirely different from the Western one.

argues that the foreign policy of Georgia is conditioned by interaction with a "modern" Russia and a "post-modern" EU. Extending this interpretation to Armenia and Azerbaijan, it can be said that, in spite of remarkable differences across the cases, factors ontologically preceding the relational dynamics, such as the specific nature of Russia and the EU, are important to the way the smaller actors approach these relationships. Consequently, in addition to suggesting that disparities of size *per se* do not determine the outcome of international dynamics, conjectures can be made in relation to the regional dimension of the South Caucasus. As already mentioned, notwithstanding their limited (or non-existent) interaction, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan deal with the same external interlocutors. This suggests that by studying the approach of all three countries towards the West and Russia conclusions could be drawn not only about each case but also about shared elements. In other words, while fully acknowledging the unique nature of the relationship between each South Caucasian country and the bigger counterparts, some common elements and patterns are expected to emerge.

Finally, a consideration of how small states try to mitigate geopolitical asymmetry requires some discussion about the strategic agency of these states. As hinted at by the research question, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia can be understood as trying to navigate their condition of relative asymmetry in relation to the West and Russia. In other words, far from being mere pawns, these countries can implement strategies, be these effective or not, to maximise their most preferred output and to advance certain policies. Going beyond the simple idea of hiding and binding, this thesis aims to show how small states can, notwithstanding the challenges posed by their various interlocutors, maximise their leeway for action through the adoption of suitable strategies. As stated by Pantev (2010, 104): "*Smart, adequate and wise policy of a small state, supported by a good quality diplomacy and security sector, largely determines its successes and failures in international relations*". To further explore this point, the next chapter will assess the extent to which small states can be understood as strategic actors and how their behaviour can be detected.

Recapitulating, this thesis looks at three aspects: a detailed investigation of the case studies, considerations of the regional dimension, and a contribution regarding the way small states implement their foreign policy strategies in a condition of asymmetry. At a more theoretical level, throughout the chapters it will emerge that the different levels of analysis, rather than *competing* against each other, *complete* each other. Even though this study adopts a primarily international analytical angle and tends to treat the state as a "corporate agent", elements such as regime type, intra-elite dynamics and leaders' personality occasionally come up. In this way, while an

internationally-oriented focus clearly emerges, pertinent in-state elements are not sacrificed in the name of theoretical parsimony.

Finally, some comments should be made about the replicability and the generalisability of this work. While other post-Soviet countries would be ideal candidates for similar studies, due to the common role of Russia and the West as relevant external actors, this thesis adopts a prudent attitude towards the direct generalisability of the conclusion and findings. In the case of Central Asia, the more limited engagement of the West (especially the EU) and the importance of China render the cases substantially different. In the case of the remaining Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine), their location in continental Europe may have remarkable relevance for processes and dynamics. Turning to replicability, this approach may be useful to other scholars interested in smallness vis-à-vis greatness. In fact, going beyond the specificity of the South Caucasian context, this work gives a certain empirical account of the asymmetric relationship between great and smaller powers. If complemented by further studies in this direction, this piece of research could contribute to a more coherent debate on small states and their external relations, offering not only a detailed assessment of certain case studies but also a replicable conceptual (and methodological, as next chapter will show) approach.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design of this thesis, including the methodological approach and the sources used in the research. These choices have been deeply influenced by the academic debate started by "Mr Perestroika", which is a pseudonym of an anonymous political scientist. In 2000, "Mr Perestroika" circulated a mail complaining about the over-dominance of positivistic approaches in political science, a mail that concluded with the following emphatic expression: "*I hope this anonymous letter leads to a dismantling of the Orwellian system that we have in APSA and that we will see a true Perestroika in the discipline".*[1]

This letter triggered a debate about the equal standing of alternative methods of enquiry in political science. On the foot of this anonymous input, several scholars embarked on discussions on research methodologies and related problematics. From these discussions, it emerged that political science research was often perceived as method-driven rather than problem-driven (Rigger 2009). In some cases, since the use of a cutting-edge methodology was likely to increase chances of publication, certain approaches were selected because of their popularity among the academic community rather than for their appropriateness for the matter under analysis. An implication was therefore that certain topics were being overlooked not due to their irrelevancy but due to their unsuitability for proper quantitative investigation. Aware of the limits stemming from this restrictive interpretation of the discipline, the Perestroika debate called for further epistemological representation.[2]

This thesis fully acknowledges the necessity of prioritising the research topic over a pre-determined methodological approach. Therefore, the decisions taken here on the way to conduct the investigation are related to the research question: "*How do the South Caucasian countries navigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia*?" This wording implies an additional set of sub-questions: Are small states strategic actors? How can their strategic behaviour

[1] Mr. Perestroika. 2000. "On the irrelevance of APSA and APSR to the study of Political Science", *anonymous e-mail*, 17 October, http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS293/articles/mrperestroika.pdf .

[2] Even if the Perestroika debate did not have a revolutionary impact on the way social sciences are conceived, in the 2000s greater attention and interest was paid to qualitative methods. In fact, in 2003 the American Political Science Association (APSA) created the Qualitative Methods section. Subsequently renamed "Qualitative and Multi-Method Research", it is currently the third largest of APSA sections. Additionally, more gender and ethnic diversity was introduced in the APSA main board, successively incorporating more women and minorities (Luke and McGovern 2010). Finally, the Consortium for Qualitative Research Methods (CQRM) was founded in 2001 (Elman and Elman 2008, 363).

be detected? On what occasions is this strategic behaviour present? How should the West and Russia be conceptualised? What sources should be analysed? How can fieldwork contribute to this work? What role does the positionality of the author play in the investigation? How can this method be replicated?

This work considers itself as aligned with an interpretivist approach (Della Porta and Keating 2008), which considers that both the object of the study and the way the researcher can access it are not purely objective elements. Additionally, it is argued that events and processes are not regulated by strict causality but rather by complex interactions. Therefore, this research does not consider parsimony as a virtue *per se* (Lawson and Shilliam 2010, 398) and it therefore does not aim to construct synthetic and stylised explanations in the way that microeconomic models do. However, considering that the very idea of a research topic involves a research scope, some choices needed to be made. Firstly, even though countries other than those considered here, such as Turkey and Iran, are relevant to the South Caucasus, their role will not be included in this work. This is due not only to space and scope limitations but also because when applying the same research design to the study of the foreign policy agency of the three South Caucasian countries the West and Russia emerge as the most relevant external interlocutors, due to their resources and geopolitical significance as well as to their conflict mediation efforts (German 2012a). Therefore, investigating how Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan project themselves vis-à-vis these actors proves to be particularly important. Secondly, as this chapter will clearly explain, both the South Caucasian countries and their external counterparts will be treated primarily as corporate actors. Finally, while considerable attention will be devoted to *how* Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan operate strategically, the relevant domestic roots or cognitive foundations will not be systematically discussed.

Considering the interpretivist assumptions behind this work, it would be anachronistic to assume the researcher to be a purely neutral observer. Therefore, and acknowledging the role of positionality, this work considers that the identity of the scholar has an impact on the research in terms of selection of the topic and collection and interpretation of the data (Taylor 2001, 17-18). The author of this research, a woman in her late-twenties from outside the region, is likely to interpret the material in light of her background, experience and knowledge. This work does not consider that this represents a substantial problem to overcome, provided that extensive preparatory research is undertaken and a rigorous approach is adopted at all stages.

Small states as strategic actors

As anticipated in the previous chapter, small states, although more constrained than their larger counterparts, have their own set of foreign policy preferences. In other words, while the limits they face are fully acknowledged, they should nonetheless not be conceived of as purely responsive pawns. Reflecting on the properties characterising the agency of small states, Cooper and Shaw (2009, 4) introduce the concepts of vulnerability and resilience. The former refers to the structural constraints that limit the room for manoeuvre of small states; the latter refers to the ability to resist these constraints. In this way, it is suggested that even though small states are contractually weaker than prominent actors they can nonetheless resort to some form of strategic behaviour. Similarly, Prasad (2009; 2004) argues that certain small states, such as the Caribbean Islands, have devised some expedients to overcome the challenges posed by their size. For example, rather than centring their economic strategy on the free-market, they tend to engage in rent-seeking activities such as acting as off-shore financial centres. This is not an unproblematic choice. For instance, Vlcek (2009) examines the hostility of the OECD in face of the low-tax regimes offered to non-residents by off-shore centres, as this provision harms the economies of most OECD member states. Strategic behaviour has also been observed in contexts of formal negotiation. Zartman (2008, 112) observes that, in the case of talks between asymmetrical partners, the weaker party often resorts to strategies as thus described: *"They blustered, dawdled, cajoled, borrowed power, vetoed temporarily (by walking out) or longer (by at least threatening withdrawal), and generally made a nuisance of themselves over an issue that mattered much more to them than to the distracted strong partner busy with other problems. In this way, they increased their (effective) power far more than initial asymmetry would have predicted".* In other words, while asymmetry is acknowledged as being a crucial structural component of the relationship between great and small powers, it does not guarantee the contractual passivity of the latter. Thus, small states have occasionally proved themselves to be tenacious bargainers.

These dynamics are visible in remarkably different contexts, such as the US-Canada negotiations in the 1980s over the free-trade area and the India-Nepal negotiations between the 1960s and the 1990s over water resources. Additionally, as illustrated by Susan Waltz (2001), in 1948 the drafting of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" received substantial input from delegates representing small states. More generally, looking at smallness within the framework of an unbalanced relationship, small states can be proactive in increasing their size vis-à-vis a bigger interlocutor. For example, Djibouti, in spite of its indisputable smallness vis-à-vis Ethiopia, has gained extraordinary leverage by means of the port of Djibouti, which is crucial for the foreign trade of Addis Ababa. Additionally, it has also maximised its size at a global level by providing

the US with its only permanent military base on the African continent (Styan 2016). In a similar way, Qatar has acquired global prominence both by allowing the United States to establish an air base on its territory and by hosting the Al-Jazeera television channel (Balsom 2003). Some literature emphasises the way in which some small countries try to overcome the limitations of their size by carving out a "niche" for themselves. As observed by Virginie Grzelczyk (2016), in order to overcome their weaknesses, small states have developed some *ad hoc* strategies, labelled as “smart” or “innovative”. For example, Browning (2006) illustrates how Finland, despite its relatively small size and the geopolitical challenges of the Cold War era, was able to support a competitive Research & Development sector, as exemplified by the Nokia success story. Similarly, both the Vatican City and Singapore, due to their ability to position themselves as authoritative members of the international system, have acquired exceptional prestige and influence over time (Chong 2010).

The empirical relevance of the agency of small states compels us to think about the most appropriate modalities for detecting this agency. Clearly, international interactions involve a substantial element of "behind-closed-door diplomacy", accessible (to a certain extent[3]) to the researcher through elite interviews and diplomatic memoirs. Other than that, some strategic behaviour can be inferred from the way in which communications are articulated. In attempting to be more specific about the issue, it is useful to look at some existing examples. Newman and Visoka (2016) observe that Kosovo, whose diplomats have been remarkable active in pursuing external recognition, adjusts its discourse to suit the sensibilities of different audiences. For example, when dealing with African and South American countries the common experience of colonisation and self-determination is emphasised. In contrast, when dealing with the Oceania-Pacific region the focus shifts to solidarity and mutual support among small states. In an analogous fashion, after the fall of Communism Czech elites adopted a consistent narrative of a "return to Europe". Among other things, this rhetoric signalled a desire to dissociate the country from its past and to move towards a Western model (Kratochvil et al. 2006). In a nutshell, in the realm of foreign relations states articulate their discourses by *also* taking into account the need to adapt them to a certain external public. Recapitulating, although strategy is not the only element that can be drawn out through discourse analysis, this thesis will look at political speeches and narratives from this angle.

[3] When choosing to use expert interviews as the main methodology of investigation, the researcher needs to reflect in depth on issues such as misrepresentation, fallacies of memories and unconscious attempts to impress the interviewer. For further clarity, see Morris (2009).

Political discourse: a strategic tool vis-à-vis a certain audience?

Numerous foreign policy works that focus on discursive elements adopt approaches inspired by critical theories, which explore the relationship between language, hierarchy and power. In so doing, they emphasise elements such as the mutually-constitutive relationship between discourse and reality, and the narrative construction of Selfness and Otherness. For example, Campbell (1992), in his famous work on American foreign policy, explores the relationship between security, discourse, legitimacy and the conceptualisation of Otherness. Similarly, Doty (1993) observes that in North American discourse the use of terms such as "the Third World", which often implies disorder and backwardness, played a role in the development of a mainstream acceptance of global relations. Similar insights were advanced by authors working within the broader "Copenhagen School" approach. For example, Lene Hansen (2012), when discussing the concept of securitisation, argues for the mutual constituency existing between public discourse and policy practice. In so doing, she highlights the relationship between the American disengagement from Iraq and Afghanistan and the related public discourse of putting local forces in charge of security. Whereas these works focus on the reifying effects of political discourse, the concepts of agency and audience do not receive comparable attention. That makes these approaches unsuitable for the research purpose of this thesis, which is the understanding of the way in which three small states, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, navigate their relative asymmetry in their relationships with greater external actors. Additionally, the very term "to navigate" implies a clear focus on the strategic dimension.

A possible way of tackling this dimension consists of looking at the strategic use of language. Janice Bially Mattern (2005), elaborating on the concrete mechanisms related to soft-power and international attraction, advances a strategic-communication argument. More specifically, Bially Mattern (2005, 584) argues that in order to deploy soft-power successfully actors must promote themselves in front of a target population. Such successful projection of the Self ultimately rests upon: "*how* the speaker articulates his interpretation to listeners during communicative exchanges" (Bially Mattern 2005, 598; emphasis in the original). Roselle et. Al. (2014) also focus on soft power and consider strategic narratives to be a core component of such power, not least because a compelling narrative can constitute a power resource. Scott (2015) examines the intertwined relationship between soft power and rhetoric in Hu'Jintao's China from 2000 to 2015. On this issue, he argues that there is: "*An array of specific English language reassurance terms directed by China to the international community; in other words, 'public diplomacy through*

communication' (Scott 2015, 249)". For example, after the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989, Beijing adopted a reassuring rhetoric that highlighted its interest in a good neighbourhood policy and in being a responsible major power. Additionally, threat-free terms such as "peaceful rise" were adopted. In this way, not only is the conscious use of rhetoric in the international arena highlighted but the role of the English language in this rhetoric is also emphasised. In considering a "smaller case", Chong (2004) looks at how Singapore adopted a consistent narrative of "Asian values" that presented the manner in which these values operated as being different to the Western acceptance of human rights. The discourse was not articulated in confrontational terms but rather as a request that international policies and priorities be formulated to take local contexts into account.

While strategic narratives are certainly a component of soft power, their relevance is certainly not confined to that realm. That is, strategic narratives can have a "hard" rather than a "soft" impact in projecting a certain message to a certain audience. An example of this can be seen in the attempt of the Bush administration to reframe the role of America in world affairs by departing from the "benign hegemon narrative" and focusing instead on the War on Terrorism (Bially Mattern 2005). While this evolution clearly represents a conscious rhetorical turn, it can hardly be categorised as a soft power approach. Notwithstanding this evidence, the discipline of IR has yet to elaborate a convincing theoretical argument that relates global narratives to concepts such as agency, structure and the construction of an international order (Miskimmon et al. 2014). In the attempt to bridge this gap, Miskimmon et al. (2014), in their 2014 volume *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order* argue the following: "*Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate*". According to this definition, strategic narratives should be conceived of as tools deployed towards an end. This acceptance of the instrumental seems to imply that political rhetoric is, to a certain extent, consciously structured to bring the agent closer to a certain international goal. While this definition could be seen as being widely generalisable, this emphasis on projecting influence seems particularly in line with the agenda and capabilities of Great Powers. The rest of the volume seems to support this interpretation as it outlines, in a discussion on strategic narrative actorness and the different forms this can assume, the following groups: Hegemon, Great Powers (e.g. the United States), Normal Powers (e.g. Germany and China), Rising Powers (e.g. the BRICS) and weak/rogue states (e.g. Iran and Burma). Although

there are numerous categories included in this list, none of them seems relevant for the study of small states. Furthermore, most of the volume is devoted to the analysis of the experiences of major actors. For example, it contains an analysis of the debate around enforcing a no-fly zone in Libya, a debate that took place in 2011 between the US and the EU. In this regard, while the strategic narratives of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States are analysed, the voices of minor allies are not included.

Furthermore, other works that build upon Miskimmon et al.'s 2014 work similarly focus on prominent actors. Szostek (2016) deals with Russian strategic narratives post-2012, looking at the peculiar mix of declarations of belonging to European civilisation with a vibrant criticism of the West, portrayed as a hypocritical actor. Szostek (2016) concludes that this rhetoric, although compelling at the domestic level, is ineffective in terms of results on the international arena. Hartig (2016) discusses the significance and effects of the presence across the globe of branches of the Confucius Institute, which has the aim of increasing the international cultural influence of China. The conclusions point out that the efficacy of the Confucius Institute is hindered by the substantial inconsistency between the Institute's strategic narratives and China's poor record on human rights and persecution of dissidents. From these examples, evidence of attempts at as well as the challenges related to projecting influence at a global level emerge. Although relevant in its own right, this ambitious strategic narrative agenda seems hardly suitable for small states as explored and defined in Chapter 1, that is, as "*the weak part in an asymmetric relationship"* (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, 6). However, provided that different goals are set, these small state actors can make strategic use of political narratives in their international relations. As the previous section illustrated, small states have the ability to adjust their narratives to suit an external audience, even when projecting global influence might be well beyond their capabilities.[4] Such strategic narrative use could for small states be most appropriate in the pursuit of less ambitious objects, such as improving relations with a powerful ally or defusing the tensions with a prominent neighbour. For this reason, the concept of strategic narratives as proposed by Miskimmon et al (2014) needs to be adjusted to the research object of this thesis, which is the agency of small states vis-à-vis external prominent actors. In light of these assumptions and to take into account these methodological considerations, the research question: "*How do the South Caucasian countries navigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia?"* can be operationalised as: "How can the South

[4] Countries such as Switzerland and Singapore constitute exceptions, as their ability to influence is far greater than their size.

Caucasian states *make strategic use of rhetoric* to cope with the situation of asymmetry in relation to the West and Russia?"

Before addressing this question, a clear conceptualisation of all the players under analysis must be introduced. The wording of the question, together with the conclusion of Chapter 1, anticipates an analysis of interactions at the systemic level. Thus, in this thesis Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan will be treated for the most part[5] as corporate actors that in their dealings with the West and Russia consciously engage in self-projection. Reflecting the relevance of this analytical level, the main targets are not individuals in foreign populations but other states and international entities, conceived of as "corporate audiences". Therefore, while this work agrees with the definition of a speech as: *"a structured verbal chain of coherent speech acts uttered on a special social occasion for a specific purpose by a single person, and addressed to a more or less specific audience*" (Schmitz 2005, 698 in Reisigl 2007, 243), both the agents and the targets are taken to be not individual people but rather corporate actors. This holds true equally for the cases of Azerbaijani public diplomacy and the Armenian diaspora since in these sub-sections the conclusions will once again concern the systemic relationship with Russia and the West. It is important to note that while the existence and relevance of domestic and international grassroots audiences are fully acknowledged this aspect will not be dealt with systematically in this work. It also must be added that, while these narratives are outlined and discussed, it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to address questions of how they originate and how they relate to other issues such as national identity and cognitive elements. In brief, while it is acknowledged that the materials under analysis contain insights that go beyond the strategic dimension, this research project is specifically concerned with this very dimension.

Strategic narratives, silences and context: the role of 'political implicatures'

As will emerge throughout the chapters, narratives will not be assessed in a vacuum but rather in relation to the context in which they are imbedded. In this regard, it is acknowledged that discourse is both constitutive[6] of context and, at the same time, located in and constrained by this same context (Taylor 2001, 5). This point is relevant as this work does not simply aim to outline the political discourse in question but to explain the strategic element related to it. In other words, it

[5] While in some cases the differences between presidential, political and media discourse will be outlined, the main argument developed throughout the thesis is that of each country's projection of the Self vis-à-vis the West and Russia.
[6] This aspect will not be dealt with in this thesis.

does not simply aim to produce a thematic analysis of the political discourse but, more ambitiously, it endeavours to interpret the pragmatic choices related to the interaction with the West and Russia.

To this end, a suitable approach can be borrowed from Van Dijk's (2005) analysis of former Spanish President Aznar's speeches in 2003 in relation to the Iraq war. In this work, Van Dijk refers to 'political implicatures' as the pragmatic use of the language in relation to the context. To illustrate this concept, Van Dijk (2005, 69) argues that Mr. Aznar's insistence on the peaceful nature of his politics, notwithstanding his support for the intervention in Iraq, should not be analysed in purely semantic terms. In fact, it should be understood as a conscious attempt to shield his person and his party from criticism from both citizens and the parliamentary opposition. Similarly, the frequent mentions in these speeches of numerical data, such as the exact quantity of chemical agents or litres of anthrax allegedly kept in Iraq, could be interpreted as an informed attempt by Mr Aznar to emphasize the validity of his claims vis-à-vis the pacifist opposition, which could not respond with numerical counter-data. Similar observations can be made about Bostdorff and Goldzwig's (1994) analysis of President Kennedy's rhetoric, which featured both realistic and pragmatic arguments. In an analysis of the latter, the frequent evocation of historical and legal notions is seen as an attempt by President Kennedy to present himself to the public as a competent and knowledgeable leader. Similarly, Bostdorff and Goldzwig (1994, 523) interpret the references to "experts", often overtly labelled as crucial actors in the decision-making of the Vietnam War, as an attempt to keep the conflict removed from public debate. In an effort to summarise these dynamics, Van Dijk (2006, 170) refers to contextual models as the "*the basis of our 'pragmatic' understanding of discourse*", which involve not only the content of the message but, among other things, the speaker's projection of the Self and of the issues at the stake. While the aforementioned works concerned rhetoric addressed at popular audiences, this thesis shows that 'political implicatures' (this term, borrowed from Van Dijk [2005], will be used across all chapters) and pragmatic elements are also relevant in the case of corporate audiences.

Explaining the relationship between discourse and context requires not only a focus on rhetorical themes but also a consideration of "discourse omissions", since a context-informed interpretation of silences can be as meaningful as an analysis of voiced declarations. Aydın-Düzgit (2016) in her analysis of the AKP discourse on Europe and Europeanisation concludes that there has been a recent consolidation of a narrative that distances Turkey from Europe. This can be inferred not only from the fact that Brussels is often represented as an uninvited intruder but also in the realisation that, in a departure from the past, the majority of foreign policy speeches do not mention

the EU at all, focusing instead on extra-EU countries, especially those in the Middle East and North Africa. In a similar way, the expression “silent response” can be a useful tool in the understanding of certain international dynamics, characterised by the discursive omissions of certain actors. Claudia Kedar (2010) looks at British non-intervention in relation to the exclusion of Argentina from the Bretton Wood Conference in 1944, an exclusion championed largely by the US. Notably, in spite of the positive British-Argentinian relationship that existed at the time, while the British treasury issued lengthy documents about national quotas, no mention was made of the non-invitation of Buenos Aires. According to Kedar (2010), London did not try to persuade Washington to alter its position as to do so would have been functional to the pattern of Anglo-Argentinian dependence of the time. Therefore, by remaining silent England was acting in its best national interest. Similarly, Kai He (2008) examines the lack of declarations by Indonesian authorities concerning Beijing’s complaints about the anti-Chinese riots in May 1998. That silence was remarkable since ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have always been a sore point in the relationship between the two countries and also given the general over-assertive attitude of Jakarta. In 1976, the Suharto Government severed diplomatic relations with the PRC due to its alleged support for the abortive coup d'état of the "September 30 Movement". Even though bilateral ties were restored in 1990, some lingering tensions remained. In 1994, following a number of anti-Chinese riots, China's declarations of concern were harshly dismissed by Jakarta as improper meddling in domestic affairs. Given these circumstances, the lack of reaction from Indonesia during a similar situation in 1998 can be interpreted not as a casual omission but rather as a notable change in the foreign policy behaviour of the country.

Borrowing from these works, this thesis deems it appropriate to analyse the political discourse (inclusive of discursive omissions) of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia not in purely semantic or thematic terms but rather in light of the ‘political implicatures’ (Van Dijk 2005) related to the West and Russia. In other words, this thesis will look at the way in which certain rhetorical choices are related to pragmatic attempts to self-project in a certain way and thus to ultimately promote particular outcomes.

Case selection

The decision to focus on the South Caucasus region was taken due to the intrinsic relevance of the region and also because it can provide some generalisable insights into the relationship between small states and their greater counterpart. As outlined in Chapter 1, while numerous studies examine the way in which external actors approach the South Caucasian region, the foreign

policies of each of these countries tend to be assessed in separate studies. In this way, possible cross-country patterns or similarities are missed. Secondly, and as concerns the potential for generalisability, these states constitute an example of small extra-EU states that are attempting to cope with an asymmetry in relation to greater external actors. Since this work focuses on the West and Russia as external counterparts, a similar research design could be applied to the remaining Eastern Partnership countries, namely Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. Additionally, were the necessary adjustments made, this model could be applied to a broader range of small states. It must be specified that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are considered small states because of both their size and their political narratives. Notably, in their political discourses, all the three South Caucasian presidents refer to the smallness of their own countries.

In order to conduct the empirical investigation, two sub-cases were selected for each country under analysis. In the process, the trade-off between structural symmetry and intrinsic relevance has been reflected upon. Commenting on the state of the discipline, Bailes et al. (2014, 27) argue that soft- and hard-power dimensions are treated unevenly in the Northern hemisphere and in the developing countries. In acknowledgement of this, for each country under analysis this thesis has selected one case within a more traditional understanding of foreign policy, focusing on issues such as security and trade, and a second "softer" case". Had it been decided instead to choose similar cases, such as ones capturing conventional security and economic situations, for the entire thesis, an elegant research design and comparable research findings could have resulted. However, this would have come with a cost, namely that the sub-case population would have appeared to have been cherry-picked for the sake of symmetry. In the end, the validity of the conclusions could have been overshadowed by allegations of selection bias. In order to avoid such a situation, the case studies have been chosen on the basis of their intrinsic relevance. Therefore, and on the basis of the author's extensive readings and fieldwork,[7] this thesis has selected the most relevant foreign policy events for each country under analysis. The table below summarises the cases under analysis.

[7] The case selection has been done in light of a deep knowledge of the context. However, the very term "relevance" implies some component of subjective choice. The author's positionality is discussed in the next sections.

Country	Hard case	Soft case
Armenia	The U-turn in 2013	State-diaspora relations
Georgia	The Russo-Georgian war in 2008	The visa liberalisation process
Azerbaijan	Energy diplomacy	Public diplomacy

Figure 1: a summary of the case selection

As emerges from the table, some of these are "proper" case studies, namely the Armenian U-Turn, the Russo-Georgian war, and the visa liberalisation process, while the others could be better characterised as processes and/or dynamics. The reason for allowing this wide selection is a desire to analyse the most significant aspects of the foreign policy experience of these countries, taking into account the relevant 'political implicatures', without this goal being constrained for the sake of a symmetric research design. In this regard, it is considered that any loss in terms of elegance is compensated for by gains in terms of empirical veracity. Furthermore, an attempt is made to avoid fallacies related to "comparing apples and oranges". The broad literature review outlined in Chapter 1 shows that foreign policy making can be informed by a plurality of factors, such as domestic bargaining and regime type. This suggests that the three countries under study, as well as their foreign policy behaviours, are characterised by significant differences, which raises doubts as to their "immediate comparability". Therefore, choosing intrinsic relevance as the main selection criteria reinforces the findings on cross-country patterns and dynamics, as they are not related to a potentially-flawed research design.

Given these premises, the justification for the specific cases selected is the following.[8] In the case of Armenia, the U-Turn and the discourse on diaspora are analysed. The U-Turn, which refers to the decision taken in 2013 to end association agreement talks with the EU and to join the Russian-led Eurasian Union instead, redefined the foreign policy possibilities of the country, making clearer the limits set by Russia and the possible forms of interaction with the West. As concerns the second case, the diaspora has often been defined as a crucial asset of the country (Minasyan 2012; Mirzoyan 2010), even though ruling authorities actively limit its influence. Throughout the chapter on Armenia, it is argued that this desire to restrict the influence of the diaspora is due not

[8] More extensive explanation about case selection is included in each empirical chapter.

only to state-diaspora dynamics but also to considerations of the external projection of the country. In the case of Georgia, the Russo-Georgian war and the discourse on visa liberalisation are the cases selected. In 2008, the conflict with Russia appeared to be the culmination of tensions between the administrations of Saakashvili and Putin, the roots of which could be traced back through the previous years (Fawn and Nalbandov 2012). Additionally, this event highlighted the limited leverage of Georgia in the EU and the US, notwithstanding the stated unconditional commitment to a pro-Western orientation. After the conflict, changes took place both at the domestic and international level. In a similar manner, the discourse on visa policy illustrates the recent attempt to redefine the relationship with the West, moving from one of unconditional allegiance to a more balanced partnership. In this regard, the effort to frame the request for visa liberalisation not as a unilateral benefit for Tbilisi but rather as a mean of advancing territorial reintegration and preserving the pro-Western orientation of the country is significant. Finally, turning to Azerbaijan, energy diplomacy and public diplomacy have been included due to the emphasis placed in presidential narratives on these aspects, which are presented as crucial components of the independent foreign policy of the country. The case of energy diplomacy shows that, in spite of a nominally interest-based foreign policy, Baku is much more assertive with the West than with Russia. While reference is made to the redrawing of 'the energy map of Europe', care is taken not to provoke unnecessary tensions with Moscow. An example of this is provided by the careful manner in which any issue pertaining to a possible trans-Caspian pipeline is handled. Similarly, in the case of public diplomacy, the West is addressed through a combination of grand events and rebukes for meddling in domestic affairs. At the same time, even though the main goal of the public diplomacy strategy consists of shaping sympathetic international public opinion over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, specific references to the Kremlin, or initiatives targeting it, are notably limited.

The main time range covered in the analysis is that between 2009 and 2016. The post-2009 scenario has been chosen as the main focus of the thesis since the modern South Caucasus cannot be understood without taking into account the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008 and the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009. The Russo-Georgian war had an impact not only on Tbilisi but also on the rest of the region. In fact, it re-enforced Russia's commitment to maintaining its influence in the region. The launch of the EaP in 2009 can be interpreted as a reaction to that. As for the end-date, 2016 was selected due to the timing of this thesis. While in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan the end-date chosen falls early in 2016, the Georgian parliamentary election in October 2016 made it necessary to extend the analysis for Georgia to the end of that

year. These dates should not be understood as rigid boundaries. For example, in the analysis of the Russo-Georgian war, detailed attention is also paid to earlier events.

Source selection

The selection of materials has been done in light of the scope, and conversely of the limits, of this research. As outlined in Chapter 1, the main focus of this work is the use of strategic narratives in a context of international interactions. The methodological operationalisation of this requires some reflection and conceptual choices since, as the following works show, political narratives are not an unproblematic concept. De Leonardis (2016, 26), in his assessment of the official Georgian narrative under the Saakashvili presidency, considers the issue of: "*Assessing to what extent such narrative was hegemonic among the wider public*". Hellman and Wagnsson (2015) look at the consistency between the narratives proposed by on-line actors, such as bloggers and cyber-activists, and those proposed by governmental actors. In doing so, they notice that the broad and multi-national English-speaking online community is particularly rich in dissenting opinions. The ultimate argument relates to the fact that the technological revolution took place in recent years, and in doing so mitigated the over-prominent position of governments in the realm of international communication. As said by Seib (2010, 742): "*A disseminated message can instantly be met by a counter-message*". However, while issues such as digital sphere and counter narratives are undoubtedly relevant to life in the countries under analysis, this thesis's focus on corporate actorness does not allow for their systematic inclusion in the chapters. It follows that this thesis will not deal specifically with the competing narratives within each country (even though these occasionally emerge in the analysis) but rather with the way the state as a whole projects itself externally. In order to operationalise this sense of wholeness, this work looks at Milliken's (1999) concept of "an elite's regime of truth", which refers to the role of elites in crafting a state's discourses. From this, elites can be conceived as gatekeepers, manning the borders between the various possible narratives and the ultimate official one. In practical terms, this work deems it appropriate to focus on political rhetoric, complemented by media sources. The latter feature both additional declarations and news, essential to the reconstruction of the context. Additional, the relevant regional academic literature is thoroughly reviewed.

In all three countries, the President has been the head of the state for most of the period under analysis, with the notable exception of Georgia, which transitioned to a parliamentary system after

2012.[9] While the peculiarities of the Georgian case[10] are tackled in a dedicated chapter, this thesis finds the official political discourse in these countries relatively homogeneous. Therefore, and given that the main goal of this thesis is to assess the strategic use of narratives within the state context, the materials under analysis are 1) presidential speeches 2) speeches of other political cadres 3) newspapers and press agencies. As emphasised in the previous sections, this work focuses on the strategic use of the language aimed at selected corporate state audiences. Considering this analytical goal, this thesis favours those materials originally made available in the English language. In his analysis of Georgian political discourse, De Leonardis (2016, 26) argues that the English translation of political speeches can be used as a primary source since these messages target not only a domestic audience but also an international one. This work considers this statement valid not only in the case of Tbilisi but also of Baku and Yerevan, as evidenced by the fact that they all have an updated English version of their official websites.[11] Turning to the practicalities, all presidential speeches[12] were systematically extracted from their respective official websites with the R package 'Castarter' (Comai 2017). Additionally, some additional material has been retrieved, in the English language, from local media sources and press agencies, such as "BBC Monitoring" mostly accessible through the electronic archive "LexisNexis". Given the number of sources under analysis, the texts have been organised and analysed with the "Microsoft Excel" and "NVivo" software. For purposes of clarity, all these non-academic sources (interviews included) are cited in footnotes[13] rather than in the Harvard style.

The analysis of the primary texts was informed by contextual knowledge, gained during seven months of fieldwork in the region, during which time the collection of texts was supplemented by expert interviews, which have assisted in the triangulation of the author's analysis.

Interviews and fieldwork

[9] At the end of 2016, the Armenian political system underwent a similar reform. However, that is beyond the timeframe analysed in this work. For further information see: Loda, C. 2015. "Armenia – From Semi-Presidentialism to Parliamentarism?", *Presidential Power Blog*, 16 September, http://presidential-power.com/?p=3805 .

[10] In addition to the 2012 Constitutional reform, Georgia diverges from the other cases due to its higher level of democratisation.

[11] The website "President of Georgia" only has an English and Georgian version while the other two countries offer also the option of a Russian language version.

[12] Although the speeches of President Saakashvili were removed from the website "President of Georgia", copies of these were available to the author.

[13] When not specified, all the electronic links were last accessed on 5 June 2017.

Attributing relevant meaning to the 'political implicatures' of a certain political discourse, and even more so to the related omissions of this discourse, requires detailed knowledge of the countries in question and of their dynamics. In this case, this was achieved by supplementing desk research with fieldwork.

The author spent six months, between February 2015 and August 2015, living in the Georgian capital Tbilisi and working as a seconded research fellow for a research company, Geowell. In these months, she also conducted fieldwork in Azerbaijan (between May and June of 2015) and Armenia (between June and July 2015). In 2016, she returned to the region for another round of interviews in Georgia (September 2016) and Armenia (October 2016). The respondents, recruited through a mix of purposive sampling and snowballing,[14] are active in the following sectors: diplomacy, academia, politics, research and civil society. In total, more than 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted, all in the English language. While some extracts from these interviews can be found throughout the chapters, most of these findings have not been directly included. However, they have been an essential tool in gaining a greater understanding of the countries and the region.

Even though some relevant factual elements emerged from the interviews, most questions were aimed at filling analytical gaps or double-checking intuitions about the relationship between context and discourse, including omissions in this discourse. Additionally, in the months spent in Tbilisi notes were taken on some relevant conversations. Opportunities for spontaneous interaction are an undisputable advantage of a long period fieldwork, as they allow for the possibility of receiving unexpected information in informal situations (Ahram and Goode 2016, 842). The author has also reflected deeply on the way in which her positionality might have played into the interviewing process. Emmanuele Claude Sabot (1999), reflecting on her own fieldwork, noticed that her respondents were much more helpful in Scotland than in her native France. Furthermore, discussing her experience with a male American colleague, who had also conducted research in her French hometown, she realised that the very same interviewees were much more keen to share reserved information and material with him rather than with her. This led Sabot (1999) to consider the role of gender, age, language and the "inside/outside dimension" in the process of interviewing. Therefore, it can be assumed that the personal characteristic of this author, namely her being a

[14] Richardson (2014), reflecting on his doctoral fieldwork experience in Russia, argues that purely purposive sampling is unlikely to be possible in a PhD project, not least because: "elites can be acutely conscious of their own importance". Given this, a suitable coping technique consists in making contacts before and during the field trip and asking these to suggest additional respondents.

woman, in her late twenties, originally from outside the region, may have unconsciously affected her respondents, who nevertheless in most cases were extremely helpful and professional. Turning to the potential biases of the author, the embeddedness of some of these at the unconscious level should be assumed. However, some strategies to mitigate these potential biases were adopted. Firstly, the months spent in Georgia and her trips in Armenian and Azerbaijan allowed her to become familiar with local customs of being and interacting. Additionally, Berry's (2002) suggestions about "doing the homework" and arriving prepared to interviews were diligently followed. This translated, in practical terms, into undertaking meticulous desk research before each fieldwork trip.

Conclusion

Over the previous pages, the main conceptual and methodological precepts underpinning this thesis were outlined. Summarising these, the main points that emerge are:

- Methodological choices are made due to their suitability for a certain research topic, not *vice versa*.
- Small states can be strategic actors, even though their agency might be constrained
- The agency of small states can be inferred by the strategic use they make of narrative, including narrative omissions
- Political discourse is studied not only in terms of semantic meaning but also of 'political implicatures'. This term, coined by Van Dijk (2005), refers to the pragmatic goals related to specific rhetorical choices.
- In an attempt to deal with these issues at the systemic level, both agents and audiences must be treated as corporate actors. Therefore, a detailed assessment of the domestic public and domestic debate goes beyond the scope of this work.
- In the selection of sub-case studies, intrinsic relevancy is favoured over structural symmetry
- 'Political implicatures' are hypothesised by the author, on foot of meticulous desk research and expert interviews. Notwithstanding the firm analytical rigour, some subjectivity and positionality are acknowledged.

These concepts allow for an innovative approach to the study of the foreign policy of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In this research, it is acknowledged that each of these countries is in a condition of asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia. At the same time, it is argued that they are

not purely responsive pawns and that their agency can be inferred from their strategic use of the political rhetoric. As will be further commented upon in the final conclusions, this work aims to offer an innovative conceptual and methodological approach, replicable by other IR scholars interested in the investigation of the agency of small states. Moreover, it is argued that the concept of strategic narratives, which refers to the way in which states articulate their political discourse in order to exercise influence on some external audiences, can be adjusted to the study of small states. While the limited size of these states normally does not allow them to exercise considerable influence, political discourse can nonetheless be consciously used to select a certain approach to some external actors.

To understand this dimension, this thesis refers to Van Dijk's (2005) 'political implicatures', which is the pragmatic use of political rhetoric both in terms of explicit content and implicit self-representation. Even though this present work does not aim to outline a "grand theory" of South Caucasian foreign policy, it is nevertheless believed that applying a consistent approach to the study of the three countries might shed some light on common dynamics and patterns.

CHAPTER 3: Armenia – the East, the West and the Diaspora

"Armenia, like a small boat, has again found itself in the very midpoint of turbulence. A war right next door, closed borders, problems with external communications, convoluted regional relations, clashing interests of great powers".[1] This statement, pronounced in 2008 by the Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan, illustrates the way that Armenia portraits itself vis-à-vis the international environment: as a small country, not blessed by geography, that is forced to acknowledge the priorities of bigger players. Given the situation, it is often argued that, rather than resisting these turbulent forces, the country's interest is better served by developing a web of cooperative international ties. As articulated by Mr Sargsyan: *"As a small country, we do not wish and cannot divide the world into friends and enemies. We rely on an evolutionary and balanced policy".*[2] From the aforementioned quotes emerges not only the relative smallness of Armenia but also the commitment to a prudent foreign policy which, in acknowledgement of the troublesome relationship with some neighbouring countries, is designed to maximise cooperation with the remaining external powers. However, in spite of these declarations of "multilateral friendship", efforts to address the research question: "*How does Armenia navigate its asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia?"* must be informed of the following notion: the hierarchical priority of Russia as a foreign policy vector, mostly because of security reasons.

Due to its limited resources and the complicated relationship it has with most of its neighbours, Armenia is often considered as the South Caucasian country in the highest need of external support. Two out of four of its national borders are closed, tension runs high with the neighbouring states of Azerbaijan and Turkey and there are almost no indigenous energy resources. Over time, security concerns have contributed to a reinforcing of ties with Russia, a powerful and sometimes unpredictable ally (Mirzoyan 2010). However, this crucial importance of Moscow has not prevented Armenia from displaying an interest in securing additional external partners, an effort that has been ongoing for roughly 20 years. The label of 'complementarity' given to this foreign policy strategy was coined by the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vartan Oskanian, at the end

[1] President of Armenia. 2008. "Speech delivered by President Serzh Sargsyan in the United States at the Official Reception hosted by the Embassy of Armenia to the US, permanent mission of Armenia to the United Nations and leading Armenian-American Organizations", 24 September, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2008/09/24/news-18/ .

[2] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan to the representatives of the U.S. Expert Community at the Carnegie Endowment", 1 October, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/10/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-Carnegie/ .

of the 1990s. In proposing this description of his country's foreign policy approach, Mr. Oskanian clarified that it did not imply equal relationships with all partners (at the time, the US and Russia), since the primacy of the Russo-Armenian relationship remained unchallenged (Mirzoyan 2010, 52). In other words, in a departure from the common understanding of the term, in the Armenian context 'complementarity' means multilateral cooperation within the room for manoeuvre allowed by Russia. Over the years, it has appeared that this desired complementarity has become a reality, with the high degree of manoeuvrability enjoyed by the country attested to by the ability to cooperate with NATO without provoking Russian discontent. In this regard, analyst Alexander Iskandaryan has commented: *"Our prime minister can ask for and successfully get 500m dollars from Russia and at the same time say thank you, we are not going to join the Customs Union, perhaps next time".*[3] Similarly, presidential discourse placed great emphasis on the country's diversified multilateral ties, as illustrated by the following quote: "*We consider cooperation with NATO a component of our security structure. On the other hand, we are not aspiring to join NATO*".[4] This declaration illustrates, *inter alia*, the manner in which complementarity requires a level of prudence. In this regard, any pledge of *membership* of Western-led organisations represents taboo in the Armenian political environment. In 2006, the pro-Western party "Orinats Yerkir" [Rule of Law] was ousted from the governing coalition as a consequence of a declaration, appearing in a German magazine, of ambitions to join NATO (Sasse 2013, 574). Furthermore, thanks to the role played by the Armenian-American diaspora, the relationship with Washington has been positive over time (Oskanian 2010, 208; Mirzoyan 2010, 19). However, the recent step taken in joining the Eurasian Economic Union necessitates some more up-to-date reflection on this policy of complementarity

In order to understand the current approach of Armenia to Russia and the West, the first sub-chapter analyses these actors in the context of the withdrawal from the Association Agreement (AA) negotiations with the EU in September 2013. This case has been selected because it illustrates clearly recent developments in 'complementarity', highlighting the leverage of Moscow and the resultant coping strategies of Yerevan. The second sub-chapter looks at the relationship between the diaspora, based in both the West and Russia, and foreign policy making. Even though the Western diaspora constitutes the main focus, some attention will be devoted to certain

[3] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2009. "Armenian pundit plays down security bloc's plan to set up rapid-reaction force", 2 July, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[4] President of Armenia .2008. "Interview of President Serzh Sargsyan to German 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung'", 11 November, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2008/11/11/news-18/ .

dynamics (and silences) involving Russia. This topic has been selected due to potential tensions between diasporic activism and the prudence necessary for complementarity. In the conclusion to the chapter, it is argued that in both cases under analysis Armenian political discourse can be seen to feature the same 'political implicature', which is that of a prudent international player, compliant with the limits set by greater powers, first and foremost Russia.

The great refusal: the Association Agreement and the Armenian U-Turn

On the third of September 2013 Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan announced the decision to join the Russian-led Customs Union. This move prevented Armenia from signing the EU-sponsored Association Agreement (AA), the terms of which had been discussed over four years and finally agreed upon in July 2013. However, the Customs Union's binding provisions made it technically incompatible, as opposed to ideologically incompatible, for Armenia sign up to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which is the part of the AA that concerns bilateral trade. More specifically, membership in the Customs Union implies the adoption of uniform import duties and international trade procedures, which prevent its members from signing additional free trade agreements (Vilpišauskas at al. 2012, 28). Therefore, the EU Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle firmly rejected a proposal from the Armenian authorities to sign the AA without the DCFTA.[5] Joining the Customs Union has not been cost-free for Armenia, as the DCFTA would have brought enormous benefits to the country, such as improving trade and investment and facilitating the progressive integration of Armenia into the huge EU market.[6] To translate into numbers: Armenia was estimated to gain €62 million in the short run and €146.1 million in the long run. More precisely, for the years following AA membership, a 2.3% growth in GDP and a 15.2% increase in export were envisaged (Ecorys 2013, 191). In addition to these benefits, the deal would have improved the external political situation of the country by offering some leverage vis-à-vis Turkey (Delcour 2015, 7). Instead, by taking the decision to join the EEU, Armenia faced the re-evaluation of its WTO commitments and a – roughly triple – rise in the price in goods imported from outside the Customs Union (Delcour 2015, 7). Finally, following the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict in 2014 Armenia found itself in a particularly vulnerable position. In 2014, the local currency, the dram, depreciated and, due to a drop in the rouble, the value of the remittances was nearly halved. This led to severe inflation,

[5] RFE/RL. 2015. "Fuele Says EU Not Abandoning Armenia", 24 December, http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-european-union-/25105725.html .
[6]European Commission. 2017. "Countries and Regions. Armenia", 22 February, http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/armenia/ .

resulting in prices rising by up to 40%,[7] with the economic situation further aggravated by the loss of competitiveness of Armenian products on the Russian market. Nonetheless, the withdrawal from the Association Agreement did not signal the end of EU-Armenian cooperation**.** For example, on 1 January 2014, the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation Treaty came into force.

The withdrawal from the AA agreement talks, and the successive attempts at cooperation with the EU, provide a clear example of 'complementarity in practice'. In this regard, Brussels represents a highly-valued partner as long as it does not jeopardise the relationship with Moscow, the most crucial and demanding ally. Building on this, the rest of the sub-chapter is devoted to corroborating this observation through the analysis of the strategic narratives in use vis-à-vis the EU and Russia, looking at both the messages projected and the related 'political implicatures'. It is concluded that, on the one hand, any potential source of confrontation with Moscow has been carefully avoided. On the other hand, it has been constantly signalled to the EU that, notwithstanding certain constraints, Armenia is fully interested in establishing and maintaining amicable ties and cooperation.

Russia and Armenia

Russia is Armenia's main partner, with this due to historic legacies, security and energy issues, trade volume and cultural proximity. For these reasons, Moscow constitutes an external vector *sui generis*, the importance of which cannot be matched by any other partner, including Washington or Brussels. However, the relationship is characterised by power equilibria and lingering tensions. The Armenian narrative reflects this complicated relationship: while Russia is often defined as a crucial security and economic partner, no specific requests or complaints are advanced. Similarly, discontent is never allowed emerge. In this way, it is clear that the terms of the relationship are determined for the most part by the "Big Brother" rather than negotiated between two equal partners.

The Armenian narrative acknowledges the importance of Russia. For example, in the aftermath of his presidential re-election, president Sargsyan said: *"I should repeat that my first trip abroad was conducted to Moscow, which is natural. It is natural because the Russian Federation is our strategic partner, our ally and it means that we are linked together with the military security as*

[7] Stratford. 2014. "The Tumultuous Birth of the Eurasian Economic Union", 31 December, Worldview, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/tumultuous-birth-eurasian-economic-union .

well as economic security issues".[8] This quote does not constitute an isolated case. In the years following this, the president reiterated the crucial nature of the Russo-Armenian relationship. As exemplified by the following extract, Russia is often depicted as a strategic ally: *"Our country has developed and continues to develop allied strategic partnership with Russia".*[9] Security appears to be the cornerstone of this relationship. After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia soon proved itself vital for the new-born Armenian Republic as between 1992 and 1993 Moscow supported Armenia with military and economic assistance[10] during the Nagorno-Karabakh war (Mirzoyan 2010, 33). Following on from this, cooperation was formalised in bilateral and multilateral forums. Notably, Armenia is among the founding members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (1991) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (1994). Additionally, on 29 August 1997 the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid" was signed.[11] This document was followed, three years later, by the Russo-Armenian "Declaration of Allied Cooperation in the 21st Century". Russia is also militarily present in Armenia, as the Gyumri military basis has been used by Russian troops since 1994. In 2010, the lease was extended until 2044. This security dimension is crucial as no actor could replace Russia in this role.

As remarked by an EU officer: "*We do not compete with Russia. We do not sell weapons".*[12] However, in spite of this dominant position of Russia in security affairs, the European Union constitutes the main export market of Armenia. Additionally, the achievement of EU regulation standards has contributed to the advancement of the Armenian business environment. In spite of this, the Armenian president often highlights the importance of Russia as trading partner and investor. Notably, Russia is the main bilateral trade partner of Armenia, pig iron and copper are the main exported commodities while energy resources are the principal imported ones.[13] The following quotes exemplify the warmth charactering the narrative around the Russo-Armenian economic relationship: "*Russia's economic presence in Armenia reflects the strategic interests of Armenia as well as Russia. Currently, Russia is Armenia's leading trade partner, and Russia*

[8] President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan met with the representatives of the Mass Media", 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference/ .

[9] President of Armenia. 2015. Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 5th media forum "At the Foot of Mount Ararat",18 March, http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Media-forum/ .

[10] The role played by Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is still matter of dispute. For more information, refer to De Waal (2013).

[11] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. 2016. "Bilateral Relations. Russia", 16 December, http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/ru/

[12] Interview with a member of the EU delegation to Armenia, Yerevan, (2015, 3 July).

[13] CIA Factbook. Nd. "Armenia", https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html (Last accessed 20 January 2016).

accounts for over 50 percent of all foreign investments in Armenia".[14] These solemn declarations, concerning both security and economy, may be interpreted as the expression of truly interiorised pro-Russian feelings. However, looking at the "discursive omissions", it could be hypothesised that, going beyond a façade of genuine friendship, the relationship rests on an imbalance of forces and lingering threats. In this regard, some authors have called the Russo-Armenian relationship unequal (Mirzoyan 2010, 53) and asymmetric (Giragosian 2014, Galstyan 2013, 3; Ademmer 2015, 677-679; Minassian 2008). Similarly, it has been observed that Moscow deploys its security trump card to safeguard its dominance in other sectors (Zolyan 2015; Delcour 2014). For all these reasons, Russia could be considered to be an unreliable partner (Mirzoyan 2010) and the partnership to be a "marriage of convenience" (ICG 2013, 8). Thus it is that the Armenian quest for security, mostly due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, makes Russia irreplaceable.[15]

An analysis of the Armenian discourse highlights these unbalanced dynamics in most realms, security included. Remarkably, although Russia is often defined as a security provider, this relationship is never described in anti-Azerbaijani terms. Consequently, Mr Sargsyan refrains from criticising Russia for its dealings with Baku. Responding to an interview question about the Russo-Azerbaijani ties, Sagsyan stated that Russia was a sovereign actor with its own priorities, free to pursue its interest by cooperating with Baku. In his words, the Russo-Armenian[16] strategic cooperation: *"does not mean that we have a right and an opportunity to forbid the Russians from cooperating with Azerbaijan"*.[17] The care taken not to create any tension by mentioning the "sore point" of Azerbaijan is particularly evident from an examination of the discourse relating to the Gyumri base and the CSTO Rapid Reaction forces. In spite of the obvious fear of the neighbour that exists in Armenia, the Russian military presence is depicted as a security provision of a generic

[14] President of Armenia. 2012. "Introductory remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the joint press conference with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin", 8 August, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2012/08/08/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-RF-Vladimir-Putin-Press/ .

[15] This analysis focuses on systemic elements. Thus, looking at the state level, some soft power elements can be see (Loda 2017; Dias 2013; Popescu and Wilson 2011; Popescu and Wilson 2009, Wilson and Popescu 2009).

[16] The same courtesy is not extended to the other CSTO members. Remarkably, on the occasion of a CSTO meeting (23-09-2013), Mr Sargsyan spoke against unspecified members taking pro-Azerbaijani positions. Kazakhstan seemed to be the target of the remark as before the CSTO meeting Astana had signed a document calling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the: "main obstacle to the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to stability and cooperation in the region without mentioning peoples' right to self-determination" [BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "Armenian leader raps stance of some members of Russia-led security bloc", 25 September, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis)].

[17] President of Armenia. 2014. "The joint press Conference of President Serzh Sargsyan and the President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman", 30 January, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-after-the-meeting-with-President-of-Czech-Republic/ .

nature. More specifically, even though it has been stated that: "*The presence of the base emanates from our own security interests",*[18] its utility is never justified in terms of the need to keep Baku at bay. This Azerbaijan-blind narrative in relation to Russo-Armenian security cooperation is clearly reproduced by lower political cadres. For example, at the end of October 2013 the top commander of the base in Gyumri, the Russian Colonel Andrey Ruzinsky, in a departure from the stated position of former President Medvedev,[19] declared to the Russian newspaper "Krasnaya Zvezda": *"If Azerbaijan decides to restore jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh by force the* [Russian] *military base may join in the armed conflict in accordance with* (…) *the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)".*[20] In spite of severe tensions with its neighbour, the Armenian establishment did not react with enthusiasm to this declaration. The main reaction was a statement given by the press secretary of Defence Minister Artsrun Hovhannisyan, who affirmed that any potential Azerbaijani aggression would not require the supportive intervention of Russia (or of the CSTO).[21] Similarly, Defence Minister Ohanyan stated that Armenia was in a position not only to react to but even to prevent possible attacks.[22]

This sense of self-reliance is in contrast with the frequent self-description of Armenia as a small state. Thus it is that these declarations, which allow Russia to avoid formally taking sides on a potentially thorny issue, seem to be made to save a strategic ally from an embarrassing situation (or, in a worst-case scenario, to prevent any declaration or action in Armenia's disfavour). Additionally, CSTO initiatives are never presented in anti-Azerbaijani terms. More specifically, the request to constitute CSTO[23] rapid reaction forces is never framed with reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or to the desire for protection from Azerbaijan. Additionally, the lack

[18] President of Armenia. 2012. "Introductory remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the joint press conference with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin", 8 August, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2012/08/08/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-RF-Vladimir-Putin-Press/ .

[19] Nichol, J. 2014. "Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S.", *Congressional research archive,* 2 April, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33453.pdf.

[20] RFE/RL. 2013. "Russian Base In Armenia Signals Role In Possible Karabakh War", *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty Armenian Service (Azatutyun),* 31 October, http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/25154047.html .

[21] Armenpress. 2013. "Armenia does not see necessity to engage CSTO or Russia to confront aggression by Azerbaijan: press secretary of Defense Ministry", 2013, 5 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[22] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2014. "Armenian defense minister: Army can prevent any Azeri attacks on border", 12 June, (retrieved through Lexis Nexis).

[23] By contrast, Azerbaijan feared this development. In 2009, when those forces where established, Azerbaijan looked at this development with concern. At that time, even if no reaction came out the presidential office, a few Azerbaijani experts and politician commented that the Rapid Reaction Forces were a threat to the country and that the NATO membership, or at least enhanced cooperation, should be considered [BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2009. "Azeri experts see CSTO rapid reaction force as threat", 8 February, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis)].

of clear rules governing the deployment of these forces is not regretted, even though this ambiguity could be to the disadvantage of Armenia.[24] In sum, the analysis of the security discourse concerning Russia, and of the relevant discursive omissions, not only highlights the importance of Russia as security provider but also the disparity of force between the two "strategic allies".

Turning to Russo-Armenian economic relations, fraternal declarations notwithstanding, a similar pattern emerges. However, in contrast to the modernising effect of Brussels (to be examined in the next section), over time Russia has been profiting from Armenia's contractual weakness. In exchange for the restructuring of the Armenian debt, Russia has progressively acquired numerous Armenian strategic assets. For example, in 2002 the Armenian parliament approved the handing over of shares of some companies to the Russian Federation.[25] Similarly in 2003, as result of unpaid fuel bills (roughly $40 million), the financial management of the nuclear reactor in Metsamor was taken over by the Russian power utility "United Energy Services" (UES).[26] In a nutshell, growing dependence on Russia pervades most productive sectors. Russian companies, including some state-controlled ones, are majority stakeholder in sectors like energy, air traffic control, railway transport, banking and mining.[27] This extensive presence of Russia in Armenia has reinforced a pattern of dependence since rather than of prioritising the economic growth of Armenia, Russia instead discourages potential alternative suppliers from entering the market. An example of this can be seen in the manner in which Gazprom actively prevented Iran from becoming an alternative gas supplier. In January 2014, the gas giant, in exchange for discounted gas rates, made Armenia agree not to purchase gas from any alternative supplier until 2043.[28] Once again, in this case, the political narrative reflects attempts on the part of political cadres not to create any tension with Moscow. For example, the Armenian Minister of Energy and Natural Resources defended the deal as economically convenient by saying that Russia was a cheaper gas supplier than Iran. Even though some members of the opposition contended that it was unwise to

[24] Tariverdiyeva, E. 2009. "Collective rapid reaction forces to scarcely likely provide military guarantees to Armenia that it seeks: ACNIS Director", *Trend News Agency*, 9 June, http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/1485030.html .

[25] The companies are the following: Yerevan Automated Control Systems Research Institute (evaluated $3.37million), Yerevan research institute of mathematical machines ($2.57 million), Scientific Industrial Enterprise of Material Science ($0.35 million), MARS ($56.29 million) and Razdan heat power plant ($31 million). [Information Agency Oreanda. 2002. "Armenia Hands Over Its Companies to Russia For Debt Repayment", *Economic News*, 5 December, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis)].

[26] Nuclear Engineering International.2003."Russia takes Control of Reactor", 31 March, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).

[27] Plus Media Solutions. 2013. "Washington: The Eurasian Union: Undermining Economic Freedom and Prosperity in the South Caucasus", 28 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[28] This agreement represented the last step taken by Russia to prevent Armenian form importing Iranian gas. For a detailed account see: Minassian (2008).

limit the energy options of the country for the following 30 years,[29] no critical voices emerged from the governing coalition. Notwithstanding this lack of criticism of the pervasive presence of Russia in the Armenian economy, it must be noted that Russia is never depicted as a modernising agent or as a benchmark of to be aspired to. By contrast, as shown in the next pages, such a role is attributed to Europe. Interpreting this silence, it would appear that the Russian model is not considered likely to foster local competitiveness in the long run.

The positive discourse concerning the Russian impact on the Armenian economy can be understood as a further indicator of the need not to jeopardise the relationship with Russia. As often stated by President Sargsyan, security is a top concern of Armenia. Consequently, and considering the irreplaceability of Russia as military ally, the absence of economy-related tensions is perceived as important for the maintenance of security. This can be clearly observed from the debate on membership of the Customs Union. The economic benefits of the Customs Union are only sporadically hinted at in the presidential narrative. In 2014, with reference to the favourable import conditions, President Sargsyan alluded to: *"Preferences the Customs Union shows to its member countries. For example, it affords us an opportunity to import power (...)*[30]*."* However, the bulk of the presidential narrative associates economic and security elements. When announcing the decision to join the Customs Union, President Sargsyan argued that: "*participating in one military security structure makes it unfeasible and inefficient to stay away from the relevant geo-economic area*".[31] As clearly outlined in the section on the issue, the broad Armenian debate on the U-Turn focused on the security rather than the economy implications of that choice.

Armenia and the EU

As examined in the previous section, Russia is Armenia's most significant external partner. However, since independence, Armeniahas also been interacting with the EU. As time has passed, this engagement with Brussels has increased. The Association Agreement talks were the last step of a longer path of dialogue and cooperation, preceded by the following steps: the institution of

[29]Yernjakyan, A. 2013. "Armenian MP: Gazprom has received the right for sole gas supplies to Armenia until 2043", 17 December, http://arminfo.info/index.cfm?objectid=484BE3E0-6729-11E3-BC4E0EB7C0D21663 .

[30] President of Armenia. 2014. "Joint Press Conference Delivered by president Serzh Sargsyan and French President Francois Hollande", 13 May, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/05/13/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-the-President-of-France/ .

[31]President of Armenia. 2013. "The RA President Serzh Sarkisian's remarks at the press conference on the results of the negotiations with the RF President Vladimir Putin", 3 September, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-working-visit-to-Russian-Federation/ .

bilateral relations in 1991 and the signature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1996 (though only entering into force in 1999). Armenia was then included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2006 and in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009. Following the Armenian withdrawal from the Association Agreement talks (in September 2013), Armenia and Brussels are now considering an alternative form of association. In contrast to the inescapable Russian presence, Brussels is perceived as a more limited actor, mostly committed to sectoral reforms and unable to offer membership perspectives (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015). That makes the EU suitable for the Armenian idea of complementarity, centred on "cooperation without membership". Additionally, the absence of a robust mechanism of conditionality allows the Armenian authorities to implement exclusively the reforms in which they are interested. In brief, even though the EU cannot replace Russia, its non-coercive modalities mean that Armenia is extremely interested in establishing and maintain certain ties with Brussels. This is reflected in the discourse.

In keeping with this longstanding interaction, the Armenian presidential narrative devotes considerable space to the relationship with the EU and with the European states and to the European cultural-normative dimension. The EU has generally been described as a desirable partner, useful in promoting modernisation and development. For example, on the occasion of a meeting with Mr Van Rompuy, former president of the European Council, President Sargsyan declared: "*Armenia is resolute to implement large-scale reforms aimed at further democratization, strengthening of the rule of law, considerable improvement of the social and economic situation and increased efficiency of the state governing structures of our country".*[32] As emerged from the previous section, Russian economic intervention has been aimed mainly at acquiring strategic assets rather than at fostering the growth of the country. In contrast, Brussels, with its advanced regulatory standards, is a more productive partner. As a result, Moscow's business climate is considered worse than Armenia's. According to the World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business" Index,[33] in 2015 Russia was ranked 51st while Armenia was ranked 35th. Excluding the Baltic States, this is the highest placement for a former Soviet country. Looking at the Armenian political narrative, it emerges that the EU countries, rather than the post-Soviet world, are generally mentioned as benchmarks for development. For example, in 2012 Mr Sargsyan, proudly setting

[32] President of Armenia. 2012."Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Joint Press Conference with the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy", 4 July, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2012/07/04/news-82/.
[33] World Bank. 2015. "Doing Business. Economy Ranking", http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings (Last accessed 2015, 18 December).

out the economic achievements of the country, said that: "*In 2012, our economic growth was 7,2 percent and it happened when the economic growth in European Union was 0.2% and in the experts' opinion the global economy grew 3.5 percent, probably less*".[34] In comparison, Russia and other post-Communist economies are never cited as benchmarks. This supports the contention that Moscow offers limited modernisation appeal. Even though the EU-Armenia interaction has mostly been based on sectoral cooperation (Ademmer and Delcour 2016; Loda 2016; Ademmer 2015; Delcour, and Wolczuk 2015; Ademmer and Börzel 2013), the role of the EU is never articulated as being confined to these sectors. On the contrary, it includes high-principles like: "*Democracy, human rights and rule of law (..) [and] consolidation of civil society"*.[35]

Looking at the normative basis of the EU-Armenian relationship, common values have often been portrayed as stemming from long-standing historical ties. Presidential speeches have included those topics on various occasions. For example, on the occasion of the third Eastern Partnership summit, Mr Sargsyan said that: *"The Eastern Partnership* (…) *[provides] an opportunity to build qualitatively new, closer and expanded relationship upon the basis of shared European values. Developing such a relationship stems from Armenia's and Armenian people's spiritual-cultural and historical-political heritage".*[36] Furthermore, in discussing in Rome EU-Armenian ties, the president declared: *"We are natural partners because our partnership is first of all rooted in shared values: Armenians and Armenian civilization are a part of European civilization, and our state is committed to promoting those values".*[37] In spite of these declarations, some ultra-conservative stances, such as the negative attitude toward homosexuality,[38] widespread in Armenian society, are incompatible with progressive EU-standards. However, the political discourse resolves this contradiction by articulating the normative dimension of shared Christian roots. In this way, the common identity is implicitly articulated as religious, and therefore based

[34] President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan met with the representatives of the mass media", 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference/ .
[35]President of Armenia. 2015. "Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the fourth Eastern Partnership Summit", 22 May, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/22/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Eastern-Partnership-Latvia-speech/ .
[36]President of Armenia. 2013.Statement by Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia at the Third Eastern Partnership Summit", 11 November, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/11/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-at-the-third-Eastern-Partnership-summit-speech/ .
[37]President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Supper with Italian Parliamentarians - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 10 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/04/10/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-italian-parliamentarians-speech/ .
[38] Martirosyan, Samson (2013).The 'Gender Equality Law' Hysteria in Armenia, The Armenian Weekly, September 20, http://armenianweekly.com/2013/09/20/the-gender-equality-law-hysteria-in-armenia/ .

on precise dogmas and conceptions, instead of as secular-cosmopolitan. This trait is often pointed out in bilateral contexts. For example, meeting the Greek president, Mr Sargsyan called the two nations: "*Representatives of the two most ancient Christian peoples".*[39] Similarly, on the occasion of his visit to Rome, he said that: "*Our relations are derived from a shared set of Christian values and world outlook*".[40]

However, these common religious traits are not presented as something uniting Armenia exclusively with Europe and thus driving it apart from other civilizations. There are frequent references to the positive ties that Armenia enjoys with the surrounding Muslim countries. In fact, President Sargsyan said that: "*as the first Christian state in the world, we have historical and inter-state ties with numerous Muslim states".*[41]Along the same lines, it is clearly stated that outbursts of violence are not the result of religious or ethnic divisions. The following quote exemplifies this: "*I assure you that crime is not a result of the separation between a Christian and a Muslim, a Jew and a German, an Armenian and a Turk, a Hutu and a Tutsi, but is a result of the divide which is present between the ones who embrace universal and fundamental values and the ones who deny them".*[42] Finally, any attempt to frame the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a "war of religion" is dismissed as incorrect and misleading. See, for example: "*Azerbaijan is trying mulishly to present in the Islamic circles the conflict in the light of religious disagreements. I believe those who are more or less familiar with the history of the Armenian people and causes of the conflict will never believe such nonsense".*[43] In brief, it can be said that for Armenia its

[39]President of Armenia. 2014."Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan on the results of the negotiations with President Karolos Papoulias of Greece", 30 September, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/09/30/Statement-of-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-President-of-Greece/ .

[40] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Supper with Italian Parliamentarians - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 10 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/04/10/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-italian-parliamentarians-speech/ .

[41] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan to the representatives of the U.S. Expert Community at the Carnegie Endowment", 1 October, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/10/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-Carnegie/ .

[42] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Supper with Italian Parliamentarians - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 10 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/04/10/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-italian-parliamentarians-speech/ .

[43] President of Azerbaijan. 2011." Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Joint Press Conference with the President of Lebanon Michel Suleiman", 9 December, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2011/12/09/news-79/ .

European ties, far from being considered as based solely on functional cooperation in specific sectors, are seen to embrace a fuzzy identitarian dimension.

Shared values are also depicted as the bedrock of EU-Armenian cooperation. Considering the mixed governance record of the country, this might be interpreted as pure rhetoric, fostered by the soft focus of Brussels on political reforms (Ademmer and Delcour 2016; Loda 2016; Ademmer 2015; Delcour, and Wolczuk 2015; Ademmer and Börzel 2013). Remarkably, Brussels has provided funds and assistance for sectoral ameliorations without insisting on democratisation and political reforms (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015). Equally remarkably, unlike the case of Ukraine and Moldavia, free and fair elections were not set as a pre-condition to the initiation of Association Agreement talks with Armenia (Babayan and Shapovalova 2011). Curiously, the normative element is raised in a particular field: that of distinguishing Armenia from Azerbaijan, with this latter often described as unconcerned with international norms, values and conventions. Baku is portrayed as having a normative conception of the cooperation with the EU and is said to perceive: "*The European realm exclusively as a convenient market for selling oil and gas".*[44] On the occasion of the joint conference with the President of the European Commission, Donald Tusk, President Sargsyan directly compared the attitude of Azerbaijan and Armenia: "*Both at the time and today I have remained in the belief that if Azerbaijan has oil and gas, then why not let the European Union cooperate with Azerbaijan in that sphere. We want our country to undergo reforms, strengthen democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law. Let us cooperate in this sphere".*[45]

Speculating on the reasons behind the insistence by Armenian elites on these normative elements, the desire to distance Azerbaijan from the values of the European family emerges. On the other hand, Armenia portrays itself as a unique actor that, despite lacking energy resources or marketable assets, still fits into the EU agenda. Far from being a sporadic claim, this discursive portrayal is part of a broader narrative. President Sargsyan often points out the democratic (or democratising) nature of Armenia versus the deep authoritarianism of Azerbaijan, which is also depicted as a spoiler in the negotiations for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[46] On

[44] President of Armenia. 2011."Remarks of the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the joint press conference with the President of Slovenia Danilo Turk", 13 April, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2011/04/13/news-65/ .
[45]President of Armenia. 2015."Joint press conference of President Serzh Sargsyan and EC President Donald Tusk", 20 July, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2015/07/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-answers-at-press-conference-with-Donald-Tusk/ .
[46] See for example: President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan at the Plenary Session of the PACE responded to the questions raised by the members of the Parliament", 2 October.

the basis of these differences, the possibility of the long-term normative convergence of Azerbaijan with any kind of shared values is questioned since "*Azerbaijan utilizes these program not for the benefit of the region, deepening further the existing dividing lines".*[47] This representation of the Self vis-à-vis Azerbaijan sometimes assumes security tones. In 2013, on the occasion of a national security meeting, President Sargsyan observed that in the previous year the GDP of Armenia had grown faster than that of the neighbouring states and that this was because, instead of being over-reliant on natural resources, Armenia was able to transform and diversify its economy[48].

In sum, Armenian strategic narratives show that, even though it cannot replace Russia, the EU is perceived as a highly-desired partner. The choice to adopt a normative rhetoric, rather than being a pragmatic decision, can be seen as an attempt to emphasise the suitability of Armenia as a partner of the West.

The U-Turn reflected in the narrative

After the announcement that Armenia was to join the Customs Union, it soon became clear that this choice signalled an end to the Association Agreement negotiations. The Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt tweeted about the U-Turn of Armenia.[49] Similarly, a member of the European delegation in Yerevan stated that they had learned only a few days before the announcement that they "*would receive an irrefutable proposal".*[50] While this move was undoubtedly sudden, it would be incorrect to talk of a dramatic evolution of Armenian foreign policy. Notably, the need to navigate the new circumstances, the search for complementarity and the attempt to cooperate with the EU were never repudiated. This in line with the image of Brussels as a modernising and non-threatening partner: even though Russian primacy remains unchallenged, incentives are high

http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/10/02/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-answered-the-questions-of-PACE-members/.

[47]President of Armenia. 2011. "President Serzh Sargsyan responds to the question raised by a journalist at the press conference with the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy", 7 October, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2011/10/07/news-73/ .

[48]President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan's Opening Remarks at the National Security Council Meeting", 5 June, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/06/05/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-invited-a-meeting-of-the-National-Security-Council-speech/ .

[49] RFE/RL. 2013. "Yerevan Says Association Agreement With EU Still Possible", 4 September, http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-customs-union-eu--association-agreement/25095833.html .

[50] Interview with a Member of the European Delegation in Armenia, Yerevan (2015, 3 June).

to “complement” the shortcomings deriving from the close association with this unpredictable ally.

The “U-Turn” in September 2013 came as a surprise to most observers as in the previous months Customs Union officials had shown no particular interest in inviting Armenia to join. Similarly, the domestic discussions of this possibility had always been limited. Looking at the narratives of the Customs Union, the predominant idea had been to encourage cooperation with Armenia rather than inviting it to join. In December 2012 Viktor Khristenko,[51] Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, hinted that in the future Armenia might sign some memorandum of understanding with the CU. Tatyana Valovaya, a high-ranking member of the Eurasian Economic Commission's Board, when discussing the relationship of the Eurasian Union with external partners declared that: "*I can say quite sincerely that deeper integration, not enlargement, is a priority goal for us in the Eurasian Economic Union (…) Armenia is also interested to have certain ties with the Customs Union”.*[52] This exclusion of membership perspectives seemed in line with domestic preferences, as throughout this same time various Armenian stakeholders had voiced their reservations about the CU. Gagik Kocharyan, formerly Head of the Department of Trade and Market Management of the Armenian Ministry of Economy (and later a member of the Eurasian Economic Commission[53]), bluntly declared that: "*The Customs Union implies that customs points among member states disappear and they can't pursue their foreign trade policy on their own*.” He also added that it would irredeemably jeopardise the Association Agreement negotiations with the EU.[54] Similarly, in May 2012 Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan wrote in the Russian journal *Vedomosti* that while Armenia had always supported further integration between the Eurasian Union and the CIS, joining the Customs Union would make no sense. This was because, in contrast with the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the lack of common borders meant that the benefits of membership were not clear. In the same article, he praised the EU modernising actions and supported the adoption of the standards necessary for entry into the Free

[51] Pismennaya, Evgenia. 2012. Интервью - Виктор Христенко, председатель коллегии Евразийской экономической комиссии [Interview - Viktor Khristenko, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission], *Vedomosti*, 19 December, http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2012/12/19/my_ne_banket_organizuem_viktor_hristenko_predsedatel .

[52] ITAR-TASS. 2013.“Discussion on new Eurasian Economic Union members not over yet minister”, 18 July, (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[53] EEC. Nd. “Gagik Karlenovich Kocharyan”, *Eurasian Economic Commission*, http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/act/trade/catr/Pages/direktor.aspx (Last accessed 2016, 10 January).

[54] Mediamax. 2012. “Armenia may interact with the Customs Union, Khristenko thinks”, 19 December, http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/business/6507/#sthash.nGN8qKX8.dpuf .

Trade Zone. These standards were considered to ultimately enhance the global competitiveness of Armenia.[55]

In July 2013 the negotiations between Armenia and the EU had finished and everything was in place for the Association Agreement to be signed, until the surprising U-Turn in September. At the end of June 2013, Serzh Sargsyan had clearly stated that: "*Armenia is a country which has registered an impressive progress in the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership. We build our work based not on "either-or" but on "both" principle, and I don't see any incongruity here".*[56] Furthermore, a few months before President Sargsyan had publicly dismissed any interest on the part of Russia in expanding the Customs Union: *"Who claim that Russians are coercing us into becoming a member of the Customs Union. No such thing. How many times should I repeat? The members of the Customs Union have no intention yet to involve anyone else, at least when it comes to us, I haven't seen such an intention".*[57] However, following the U-Turn the narrative quickly adjusted to the new room for manoeuvre allowed by Russia. Suddenly, failing to integrate into the Customs Union was presented as a threat to the safety of Armenia. Of significance in this regard is that, when announcing the decision to join the CU, President Sargsyan pointed out, with reference to the Armenian membership of the CSTO, that: "*participating in one military security structure makes it unfeasible and inefficient to stay away from the relevant geo-economic area."*[58]

With very few exceptions,[59] most speeches linked membership of the CU to both economic and security benefits. Similarly, the broader Armenian debate developed as highly-securitised. The political analyst Khachik Galstyan, interviewed by the pro-government newspaper Hayots

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[55] Sarkisian, T. 2012. "Армения смотрит на Европу" [Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia looks to Europe], *Vedomosti*, 16 May, https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2012/05/16/vremya_sobirat_edinye_standarty .

[56]President of Armenia. 2013. "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the joint press conference with the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski", 25 July, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/06/25/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-the-President-of-Poland/ .

[57]President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan met with the representatives of the mass media", 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference/ .

[58] President of Armenia. 2013. "The RA President Serzh Sarkisian's remarks at the press conference on the results of the negotiations with the RF President Vladimir Putin", 3 September, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-working-visit-to-Russian-Federation/ .

[59] For example, when asked about the Armenian position on Russia selling weapons to Azerbaijan (a non-CSTO member), Serzh Sargsyan denied any resentment and added that "the Customs Union is first of all an economic rather than a military structure" [President of Armenia. 2014. "The joint Press Conference of President Serzh Sargsyan and the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman", 23 January, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-after-the-meeting-with-President-of-Czech-Republic/]

Ashkharh, made a vague mention of the economic rationale behind joining the Customs Union: i.e., the possibility of overcoming the lack of common borders and new foreign investments. However, the geopolitical reasons were much more extensively articulated: the need for Russia to maintain its traditional zone of interest and, more indirectly, the maintenance of the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh.[60] Similarly the political-analyst Levon Shirinyan, quoted by the same newspaper, bluntly declared that: "*Have the EU or the USA given us any guarantees against Turkish attack on Armenia over these past 20 years of Armenia's independence?".*[61] Changing arguments but not perspective, the opposition newspaper Zhamanak presented the choice as a failed attempt to shift away from an unpredictable patron. In sum, as the analyst Hovhannes Igityan pointed out: "*It is very difficult to look at the Customs Union from the economic side, since everybody only speaks of its political nature*". This last statement holds true not only for Armenian but also for Russian sources. For example, the Carnegie Centre analyst Aleksey Malashenko focused on the political significance of the decision. More specifically he said that, considering the tensions with Ukraine and Belarus, the Armenian choice was a clear victory for Russia[62].

The U-Turn illustrates not only the leverage of Moscow but also the discursive prudence of Yerevan. However, even though the Armenian discourse presents the EU as being the sole actor responsible for considering the Association Agreement to be incompatible with the CU, it was likely that Russia shared the same opinion. While Mr Putin did not make any such statement with reference to Armenia, Ukraine was warned about the incompatibility of the AA and the CU. In October 2013, on the occasion of a press conference following the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting, President Putin said that even though taking the decision whether or not to sign the EU Association Agreement was a sovereign right of the Ukrainian people and governors, an affirmative choice in this regard would have been incompatible with future membership of the Customs Union. This was the case because, according to Mr. Putin, Moscow could not risk having its shops flooded with products originally produced in the EU and only assembled in Ukraine.[63] This unequivocal statement makes it difficult to imagine a different approach in the case of Armenia.

[60] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "Pundit mulls Armenia's, Russia's interest in unions in post-Soviet area", 22 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[61] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "BBC Monitoring quotes from Armenian press 6 Sep 13", 6 September (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[62] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2013. "Russian daily views reasons for Armenia's decision to join Customs Union", 8 September (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[63] President of Russia. 2013. "Press conference following Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting", October 24, (2013, 24 October), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19485 .

In spite of this situation of incompatibility, Mr Sargsyan never ceased to reiterate how much he wished to maintain the relationship with the EU. Remarkably, a few months after the U-Turn, President Sargsyan declared: *"We are convinced that different integration processes may certainly be developed based on compatibility and cooperation rather than controversy"*.[64]

The Bridge

In spite of these events, it would be incorrect to say that the U-Turn challenged the whole idea of complementarity. Instead, the analysis of strategic narratives show that what changed was the approach taken to achieve complementarity, rather than the *principle of* complementarity itself.

Examining the declarations of Armenian political elites, the interest that existed in adjusting complementarity to the new reality emerges. A recurring statement was that Armenia, by virtue of its membership of the CU, could facilitate the establishment of economic ties between the European Union and the Eurasian Union. *"We are natural partners because our partnership is first of all rooted in shared values: Armenians and Armenian civilization are a part of European civilization (..). At the same time, being a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (..) leading to a 170-million EEU market".*[65] While the possibility of serving as a bridge was to the fore in the presidential narrative, it was also to be found in the declarations of other politicians. For example, in April 2015 deputy foreign minister Karen Nazaryan clearly articulated this view.[66] Despite these declarations, observers see a limited role for Armenia as a bridge between the EU and the EEU. Thus, when asked about the possibility that Armenia could play the role of bridge between the Eurasian Union and the European Union, a member of the European delegation in Armenia answered: "*I do not see how*".[67] According to the Swiss Ambassador Lukas Gasser,[68] the only possibility of assuming such a bridging role is through private business. More specifically

[64] President of Armenia. 2014. "The joint Press Conference of President Serzh Sargsyan and the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman", 23 January, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-after-the-meeting-with-President-of-Czech-Republic/

[65] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Supper with Italian Parliamentarians - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 10 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/04/10/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-meeting-with-italian-parliamentarians-speech/ .

[66] Armenpress. 2015. "Armenia is actively working on becoming a bridge between the EU and the EEU: Armenian deputy FM", 17 April, http://armenpress.am/eng/news/802237/armenia-is-actively-working-on-becoming-a-bridge-between-the-eu-and-the-eeu-armenian-deputy-fm.html.

[67] Member of the European Delegation to Armenia, Yerevan, (2015, 3 July).

[68] Interview with Lukas Gasser, Ambassador of Switzerland in Armenia, Yerevan (2015, 30 June).

Ambassador Gasser[69] suggested that Armenia could be a "window" for Western companies to enter a bigger market, as the business environment is friendly and the quality of services is good. For this reason, some Swiss companies are already present in Armenia. Thus, the favourable business climate, as discussed in the previous section, would render Yerevan particularly well-placed to provide economic ties across the organisations. Therefore, it could be said that, even though other candidates such as Kazakhstan[70] had proposed themselves as "bridges", Armenian claims in this regard seemed more realistic.

Armenian self-projection has not only a "macro-dimension" but also a regional dimension. Notably, President Sargsyan outlined that Georgia and Armenia, due to their different cooperation paths, could find new and original forms of cooperation: "*Armenia's decision to join the Customs Union and Georgia's decision to sign a free trade agreement with the European Union will not hinder our economic relations. Conversely, those decisions give new opportunities to our businessmen".*[71] In spite of these challenges, as of 2015 Armenia seemed to have been successful in negotiating a different form of cooperation with Europe. As said by a member of the EU delegation to Armenia,[72] Brussels and Yerevan were working on a different form of partnership, to be called something other than an "Association Agreement". Shortly after, Jean Asselborn, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, declared that the EU was preparing a new type of agreement with Belarus and Armenia. In fact, although customs preferences could not be offered, Brussels was working on *"an easier version – less persistent and fundamental*".[73] In December, Brussels and Yerevan started negotiations on a new deal based on various political and economic provisions contained in the abandoned Association Agreement.[74] On the occasion of the official launch of the

[69] Ibid.
[70] Remarkably, in summer 2015 the Kazakh First Deputy Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev pointed out that his country could serve as a bridge between Asia and Europe [The Times of Central Asia. 2015. "Kazakhstan can become a bridge between Europe and Asia", 6 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis)].
[71] President of Armenia. 2014. "The statement of President Serzh Sargsyan on the results of the negotiations with President Giorgi Margvelashvili before the representatives of mass media", 27 February, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/02/27/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-the-President-of-Georgia/ .
[72] Member of the European Delegation to Armenia, Yerevan, (2015, 3 July).
[73] Armenpress News Agency. 2015. "Luxembourg: EU prepares new variant of agreements with Belarus and Armenia", 5 September (retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[74] Danielyan, E. 2015. "EU, Armenia Open Talks On 'Comprehensive' Accord", *Azatutyun.am*, 8 December, http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27412677.html .

new negotiations, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbadian (though not the President) expressed his satisfaction with the process.[75]

In sum, while interest in cooperating with the West remains, the pertinent Armenian political discourse has become more moderate. Notably, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his satisfaction with the launch of new negotiations, the President did not issue a similar statement. With reference to Russia, this low-key approach can be seen as an attempt to avoid arousing new tensions.

The U-Turn: What conclusions?

This analysis shows that Armenia, in the process of navigating its relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the EU and Russia, has to deal with two completely different vectors. Moscow is the indispensable ally and Brussels is the benevolent partner for modernisation. The differences between these players, and the need to approach them in light of their specificities, emerges from the analysis of Armenian strategic narratives. Throughout the chapter, the analysis of political discourse, and even more so of the silences within this discourse, has provided evidence of an understanding of the uneven 'strategic partnership' with Russia and of the desirability of avoiding tensions. One example of this purposeful quiescence is the lack of protest against Moscow's selling of weapons to Azerbaijan and against the disadvantageous conditions for the restructuring of the Armenian debt. Turning to the discourse of the West, the strategic communication is not framed simply as the search for functional cooperation but rather as an interest in normative cooperation. In terms of 'political implicatures', this could be seen as the act of projecting the Self as an eager partner, whose deep commitment to Western values compensates for geopolitical constraints and limited resources.

This chapter shows that Armenia is undoubtedly a small state, whose agency is constrained by greater external powers. Nevertheless, strategic narratives can be used, on the one hand, to deal with the overly-dominant Russian ally and, on the other hand, to maximise the scope for cooperation with Brussels. This can be gleaned from the declarations made after the withdrawal from the Association Agreement talks. Notably, the possibility that Armenia might act as a bridge between the EU and the EEU was hinted at. Despite the negligible empirical applicability of these

[75] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. 2015. "Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia at the official launch of the negotiations on a new Armenia-EU Agreement", 7 December, http://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/item/2015/12/07/min_eu_speech/ .

comments, they nonetheless indicate that even though joining the Customs Union changed the terms of the interaction with Europe, finding an alternative format for cooperation with Brussels was a priority for Armenia. In addition to this, the use of a "normative language" when dealing with the EU suggests an understanding of the nature and preferences of this interlocutor and therefore indicates an effort to reflect these preferences.

The Armenian government discourse on the diaspora

"Azerbaijan has oil, Georgia has sea, Armenia has diaspora" (Harutyunyan 2009, 201).

"*Armenian foreign policy over the last decade has sought to bridge the inherently conflicting interests of Russia and the West, while also seeking to leverage its most significant asset — a significant Diaspora. This foreign policy, termed 'complementarity,' incorporates Armenia's strategic imperative of security*" (Giragosian, In Minasyan 2012, 270). These words suggest the importance of the diaspora for the foreign policy conduct of Armenia, a diaspora that over the years has promoted the relationship between Armenia and the Western World, and first and foremost with the United States (Mirzoyan 2010, 19). However, notwithstanding its importance, the motherland-diaspora dynamic is not free of tensions. More precisely, the government often feels pressured by diasporic preferences while diasporans lament being predominantly treated as wealthy donors (Panossian 1998). Rather than being an internal Armenian issue, this relationship has significant implications for the way Armenia approaches the external world, not least because both Russia and the West host large diasporic communities. Additionally, notwithstanding a generally celebratory grand rhetoric, the diasporic intervention is played down in sensitive topics such as the relationship with Turkey and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this regard, two complementary explanations are in order. Firstly, the central state is keen not to see its primacy in foreign policy challenged. Secondly, there is a consciousness of potential tensions with the diaspora's host countries, first and foremost Russia and, to a lesser extent, the United States. Therefore, this chapter contends that the state-diaspora relationship should be studied not as a self-contained phenomenon but rather as something relevant to foreign policy.

The section is organised as follows. It firstly considers the diaspora in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Secondly, it looks at the way in which Armenian elites frame the diaspora in relation to economy, genocide and Nagorno-Karabakh. Throughout the chapter, the state's attempts to limit the interference of the diaspora in foreign policy agenda-setting will emerge. These attempts to limit diasporic intervention can be explained by reference to two aspects. Firstly, the diaspora

represents an asset rather than a constraint only as long as it does not challenge the primacy of state decision-making. Secondly, and in keeping with the theory of complementarity and the prudent behaviour assessed previously, Armenian ruling elites are cautious about allowing diasporic activism to affect the relationship with prominent external interlocutors.

Diaspora and motherland: a complicated relationship

This section contextualises the relationship between Armenia and its diaspora, outlining the elements of complexity over time. The Armenian diaspora, if taken to be the totality of ethnic Armenians living outside the state, should be understood as an ancient phenomenon. Remarkably, in the sixteenth century the first Armenian book was published in Venice and the first Armenian Bible was printed in Amsterdam (Panossian 1998, 153). However, in modern usage the expression "Armenian diaspora" generally indicates the Northern American and French communities that trace their origins to the Ottoman Empire and the 1915 genocide. This dramatic event, out of which arose the modern Western diaspora,[76] had a tremendous impact on the self-understanding of these communities. As pointed out by the historian Jenny Phillips (Pattie in Herzig, 128), this tragedy, which touched nearly every family, was to shape Armenian identity around the paradigm of an "endangered people". Paul (2000), who defines diasporic identity as constructed (as opposed to "naturally happening"), classifies the 1915 tragedy as a group trauma that is the basis for diasporic solidarity. The validity of this claim has been confirmed by studies on the diasporic dynamics of formation, grouping and self-understanding (Paul 2000). Remarkably, in spite of profound divisions the different diasporic organisations attribute the same high degree of importance to that historic trauma and have occasionally cooperated to this end. For example, in 1975 various diasporic groups submitted a joint memorandum to the UN, advocating for the return of the historical Armenian territories, nowadays part of the Turkish state, to the "*Armenian People"* (Harutyunyan 2009, 64).

Far from being a monolith, the Armenian diaspora in the US today is divided into different well-structured groups. First of these is the Dashnaks party, which dates back to the Ottoman empire and which established itself after 1921 as a prominent anti-Soviet diasporic organisation in the United States and beyond. It is currently active in Armenia as a political party with the

[76] Even though most research focuses on the North American experience, the Armenian diaspora acts in a similar way in the UK (Koinova 2014) and in France (Popescu 2010).

name “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” (ARF). Secondly, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was regarded during the Cold War as the pro-Soviet branch of the diaspora. In the 1940s it supported the resettlement of Middle-Eastern Armenians in the homeland (Yousefian 2014; Lehmann 2012). In recent times, the AGBU has consolidated as a conservative-philanthropic association committed to charitable, cultural and educational initiatives (Tölölyan 2007, 113). Thirdly, two other groups came into existence in the second half of the twentieth century: the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), openly anti-Soviet, and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA or “Assembly”) (Zarifian 2014). All these groups conducted their diasporic activities separately, had completely separate structures, like schools and offices, and even pledged loyalty to two different patriarchs. The end of Soviet rule did not end this pluralism. On the contrary, new groups emerged. The Haiastan (or Armenia Fund), whose main goal is fundraising, was established in the 1990s as result of a joint effort on the part of state officials and prominent diasporans (Totolyan 2007). Additionally, in recent times new forms of youth diasporic activism, mostly oriented towards exchanges and working holidays, have emerged (Darieva 2011, 499). In spite of their differences, in the post-Soviet phase all these groups faced a common challenge in dealing with Armenia: that of finding a mediation point between the imaginary homeland and the actual reality of the country (Kasbarian 2015). In 1988, the aftermath of a dramatic earthquake saw the first major engagement of the diaspora with the practical needs of the home country (Baser and Swain 2009, 56; Ishkanian 2008, 139), which since then has relied on diasporic donations. On the occasion of the earthquake, Armenian-Armenian groups also demonstrated their ability to gain political support for the homeland. This was evidenced by the fact that the son and grandson of President Bush visited the areas affected by the calamity (Mirzoyan 2010, 137). Following the outburst of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, contributions came not only from Northern American communities but also from Middle Eastern ones, who provided military equipment to Armenia (Papazian 2008), and from the Soviet diaspora.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, independence and the subsequent election of indigenous elites gave an impetus to completely new state-diaspora dynamics. Soon tensions arose. More specifically, the Armenian authorities were satisfied with the economic contribution of the Western communities but annoyed by their requests to engage in political life. By contrast, the diaspora was frustrated by this attitude and felt treated like a “milking cow” (Panossian 1998, 179). This already troubled relationship quickly deteriorated under the presidency of Ter-Petrosyan (1991-1998). Even as President Ter-Petrosyan tried to stimulate and even oversee diasporic donations, he limited the possibilities for the engagement of the diaspora in political life.

In this regard, two controversial decisions were taken: outlawing Dashnak, which after independence had established itself as a political party, and barring dual citizenship.[77] The willingness to normalise the relationship with Turkey without setting recognition of the genocide as a precondition constituted another point of high tension. This pragmatic position, originally proposed by then-President Ter Petrosyan, was directly linked to the necessity of presenting state interest as a state-centred rather than a pan-Armenian issue. His successor President Robert Kokharian, aware of the unprofitability of alienating the overseas communities, promoted a much more inclusive attitude toward the diaspora. However, this change in attitude has been observed to have been more rhetorical than substantial (Papazian 2006). Dashnak was subsequently readmitted as a political actor (1998) and dual citizenship reintroduced (2007). However, the diaspora remains unsatisfied with some domestic issues, the foremost of these being corruption. Nevertheless, such severe tensions have not prevented diasporans from acting in favour of the motherland.

In the early 1990s, diasporic activism was crucial in shaping the US attitude towards Armenia, as organised groups started to lobby in order to influence the foreign policy priorities of Washington. This lobbying activism registered both successes and defeats. Over the decades, pressure groups were able to obtain economic aid for the homeland, to limit the engagement with Azerbaijan, to obtain recognition from most American states and to influence the appointment of the US ambassador to Armenia. However, diasporic groups failed to have Armenia included in the main regional infrastructural projects, most significantly the TBC pipeline, and to obtain federal recognition of the genocide (Zarifian 2014). In spite of the successes, Armenian political cadres were careful not to overly praise the contributions of the diaspora. This attitude can be observed in the practices of the Kokharian administration (Papazian 2006) and endures under the Sargsyan administration where, although the diaspora is often hailed as useful and important, praise for its lobbying activities is almost absent from the Armenian political narrative. There are a few exceptions, as for example "*the efforts of the Armenian lobby help bring about such a decision* [on genocide recognition], *but the political strength of that lobby alone is not enough".*[78] However, in these occasional declarations, diasporic activism is generally minimised and depicted as a component of a broader framework. This chapter argues that this rhetoric of downplaying is

[77] As consequence of this, diasporic Armenians were eligible for a "blue passport", which granted them long-term residency and economic (but not political) rights (Darieva 2011, 496).
[78] President of Armenia. 2009. "President Serzh Sargsyan answered questions posed by the editors of the Armenian Reporter", 2 October, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2009/10/02/news-38/ .

not only aimed at preventing the over-empowerment of the diaspora but also at avoiding challenges to the established style of self-portrayal vis-à-vis the external environment.

The Armenian diaspora: the non-Western communities

Another point to note is that, even though most research and political narratives[79] focus on the Western dimension, a high number of ethnic Armenians dwell in Russia.[80] Furthermore, remittances to the Armenian republic, coming predominantly from Russia, account for 17.9% of the Armenian GDP.[81] The Russo-Armenian diaspora has resulted from 'several "waves", each of which has its own particular features and exists in isolation from the others (Oussatcheva 2001,11). The first group of immigrants, dating from before perestroika, is by and large successfully integrated into Russian society. In contrast, the groups that immigrated after independence are much more varied as they include both high-achieving businessman and under-skilled seasonal workers (Oussatcheva 2001). Notwithstanding these profound differences, none of these waves see the genocide as a primary identity shaper, which is what distinguishes the Russian diaspora as a whole from its Western equivalent. In most cases, the Russo-Armenian diaspora is primarily concerned with remittances and labour legislation rather than with the establishment of historical justice. Recently, the Russo-Armenian communities have begun to organise as interest groups; the Union of Armenians of Russia (UAR) is the biggest of these (Cavoukian 2013). However, the modalities of action remain different since while the Armenian-American communities have often lobbied at federal level in favour of the Motherland the Russo-Armenian activists, who are often close to the Kremlin, seem to have a business-led agenda. Finally, there are Armenian communities located in the Middle East, predominantly in Iran, Lebanon and Syria. Despite being Christian minorities in predominantly Muslim countries, in all these cases the Armenian communities enjoy good relations with the ruling elites. The Armenian community in Iran, which dates for the most part back to the seventeenth century, is well rooted in Teheran. For instance, members of the Armenian community hold of two of the five parliamentary seats reserved for religious minorities and even though Iran has not officially recognised the 1915 genocide Iranian-

[79] As will be shown in the next sections, most times diaspora is mentioned with reference to "assimilation" and "genocide". These themes are almost exclusively relevant for the Western diaspora.
[80] More than 500,000 Armenian citizens are estimated to live in the Russian Federation (Unicef. 2013. "Armenia Migration Profile" https://esa.un.org/miggmgprofiles/indicators/files/Armenia.pdf). Additionally, Kristin Cavoukian estimates more than 2 million ethnic Armenians reside there.
[81] WorldBank. 2016. "Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016. Advanced edition". http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/4549025-1450455807487/Factbookpart1.pdf .

Armenians are allowed to commemorate its annual anniversary (Therme 2011, 143-144). In the case of Lebanon and Syria, after 1915 these countries gave shelter to entire communities of surviving Anatolian Armenians.[82] In this regard, on the occasion of a visit paid to Armenia by the Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, president Sargsyan declared that, due to that shared history: "*It is no incidence that the Armenian authorities have always been paying particular attention to the expansion of cooperation with the Arab world, while for us Lebanon occupies a special role among these countries".*[83] In more recent times, the government in Yerevan responded to the outbreak of war in Syria by welcoming Armenian refugees, who are granted a fast-track naturalisation process.[84] Recapitulating, Armenian communities in the Middle East are well integrated into their host countries and to a certain extent play a role in bilateral relations. However, since this work's research question specifically focuses on the West and Russia, exploring this aspect goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

In the next pages, some aspects of the state-diaspora interaction – i.e., economy, genocide recognition and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – will be looked at. It will be concluded that although Armenian authorities have abandoned Mr Ter-Petrosyan's confrontational rhetoric (Papazian 2006), the attempt to maximise diasporic support while minimising diasporic interference remains unchanged. Quite apart from being an intrastate-diaspora dynamic, this effort to keep the diaspora in check can be seen as an attempt to avoid tense situations with the West and Russia. It follows that by preventing the diaspora from influencing the course of its foreign policy, Armenia projects itself as a reasonable and prudent actor, unwilling to get involved in unnecessary diplomatic quarrels.

The diaspora in presidential narratives

This section looks at how the Armenian diaspora is represented in presidential narratives. In spite of their lofty tones, these narratives are mostly rhetorical declarations with limited applicability. This is consistent with the argument concerning the attitude of the Armenian

[82] Hartrick, A. 2016. Beirut's 'Little Armenia': A Haven Of Diversity 101 Years After The Genocide. *The Huffington Post*, 28 April, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/beirut-little-armenia_us_572218fbe4b01a5ebde49d47 .
[83] President of Armenia. 2011. "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the joint press conference with the President of Lebanon Michel Suleiman", 12 December, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2011/12/09/news-79/ .
[84] Armenpress News Agency. 2014. "Back to Armenia: BBC's special report on the difficult path of Syrian-Armenians", 22 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

political elites, this being that although they are extremely careful not to antagonise the diaspora, they are nonetheless proactive in limiting its co-participation in policy-making.

As might be expected, speeches containing references to the importance and desirability of the diaspora abound. In presidential narratives, Mr Sargsyan often characterises diasporans as being fully-fledged members of the Armenian nation and, consequently, entitled to both national rights and duties. Remarkably, Spyurk, which means diaspora in the Armenian language, is never set in opposition to Hayastans, or citizens of Armenia, but is instead presented as a fully-fledged part of the Armenian nation. The following expression is indicative of this concept: "*Hotels are for guests, while each Armenian must be imbued with the idea of being a householder".*[85] Therefore, this inclusive idea of "Armenianness" conceives of diasporans as pieces of the "*world-spread Armenian nation*". Far from being a spontaneous remark, this specific reference to national belonging is frequently mentioned and articulated as an ontological unity between Motherland and Spyurq. Along this same line, the future of the country is said to rest upon the: *"Participation of every Armenian, not only the citizens of Armenia, because our strength is in our unity".*[86] Outside of this one particular presidential narrative, the role of the diaspora is a recurring theme in the discourse of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also. For example, in a famous speech about the role of Armenia's international compatriots, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Oskanian (himself of diasporic origin) openly labelled the diaspora: "*An extension of the homeland – not a permanent dislocation, not a destructive dispersion, but life at a distance".*[87] Through these words, the diaspora emerges as something other than an aberration to be resolved through a massive return to the homeland. Indeed, the Armenian political narrative represents the diaspora as what King and Melvin (1999, 236) call: "*A normal and permanent feature of its members' sense of self and community*". This last point is supported by the insistence on the "triumvirate of Armenia, Diaspora and Karabakh", often mentioned by the President. This expression, which may suggest an analogy with the Christian Holy Trinity, reinforces the idea of "Armenianness" as a composite object resting upon three pillars.

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[85] President of Armenia. 2014. "Remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 5th Armenia-Diaspora Conference ", 20 September, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/09/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Armenia-Diaspora-conference/ .

[86] President of Armenia. 2012. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the reception organized by the Armenian community and church council of Britain - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 28 July, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2012/07/28/London-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-amenian-community/

[87] President of Armenia. 2009. "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the meeting with the representatives of the Armenian-Swiss community", 3 February, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2009/02/03/news-29/ .

Pan-Armenianness is also the idea behind several major events. President Sargsyan often attends various pan-Armenian events such as general gatherings, youth meetings and sports competitions. The pan-Armenian games,[36] a famous multi-sport competition where participation is reserved for Armenian citizens and diasporans, exemplify these celebratory notions of pan-Armenianness. The last Pan-Armenian games took place in 2015 and saw competitions take place in both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.[37] During the opening ceremony, President Sargsyan greeted the participants with the following words: "*All the people present here are bound together by one commonality – the Armenian identity*. (…) *Armenianness, being Armenians is our mother identity*[88]". This resilient Armenianness, which survives in spite of the perils of assimilation, is more than a culturally or generally identitarian fact. Instead, this complex concept is used to depict the empowerment of the Armenian *country* as an interest of the whole Armenian *nation*. It follows that, instead of being presented as unilateral support from the Spyurk to the homeland, supporting the Armenian state is depicted as the *"utmost goal of the entire Armenian nation".*[89] The following quotation exemplifies this: *"The Motherland and Spyurk are interrelated just as a live organism and cannot move forward or withstand challenges without supporting each other".*[90] In these terms, assimilation (although not explicitly mentioned) is a victory for the foes of the Armenian nation while, conversely, working together for a prosperous and empowered Armenia serves to reinforce Armenianness in the long-term.[91] Although Armenianness is presented as a common goal, the promotion of the Armenian state is clearly stated as the desired ultimate outcome of this interaction. The following quote clearly expresses this concept: "*The maximum of the motherland's capabilities for the Diaspora and the maximum of the Diaspora's capabilities for the homeland. […] Our common goal is to pass on a more developed, democratic, powerful, peaceful and safer Armenia to coming*

[88] Arminfo News Agency. 2015. "President of Armenia attends opening of 6th Pan-Armenian Summer Games", 3 August (retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[89]President of Armenia. 2012. "President Serzh Sargsyan's speech at the AGBU 87th General Meeting - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 19 October, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2012/10/19/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-AGBU-87/ .
[90]Ibid.
[91] This relationship is not something new but, on the contrary, its roots can be traced back to the 1960s. Due to the efforts of the "Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians", established by Soviet authorities in 1964, the idea of the homeland providing "cultural nourishment" to the diaspora become predominant even in the Dashnak segments (Panossian 1998). According to this framing: *"The homeland was now perceived to be the bastion of Armenianness, coming to help its culturally "impoverished" brothers in exile"* (Panossian 1998, 160). In sum, while President Sargsyan operationalises this paradigm as suitable for the post-independence phase, this guide-role for the homeland can be traced to Soviet times.

generations."[92] In this way, overseas support for the motherland does not constitute an act of charity but is instead a membership duty. This unitary rhetoric is in contrast with the inflamed debate on dual citizenship (Harutyunyan 2006).

Acknowledging that, in spite of such fraternal declarations, the relationship between Armenia and its diaspora has often been tense, this analysis aims to shed light on the way the diaspora is treated in regard to foreign policy making. In particular, it looks at how diasporic support is framed in the government discourse in regard to economic issues, recognition of the genocide and contributions to the Nagorno-Karabakh cause. What emerges is that, with the exception of genocide remembrance, the potential contribution of diaspora to the homeland is often described in vague terms. In particular, in spite of the crucial importance of the security issues, considerations of how the diaspora could play a role in the relationship with hostile neighbours Turkey and Azerbaijan are generally omitted. After providing a detailed reconstruction of events and dynamics, it is argued that diasporic support is not emphasised as this would be counter-effective in terms of both state sovereignty and self-projection in the international realm.

Diaspora and economy

When considering the ways in which the diaspora can be thought of as an asset to Armenia, economic support constitutes the most visible benefit. The Western Armenian groups, due to their widespread wealth, have made significant donations to the homeland.[93] Moreover, many Armenian families live on remittances from Russia.[94] However, these forms of external contribution are downplayed in the presidential narrative. Indeed, the diaspora is often invited to support the homeland with investments instead of with donations. After analysing the political rhetoric, this sub-chapter presents it as attempting to ensure that Armenia is not portrayed as a weak actor vis-à-vis the international community. Moreover, potential sources of tension with Russia are outlined.

[92]President of Armenia. 2014. "Remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 5th Armenia-Diaspora Conference - Statements and messages of the President of RA", 20 September, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/09/20/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Armenia-Diaspora-conference/.

[93] The aggregate family income of Armenian-Californian families is estimated to be 15 times higher than the entire Armenian GDP (Minoian & Freinkman 2006, 129).

[94] In 2016, remittances from Russia and the US totalled $949 million and $207 million respectively [World Bank. 2016. "South-South Migration and Remittances", *World Bank*, www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances] .

In spite of some friction between the two communities, the Republic of Armenia has consistently benefited from the donations of its Western diaspora. Given the desperate need for external resources and support, successive presidents have been careful not jeopardise this revenue source. Thus, although the departure of Mr Ter-Petrosyan changed the Armenian political narrative, his successors were consistent in their attempt to extract resources from the diaspora while limiting its political participation. This attitude has provoked the discontent of diasporans. While early crises, namely the earthquake and the Karabakh movement, triggered significant contributions from abroad, the attitude of successive state authorities[95] led to this generosity being reconsidered.[96] In 1992, the establishment of the "Armenian Fund" was plagued by some unhappiness due to the predominance of the government in the management of the budget (Panossian 1998).[97] In the following years, contributions took the form, for the most part, of enormous individual donations rather than fundraising campaigns.[98] The billionaire Kirk Kerkorian is probably the most famous American-Armenian benefactor as his "Lincy Foundation", operating from 1989 to 2011, channelled hundreds of millions of dollars to Armenia.[99] In spite of these donations, requests for economic contribution are marginal in the presidential narrative. While generic comments about contributing to the prosperity of the homeland are made, these do not take the form of open requests for monetary donations. Similarly, the Minister of Diaspora, established in 2008 to coordinate all diaspora-related activities (Kitchin and Boyle 2011, 14), does not publish in the English language on its website any requests for donations. In addition, individual contributors such as Mr Kerkorian are not acknowledged in presidential speeches.

Indeed, the state narrative, instead of soliciting donations, puts emphasis on the profitability of Armenia as an investment venue. Thus, on several occasions President Sargsyan has announced his commitment to "*move from charity to a mutually beneficial partnership".*[100] Similarly, the

[95] As already mentioned, indigenous cadres expected economic support without any meddling in domestic affairs while the domestic actors soon started to feel treated as cash-cows.

[96] Policy Forum Armenia. 2010. "Armenia-diaspora relations: 20 years since independence", August, https://www.pf-armenia.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/PFA%20Diaspora%20Report.pdf .

[97] Currently, the Armenian fund is still working and every year raises money for Armenia and Karabakh through an annual Telethon fundraising event. In the few last years, donations have diminished (Policy Forum Armenia 2010, https://www.pf-armenia.org/).

[98] Policy Forum Armenia. 2010. "Armenia-diaspora relations: 20 years since independence", August, https://www.pf-armenia.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/PFA%20Diaspora%20Report.pdf .

[99] Bank.am. 2011. "Lincy Foundation, that financed multi-million projects in Armenia, terminates its activity", http://www.banks.am/en/news/newsfeed/5349/.

[100]ACCC. 2012. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the reception organised by the Armenian community and church council of Britain", 28 July, http://www.accc.org.uk/presidents-message-to-the-armenian-community-of-great-britain/

Minister of Diaspora Hranush Hakobian has openly pointed out the service that each diasporan could do to the motherland by lodging even $1,000 in an Armenian bank.[101] This insistence on investments appears to be related to the importance attributed to modernisation and to the creation of a positive business environment (as outlined in the previous section). Therefore, far from being isolated quotes, these statements should be understood as part of a long-term plan to attract foreign investors. It should be noted that encouraging investment from the diaspora has been deemed desirable since the 1990s (Minoian and Freinkman 2006, 131). However, in spite of these effort, the results remain well below expectations (Khachatrian 2010; Freinkmann 2000) and in the 2011-2015 timespan foreign investments fell.[102] More broadly, although they have been deemed highly desirable, foreign investments have never been the cornerstone of state-diaspora relations. A possible explanation for this is that most Armenian-Americans originated from present-day Turkey and henceforth lack family ties in modern Armenia (Minoian and Freinkman 2006). The state's poor relationship with its neighbours and the problem of widespread corruption might also contribute to this outcome. This negative trend does not preclude some success stories of investors from the diaspora. The Armenian-Argentinian businessman Eduardo Eurnekian invested in the renovation of the "Zvartnots International Airport" in Yerevan. Due to his individual effort, in 2008 Argentina was the second most important international state-investor in Armenia (after Russia) (Khachatrian 2010, 18). Additionally, the Armenian-American community has the potential to play the role of "first movers", which entails investing in a non-conventional market, influencing risk expectations and eventually attracting more investors (Freinkman 2000, 334). As explained by former US ambassador to Armenia John Heffers, it is highly unlikely that the American business community will invest in Armenia if the Armenian diaspora does not do so first.[103] In spite of these potential benefits, the humanitarian involvement of the diaspora has been much more significant than its economic participation. This pattern of support has not been free of tension. As emerged from an interview carried out as part of this research project,[104] diasporans often feel their role to be confined to the construction of schools and streets while their political input is unwelcome. This mix of frustration and scepticism seems likely to hamper future investments.

[101] Bedevian, A. 2015. "Armenian Minister In Hot Water After Diaspora Criticism", *Azatutyun-RFE/RL*, 28 April, http://asbarez.com/134620/armenian-minister-panned-after-criticizing-diaspora-serj-tankian/ .
[102] World Bank. 2016. "Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$)", http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD?page=1 .
[103] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2016. "Armenian press discuss role of diaspora in relations with USA, economic ties", 30 March (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[104] Interview with Armenian Analyst, Yerevan, (2015, 2 July).

This narrative of Armenia becoming a potential "*investment venue*" for its diaspora does not target the Western diaspora exclusively, as is largely the case for the genocide and Nagorno-Karabakh, but also the Russo-Armenian diaspora. The topic of "*moving from charity to investment*" has also been raised in front of Belarusian[105] and Russian entrepreneurs. This latter business audience has received particular attention in Armenian political discourse. Remarkably, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the "Union of Armenians in Russia" (UAR) Foundation, President Sargsyan publicly acknowledged the importance of the organisation and the efforts of its founder Ara Abrahamyan.[106] While much less studied than its Western counterpart, observers consider the role of this Eastern diaspora to be more relevant than it might initially appear as its members, already familiar with the petty corruption of the post-Soviet system, easily understand the informal elements of the Armenian business environment. This focus on the business diaspora is in sharp contrast with the limited references to labour migrants. An example of this is provided by an interview given by Serzh Sargsyan in 2014. On that occasion, widespread emigration was described as a phenomenon common across the post-Soviet world, although in the case of Armenia the negative impact was exacerbated by the small population size. President Sargsyan also acknowledged that, due to pre-existing emigration networks, Russia was the most likely destination for Armenians[107] and that two million Armenians were resident in Russia.[108] However, the occasional acknowledgement of this phenomenon is generally not followed by any particular requests. More precisely, although on one occasion the exploitation faced by migrant workers was hinted at,[109] this issue is usually simply omitted. For example, in 2014 the reform of a Russian law on immigration had an impact on the lives of migrant workers.[110] Notwithstanding the widespread unhappiness that resulted, Armenian political elites refrained from commenting. These findings

[105] President of Armenia. 2013. "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan on the outcome of the negotiations with the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko", 13 May, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/05/13/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-the-President-of-Belarus/ .

[106] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan on the 15th anniversary of the Union of Armenians in Russia pan-Russian NGO", 12 October, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/10/12/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-congratulation-to-Ara-Abrahamyan/ .

[107] President of Armenia. 2014. "President Serzh Sargsyan's interview with journalists in attendance of BAZE 2014 forum", 23 August, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/08/23/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-interview-Baze-2014/ .

[108] President of Armenia. 2015. "Address by President Serzh Sargsyan at the 5th media forum 'At the Foot of Mount Ararat'", 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Media-forum/ .

[109] President of Armenia. 2013."President Serzh Sargsyan met with the representatives of the mass media", 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference/ .

[110] Grigoryan, Marianna. 2014. "Armenia: Russia Puts Squeeze on Migrant Workers", *Eurasianet*, 24 February, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68078 .

seem consistent with the failure to mention Russia's predominant role in the Armenian economy (as analysed in the previous sub-chapter). In speculating on the reasons behind this silence on the subject of Russia, two possible explanations emerge. First of these is the reluctance of Armenia to provoke Russia by hinting at some flaws in the relationship between the two countries. Second is an attempt to underplay the fact that Armenia is not simply a smaller country vis-à-vis Russia but is also a dependent and contractually weaker interlocutor.

Recapitulating, it emerges from the analysis that top Armenian elites do not usually describe the country as highly-dependent on external donors. This omission is consistent with the general care taken not to emphasise the importance of the diaspora. This omission can also be interpreted as an attempt not to project the country as an "international beggar", completely reliant on the charity of its kin abroad and therefore also, indirectly, on their host countries. Additionally, despite the importance of the Russian-Armenian community, labour migrants are seldom mentioned. This silence could be interpreted as an attempt to avoid stirring tensions with the "Russian strategic partner".

The Armenian diaspora and the genocide recognition: an almost Turkish-blind narrative

The Armenian president has often invited the diaspora, in general terms, to campaign for recognition of the genocide. However, it is never overtly suggested to the diaspora that recognition be sought from Turkey.[111] This sub-chapter tries to interpret this peculiar use of political rhetoric, arguing that it relates to a desire not to depart from a prudent foreign policy strategy.

For the European and the North American diaspora, the remembrance of the genocide is both an identity shaper and a stimulus for rapprochement (de Waal 2015), especially since the Western diaspora is the direct result of the massacres that took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1918. Additionally, and especially from 1965 onwards (de Waal 2015), genocide recognition has become the main unifying element between the different Armeno-American diasporic groups. This link between diasporic self-understanding and genocide did not substantially change following independence (de Waal 2013). In 2015, the commemoration for the centenary of the genocide received contributions from the worldwide Armenian community. While the visit to Yerevan of the celebrity Kim Kardashian and the rock group "System of a Down" were the most

[111] As shown by the opposition to the Zurich Protocols in 2009, the diaspora tends not to consider pragmatic approaches to the reconciliation with Turkey.

media-friendly and attention-grabbing aspects of the centenary celebrations,[112] on the 24th of April many American cities bore witness to huge commemorative processions organised by local Armenian communities. As is evident from their declarations, Armenian elites recognise and celebrate the link between being Armenian and experiencing genocide. Looking at the presidential narrative, on various occasions the presidential discourse has linked current national identity to the tragedy. From this arises what is presented as both the right and the duty to obtain recognition of the genocide. *"No matter how many new and different additional strata of identities are added, Armenianness, being Armenians, is our mother identity. It is that very identity that in this year marked by Armenian Genocide commemorative events makes us repeat the slogan of 2015 – "I Remember and Demand".*[113] Therefore, an important function of the Armenian diaspora is to agitate internationally for the recognition of the genocide. Far from being an exclusively Armenian issue, the duty to remember and demand is framed as important for the confrontation of present atrocities and the prevention of future ones.[114] The diaspora, depicted as part of the larger Armenian nation, is called onto the front line in the campaign for recognition, as exemplified by the following extract: "*The process of the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide goes on through the joint efforts of Armenia and Diaspora".*[115]

However, there is a crucial aspect in which the diaspora is not involved: the request for recognition from Turkey. This is in spite of the fact that Armenia declares that it attaches high importance to obtaining recognition from Ankara. In this regard, on the websites of both the president[116] and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[117] the following statement appears: "*The last phase of the Armenian genocide appeared with the total and utter denial by Turkish government of the mass killings and elimination of the Armenian nation on its homeland*". In addition to this, on various occasions President Sargsyan has mentioned the negative human rights reputation earned by Ankara and its endurance into the present day, as demonstrated by the trial of prominent intellectuals such as

[112] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2015. "Russia manoeuvring between Yerevan, Ankara on genocide issue –paper", 6 May (retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[113] ARMINFO News Agency. 2015. "President of Armenia attends opening of 6th Pan-Armenian Summer Games", 3 August (retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[114] President of Armenia. 2014. "Joint press conference delivered by President Serzh Sargsyan and French President Francois Hollande", 13 May, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/05/13/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-with-the-President-of-France/ .
[115] President of Armenia. 2012. "Address by the President of the Republic of Armenia, President of the Republican Party of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the 13th Republican Convention", 10 March, http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2012/03/10/news-2054/ .
[116] President of Armenia. nd. "Genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Empire", http://www.president.am/en/genocide/ .
[117] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. nd. "Genocide", .

Orhan Pamuk.[118] Even more importantly, the Armenian request that the genocide be recognised is also framed in relation to security issues, as captured in the following: "*For the Republic of Armenia, the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian genocide (…) also has a security dimension. I trust without Turkey's sincere repentance and elimination of the repercussions of the Genocide, Armenia's safe existence in the region is endangered".*[119] That strong security implications are attributed to the recognition of the genocide can also be inferred from the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh war is often framed as the continuation of this tragedy[120] (Gamaghelyan 2010; Özkan 2008). Indeed, the graves of the first Armenian casualties of the Nagorno-Karabakh war are located in the same venue as the genocide memorial. Similarly, in 1997 the "Prime Minister" of the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh state, Leonard Petrossian, argued that there was a direct link between the lack of global recognition for the Armenian genocide and the violent conflict in his land (Paul 2000, 29). Given the importance of this security dimension, together with the major responsibility assigned to the diaspora of securing recognition of the genocide, requests for open support might be expected. However, looking at the political narrative, the lack of direct reference to the diaspora taking action to directly influence the Turkish government is noticeable. This is in spite of the fact that the diaspora itself has been vocal in its requests to Turkey, as demonstrated by the on-line statutes of most lobbying organisations.

A likely explanation lies in a desire to normalise the relationship with Turkey, as the following quote suggests: "*Today as years ago we think that the Republic of Armenia and Turkey must establish relations without preconditions".*[121] An excessive emphasis on the diaspora would be counterproductive in this, not least because, in addition to "overcrowding the negotiation table", the issue of the diaspora is related to one of Turkey's biggest concerns: the request for reparations. The bulk of the Armenian diaspora can be traced back to the former Ottoman territories that today belong to Turkey. Therefore, for most diasporans the "Armenian homeland" is a place in which their ancestors never in fact lived. Considering the potential for diplomatic quarrels related to these

[118] President of Armenia. 2013. "President Serzh Sargsyan's Address on the Genocide Remembrance Day", 24 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/04/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Address-on-the-Genocide-Remembrance-Day/ .

[119] President of Armenia. 2013. "Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at The Extended Meeting held at the Ra Ministry of Defense", 15 January, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/01/15/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-session-Ministry-of-Defense/ .

[120] In 1993 Turkey closed its Eastern Border with Armenia in solidarity with Azerbaijan.

[121] President of Armenia. 2014. "The joint press Conference of President Serzh Sargsyan and the President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman", 30 January, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-after-the-meeting-with-President-of-Czech-Republic/ .

points, the Armenian president is cautious in avoiding mentioning them. The avoidance of territorial demands is even more pronounced. Significantly, a lack of interest in reparations has been clearly enunciated by President Sargsyan to both a Turkish[122] and Russian[123] audience. In this regard, it should be noted that any compensatory claim would be unlikely to obtain substantial international support, as suggested by the refusal of the European Parliament in 1987 to hold Turkey liable for what happened in 1915. It was also specified that "the recognition of this historical event as an act of genocide" would not change the question of Turkey's liability (ICG 2009, 14). Even though the fear of future compensation holds Turkish officials back from progressing on the recognition issue (Gamaghelyan 2010, 44; Cooper and Akcam 2005), this section suggests that the marginalising of the diaspora and its potential demands is not a simple bilateral issue. On the other hand, to show moderation is fully consistent with Armenia's usual self-portrayal in international relations. In this regard, it can be observed that Yerevan is extremely cautious about blaming Washington for failing to use the term 'genocide'. In her memoirs, Condoleezza Rice (2011) recalls the US Lower House vote in 2007 on federal recognition of the Armenian Genocide, as favoured by the Armenian lobby and opposed by Turkey. On that occasion, the American executive opposed the (ultimately unsuccessful) initiative, in consideration not only of the inevitable tensions with Ankara but also of the lukewarm attitude of the Armenian government. In the years following the vote, President Sargsyan refrained from making declarations, at least in the English-language media, against President Obama and his departure from his senatorial stances[124] on the need to recognise the Armenian genocide. These dynamics seem to suggest that, in considering the delicate dynamics involved in this issue such as the Turkish-American alliance (Zarifian 2014), Armenia has once again demonstrated moderation vis-à-vis its international interlocutors.

The issue of genocide recognition is a telling example of importance of reconciling the need to maximise the political weight of diaspora and the pursuit of the state's foreign policy goals. Whereas general recognition of the genocide is framed as a pan-Armenian issue, it is made clear

[122]President of Armenia. 2015. "Interview of the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan to 'Hurriyet' Turkish Newspaper", 24 April, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2015/04/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-hurriyetdailynews-interview/ .

[123] Posner, Vladimir. 2015. "27 апреля 2015 года в программе «Познер» — Серж Саргсян" [27 April, 2015 in the "Posner" program - Serzh Sargsyan]. Radio Interview transcript, *Познер Online* [Posner Online], 27 April, http://pozneronline.ru/2015/04/11332/ .

[124] Harsher comments are made in Russian-languages media [Posner, Vladimir. 2015. "27 апреля 2015 года в программе «Познер» — Серж Саргсян" [April 27, 2015 in the "Posner" program - Serzh Sargsyan]. Radio Interview transcript, *Познер Online* [Posner Online], 27 April, http://pozneronline.ru/2015/04/11332/ .]

that the government is the sole party responsible for setting foreign policy goals, means and timing. In this regard, government discourse emphasises Armenia's desire to strengthen its own 'actorness' on this issue and to avoid either becoming or being perceived as becoming a product of diaspora pressure. The above analysis shows a level of relevant strategic discourse that has been largely successful in performing this potentially difficult balancing act.

Karabakh: a vague mention

The treatment of the diaspora in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict follows the pattern outlined in the previous section: generic declarations on the importance of the diaspora that are not matched by practical guidelines. This section argues that this behaviour also has some purpouse in relation to the West and Russia, namely to portray itself as a cooperative participant in the Minsk mediation efforts. Additionally, in relation to the Kremlin, Armenia demonstrates a desire not to cross 'red lines' in areas of specific interest.

As previously stated, in the broader Armenian narrative the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is highly symbolised as it is depicted as the continuation of the genocide (Gamaghelyan 2010; Özkan 2008). Additionally, Nagorno-Karabakh, which has always preserved its Armenian identity, has entered into collective memory as the "last Armenian stronghold" (Gamaghelyan 2010, 38). This narrative is fully embraced by the diaspora, which has supported Nagorno-Karabakh both in present and past times (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). More specifically, diasporic communities have raised over the years substantial amounts of money for the construction of various projects, from schools to water-pumps. Throughout the years, fundraising has become more organised. For example, each Thanksgiving, the Hayastan-All Armenian Fund organisation runs a Telethon broadcast to benefit Karabakh. This event, which features both prominent members of the US-Armenian community and the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, is broadcast live by US-Armenian and Armenian channels. In 2014 $12.4 million was raised, most of which was intended for the construction of a second highway connecting the Republic of Armenia to Nagorno Karabakh.[125] In addition to economic aid, the Western diaspora has also provided political support, with various US-Armenian groups lobbying the US congress to gain support for the motherland in conflict. In October 1992, the Armenian Assembly of Armenia (AAA) succeeded in persuading the US Congress to approve Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. This provision restricted the amount and type of aid the

[125] Danielyan, E. 2014. "More Armenian Diaspora Funds Raised For New Karabakh Road", *Azatutyun/ Radio Free Europe*, 28 November, http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/26715429.html .

US could send to Azerbaijan.[126] In contrast, non-military aid to Armenia and the much smaller (but symbolically important) amount given to Karabakh was not restricted (Tölölyan 2007, 117).

These diasporic initiatives continued even when the relationship between the diaspora and the government was tense. As observed by Tom de Waal, "*The more reports have reached them of corruption and bad government in Armenia, the more foreign Armenians have projected their hopes and ideals onto Karabakh*" (de Waal 2013, 259). The diaspora has been important not only in supporting Armenia and Karabakh in the "frozen" phase of the conflict; various individuals (mainly from the Soviet diaspora) also joined the Karabakh-Armenian side in the warfare effort. Tölölyan (2007, 115-116) points out how during the Karabakh War the Armenian diaspora in the USSR, and especially the descendants of emigrants from Karabakh, came back to fight in person. In addition to the regional diaspora, a number of Western-diasporic Armenians joined the war effort. The most famous of these was Monte Melkonian, who was eventually killed in battle (de Waal 2013). However, the presidential narrative does not celebrate this diasporic support. For instance, in spite of the "popular-hero status" of Monte Melkonian, President Sargsyan mentions him only once *en passant*, under the more impersonal label of "the Melkonian brothers".[127] This constitutes a first indication of an unwillingness to frame the Nagorno-Karabakh victory as an inclusive pan-Armenian success.

This "domestic ownership" of the victory is in contrast with a common theme of the presidential narrative: the pan-Armenian duty to support Nagorno-Karabakh. More specifically, President Sargsyan has often evoked in rhetorical terms the relationship between the Karabakh conflict and the Armenian diaspora. In particular, he has often mentioned the "*triumvirate of Armenia, Artsakh*[128] *and the diaspora*[129]". This specific expression has been used primarily, if not exclusively, during meetings with diaspora communities. On these occasions, the crucial importance of these ties it is usually described in impressive language. Additionally, references to

[126] In 2001, as consequence of the 9/11 attacks, the measure was amended and the president acquired the prerogative of waiving it for a one-year period (renewable).

[127]President of Armenia. 2012. President of Armenia. 2012. "President Serzh Sargsyan's Speech at the AGBU 87th General Meeting", 19 October, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2012/10/19/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-AGBU-87/ .

[128] Artsakh means 'Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenian language. In 2017, as a result of a constitutional referendum, the de facto country has officially been renamed 'Artsakh Republic'. [The Armenian Weekly. 2017. "Artsakh Votes for New Constitution, Officially Renames the Republic", 21 February, http://armenianweekly.com/2017/02/21/artsakh-votes-for-new-constitution-officially-renames-the-republic/] .

[129]President of Armenia. 2015. "President sends congratulatory message to His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia", 18 July, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/07/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-congratulation-to-Aram-A/ .

a common national membership, such as "*dear compatriots*", are used. In an attempt to highlight the necessity of acting together, it is also said that: *"New challenges facing the Armenian state, the Artsakh world and the diaspora suppose, more than ever, combining our efforts and taking wise actions".*[130] However, there is almost no consistency between these solemn tones and more practical statements. More specifically, the diaspora is almost never invited to undertake any type of action related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and, consequently, to Azerbaijan. In other words, despite the security concerns related to the conflict, the diaspora is never requested to provide any form of specific support. A possible interpretation would be that a highly mobilised diaspora is not considered useful in enhancing security, as it could introduce an element of unpredictability. Additionally, the involvement of the diaspora in this regard could come into conflict with the emphasis placed in the presidential narrative on the Minsk negotiations, chaired by Russia, France and the US, especially as it is often said that Armenia is committed to solving the conflict within the framework of the Minsk process.[131] Therefore, a galvanised diaspora that would not bear the cost of security choices made could have a disastrous effect on the country. In this regard, President Sargsyan has suggested that the preferences of the diaspora could undermine the interest of the country: *"Probably for an Armenian who lives in Toronto it would be nice if Armenia recognizes independence of NK. But is it worth endangering the lives of thousands?".*[132]

It could be hypothesised that Armenia, not only respecting the format of negotiations but also being overall satisfied with the status quo, has no interest in an intervention on the part of its extremely unpredictable diaspora. Another possible explanation is that the "strategic ally" Russia could, as outlined in Chapter 1, have its own agenda in the conflict. Therefore, and in keeping with the other findings of this chapter, tensions are carefully avoided.

Discourse on the Diaspora and foreign policy: concluding remarks

Throughout this section, it has emerged that the state's approach towards the diaspora in its public discourse includes relevant 'political implicatures' for the West and Russia. In light of this, it could

[130]President of Armenia. 2015. "President Serzh Sargsyan's welcoming remarks to the participants of the 11th Representatives' Assembly of the Armenian General Union of Body Culture", 7 September, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/09/07/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Armenian-General-Athletic-Union/ .

[131] President of Armenia. 2015. "Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the fourth Eastern Partnership Summit", 22 May, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/22/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Eastern-Partnership-Latvia-speech/ .

[132]President of Armenia. 2013. President Serzh Sargsyan met with the representatives of the mass media, 18 March, http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/03/18/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference/ .

be said that these strategic narratives have a dual function: reiterating the solidity of the state's sovereignty and projecting Armenia as a responsible international actor.

The diaspora is often considered to be an important vector of Armenian foreign policy. However, this relationship has experienced tensions over the years. In an analysis of the Armenian political discourse on the diaspora, the contrast between the high-rhetorical praise attributed to pan-Armenianness and, the simultaneous silence on specific matters such as economy and security emerges. The need to avoid alienating the diaspora, while also asserting the primacy of the state apparatus in foreign policy making, provides an important explanation for this discursive approach. In other words, maximising the support of the diaspora can be seen as a delicate juggling of the need to extract resources and the desire to preserve the state monopoly over agenda-setting. From this perspective, efforts taken to present the diaspora as a useful complement, rather than as a crucial economic and security asset, could be interpreted as an attempt to avoid portraying the Self as needing to outsource basic state functions. In this regard, the target audience is composed not only of diasporans but also of other countries, including the arch-enemy Azerbaijan.

The 'political implicatures' related to the West and Russia should also be noted. A moderate foreign policy would not be compatible with the priorities, of the diaspora while assertiveness on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and recognition of the genocide could stir tensions with Russia, the US and, more indirectly, with the EU. It would also render a pragmatic agreement with Turkey impossible. Likewise, representing the interests of Armenian migrant labourers is not compatible with the state's overall goals vis-à-vis Russia. Therefore, the pattern of government discourse is relatively consistent. It does not incorporate issues raised by the diaspora, or seek to mobilise the diaspora through public discourse, where these actions would damage Armenia's efforts to project an image of itself as a small actor, fully aware of its place in the international system and committed to maintaining positive ties with as many partners as possible.

Conclusion: Armenian foreign policy, complementarity and diaspora

On foot of the two case studies analysed in this chapter, it can be inferred that Armenian strategic discourse exercises a consistent effort to portray the country as a prudent international actor, aware of its size and limits. Such attitude is framed not as a simple pragmatic calculation but rather as an idealist worldview. Thus, foreign policy elites present it as in line with the thinking of Woodrow Wilson rather than that of Lord Palmerston. Such a theme has emerged from the presidential narrative on various occasions. For instance, Serzh Sargsyan said that: "*One of the better-known adages of civilization stipulates that there exist no permanent enemies or permanent friends, only*

permanent interests. (…) But I am a believer in lasting friendship. I believe in friendship between people, nations, states, and countries".[133] Notwithstanding the cosmopolitan spirit embedded in this quote, the actual conduct of foreign policy shows a distinctive pragmatic component. To resort to another historical analogy, the Armenian Government operates in line with Chancellor Bismarck's worldview, famous for maximising the external leeway of the country through a complex web of international ties. The difference between Bismarck's Prussia and present-day Armenia is that the latter is situated in a particularly challenging region and its main partner/patron Russia is extraordinarily unpredictable. As stated by the Swiss Ambassador Lukas Gasser in Armenia: "*Desire is not limited, possibilities are*".

In order to establish ties with other powers without jeopardising the relationship with Moscow, Armenian politicians act according to the guidelines of 'complementarity', which recommend holding multiple external ties without challenging the primacy of the Russian relationship. The restructuring of the relationship with the West after the so-called U-Turn in 2013 offers a remarkable example of 'complementarity' in practice. Additionally, the Armenian leadership has cultivated a relationship with a powerful non-state actor: its worldwide diaspora. However, this latter element presents some challenges, mostly due to discrepancies between the diasporic preferences and those of the state.

Even though the case studies analysed in this chapter are remarkably different, the strategic narratives concerning Russia and the West reveal similar 'political implicatures'. Firstly, there is clear priority given to the attempt not to cause any unnecessary tension with Russia, while seeking to maximise the relationship with the EU within this constraint. This is observable in Armenian security discourse, which is surprisingly silent about issues such as Moscow's selling of weapons to Baku or the bureaucratic restrictions faced by migrant workers in Russia. Secondly, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is dealt with cautiously. This is visible not only from the security discourse in relation to Russia, which is never asked to give any additional security guarantees, but also with reference to the diaspora, the extreme stances of which are not incorporated into the foreign policy agenda of the motherland. Furthermore, the political speeches aimed at the EU show a clear interest in cooperation, despite the limits created by Moscow. For instance, after the withdrawal from the AA talks, Armenian elites clearly signalled their interest in an alternative

[133] President of Armenia. 2013. "Toast by the President of the Republic of Armenia Mr Serzh Sargsyan at the dinner in honour of the Guests Participating at the Inauguration Ceremony", 9 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/04/09/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-dinner-on-the-occassion-of-inaguration-toast/ .

form of association. In this regard, the repeatedly articulated desire to act as a bridge between the EU and the EEU can be interpreted, in terms of 'political implicatures', as an indication of a desire to cooperate with the Western world, albeit under changed circumstances. In sum, the analysis of Armenian behaviour vis-à-vis Russia, the EU and its diaspora provides evidence of Armenian strategic behaviour that tries to maximise the extent of its foreign policy within the limits allowed it. From this emerges the proactivity of a small state that, in spite of visible limits, tries to maximise its scope for autonomous action.

CHAPTER 4: Georgia – Russia's European Neighbour

"*Georgia is a small country with a great number of heroes. This small country is still alive because we had many heroes who defended this small land*[1]". These words summarise the complex way in which Georgia frames itself: as small, proud and resilient. More broadly, the Georgian political narrative often refers to Georgia as a small country that, instead of succumbing to the imperialistic appetite of its Russian neighbour, has consciously decided to join the "free world" and thus to adopt a clear pro-Western foreign policy orientation.

The ambition of obtaining EU and NATO membership has been a distinctive trait of Georgian self-representation. It is no coincidence that European flags are flown all around Tbilisi (Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014), visually reinforcing the quest for Euro-Atlantic integration,[2] to the point that an uninformed tourist could believe themselves to be "*in an enthusiastic European capital"*.[3] After the first turbulent years of independence, successive presidents have declared Euro-Atlantic integration to be an ultimate goal of Georgia. For example, former President Eduard Shevardnadze (1995-2003) announced his interest in pursuing NATO (German 2015, 603) and EU membership.[4] Former President Mikheil Saakashvili (2004-2013; UNM political party) was extremely aware of the importance of symbols and consequently made widespread use of them. For the presidential inauguration ceremony in January 2004, he arranged for the EU flag to be raised alongside the Georgian one and for a choir to sing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the European anthem (Brisku 2013, 164). In 2010, in his address to the members of the European Parliament, Mr Saakashvili referred to this strategic symbolism with the following words: *"The vision that guided all these steps was captured by a single symbol: besides every Georgian flag, in every official building, we installed a European flag".*[5] After the 2012 parliamentary election and the 2013 presidential election, the Georgian Dream administration, despite being generally considered more pro-Russian than its predecessor, stated clearly that there was no prospect of a foreign policy U-turn and, therefore, that European and Euro-Atlantic integration was still a national priority (MacFarlane 2015). In most cases, the Georgian discourse leans to the West,

[1] President of Georgia. 2009. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 3 October, (Removed from the website)
[2] Marcus, S. 2008. "What lies beneath Georgian symbols", The Telegraph, 21 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[3] Euromoney. 2014. "Emerging Europe: A free market for Georgia?", March (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[4] Dzhindzhikhashvili, M. 2000. "Shevardnadze: Georgia must join EU, build new ties with Russia", *Associated Press International*, International News, December 25 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[5] President of Georgia. 2010. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 23 November, (Removed from the website).

understood as a non-specific mix of the EU, Europe and NATO (Kakhishvili 2016, 166). Even though an attentive analysis of Georgian foreign policy aspirations suggests that before 2008 the real objective was not that of joining the EU but rather that of joining NATO[6] (Boonstra and Delcour 2015), the political narrative emphasises that the process of integration into the different organisations progressed along parallel tracks. In an interview, former President Shevardnadze declared that: "*NATO membership remains an important goal for Georgia. (…) Accession to NATO is accession to the EU".*[7] A few months before the Russo-Georgian war, Mr Saakashvili declared that: "*We will continue our progress toward NATO and the European Union".*[8] In his inauguration speech in 2013, President Margvelashvili declared that: "*Becoming a full member of the free world serves as a long-term guarantee of Georgia's national security and sustainable development. This, in turn, can be ultimately achieved by means of integration into the European Union and NATO".*[9] In terms of 'political implicatures', the country consistently projects itself as a worthy member of the Western word.

In light of this introduction, some points can be highlighted. Firstly, since smallness is often depicted as a key characteristic of Georgia, the Western world is presented as the most favourable environment for small states. By contrast, Russia is represented as an international bully, who agitates rather than mediates in this area of what once was its backyard. Secondly, while this representation of Moscow is not fundamentally inaccurate, this attitude of Tbilisi towards its "much bigger neighbour" could be considered surprisingly assertive. Thirdly, whereas all political speeches contain some component of strategic communication, Georgian elites have shown an enhanced awareness of the power of words and symbols. Fourthly, in spite of changes in leadership, there has been substantial continuity in the foreign policy orientation of the country. These points can be inferred from the following cases: the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, selected due to its crucial relevance for Georgia and the rest of the South Caucasian region, and the Georgian visa policy, selected due to the apparent contrast that it highlights between the country's self-depiction as European and the mobility restrictions that exist for Georgian citizens. From both cases, it emerges that the enthusiastic embracing of a pro-Western outlook does not negate the interactional asymmetries stemming from size. As already pointed out by Tracy German (2015)

[6] Ghia Nodia (2014, 148) argues that, after the conflict, Europeans and Americans have often invited Georgia to focus mostly on European integration rather than on integration with NATO, perceivable as confrontational against Russia.
[7] Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast. 2006. "Interview with Georgian Former President Eduard Shevardnadze", *Izvestia Daily*, P. 1, 5, 5 September, 2006', (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[8] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 20 January, (Removed from the website)
[9]Civil Georgia. 2013. "President Margvelashvili's Inauguration Speech", *Civil Georgia*, 17 November7, Tbilisi, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26693 .

the foreign policy of Georgia is a mix of idealism and pragmatism. This chapter contributes to this debate by highlighting the conditions of this partnership, unspoken terms included. Throughout the chapter the following points emerge. Firstly, Georgia avoids making any form of negative remark about it Western ally. Secondly, despite harsh statements being made about Russia, Georgia has adopted a reasoned attitude (towards both Moscow and the West) by limiting the Russophobic narrative. Finally, in more recent times the quest for a degree of normalisation with Russia is slightly affecting these dynamics, as can clearly be inferred from the recent narrative on visa liberalisation. Thus, while the GD administration has declared its commitment to adhere to the pro-Western orientation, an analysis of the political discourse reveals (constrained) attempts to introduce some balancing.

The Russo-Georgian War

This section deals with the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia and with the discursive representation of this conflict and its impact on the relationship between Georgia and its external interlocutors. The decision to focus on this case was taken due to its indisputable relevance to both the region and Georgia. The events of 2008 indicated to the whole post-Soviet space the readiness of Russia to intervene militarily. To Georgia, it represented not only the collapse of the relationship with Russia but also the almost certain end of the NATO dream (Wivel 2016). As articulated by the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the August war was the main reason for denying Tbilisi a Membership Action Plan (MAP) (Fawn and Nalbandov 2012, 69). Additionally, the war hastened the decline of Mr Saakashvili and triggered the subsequent change in leadership. During the conflict, the strategic use of political narratives revealed not only expected tensions with Russia but also a certain asymmetry between Georgia and the West. Since focusing only on the conflict, and thus treating it if it had occurred in a vacuum, would not lead to an accurate understanding of these dynamics, this work looks at a broader time span, which allows for the changes both in the approach to external actors and the related 'political implicatures' to be included. In this way, the evolution in the representation of the different international actors can be outlined.

The section is organised as follows. After a short review of the post-independence Russo-Georgian relationship, the dramatic deterioration of this relationship during the Saakashvili administration is considered briefly. Following this, Georgian discourse in the immediate aftermath of the conflict is dealt with. In addition to the predictable acrimony towards Moscow, some asymmetry with the Western allies also emerges. From this, it is concluded that the Georgian experience illustrates the

risk that exists for a small state with an unbalanced foreign policy orientation that lacks any binding mechanisms. This risk is due to the fact that "friends" are not bound by any specific form of support while alternative options are virtually non-existent. The quest for some form of normalisation with Russia in the years since the war can be interpreted as an attempt to mitigate this lack of certainty in foreign policy. However, some constraints come into play, namely the nature of the domestic political environment and unresolved territorial conflicts.

Russia and Georgia before August 2008

As already hinted at, the European and Euro-Atlantic ambitions of Georgia did not emerge solely in reaction to the 2008 War. On the contrary, the geopolitical position of the country has been a longstanding issue. Kornely Kakachia (2013, 48) observes that Georgia, which has gravitated towards the West virtually since independence, has proactively worked to distance itself from its communist past. Similarly, former Defence Minister Irakli Alasania (2013, 7), describing Georgia's external orientation, considers that the country has abandoned its position at the crossroads and has instead chosen a clear foreign policy orientation. Overall, Georgian political discourse, even when Western ambitions alone are mentioned, implies a choice taken to dissociate from Russian projects and values. Notably, when President Saakashvili resorted to expressions like: "*We haven't started fighting for establishing Georgia as a part of Europe today. This fight counts many centuries*"[10], any possible association between Georgia and the "русский мир" (Russian world) was fundamentally ruled out. At the same time, Georgian political discourse concerning the Kremlin has mostly been articulated as a request for an equal partnership rather than as the outline of an *a priori* enmity. For instance, less than two months before the August War, President Saakashvili declared that: *"Russia and Georgia have got many common interests. Russia is strong when Georgia is on their side, but Georgia will be beside those, who will stand beside us[11]"*. Through a reconstruction of the Georgian narrative in the years before the war, this sub-section argues that Georgian policy-makers refrained from self-projecting as blindly Russophobic not only to avoid provoking (even further) the Russian neighbour but also to demonstrate to the West the ability to be self-restrained.

The relationship between Russia and post-independence Georgia has been characterised by several tensions. Georgia has generally shown a much higher degree of assertiveness towards Russia than might be anticipated in light of their "size disparity". This assertive attitude, adopted openly by

[10] President of Georgia. 2006. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 18 February, (Removed from the website).
[11] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 28 June , (Removed from the website)

policymakers, dates from well before the start of Saakashvili's presidency. In 1993 the great disparity of forces between Russia and Georgia gave the former considerable leverage over the latter (i.e. obliging Tbilisi to join the CIS and to accept the Russian-sponsored ceasefire terms) (Jones and Kakhishvili 2013, 17), whereas when in 2000 President Shevardnadze outlined the foreign policy goals of Georgia these were to join the EU and create a new partnership with Russia. The rationale was that Georgia, being located in *"a somewhat dangerous area,*" (in the official narrative, the perilous area was the unstable Chechnya only), needed "*A strong shield, which is the European Union"*.[12] In the previous months, Russia had been made to agree to abandon the military bases in Gudauta and Vaziani[13] and further talks about more bases were scheduled.[14] Amid tensions, and using the excuse of Chechen fighters finding "safe haven" in Georgia, Russian authorities revoked the free-travel regime that had been available to Georgian citizens, re-establishing visa formalities from January 2001. Tbilisi responded in kind, making no exception for the Russian troops stationed in Georgia.[15]

In 2003, Mr Saakashvili's rise to power seemed to signal to an improved relationship with Russia. In February 2004, Mr Saakashvili attended a Summit at the Kremlin and soon after declared his commitment to arresting and extraditing back to Russia Chechen fighters fleeing across the Georgian border. Stressing the crucial importance of the Russo-Georgian relationship, Mr Saakashvili declared that: "*Georgia will not enter into any relationship with other countries to the detriment of Russian security interests*".[16] He also often stated that he was committed to a friendly relationship with Russia, based on mutual respect and independence.[17] In the months after, Russia cooperated with Georgia in the removal of Adjaran warlord Aslan Abashidze (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009, 310). However, the relationship between the two countries deteriorated

[12] Dzhindzhikhashvili, M. 2000. "Shevardnadze: Georgia must join EU, build new ties with Russia", *Associated Press International*, International News, 25 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[13] The Vaziani base was vacated on June 2001 [Cohen, Ariel. 2009. "Georgia: Russia Plans Three Military Bases in Abkhazia", *Eurasianet*, February 5, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020609g.shtml]. The base in Gudauta, situated in Abkhazia, according to Georgian sources was never completely vacated (the de-facto authorities did not allow inspections). With the Russian recognition of Abkhazia, the Gudauta base has been reopened [Jamestown Foundation .2001."Russian Military Hands over Vaziani Base to Georgia", *Monitor Volume 7 (127*), 3 July3, https://jamestown.org/program/russian-military-hands-over-vaziani-base-to-georgia/.]
[14] RIA Novosti. 2000. "Georgia Refuses to Settle the Issue of Russian Military Bases Status in this Country". December 26 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[15] Associated Press International. 2000. "Georgia to require visas for Russian troops", *International News*, 24 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[16] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. 2004. "Georgian president looks ahead to developing partnership with Russia", 27 January (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[17]BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. 2004. "Saakashvili sees 'promising signs' in Putin stance on Georgia". 10 February (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

after Russian attempts to influence the formation of the Georgian cabinet.[18] The demand that Russia remove its military bases[19] and the stance of Tbilisi on territorial reintegration, together with Georgia's overt European and Euro-Atlantic ambitions, also contributed to the exacerbation of Russo-Georgian differences (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009). In the words of Ó Tuathail (2008, 682): "*Russian-Georgian relations went from bad to worse*". Tangible elements of this worsened relationship include Mr Saakashvili's firmness in requesting the removal of the Russian bases and the wine embargo imposed by Moscow.

In spite of these recurring tensions, the Saakashvili administration cautiously refrained from adopting a "Russophobic" narrative. Furthermore, in spite of the gravity of these events, President Saakashvili was careful not to frame this bilateral setback in terms of "incompatibility" with (or even worse, hatred of) Russia. On the other hand, he often emphasised that Georgia, despite past Russian actions, was not objecting to a friendly future relationship based on equality and mutual respect. This is illustrated by the language used by Mr Saakashvili about the removal of the Russian bases from the Georgian territory: "*We believe that the military bases are a relic of imperialism in Georgia. They have no place in a constructive relationship between Georgia and Russia. We want a constructive relationship with Russia, we want a good, neighbourly relationship".*[20] Similarly, notwithstanding his high displeasure with the wine embargo[21] imposed by Russia in April 2006,[22] President Saakashvili refrained from uttering hostile remarks against Russians. Notably, in an interview for the "Imedi TV Channel", he declared that Georgia, a sovereign state protecting its self-interest, still sought friendship with Russia, in spite of the fact that: "*Cutting off the wine was the filthiest thing they could have done to us*"[23] (before the blockade, the Russian market accounted for 80% of Georgian wine exports[24]). Even though President Saakashvili for the most part refrained from harsh comment, not all the members of his

[18] Interview with Timothy Blauvelt, Tbilisi (2016, 25 September).
[19] In Soviet times, due to the proximity of the Turkish border, the Transcaucasus military district was headquartered in Tbilisi. Additionally, military bases were located in Vaziani and Gudauta, Akhalkalaki, Batumi and Gudauta (currently located in Abkhazia). Notwithstanding the collapse of the USSR, in 1993 15000 Russian troops and border guards were estimated to remain in Georgia. While in the immediate aftermath of independence Georgia did not prioritise the withdrawal of these troops, unhappiness started to mount after defeat in the civil war with Abkhazia (Kakachia 2008).
[20] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2006. "Georgian President welcomes agreement on Russian bases", 3 April (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[21] Successively other products were banned: mineral waters, agricultural products, and even postal and air connections (Tsereteli 2013)
[22] According to Russia, due to health-related reasons.
[23] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2006. "Georgian leader says Russian wine embargo 'filthy trick'". 6 April (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[24] Osborn, A. 2006. "Moscow's restaurants pay the price for Georgian wine ban". *The Independent*, 6 May, p. 27 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

cabinet were as restrained. In April 2006, outlining what he considered the appropriate response to the Russian embargo on Georgian wine, the Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Okruashvili suggested that the general quality of the wine had to be improved after the closure of the Russian market, where even "*faeces could be sold"*.[25] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin subsequently condemned the inappropriateness of this statement.[26] Notwithstanding this incident, it was often reiterated in mainstream narratives that the acrimony with the Kremlin should not translate into a refusal to associate with Russian citizens. Indeed, amid increasing tensions, the possibility of a simplified visa regime for Russian citizens was often hinted at. In this regard, Mr Saakashvili clearly said that: *"we have unilaterally relaxed the rules. In principle we are prepared to abolish visa requirements completely"*.[27] By contrast, he repeatedly voiced his unhappiness with the strict visa requirements for Georgians, which resulted in: "*imposing uncivilised restrictions on people's movement".*[28] This refusal to project bilateral tensions onto ordinary people was not confined to the elite level but held true also for the Georgian public, who never objected to the presence of Russian tourists[29] or ethnically Russian residents[30] in the country.

During the second half of 2006, the Russo-Georgian relationship further deteriorated over the arrest of four alleged Russian spies. On that occasion, video and audio tapes of the activities of these individuals were posted on official Georgian websites (Lefebvre and McDermott). Notwithstanding the immediate release and repatriation of the alleged spies, this event prompted higher intransigence on the part the Kremlin.[31] Indeed, less than one month after that quarrel, Gazprom announced that as of January 2007 the price for 1,000 cu meters of gas would increase from 110 US dollars to 230 US dollars. That amount substantially exceeded the price paid by most post-Soviet countries in 2007. For example, Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia paid 130, 170 and 110 US dollars respectively.[32] However, this move did not cause the Georgian narrative to be

[25] Civil Georgia. 2006. "Okruashvili Speaks of Wine Row," 23 April, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12394 .
[26] Russia & CIS General Newswire. 2006. "Chief sanitation official calls Georgian minister's comments on wine market "rude", 28 April (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[27] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2005. "Georgian President says visa requirements for Russians may be abolished", 29 April (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[28] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2006. "Georgian leader criticizes Russia for 'draconian' visa rules, flyovers", 21 February (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[29] Interview with Timothy Blauvelt, Tbilisi (2016, 25 September).
[30] Interview with EU officer, Tbilisi, (2016, 29 September).
[31] Blomfield, A. 2006. "Russia starts deporting Georgian immigrants. President Mikhail Saakashvili (left) tells Adrian Blomfield the West must denounce Russian 'xenophobia'", *The Daily Telegraph*, News International, p. 14 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[32] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2006. "Russia uses economic levers to exert pressure on Georgia", November 22 (retrieved through LexisNexis)

reversed. After the energy price rise had been announced, Mr. Saakashvili, after expressing his worries about possible energy wars, nevertheless declared that: "*We want to have friendly relations with all our neighbours, including Russia*," and confirmed that he would be attending the CIS summit in Belarus at the end of that month.[33] Georgia did not depart from this "reasonable attitude" even when the cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan opened new trade and energy corridors, easing Tbilisi's energy dependency. While President Saakashvili valued the support of Ankara and Baku[34] and although the inauguration of the BTC pipeline, operative since 2007, contributed to enhancing Georgian foreign policy self-confidence[35]and independence (Shiriyev 2013, 159), Georgia did not depart from its usual discursive self-representation: that of an independent state, unjustly victimised by Russia yet not blinded by bitterness or opposed to future cooperation. Furthermore, in May 2008, three months before the Georgian-Russian war, President Saakashvili declared that there were talks on-going on the simplification of visa rules.[36]

Speculating on the reasons for this particular form of self-projection, assertive but lacking any element of *a priori* antagonism, two explanations come to the fore. The first and most intuitive of these explanations identifies an effort to limit the damage with the big neighbour. Considering the disparity in size between the two countries as well as the geographic proximity and the over-assertive attitude of Georgia, it would have been unwise to add an unnecessary element of confrontation (such as issuing spiteful declarations). The second explanation relates more to the West and lies in showing "desired allies" that Georgia would not be a troublesome partner if accepted into NATO. While it was never openly stated, the Euro-Atlantic partners had felt some concern at the possible inclusion of a "potential troublemaker". Some episodes support this observation. In the aftermath of the "spy crisis", although the EU condemned the subsequent embargo, most embassies refrained from commending the Georgian operation. In fact, it was generally considered that had Tbilisi overstepped the mark on that occasion.[37] Even the United States, who at the time was on excellent terms with Georgia, seemed slightly perplexed by the Georgian actions. Matthew Bryza,[38] the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, while restating American support for Georgia admitted that the Georgian handling of the Russian spies differed

[33] Agence France Presse. 2006. "Russian gas price hike 'no catastrophe': Georgian president", 3 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[34] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2007. "Georgian leader says ties with Turkey, Azerbaijan mark geopolitical shift", 7 February (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[35] Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi, (2016, 1 October).
[36] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 20 May, (Removed from the website).
[37] Interview with Timothy Blauvelt, Tbilisi (2016, 25 September).
[38] CQ Transcriptions. 2006. "Matthew Bryza Holds a News Conference at OSCE Vienna", 16 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

from the usual (i.e. quiet) shared international practices. The fear of enraging Russia also accounts for the opposition at the Bucharest summit in 2008 of some countries, the foremost of these being Germany, to proposals to open the "Membership Action Plan" to Georgia (ICG 2008a, 14). In brief, Georgia seemed aware that a "Russophobic" prospective NATO member, especially if this member was small and a neighbour of Russia, would be problematic and henceforth showing some pragmatism, albeit more in words than in deeds, was necessary for the realisation of Georgian foreign policy goals. However, as will emerge from the next pages, this attitude changed, at least temporarily, in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 war.

The Georgian Narrative at War: Key Events

The events surrounding the August 2008 war are crucial to the understanding of the external relationships of modern Georgia and, more generally, of the post-Soviet world. The war signalled the willingness of Russia to intervene militarily in its neighbourhood rather than relying on proxy intervention.[39] After a brief review of the events of this period, this work analyses the Georgian narrative in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. In considering the strategic dimension of the political discourse, some elements emerge: the departure from the previous (relatively) conciliatory narrative towards Russia and the implicit acknowledgement of the asymmetry between Georgia and the sought-after Western ally.

Given the poor state of the Russo-Georgian relationship and the high importance attributed by Georgian policymakers to territorial reintegration, a conflict in the South Caucasus was feared. Additionally, there were repeated mutual violations of the airspace. Notably, in July 2008, during the visit of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Georgia, four Russian aircraft circled South Ossetia (Ó Tuathail 2008, 284). Exactly one year before, International Crisis Group (ICG 2007) had warned about the escalation potential of security incidents on the Georgian-South Ossetian border. In 2008, two events seemed to exacerbate the situation: Kosovo's declaration of independence (17 February) and the Bucharest Summit declaration of eventual NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine (2-4 April) (ICG 2008a, 2). In June, analysts feared a conflict in Abkhazia,[40] with high-spillover potential (de Waal 2008; ICG 2008a). Less than 20 days before the beginning of the hostilities, Russia's envoy to NATO openly declared that Mr Saakashvili was trying to secure NATO support before proceeding with forceful territorial

[39] Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September).
[40] Yalowitz, K. and Courtney W. 2008. "Georgia and Russia can avoid war - if the West helps". *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

reintegration.[41] Given the climate and the hawkish attitude in both Tbilisi and Moscow, an escalation seemed to be very much within the realms of possibility.[42] After a series of incidents between Georgia and South Ossetia,[43] on the night of 8 August Georgian troops entered South Ossetia. As a response, Russian troops entered first into South Ossetia, through the Roki tunnel, and afterwards into Georgia itself. On 12 August, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed a six-point cease-fire document that was signed on 15 and 16 August in Tbilisi and Moscow (ICG 2008b). On 26 August, Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries. On 8 October, the last Russian checkpoint was withdrawn. In the immediate aftermath, the EU Monitoring Mission and the Georgian police began patrolling the area[44] (Ó Tuathail 2008). The suddenness and the emotional implications of the August 2008 war are reflected in the political discourse of the immediate aftermath.[45] As might be expected, most speeches had a tone that was clearly sceptical of Russia and, conversely, a clear pro-Western orientation. In the next paragraphs the following discursive themes will be dealt with: the premeditation of the Russian action, the legacy of post-Soviet imperialism and the support of the West for Georgia. Additionally, the acquiescence of Georgia, in the absence of actual military support, will be analysed.

The Russo-Georgian war: the political discourse

Firstly, there is a clear emphasis on the element of premeditation and on the brutality of the Russian action. This aspect is particularly relevant since, after 8 August, both parties accused each other of initiating the hostilities. Russians justified their intervention as a response to Georgian adventurism while Georgian authorities claimed that the Kremlin's action had been planned months in advance. As could be expected, the legitimacy of the intervention and its consistency with the principles of humanitarian law were topics of discussion during this heated debate. Russian politicians and analysts justified the operation as intended to ensure the protection of

[41] Russia & CIS General Newswire. 2008. “Russian diplomat: Georgia seeking war on Abkhazia, S. Ossetia”, 19 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[42] Harding, L. 2008. “Analysis by Luke Harding Moscow: A furious Kremlin is determined to bar NATO from its backyard but conflict will solve nothing”, the Observer, 20 July, Observer Foreign Pages, Pg. 39 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[43] For a detailed reconstruction of the events, refer to ICG (2008b).
[44] The EUMM’s mandate covers the entire Georgian territory, breackaway regions included. However, due to the contrariety of Russia and the de facto states, the monitoring operations do not extend to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
[45] Ó Tuathail (2008) has already proposed an analysis of the competing narratives of Russia and Georgia. Similarly, Fawn and Nalbandov (2012) offer an analysis of the different media discourses. Consistently with the broader research question, this work mostly focuses on the concepts of "smallness" and on the way the relevant external actors are portrayed.

compatriots abroad, who were portrayed as potential victims of ethnic cleansing. Immediately after the launch of hostilities, Ivan Melnikov, the Russian Duma Communist Party Deputy Speaker, bluntly declared that: "*This is genocide of the Ossetian people, but Russian citizens die as a result of the genocide too, therefore Russia must take the most resolute measures to protect its citizens".*[46] Similarly, the Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov defined the Georgian operations in South Ossetia as: "*A case of horrible, savage, mass genocide".*[47] A couple of days later, President Medvedev[48] and Prime Minister Putin 2008[49] also labelled the events in South Ossetia as genocidal acts. Additionally, Russian policymakers referred to the Bush doctrine, which allowed for pre-emptive war without a UN mandate (Goltz 2009, 253).

In terms of the presidential narrative, the Georgian response in this dispute over legitimacy was largely articulated around two main points: Russian premeditation and Russian war crimes. Concerning the premeditation issue, President Saakashvili claimed that: "*Russia's acts are performed in all directions and it clearly shows, that this operation is an implementation of a previously well-planned plan*"[50]. Similarly, when commenting on the dynamics of the hostilities, Georgian experts were almost unanimous in calling the Russian action "*a blatant act of aggression*", intended both to punish the Euro-Atlantic ambitions of Georgia and to test the decisiveness of the West.[51] President Saakashvili also remarked that, far from being a tailor-made post-war claim, Georgia had already warned external powers about Russia's warmongering intentions: "*We warned different politicians in the world (…); few days before Russia started to attack Georgia, they evacuated whole civilian population of Tskhinvali and areas, and this should have told you something*".[52] Using the words of American journalist Thomas Goltz (2009, 251), Georgia portrayed itself as the "Cassandra in the Caucasus", unheeded when voicing concerns about the Russian threat. Furthermore, this point can be interpreted as an indirect criticism of the West for not being more alert and receptive in the previous months. As will be explored later in this section, Georgian authorities consistently refrained from publicly blaming the country's

[46] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2008. "Russian deputy speaker accuses Georgia of genocide", 8 August, (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[47] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2008. "Moscow mayor accuses Georgia of genocide, slams Western media", 9 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[48] Agence France Presse .2008. "Medvedev calls Georgian attack 'genocide': report", 10 August (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[49] EuroNews. 2008. "Putin Calls Georgian Assault a 'Crime' and Genocide", *English Version*, 10 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[50] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 10 August, (Removed from the website)
[51] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Georgian pundits downbeat on implications of conflict with Russia", 19 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[52] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 17 August, (Removed from the website)

Western allies. Finally, the imbalance of forces that existed was cited in a repudiation as utterly illogical of the hypothesis that Georgia had initiated the hostilities. In President Saakashvili's words: "*We are a very small country, Russia is huge, we are not suicides to start a war with the country like Russia. It is a fact that a big country destroys a small country".*[53]

In addition to undermining the Russian argument of humanitarian intervention by describing the action as unequivocally pre-planned, President Saakashvili also said that, despite adopting the guise of "humanitarian defenders", Russian soldiers did not refrain from drunkenness and looting.[54] Similarly, a report from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke of aerial attacks on civilian targets.[55] Furthermore, with reference to the areas in South Ossetia previously controlled by pro-Georgian authorities, President Saakashvili said that: "*There is ethnic cleansing being committed and we are demanding access; this has been committed in areas previously controlled by the central Georgian government, because half of South Ossetia had always been controlled by the Georgian central government and to see what was this invasion all about".*[56] This last point refers to the fact that, in contrast to the Abkhazian case,[57] a significant number of ethnic Georgians still lived in South Ossetia. Because of this, the Georgian government had, since 2006, started to support an alternative local administration, led by Dmitri Sanakoev and favoured by the Georgian population (ICG 2007). After the 2008 war more than 20,000 ethnic Georgians fled South Ossetia (Human Rights Watch 2009); since then, most Georgian villages have reportedly been destroyed.[58] Crimes against the civilian population were also reported by the Georgian National Security Council Secretary Kakha Lomaia, who said that Russian-backed criminal gangs were terrorising the people of the Akhalgori district (a predominantly Georgian area in South Ossetia), ordering them to either obtain Russian passports or to leave the town.[59] By presenting Russian soldiers as perpetrators of war crimes, the Georgian narrative aimed to undermine any claim of humanitarian intervention and, conversely, to portray the Russian operation as motivated purely by an expansionist agenda.

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[53] President of Georgia. 2009. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 22 September, (Removed from the website)
[54] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 19 August, (Removed from the website)
[55] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Georgia condemns continued Russian bombings". August 12 (retrieved through LexisNexis).
[56] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 19 August, (Removed from the website).
[57] Mostly due to the expulsion of the Georgian population in 1993.
[58] Interview with "EU Official", Tbilisi, (2016, 29 September 2016).
[59] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Ethnic Georgians "terrorised" in South Ossetian district-top security official". 25 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

The aggressive nature of Russia is not presented as emerging exceptionally in the context of this specific war but rather as being characteristic of a cyclical history. Historical analogies[60] are made with reference both to the past record of Russo-Georgian relations and to Russian/Soviet imperialism, including the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.[61] Even though the invasion of Afghanistan is repeatedly mentioned, the comparisons made are mostly with the Czechs and the Hungarians who, being citizens of satellite countries in Eastern Europe, experienced Soviet interventionism. For example, it was said that: "*This is country under occupation, but like Czechs in 1968 and like Hungarians in 1956, as a European nation, Georgians are continuing to resist in their peaceful ways and this peaceful resistance will continue and intensify*".[62] In this way, not only is Soviet interventionism emphasised but so too is the fact of Georgia belonging to a European civilisation. It is remarkable how this analogy was reproduced by external actors. Indeed, the British foreign secretary David Miliband wrote in the "Times": "*You don't need to be a student of the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 to find the sight of Russian tanks rolling into a neighbouring country chilling".*[63] Similarly, the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that: "*This is not 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia where Russia can threaten a neighbor, occupy a capital, overthrow a government and get away with it. Things have changed*".[64] These declarations were received with glee in Georgia, not least because, as will be explained in the next paragraph, enhancing Western support for Georgia constituted a crucial aim of the presidential narrative.

More broadly, the political discourse depicts Georgia as a small state that in August 2008 became a battlefield for opposing values and worldviews. More precisely, it was said that, far from being a mere bilateral quarrel, the Russo-Georgian conflict constituted: "*a war between civilisation and non-civilization",*[65] where the issues at stake were far bigger than territorial gains or losses. At the same time, in the Georgian narrative a highly symbolic meaning was attributed to the smallness of the country, as can be inferred from the following words: "*This is the fight between a big, brutal force and a small, united nation. This is the fight between David and Goliath".*[66] Additionally, and in equally emphatic tones, Mr Saakashvili declared that: "*Today the fate of Europe and the free world is unfortunately being played out in my small country. But together, we can and we must*

[60] See also Fawn and Nalbandov (2012, 67).
[61] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 26 August, (Removed from the website).
[62] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 19 August (Removed from the website).
[63] Miliband, David. 2008. "Russia will not benefit from its aggression". The Times. 19 August. http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/law/columnists/article2047557.ece .
[64] Torchia, Christopher. 2008. "Russia: Forget about Georgia territorial integrity", *Associated Press Online,* August 14 (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[65]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 10 August, (Removed from the website).
[66]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 1 September, (Removed from the website).

unite to meet this challenge."[67] In this way, Europe and Europeans are mentioned not simply as desired protectors but as directly involved in the hostilities. It follows that, given that core European values are at stake and remembering the consequences of the 1938 appeasement, Europe should not dismiss the conflict as a "post-Soviet quarrel" but should instead live up to its reputation: "*We expect from Europe what I have always dreamed about - when wickedness and kindness fight with each other, kindness must always win. It has to defend kindness and fight with wickedness, defend its fundamental values, the freedom and future of small and big nations".*[68] This point is restated in Saakashvili's speech at the UN General Assembly: "*Despite our small size, the legal, moral, political, and security implications raised by that invasion could not be larger in consequence. Indeed, those issues cut through to the heart of the UN's founding charter*".[69]

This "clash of civilisations" narrative[70] was reproduced by other political cadres. Foreign Minister Eka Tqeshelashvili declared that: "*Russian aggression is a response to Georgia's aspiration to become a part of civilized Europe*".[71] In this way, the Georgian narrative framed the country as having been attacked for explicitly choosing a Western course. Europe is implicitly invited to live up its reputation by not abandoning its "supporter under attack". The strategic effectiveness of this argument was acknowledged even by Russian observers. The Russian paper *Vedomosti* published an editorial warning Russian politicians not to give Georgia any pretext to frame the conflict as a battle between Moscow and the civilised world.[72] However, leaving aside the declarations of solidarity from most Western governments, no external military support was offered to Georgia. This question of military support provoked a public debate on issues ranging from the appropriate level of Western support[73] to the potential implications of a proxy war fought on Georgian soil.[74] In spite of expressing some predictable disappointment,[75] the political narrative refrained from open criticism. This work attributes this restraint to the desire not to create tensions with the allies.

[67]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 26 August, (Removed from the website).
[68]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 31 August (Removed from the website).
[69]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 24 September, (Removed from the website).
[70] This term is also used by Fawn and Nalbandov (2012, 65).
[71] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Foreign minister questioned regarding Georgian-Russian war", 28 October, (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[72] Vedomosti. 2008. "От редакции: Поединок в эфире [Editorial: Duel in the air]", 11 August, http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2008/08/11/ot-redakcii-poedinok-v-jefire .
[73] Interview with Levan Khakhishvili, Tbilisi (2016, 27 September).
[74] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008 "Georgian pundits downbeat on implications of conflict with Russia", 19 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[75] Confirmed by interviews

War-time friends?

President Saakashvili often emphasised the external support available to Georgia. For example, he declared that: "*We will not give Russians our houses or our villages. We are Georgians and the whole world is focused on us".*[76] Additionally, even though analysts feared that the war could delay the NATO MAP for Georgia,[77] top political elites emphasised an undiluted desire on the part of Georgia to eventually join NATO.[78] At the same time, it was declared that external military support was not expected. In his press conference with the NATO Secretary General, on August 16, Mr Saakashvili stated that: "*Georgia does not stand alone at this very tough period of time. Now more than ever Georgia's course to Euro-Atlantic integration is on the irreversible track".*[79] Slightly departing from this line, in an interview with the French Magazine "L'Express" he declared that: "*I never considered that NATO forces or the US Army would land here".*[80] In this regard, Professor Bakur Kvashilava[81] observes that, in spite of these declarations and while the expert community did not expect an external military intervention, at least some sections of the political establishment bemoaned in private the limited support received. This seems in line with the fact that, although there was a lack of official declaration to this end, some unhappiness emerges from cinematographic reconstructions of the events. The movie "Five Days War", financed by pro-Government individuals and released in 2011, begins with the image of an American vehicle in Iraq saved from an ambush by a valiant Georgian unit. The movie concludes with the main Georgian character asking his American interlocutors where the US had been during the invasion of Georgia (Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014, 934).

The contrast between this predictable dissatisfaction and the moderate character of political speeches can be explained by a pragmatic approach to political discourse at the time: considering the dramatic deterioration of the relationship with Russia, it was absolutely imperative to avoid creating any tension with the Western allies.[82] A similar conclusion was reached by Kornely Kakachia, who labelled this cautious behaviour "strategic prudence". Certain insights into

[76]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 16 August, (Removed from the website).
[77] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Tension in breakaway regions to affect Georgia's NATO chances –pundit", 10 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[78] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Tension in breakaway regions to affect Georgia's NATO chances -pundit", 10 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[79]President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 16 August, (Removed from the website)
[80] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2008. "Georgia's Saakashvili says Putin aiming to change "world's strategic balances". 9 September (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[81] Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September).
[82] Ibid.

"international equilibria" can be inferred from this pragmatism. More specifically, in light of the blame-free political discourse identified above, it is safe to assume that the Georgian leadership was conscious of the asymmetry in the relationship with the West and of the desperate need, due to the disastrous state of the relationship with Russia, not to cause any friction. As pointed out by a Western diplomat, the (impracticable) alternatives to an acquiescent attitude towards the West were either complete isolation or a return to the Russian sphere as the "prodigal son".[83] As pointed out by Professor Kvashilava,[84] the war reinforced Georgia's sense of vulnerability. Therefore, it can be argued that this sense of vulnerability was due not only to the Russian threat but also to the lack of certain security guarantees and the absence of alternative external options other than the West.

The lack of criticism of the West is indicative of a certain pragmatic attitude. This failure to articulate dissatisfaction with the West is far from being the only discursive element of this pragmatism, as the approach of Georgia towards *individual EU member states* shows evidence of similar considerations. In spite of a discursive emphasis on *international organisations* and the excellent relationship with some Eastern states and Baltic countries, Georgian elites were proactive in gaining the support of prominent *countries*. A relevant feature of the August War was the limited role[85] played by the United States,[86] which represented a departure from the almost unconditional support given to Georgia since the Rose Revolution and from the particularly warm relationship enjoyed between the presidents of the two countries. It has been observed that, notwithstanding Georgian rhetoric about being part of a European civilisation, up until August 2008 the real national goal was that of membership of NATO rather than of the EU (Boonstra and Delcour 2015). As suggested by Kornely Kakachia,[87] a mistake made by Mr Saakashvili at the time was to focus too much on the US, and, conversely, to neglect Europe. The limited and confused reaction of the United States and the remarkable diplomatic interest of Europe seemed to indicate to Mr Saakashvili the need to adjust his policy in the short run. Thus it is can be seen that Mr Saakashvili's speeches in the immediate aftermath of the conflict begin to ascribe a greater

[83] Interview with "West European Diplomat2", Tbilisi (2016, 28 September).
[84] Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September).
[85] Notably, President Bush voiced his support to Georgia from his ranch in Texas [Riechmann, Deb. 2008. "Bush tells Russia to get out of Georgia", *The Associated Press*, Domestic News, 16 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis)].
[86] According to Condoleezza Rice's biography, in the months before Georgia had repeatedly been warned not to expect military support. In August 2008, even though the US National Security Council (NSC) discussed the military option, risking a conflict with Russia over Georgia was not considered a viable option (MacFarlane 2013).
[87] Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi, (2016, 1 October)

relevance to Europe, and primarily to the "big actor" that was Germany. On the 12 August, the heads of state of Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania came to Tbilisi and gave public declarations in support of Georgia. However, the Georgian political discourse seemed to give greater relevance to Germany, never previously a "political patron" of Georgia.

Indeed, a few months before, at the Bucharest NATO Summit, Germany had been one of the primary opponents to the proposal to open the NATO Membership Action Plan to Georgia. Additionally, roughly one month before the conflict, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that the admission of Georgia into NATO was conditional upon the prior resolution of its territorial disputes.[88] In spite of this, after the outbreak of the war, high expectations were placed on Berlin. When Mrs Merkel came to Tbilisi and declared that the path to NATO accession was still open if Georgia wished to move towards it, many expected a radical change of direction (even though no concrete steps were suggested[89]). Additionally, to illustrate how the global balance had shifted after the Five Days War, Mr Saakashvili declared: *"World order is totally reversed. During the last decade Germany had most favorable attitude towards Russia. However, today, German press expresses so unanimous support towards Georgia that no country ever had such a support".*[90] Leaving aside the realities of Berlin's intervention,[91] these declarations show that Georgia, in spite of much warmer ties with smaller actors and the existence of collective mechanisms, was aware of the importance of the old-style support of powerful state actors. From that point on, the securing of the support of major European players seems to have become a primary goal for Georgia. Indeed, gaining German support has been a priority of the new administration.[92] In conclusion, drawing upon high-ideological expressions, including historical analogies, Georgia frames the conflict with Russia not as a territorial dispute but as a "clash of civilisations" in which Russia invaded Georgia as a punishment for its pro-Western aspirations. Furthermore, Georgian politicians emphasised how the "civilised world" had stood staunchly by Georgia. Looking at the omissions in this extremely polarised narrative, it can be observed that the political discourse never blames the Western allies for failing to provide actual military support. Furthermore, although the West is mostly referred to as a unitary block, particular importance is attributed to prominent actors, first and foremost among these being Germany. These findings highlight the uncomfortable

[88] McGroarty, Patrick. 2008. "Merkel says Georgia must resolve conflict with Russia before joining NATO", *Associated Press International*, International News (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[89] ICG, August 2008.
[90] President of Georgia. 2008. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 24 August , (Removed from the website)
[91] France, at the time president of the Council of Europe, was the most active European country in that matter.
[92] Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi, (2016, 1 October); Interview with Eastern European Diplomat, Tbilisi (2016, 27 September).

position of Georgia in August 2008: in a war with Russia and needing to secure, in the absence of binding security guarantees, the maximum possible support from the West.

Forewords: the years after the war

In the aftermath of the August 2008 war, Georgia needed to rethink its self-representation and its foreign policy. Rather than this happening immediately, the most significant changes can be observed as occurring over the following years. This section will focus on the following points: a symbolic opening on the part of Mr Saakashvili and the promise of normalisation with Russia that was promoted by the subsequent administration.

As seen in the previous sections, in the aftermath of the 2008 war Georgia was extremely harsh in its condemnation of the Russian operation. In response to the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which involved recognising the validity of passports issues by these regions), Georgia limited its visa requirement exemptions to citizens of the North Caucasian republics. This provision was disliked by the Kremlin, as it challenged Russian efforts to minimise the differences between the Caucasian region and the rest of the country.[93] Aware of the Kremlin's preferences, and encouraged by its Western partners to avoid unnecessary provocation,[94] in 2012 Georgia lifted the visa requirements for *all* Russian citizens. On that occasion, President Saakashvili delivered a powerful "(…) *message to the citizens of Russia; Georgia is not hostile".*[95] Although there were considerable external elements that contributed to this choice, it nonetheless had a major moral result: showing, in concrete terms, that Georgia felt no acrimony towards ordinary Russians. Professor Bakur Kvashilava[96] considers that this move, which the Kremlin was unable to reciprocate, embarrassed the Russian government and weakened its argument about the inherent Russophobia of Georgian cadres. It therefore represented a moral victory for Georgia. Nevertheless, the most significant window of opportunity for change to be brought about in the Russo-Georgian relationship was opened after a renovation of the political landscape.

[93] Umodov, A. 2010. "Why Does Georgia's Visa-free Regime in the North Caucasus Concern Russia?", *USAK, Caucasia Analysis,* 22 October, http://www.usak.org.tr/en/usak-analysis/caucasia/analysis-why-does-georgia-s-visa-free-regime-in-the-north-caucasus-concern-russia .
[94] Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi, (2016, 1 October).
[95] President of Georgia. 2012. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 26 June, (Removed from the website).
[96] Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September).

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder of the Georgian Dream coalition, was elected as prime minister[97] (he later resigned and was replaced by Irakli Garibashvili). In the 2013 presidential elections, the victory of the Georgian Dream candidate Giorgi Marginishvili brought a period of uninterrupted UNM power, dating from 2003, to an end. In spite of an electoral campaign in which tensions were heightened and in which the Georgian Dream coalition was depicted as blatantly pro-Russian (MacFarlane 2015, 6), the new administration did not depart from the external goals set by its predecessor. Indeed, the Georgian Dream government, in an attempt to escape a dichotomous conception of foreign policy, proposed a normalisation of the relationship with Russia without departing from the primacy of the Western orientation (Minesashvili 2016, 21; German 2015, 604). Additionally, the refusal to compromise on territorial integrity has not been changed. In 2013, Prime Minister Ivanishvili underlined that the restoration of diplomatic relations[98] with Moscow was conditional upon the revocation of the recognition of the *de facto entities* and the withdrawal of those Russian troops still based in those territories.[99] At the time of writing, diplomatic ties have not been restored and a political understanding is far from being reached. In the words of Zurab Abashidze, the representative of the Georgian prime minister for relations with Russia:[100] "*Russia's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence created a vicious circle from where there is no way out".*[101] Although for the time being normalisation has not come to represent political understanding, it has nevertheless led to better trade relations. For example, in 2013 the Russian embargo on Georgian products was lifted while in 2015 Georgia did not impose proposed sanctions on Russia.[102]

[97] Due to the 2010 Constitutional reform, the prerogatives of the Prime Minister were substantially more relevant than in the past. As a consequence, in spite of the President remaining head of the executive, the Prime Minister had remarkable scope for independent action.

[98] Since March 2009, the Swiss embassy in Tbilisi has hosted a "Russian Federation interests section" (while, simultaneously, its counterpart in Moscow has opened a "Georgian interests section") [Swiss Confederation. 2014. "Russian Federation Interests Section at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tbilisi", 12 December, https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/georgia/en/home/representations/russian-federation-interests-section.html]. Among other duties, the section is responsible for issuing Russian visas [RIA Novosti. 2009. "Swiss embassy in Georgia to issue Russian visas from March 5 -2", 2 March, (Retrieved through LexisNexis)].

[99] Whitmore, B. 2013. "Georgia's Changing Russia Policy", *RFE/RL*, 29 Apri, http://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-russia-foreign-policy-ivanishvili-saakashvili/24971738.html.

[100] Previously, the relationship with Russia was managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The institution of this role can be interpreted as a more concrete attempt of dialogue with Russia [Interview with EU Official, Tbilisi (2016, 29 September)].

[101] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2015. "Georgia not to join NATO soon, official for relations with Russia says", 26 February (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[102] RIA Novosti. 2015. "Georgia Excluded From Russia's Food Embargo Amid 'Negligible' Sanctions - Russian Cabinet", 13 August (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

While the normalisation of the relationship with Russia pertains to the external dimension, it has nonetheless altered the nature of the Georgian political landscape. In the current situation, while there are no overtly pro-Russian political parties in the Georgian political landscape, some politicians are considered as being closer to the Kremlin (Kakhishvili 2016). This was evident in the parliamentary election campaign of 2016, which saw the return of parties ideologically close to the Kremlin that, although they characterise themselves as "neutral" rather than "pro-Russian"[103] and whereas they do not advocate joining the Eurasian Union as a viable option, allege that NATO membership would make the territorial mutilations permanent.[104]

The Russo-Georgian War: Conclusive remarks

The analysis of Georgian strategic narratives, before and after the 2008 war with Russia, highlights some changes in the approach to the West. Georgia shifted from an approach of self-projecting as an unconditional supporter of the Euro-Atlantic structures to introducing some elements of normalisation with Russia. However, the issues related to territorial integrity complicate the relationship with both the West and Russia.

The choices of the Saakashvili administration consisted for the most part in a clear pro-Western orientation, which had the effect of bringing about a deterioration of the relationship with Russia. According to this analysis, even the suggestion of moderation towards Russia had some 'political implicatures' related to the Western world, namely by showing that Georgiawould not be a troublesome prospective member of Euro-Atlantic organisations. However, this approach revealed evident limits after the conflict of August 2008 (Ó Tuathail 2008), as Georgia not only failed to be admitted into the Euro-Atlantic structures but also received limited material support during the conflict. The declarations – and, even more significantly, the narrative omissions – in the aftermath of the conflict, seem to confirm this. Commenting on the conduct of the warfare operations, President Saakashvili described Russian imperialism in high-rhetorical terms, drawing out parallels with the Soviet Union and the satellite states. These accusations were matched by Russian claims that Georgia was engaging in genocidal acts. Given the high-level of mistrust between Russia and Georgia, the "narrative competition" in which they engaged should not be interpreted

[103] That is also due to the watchdog attitude of the whole political spectrum. Following bipartisan outrage, in Summer 2016 the "Centrist party" was stripped of its registration for the forthcoming parliamentarian election due to a visibly pro-Russian electoral clip [Fuller, L. 2016. "Party Stripped of Registration for Georgian Parliamentary Elections amid 'Pro-Russia' Outcry", *RFE/RL*, Caucasus Report, 18 August http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-georgia-party-out-of-elections-after-pro-russia-ad/27931601.html].

[104] Interview with Levan Kakishvili, Tbilisi (2016, 27 September).

as a dialogue between the parties but rather as a struggle for legitimacy, with the international community as the "judge" being addressed. For Georgia, this narrative competition resulted in a mixed outcome. On the one hand, analogies such as the Prague Spring were taken up and repeated by prominent policy-makers such as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. On the other hand, Western support came solely in diplomatic form. In brief, as a consequence of the conflict, Georgia learned the hard way the difference between declarations of sympathy and formal mechanisms of alliance. While on that occasion Georgian policy-makers, as evinced by the lack of official complaints, were careful not to create any tension with the West, the limits of this unshakable unilateralism, in the absence of binding guarantees, emerged nonetheless. In the following years, the coming into power of the Georgian Dream administration and its quest for a degree of normalisation with Russia was to changes some dynamics. However, as the prudent political discourse that was adopted suggests, it would be incorrect to talk about a U-turn. Firstly, the GD administration declared the pro-Western orientation to still be in place. Secondly, the dynamics stemming from the territorial issues limit the options of Georgia, as they preclude both NATO membership and a political normalisation with Russia.

I am Georgian, and therefore I'd like to travel (visa-free[105]) to Europe. Georgia, Visa Policy and Foreign Policy

"*The next step for Georgia is the process of visa liberalisation, which is crucial for our country and our citizens. Allowing visa-free travel to EU states will deepen trade and cultural ties between Georgia and the EU. It will provide more EU in Georgia and more Georgia in the EU".*[106] These words, pronounced by President Margvelashvili on the occasion of his meeting with the EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, offers an example of the importance attributed by Georgia to the visa liberalisation process with the EU. Notably, while EU citizens had been able since 2005 to travel to the country without prior consular formalities, prior to March 2017 Georgians were required to apply for visas in order to enter the EU. Far from being a merely technical matter, symbolic issues, such as the disparity of force and Georgia's belonging in Europe, emerge from an analysis of this issue. With this in mind, this section looks at the visa policy of Georgia, with a

[105] In March 2017, the visa-free regime to the Schengen area was granted to Georgia. However, this development is not included in the timeframe of this analysis.
[106] President of Georgia. 2015. "The President of Georgian and EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn met with Diplomatic Corps, Non-governmental Organisations and Experts", 27 November, https://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News?9928 .

special focus on the quest for visa liberalisation with the EU.[107] Even though the study of foreign policy and international relations has devoted surprisingly little attention to visa regimes, this work considers that an analysis of the topic can provide some insight into the way in which Georgia navigates the imbalance between itself and the international environment. The reasons for this belief are the following. Firstly, before March 28 2017, visa conditions in the Georgian-EU relationship were not of a reciprocal nature. This reflected the asymmetric relationship between Georgia and its international partners. Therefore, there was some contradiction between the frequent declarations of European belonging and the mobility restrictions in place for Georgian citizens. Secondly, and largely after the rise to power of the Georgian Dream administration, the "Russian factor" was used as an "indirect bargaining tool" in the visa-related discourse in order to reinforce the message that some return was required if the pro-European orientation of Georgia was to remain unchallenged. In other words, while in this case the EU was by far the main target of Georgia's strategic narratives, the Kremlin was still factored into the equation.

In order to explore the nexus between visas, foreign policy and size, this sub-chapter is organised as follows. Firstly, the link between the visa-free regime and foreign policy is outlined. Secondly, after reviewing the discourse on "Georgia and Europeanness", the visa policy implemented by Georgia is described. Thirdly, the desire for a visa-free regime with the EU is presented. Finally, the strategic use of the "Russian factor" is looked at.

Visa Policies and Foreign Policy: Why does it matter?

Before dealing with the specificity of the Georgian case, the relationship between visa regimes and foreign policy must be outlined. Even though visa regimes are surprisingly understudied (Neumayer 2006), they can indicate both the quality of the different bilateral relations and the general attitude of a country vis-à-vis its external environment. In some cases, there is some correspondence between the openness of a country and the relaxation of its immigration policies. For example, autocratic regimes are often suspicious of foreign influences and therefore prone to putting in place visa restrictions (Neumayer 2010, 178). In 1999, the withdrawal of Turkmenistan from the CIS visa-free regime signalled an increasingly limited interest on the part of Ashgabat in interacting with the outside world (Pomfret 2008). By contrast, Turkey's liberal visa system can be interpreted as a soft power tool of the country (Kirişçi, and Kaptanoğlu 2011; Kirişçi 2005) and as a tangible sign of its multi-vector foreign policy (Devrim and Soler 2010). Finally, a liberal

[107] Even though this chapter, reflecting the mainstream narrative, uses the term "visa-free regime with the EU", what is actually discussed is a visa-free regime with the Schengen area.

immigration regime can be a mechanism of attraction employed towards smaller states. For instance, it has been observed that granting a visa-free regime to most post-Soviet countries is a component of Russia's "soft-power portfolio" (Popescu and Wilson 2009; Wilson and Popescu 2009). On the other hand, and as outlined in the previous sub-chapter, Russia attempted to exercise leverage over Georgia by means of visa negotiations.

These reflections regarding the manner in which Russia uses attraction (or leverage) vis-à-vis its smaller neighbours suggest the following: visa restrictions may have the function of revealing inequalities between wealthy and developing countries (Helleiner 2015; Neumayer 2010; Neumayer 2006). Indeed, while most visa-free regimes are negotiated as reciprocal acts, this does not apply to the prosperous OECD countries, whose citizens face much fewer travel restrictions than do their non-OECD peers (Neumayer 2006). In other words, affluent countries are often able to secure favourable travel regimes for their citizens without having to provide an equal benefit to their poorer counterparts. In addition to these economic considerations, the perception of cultural compatibility appears to be positively related to the concession of a favourable travel regime (Helleiner 2015, Neumayer 2010). As suggested earlier, these disparities bear a symbolic meaning as the existence of visa regimes marks the difference between desirable visitors *by default* and potentially undesirable ones (Neumayer 2006). Far from being an abstract concept, this "potential undesirability" is experienced by ordinary citizens who, in order to travel abroad, incur monetary costs and are subject to arbitrary decisions (Neumayer 2006, 74). These elements ultimately have an effect on the grassroots perception of the national status. Studies on the post-Yugoslavia case show how citizens of the newly-independent states, no longer able to travel visa-free to most EU countries, perceived the new visa regulations as a downgrading of their Europeanness (Jansen 2009). Correspondingly, being exempted from visa requirements can be perceived as a "national upgrade". Ha-Joon Chang, recalling the years of burgeoning economic growth in his native South Korea, writes that: *"In the late 1980s, Korea had become a solid upper-middle-income country. The surest proof of this was that European countries stopped demanding that Koreans get an entry visa"* (Chang 2007, xviii). While these considerations are relevant for most developing countries, the Georgian case stands out as crucial due to the aforementioned contrast between an articulated Europeanness and a limited mobility. Georgian political discourse has consistently emphasised the European identity both of the country and its citizens. Notably, declarations like: *"European choice of the country is not only aspiration of political groups or the government, but it is also a*

choice of Georgian people"[108] seem to overlook the fact that Georgians, whenever they plan a short trip to Europe, need to file a visa application.[109] In addition to being experienced at the individual level, this unequal situation can also be analysed through more systemic lenses. In this case, the asymmetry between international actors emerges not only from the imbalance in visa regimes but also from the absence of any clearly articulated complaint on the part of Georgia. Despite the limited literature available on this topic, the foreign policy importance attributed to visa regimes can be inferred from the themes raised, as well as from those omitted, in Georgian political discourse.

Georgia, a European country by destiny and by choice

The importance of a visa-free regime with the EU is not only due to practical reasons. Freedom of mobility represents a concrete way of reaffirming Georgia's "Europeanness". In order to develop this point, some elements of the Georgia's "European identity" must be introduced.

A distinctive trait of the Georgian political narrative is that it depicts this "Western aspiration" not only in terms of institutional or market cooperation but also in terms of returning the Georgian people to their European identity. In 1999, the Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, addressing the Council of Europe, articulated the famous sentence: "*I'm Georgian, and therefore I am European*" (Kakachia and Minesashvili 2015, 174). During his presidency, Mr Saakashvili insisted that Georgians were Europeans both by nature and by choice. For instance, he underlined the Europeanness of Georgians by referring to scientific elements: "*Georgia is one of the European states. It is proved by the fact that the skulls of the oldest Europeans, the Georgians, are kept in the museum which is 200 meters walk from here".*[110] Furthermore, throughout his period in power, President Saakashvili was consistent in saying that the Rose Revolution represented a Western choice and, by extension, a choice not to be anything other than Western. The year after the revolution, he spoke about the need to renovate the transport system by saying that: *"We will bring in hundreds more buses, so that we have normal, European, civilized transport, not like Bombay. (...) if we are European country, we cannot be like some Asian or African city. We should have European-looking towns and villages*[111]*".* Additionally, addressing

[108] President of Georgia. 2015. "President of Georgia Meets with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini", 10 November.
[109] Long-term Schengen visa were not commonly granted. Additionally, there was no clear procedure for obtaining them [personal communication to the author, Spring 2015, Tblisi].
[110] President of Georgia. 2006. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 18 February (Removed from the website)
[111] President of Georgia. 2005. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 26 May, (Removed from the website)

the European Parliament in 2010, Mr Saakashvili said that the Rose Revolution was a revolution of the mind, which erased the post-Soviet mentality and transformed society.[112] In more recent times, President Margvelashvili has insisted repeatedly that the EU is a choice not only of the elites but also of the people. For example, he said that: "*The vast majority of Georgian citizens and all of our major political parties support European integration as the cornerstone of our foreign policy".*[113] In sum, far from being simply a geographic area, Europe is depicted as the historical cradle of Georgia and as the standard to be aspired to, in both economy and politics.

It has been observed that self-perception as European, often framed as a "return to Europe", is a strong component of the Georgian identity (Kakachia and Minesashvili 2016; German 2015; Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014) and the idea of being part of Western civilisation is relevant in Georgian foreign policy choices (Kakachia and Minesashvili 2015). Additionally, in order to suggest the natural belonging of Georgia to Europe, the United National Movement (UNM) put considerable discursive emphasis on Georgia being a Black Sea country (Kakhishvili 2016, 172). In 2006, on the occasion of the Munich Security Conference, President Saakashvili described Georgia as a Black Sea country, like Romania and Bulgaria, albeit one yet to be fully included in the European integration process (Brisku 2013, 193). On a previous occasion, during a visit of the Romanian president to Georgia, Mr Saakashvili outlined his expectation that Bucharest would support Georgia's accession to NATO. He added that the then-upcoming entry of Romania into the EU was a first step toward the admission of more Black Sea countries.[114] Notwithstanding its broad articulation, this strong identitarian component of Georgian strategic discourse is not contradiction-free. For example, the constant claims of a European identity often seem to be in contrast with the adoption of policies more in line with an American political identity, like market deregulation and privatisation of services such as healthcare (Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014; Cheterian 2008; Lazarus 2013). Additionally, it has frequently been remarked that Georgian politicians have on occasion declared that Singapore, a prosperous and authoritarian micro-state, could be the ideal model of development for Georgia (Ó Beacháin and Coene 2014; Papava 2014; Delcour 2013; Papava 2013). More generally, it has been noted that there is some contradiction between the voicing of European aspirations and the delay in adopting those EU regulations not in line with the domestic agenda. Notably, whereas Georgia willingly complied with anti-

[112] President of Georgia. 2010. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 23November, (Removed from the website)
[113] President of Georgia. 2013. "Address of the President of Georgia Eastern Partnership Summit", 28 November, https://www.president.gov.ge/en-US/pressamsakhuri/siakhleebi/Address-of-the-President-of-Georgia-Eastern-Pa-(1).aspx .
[114] BBC Monitoring Europe. 2005. "Romanian president attends revolution anniversary in Georgia", 24 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

corruption and migration management measures (Ademmer and Delcour 2016), it showed some resistance to the adoption of food and safety regulations (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015; Ademmer and Börzel 2013; De Waal 2011b). The attitude toward Europe is not contradiction-free at the grassroots level either. Thus, while the overwhelming majority support further integration with Europe, conservative stances and values remain popular (Minesashvili and Kakhishvili 2015).

In spite of these contradictions, visa simplification with the EU has been consistently pursued. Even though it is sometimes claimed that declarations about the "Europeanness" of Georgia are removed from grassroots concerns, surveys show the importance attributed to this issue by ordinary citizens. While less than 10% of respondents consider Europe to be the region closest to Georgia in terms of culture (this figure doubles when only the English-speaking population of the country is consulted), deeper integration with the EU is widely supported.[115] Furthermore, it is believed that more EU-integration will lead to a positive change regarding international mobility. In 2015, 77% of respondents expected the EU Association Agreement to be followed by a simplification of visa procedures.[116] Similarly, in June 2016, when the visa-free regime with the EU seemed imminent, 64% of respondents declared that they expected some tangible benefits to result from the provision.[117] These answers are not surprising to anyone familiar with the Georgian middle class and aware of rumors about the strictness of the various Schengen Embassies.[118] Furthermore, and as the following paragraphs highlight, the importance of visa liberalisation also emerges from the speeches of high-ranking politicians. The next pages will deal specifically with Georgian visa politics, looking firstly at its generous admission regime and then at the quest for visa liberalisation with the EU.

Georgia and visa regimes: signalling openness

The importance attributed to being granted a visa-free regime by the EU cannot be fully understood without reference to the travel policies adopted by Georgia. The country, which allows the citizens of a large number of countries to visit visa-free, has never hidden its goal of having this measure reciprocated by Brussels. On the other hand, despite more than a decade of unequal

[115] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers.2015. "Caucasus Barometer 2015 Georgia dataset". Retrieved through ODA, http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015ge/CLSMDCL/ .
[116] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers.2015. "Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2015". Retrieved through ODA, http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2015ge/codebook/ .
[117] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers.2016. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, June 2016". Retrieved through ODA, http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2016ge/VISABEN/ .
[118] The author lived and worked in Tbilisi for most of 2015. Conversations of this kind were extremely common.

travel conditions, Georgia has never openly declared that it finds this unequal mobility regime unfair. This section argues that some dissatisfaction can nonetheless be detected by looking at discursive omissions. It emerges that, while the bilateral free-travel regime instituted with Turkey in 2006 is frequently mentioned, the unilateral choice taken to relax travel conditions for Western foreigners is surprisingly underemphasised, since to draw attention to this fact could undermine the Georgian government's frequent attestations of Western support for Georgia.

Georgia has, since June 2005, implemented an incredibly generous visa policy, which allows citizens from 31 developed countries to obtain at the airport a visa valid for 90-days.[119] In 2009, the visa-free period was extended to 360 days. Additionally, over the years the list of visa-free countries has kept expanding (Gabrichidze 2011). While in 2014 the maximum visa-free stay was amended back to 90 days,[120] the following year the 360-day rule was restored.[121] Back in 2005 this choice, which was in line with the other liberal policies of the Saakashvili administration, could be explained in light of the desire to attract foreigners (both travellers and investors).[122] By this logic, even if it was entirely unreciprocated, an open visa-free regime was central to the interest of the country, which at the time was extremely poor and with an undeveloped electricity network.[123] Even though post-Rose Revolution Georgia was not able to make any progress in requesting the reciprocation of visa liberalisation,[124] the unilateral and one-sided open visa-regime was almost never mentioned in political speeches. It is remarkable that President Saakashvili, on other occasions extremely vocal about the opening up of the country, did not include any mention of this revolutionary move in any of his speeches. Agence France Press,[125] one of the few agencies covering the issue, reported only Goga Chkhenkeli, a functionary from the Georgian international tourism department, saying that: "*The president believes we should do everything to boost Georgia's popularity in the world"*. However, there is no first-hand record of (the usually vociferous) Mr Saakashvili endorsing this move. This is in spite of numerous previous declarations about the importance of developing the country through the promotion of tourism. For example,

[119] AP Worldstream. 2005. "Georgia scraps visa requirement for citizens from EU, U.S and other Western countries", 2 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[120] Tabula. 2014. "Georgia Abolishes Visa Free Regime for 24 Countries", 26 August, http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/87085-georgia-abolishes-visa-free-regime-for-24-countries#comments .
[121] Agenda.ge. 2015. "Check if you can enter Georgia and stay for a year visa-free", 10 June, http://agenda.ge/news/36828/eng .
[122] Interview with Timothy Blauvelt, Tbilisi (2016, 25 September).
[123] Interview with "West European Diplomat 1(in Georgia)", Tbilisi, (2016, 26 September).
[124] In this aftermath of this visa liberation, the Georgian lawmaker Kote Gabashvili pointed out the difficulty that existed for Georgians in obtaining visas to foreign countries. However, this remained for the most part an isolated comment [Agence France Presse. 2005. "Georgia allows visa-free travel from 30 countries", 2 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis)].
[125] Ibid.

just one week before the move President Saakashvili had commented on how the renovation of the Old City of Tbilisi would prompt tourism, yet he refrained from making any comment about the draft bill on visa liberalisation.[126] In analysing possible reasons for this silence, it can be hypothesised that some frustration existed with the unilateral[127] nature of the policy.

The imbalance embedded in this non-reciprocal visa regime, and the Georgian awareness of this imbalance, can also be detected in the emphasis put on the establishment of a *mutual* visa-free regime[128] with Turkey, signed in Tbilisi in March 2006 on the occasion of the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On that occasion, President Saakashvili did not limit himself to saying that the new provisions would enhance trade and tourism. Instead, he associated this event with the transcendence of a Soviet past: "*Georgian-Turkish border, which was one of the most closed borders during the cold war (….). This* [agreement] *will enter the history as the most successful fact in terms of the development of bilateral relations and the whole region".*[129] Far from this being an isolated quote, it was frequently reiterated that the new travel regime represented a significant departure from the situation of less than a decade before, when an open border between the Soviet Union and a NATO country had been simply unthinkable.[130] This break from the past was facilitated by Turkey which, as a consequence of a visa-free and a trade-free regime, served, according to President Saakashvili as "*a window onto Europe, the rest of the world and a better future*".[131] In general, freedom of mobility was presented as a favourable effect of this transition, as shown by the following presidential declaration: "*It has become necessary to have 48 pages thick passport. We don't live in Soviet times when people could go abroad only twice a year".*[132] In summary, the visa liberalisation agreement with Turkey was attributed high symbolic importance. This renders striking the contrast between the emphasis given to the *mutual* liberalisation of the visa-free regime with Ankara and the silence regarding the *unilateral* visa liberalisation in place for most Western countries. More broadly, it can be read in light of a broader

[126] President of Georgia. 2005. "Mikheil Saakashvili Speech", 25 May (Removed from the website).
[127] Even though the chapter focuses on visa policy, it is not the only case of "unilateral asymmetry". The massive voluntary contribution of troops in Iraq, impressive for a non-NATO member, is also a sign of this. Ten years later, the country sees itself much more linked to the West.
[128] As from 2004, citizens of most Soviet countries (with the exception of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) were able to enter to Turkey with only a border-issued visa, usually valid for one or two months. The only exception was Georgia, whose citizens were granted a 15-days visa. In the following years, Turkey pursued an open visa policy consistently (Kirisci 2005).
[129] President of Georgia. 2006. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 14 March, (Removed from the website)
[130] President of Georgia. 2006. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 7 July, (Removed from the website)
[131] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2006. "Georgian president praises ties with Turkey", 20 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[132] President of Georgia. 2006. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 17 April, (Removed from the website)

framework of an "unvoiced asymmetry", as already outlined in the previous sub-chapter, between the Western ally and Georgia.

An in-depth analysis of the Georgian political discourse suggests that the decision not to emphasise these disparities in travel regimes was also important for narrative consistency. The next section will outline the manner in which Georgian authorities advanced their requests for visa liberalisation with the EU.

Visa liberalisation with the EU: a long-term Georgian foreign policy goal

This section focuses not only on the technical relevance of visa liberalisation but also on its symbolic significance. As already hinted at, rather than solely being a single issue in an external action agenda, the visa regime is a visible reminder of the disparity between Georgians and EU citizens. Neumayer (2006), reflecting on the way travel regimes condition the perception of a nation's status, argues that visa regimes indicate the difference between guests who are welcome by default and potentially undesirable travellers. As stated by Jansen (2009, 817), the *"relations between different passports are hierarchical and* (…) *they are experienced as such"*. Reflecting on the link between individual regime mobility and the perception of the Self, Salter (2006, 168) uses the term "*biopolitical"* to indicate how visa regimes influence how *"we understand ourselves as mobile bodies"*. As emerged from interviews (conducted before March 2017) and some knowledge of the Georgian context, visa liberalisation simplifies, rather than revolutionises, the life of most Georgian tourists.[133] This is because those who had the means to travel already did so while those who could not afford to travel were unlikely to see any change in their condition.[134] On the other hand, the provision of visa-free travel has a highly symbolic value: showing ordinary citizens the willingness of the "European community" to acknowledge them as peers.[135] Before March 2017, Georgian citizens needed to apply for a new visa before each trip to the Schengen area.[136] Due to the EU-Georgia visa simplification agreement, entered into force in March 2011, the Schengen visa fee for Georgian citizens was reduced to 35 Euros.[137] However, applicants[138]

[133] The visa-free regime applies only to short-term visitors.
[134] Even if some illegal economic migration can be expected, the small size of the Georgian population will prevent this phenomenon from becoming substantially relevant [Interview with "West European Diplomat 3(in Georgia)", Tbilisi (2016, 30 September)].
[135] Interview with "East European Diplomat 1(in Georgia)", Tbilisi (2016, 28 September).
[136] Even though multi-entry visas can be issued, the difficulty in obtaining these is often reported.
[137] Delegation of the European Union to Georgia. SD. "Simplified visa requirements for Georgian citizens", http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/travel_eu/visa/index_en.htm (Last accessed on 2016, 29 August).
[138] These procedures are simplified for some categories of citizen such as students, journalists and businesspeople.

needed to produce proof of travel arrangements and of financial means. Even though the visa-free regime with the Schengen area has finally been liberalised, for a number of years the need for Georgians to fill out detailed visa applications had been in stark contrast with the widespread narrative of "Georgians as Europeans" and with the EU flags flown all over Tbilisi. In other words, they made visible the difference between the idea of a "common European family" and the incontestable hierarchy embodied in uneven travel regimes.

An examination of the political discourse reveals that visa simplification and visa liberalisation have consistently been an explicit goal of both President Saakashvili and President Margvelashvili. During the Saakashvili's presidency, while there is no condemnation voiced against the EU for continuing to enforce a visa regime, some reference is made to the unpractical nature of the procedure. In 2007 President Saakashvili announced that the long queues outside embassies would soon be only a memory as Georgian citizens were about to be granted a visa facilitation programme[139] (the agreement was eventually implemented in 2010). In 2009, he reported enthusiastically that, on the occasion of the NATO summit in Brussels, the possibility that Georgia would be granted a visa-free regime[140] was mentioned for the first time. In the same year, when the visa facilitation regime was about to enter into force, he declared that: *"We are on the last stage of signing an agreement regarding the visa regime. (…) This is the first serious signal sent by EU after the Russian aggression".*[141] A first visible result of this would be *"that people will not have to stand in long lines".*[142] This was not the first reference that Mr Saakashvili had made to a high-visible symbol of the visa regime. On another occasion, referring to the talks on a visa liberalisation process, he argued that: "*Each citizen of Georgia must be able to cross over to the European Union territory with an ordinary passport*". This mix of the logistic and symbolic implications of visa regimes is in line with other studies. Jansen (2009), in his study of Bosnia and Herzegovina, observes that the queues outside embassies symbolise the hierarchical disparities between the embassies of the EU countries, protected by guards and high fences, and local applicants, waiting in line for their turn to enter. Therefore, although the EU was never openly accused of being unfair toward Georgian citizens, it can be seen that Georgian political elites, in addition to describing their people as unequivocally European, framed the prospect of enhanced mobility as a crucial upgrade of their Western status. The following quote further reinforces this point: "*We are one step away from having our citizens travel to Europe visa-free with their*

[139] President of Georgia. 2007. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 2 March, (Removed from the website)
[140] President of Georgia. 2009. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 22 March, (Removed from the website)
[141] President of Georgia. 2009. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 13 November, (Removed from the website)
[142] President of Georgia. 2010. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 17 March, (Removed from the website)

Georgian passports, carry all of our products emphasised free and feel like full members of Europe and participants of its processes[143]".

Even though the Georgian Dream government has often been said to be less pro-European than its predecessor, President Margvelashvili has not only been consistent in seeking a visa-free regime but has also proved willing to take all the necessary steps to obtain this. More specifically, since 2012 Georgia has agreed to ratify seven international conventions and to adopt eight national strategies, around 60 legislative amendments and roughly 70 by-laws, regulations and instructions.[144] President Margvelashvili, in a rare reference to this fact, openly declared that delays in the process were the fault of the previous administration: "*As you know Moldova started this process in 2010 and now they already have visa-free travel rules [with the EU]. Our government has made really a huge leap forward".*[145] Throughout 2015 and 2016, when visa liberalisation seemed imminent (with Georgia disappointed by the delays[146]), the president often mentioned the country's commitment to the goal of visa-free travel. Indeed, it was often highlighted that enhanced mobility would favour Georgia's European integration. Thus, the GD administration has been extremely vocal in outlining that such a provision would enhance Georgia's European sense of belonging. Additionally, it was contented that it would enhance positive dynamics within the EaP by demonstrating to: "*Other EU partner countries […] that reforms are feasible and states are promoted in line with the "more for more" principle".*[147]

The previous section has shown that while the Georgian political narrative often set out the country's European and Euro-Atlantic ambitions before, during and after the August 2008 conflict, dissatisfaction with the support – of lack thereof – of the West was almost never expressed. Notwithstanding the different nature of the issue at stake, the political discourse on visa liberalisation does not suggest any significant departure from this approach. Notably, despite the delayed liberalisation process, no serious complaints were made about the slow pace of the EU, whose citizens could travel to Georgia without restriction. Additionally, when reflecting on the difference between the different administrations a counterintuitive element emerges: while the

[143] President of Georgia. 2012. "Mikheil Saakashvili speech", 17 October, (Removed from the website)
[144] Moody, C. 2016. Georgia's EU visa waiver should not be politicised. EUObserver, *Brussels*, September 5, https://euobserver.com/opinion/134917.
[145] Civil.ge. 2015"Garibashvili. Riga summit success for Georgia", 23 May, http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28294 .
[146] Private communication to the author, Spring 2015, Tbilisi.
[147] President of Georgia. 2016. "The President of Georgia Met Mr Donald Tusk in Washington" 2 April, https://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/Releases?p=10187&i=3 .

UNM party is generally considered to be more pro-Western than its successor, most of the reforms needed to advance liberalisation of the travel regime were implemented by the Georgian Dream government.

EU, Visa Liberalisation and Russia. Time to Deliver Something?

Even though the EU visa-liberalisation issue could initially be assumed to have involved only bilateral dialogue between Tbilisi and Brussels, some references to Russia can nonetheless be detected. The next section will discuss visa liberalisation with reference first to territorial integrity and then to the domestic political landscape.

Recalling the earlier-mentioned concept of attraction power, it can be observed that Georgian strategic discourse had often promoted the idea that the granting of visa liberalisation to Georgia could encourage territorial reintegration. The core argument was the following: should Georgia be granted a visa-free regime with the EU, then citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would have a strong incentive to apply for a Georgian passport. Eventually, and in spite of the role of Russia, this grassroots pragmatism would lead to the reunification of the country. While the validity of this claim could be challenged, this particular theme can be seen as a reminder to the EU of its support for Georgia's territorial integrity. It also constitutes a response to some of the "neutral parties" who link territorial reintegration with support for Russia, and sends a message to the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia about the new attraction-based reintegration policy.

In 2013, on the occasion of the Eastern Partnership summit (which resulted in the initiation of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU), President Margvelashvili declared: "*Association is the key to peaceful reconciliation with our compatriots in occupied Abkhazia and Tskinvali Region and the reunification of our country, because it is by ATTRACTION that we will draw these regions back into the Georgian state"*[148] [capitalisation in the original document]. Reflecting in concrete terms on what might constitute Euro-attraction, visa facilitation has frequently been mentioned.[149] Paata Zakareishvili, the Georgian Minister of State for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, evoking the pragmatic approach towards South Ossetians

[148]President of Georgia. 2013. "Address of the President of Georgia Eastern Partnership Summit", 29 November https://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News?8567 .

[149] Ironically, this argument was originally mentioned while discussing a possible visa-free regime between the EU and Russia. On that occasion, some concern was raised about the potential impact of this move on the territorial integrity of Georgia (Golunov 2011).

receiving healthcare[150] in Georgia and mentioning the success stories of North Cyprus and Transnistria, argued that: "*Visa liberalisation gives them an amazing opportunity to travel to Europe easily with just one passport. This means a lot to them*". The reasons for this are the following. Even though 80% of Abkhazians were estimated to have a Russian passport by as early as 2005,[151] European consulates have often proven unwilling to issue them with visas. Due to these travel limitations, citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would have an incentive to apply for a Georgian passport, which would allow them to travel to the EU without going through consular formalities. A similar dynamic has been observed in the case of North Cyprus and Transnistria where, as a consequence in one case of EU membership and in the other of a free travel regime with the EU, passport requests to the base-state sharply increased (Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016).

In spite of the validity of these arguments, other elements suggest that in the particular case of Georgia the visa-free regime would have a potentially-limited impact on territorial reintegration. Firstly, citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia face social and legal pressure to refuse Georgian travel documents. Indeed, the authorities of the de-facto entities have legislated against initiatives in this direction. For instance, the president of Abkhazia announced the state's intention to expel those international organisations that offer neutral Georgian travel documents to Abkhazians (Caspersen 2015, 402). Additionally, between 2015 and 2016 both Sukhumi and Tskhinvali passed Laws on Foreign Citizens detrimental to the civic and property rights of dual citizens.[152] Social pressure also factor into the equation. In summer 2015, some young Abkhazians went to Tbilisi because of a "UEFA Super Cup" football match. The Abkhazian press promptly criticised this as an antipatriotic act, using tones like: "*It wasn't worth to disregard the enormous sacrifices, which our nation suffered, in order to see* [the football player] *Lionel Messi*"[153]. The current situation is that most citizens of de-facto states refuse to accept neutral travel documents (i.e. those without reference to nationality) issued by Georgia.[154] Considering this hard-line scenario, visa liberalisation on its own and unsupplemented by economic benefits or scholarship opportunities

[150] In spite of the absence of a public health system in Georgia, the Georgian government subsidises the medical treatments of citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While during the Saakashvili administration this benefit was conditional upon the acquisition of Georgian documents, the Georgian Dream administration lifted this requirement. As of 2015, several hundreds of South Ossetians had travelled to Georgia for medical reasons (Menabde 2015).
[151] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2005. "Russian ministry confirms 80 per cent of Abkhazians are Russian Citizens", 19 August, (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[152] Interview with EU Officer, 29 September 2016, Tbilisi.
[153] Cagara, Dominik K. 2015. "Tbilisi super cup heats up an old debate in Abkhazia", *Democracy and Freedom Watch*, 25 August, http://dfwatch.net/tbilisi-super-cup-heats-up-an-old-debate-in-abkhazia-37981
[154] Interview with Levan Kakishvili, Tbilisi (2016, 27 September); Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, September 30).

hardly seems a game changer.[155] This issue is further complicated by the non-exclusively ethnic nature of the conflict. In fact, in addition to the individual level, the Russo-Georgia dimension and the Russo-West dimension must also be considered[156] and while the visa-free regime could persuade some people to request a Georgian passport, the extent of the phenomenon is likely to be limited. Additionally, were Georgia granted a free-travel regime with the EU, Russia might be expected to offer a deeper form of cooperation to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[157] In light of this, the discursive linking of visa liberalisation and territorial reintegration could be interpreted as an indirect invitation to the EU to live up its pledge regarding the territorial integrity of Georgia,[158] which is at risk from the manoeuvres of Moscow. Indeed, even though no specific requests to Brussels are made, the political discourse nonetheless emphasises the conflict resolution potential of visa liberalisation during periods when the relationship between Russia and the West is at a low point.

In addition to sending a message to the Western audience, there could be another aim to the linking of visa liberalisation and territorial reunification: challenging the 'pro-Russian version', proposed not only by Russia itself but also by Georgia's "neutral parties", which contends that support from Moscow would make territorial reintegration possible. This position is predominant in the Russian narrative. For example, the Russian journalist Marina Perevozkina wrote that, as a consequence of Georgia integrating with Europe, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were reinforcing their ties with Russia and thus making irreversible their separation from the parent state.[159] Turning to the Georgian public discourse, as outlined in the previous section, allegedly pro-Russian political parties have insisted that an unmediated pro-Europeanism is likely to make the Georgian territorial mutilation definitive. This point of view seems to be shared by the so-call pro-Russian segment of the Georgian political scene,[160] with these groupings agreeing that territorial reintegration cannot happen without the active intervention of the Kremlin (Kakhishvili 2016, 180-181). To recapitulate, while in the short-term the achievement of a visa-free regime could have only a

[155] Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi, (2016, 1 October).
[156] Interview with EU Officer, Tbilisi (2016, 29 September).
[157] Ibid.
[158] See for example: [European Union External Action. 2015. "Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the announced signature of a "Treaty on Alliance and Integration" between the Russian Federation and Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia", *Statement*, Brussels, 17 March, http://collections.internetmemory.org/haeu/content/20160313172652/http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150317_04_en.htm].
[159] BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union. 2013. "Russian commentary says EU deals to trigger disintegration of Georgia, Moldova", 13 December(Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[160] Due to the pro-Western nature of the Georgian political landscape, no party has an open pro-Russia agenda. However, some "pro-Russian elements" emerge from the political discourse (Kakhishvili 2016, 176-177).

marginal effect on the reunification of Georgia, a discursive emphasis on the impact of the visa-free regime on reunification prospects seems directed both towards a domestic and an international audience.

However, in the discourse on visa liberalisation, "neutral parties" are not only framed as political contenders but also used as an instrument of leverage over Brussels. For example, on the occasion of the electoral campaign in 2016, an election that was characterised by the resurgence of allegedly pro-Russian parties, Georgian political cadres pointed out how these pro-Russian actors could be further empowered by more delays in granting Georgia an EU visa-free regime. While this claim may not have been totally groundless, this chapter argues that over-emphasis was intentionally placed on this them in political speeches in order to instil some urgency into the work of decision-makers in Brussels. Over the months, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili repeatedly set out an argument about the link between the visa liberalisation process and the empowerment of pro-Russian forces. In February 2016, with reference to the (anticipated) forthcoming visa free-regime with the EU, he stated that: "*Any failure in the direction of the European agenda will be used by those forces that are rather pro-Russian".*[161] Subsequently, while in full electoral campaigning mode, he bluntly pointed out that: "[the] *introduction of visa free travel for the Georgian nationals carries particular significance (...) For the purpose of instigating pro-Western aspirations within the Georgian society, tangible result shall be achieved prior to elections scheduled on October 8."* According to Prime Minister Kvirikashvili, the prompt implementation of the visa liberalisation process was necessary: "*In terms of encouraging pro-western aspirations and prevention of abuse of this temporary delay by anti-European forces*".[162] Similarly, President Margvelashvili contended that the outcome of the Warsaw Summit and of the visa liberalisation process were likely to have an impact on the highly-polarised forthcoming elections.[163]

Some other analysts and diplomats made similar comments. Wojciech Gorecki, a former diplomat and current analyst at the Warsaw Center for Eastern Studies, observed that the repeated postponing of the visa-free regime had favoured pro-Russian parties. According to this interpretation, while in the past to take a pro-Russian stance had been akin to political suicide, it was now the case that the message about the unreliability of the Western ally was gaining

[161] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2014. "Georgian PM urges strong public support for European aspirations", February 14 (retrieved through LexisNexis).
[162] Government of Georgia. 2016. "Prime Minister at the discussion panel", 6 September, http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=440&info_id=57669 .
[163] President of Georgia. 2016. "The President H.E. Giorgi Margvelashvili: Our challenge in this election is to bring citizens to the voting booth", June 7, https://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News?10377.

traction.[164] Similarly, Professor Kvashilava declared that while a quick process of visa liberalisation would represent a victory for the government, further delays could strengthen the narrative, put forward by "neutral parties", about the equal unreliability of Russia and the West[165]. In this regard, Archil Karaulashvili, previously First Deputy Minister on Euro-Atlantic Integration, observed that Moldova,[166] although not more advanced than Georgia, was on a visa-free regime. In considering on the impact that this could have on ordinary citizens, he speculated that this visible disparity could be fertile terrain for Russian propaganda.[167]

Notwithstanding the validity of these considerations, other elements suggest that, even were there further delays, the effect on the electorate might not be that clear-cut. Although the timing of visa liberalisation and the resurgence of pro-Russian political parties could be *somehow* related, the political narrative tends to exaggerate the importance of this link. Notably, while "neutral politicians" such as Nino Burjanadze have spoken of the perils of joining NATO, no comparable attention has been paid to the delays in the visa-free regime. Prior to the elections in October 2016, diplomatic sources – speaking under the condition of anonymity – agreed that whatever the outcome of the visa-liberalisation process it would have had a limited impact on the behaviour of the electorate. This is probably due to the fact that, since the granting of a visa-free regime does not represent a step towards EU membership, campaigning on this issue would soon expose its weaknesses.

In light of these elements, it can be argued that the causal importance attributed by Georgian elites to the visa free-regime is not reflected in the actual political landscape. In an effort to explain this, this work considers that the emphasis on visa liberalisation could be explained as an attempt to remind Brussels that the previously unquestioned pro-Western orientation of Georgia could be reviewed in the absence of concrete benefits. Instead of ascribing such a possible choice to the ruling party, neutral parties are strategically presented as potential spoilers, to a degree well above

[164] Sputnik International. 2016. 'Waking From the European Dream, Georgians Pondering Pivot Back to Russia', 19 July, http://sputniknews.com/politics/20160719/1043268973/georgia-eu-nato-russia-pivot.html
[165] Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September).
[166] The expert and political communities are well aware that this difference is not due to arbitrary double standards but due to the earlier starting of the Moldovan process. With reference to that, the Georgian Parliament Speaker Davit Usupashvili said: "We are little bit behind, but we are not jealous, we need to complete our homework and I believe in one year or so we will be able to complete that process as well[166]." [CivilGe. 2014. "*Parliament Speaker Visits Moldova*", 29 April, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27179]. However, in the grassroots Georgian perception, Moldova is not perceived as more advanced than Georgia [Interview with Bakur Kvashilava, Tbilisi (2016, 30 September0)].
[167] Yerepouni Daily News. 2015. "Left dangling by EU, some Georgians eye return to Russia's embrace", 18 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

their actual potential, while visa liberalisation is not only framed as a goal of the Georgian state but also as a useful tool to "keep the country on track".

Visa and mobility regimes: concluding remarks

This sub-chapter has set forth the 'political implicatures' related to the Georgian discourse on travel and visa issues. In particular, it highlights the balance between identitarian and pragmatic elements, showing the way in which visa regimes are related to concepts such as smallness and international asymmetry.

While to date understudied, this particular visa policy has long been a distinctive feature of Georgian foreign policy. Indeed, the country, which since 2005 has been incredibly generous in the setting of its own admission requirements, has consistently voiced its desire for the liberalisation of the visa regime with the EU. Far from being a simple bilateral arrangement, visa liberalisation carries significant symbolic relevance, which is that of reconciling the narrative on the "Europeanness of Georgians" with conditions of international mobility. Additionally, for more than a decade the remarkable difference between the travel conditions offered by Georgia and the travel conditions offered to Georgians has constituted a visible reminder of the asymmetry between Tbilisi and Brussels.

Rather than this being a stand-alone issue, the political discourse on visa liberalisation, and its evolution over time, is fully in line with the broader approach to the West. On the one hand, Georgian policymakers, especially during the UNM administration, have been careful not to complain about the inequality embedded in the relationship with Europe. While they have consistently mentioned their desire for unrestricted travel arrangements with the EU, they have refrained from complaining openly about delays or any lack of reciprocity. Nonetheless, some change can be identified after the election of Georgian Dream in 2012. The strategic use of narrative on visa liberalisation is indicative of the GD administration's attempts to use the Russian factor to gain some leverage in order to persuade Brussels of the necessity of delivering a result on visa liberalisation. In this regard, Georgian elites have pointed out that a visa-free regime could favour the territorial reintegration of Georgia, thus challenging Russian aims. Additionally, on several occasions, especially in the election year of 2016, the Georgian President and Prime Minister pointed out that further delays in the visa liberalisation process could be to the advantage of pro-Russian parties. This seems to reflect a broader change in the strategic use of the narrative.

While previously the unwavering nature of Georgia's pro-Western commitments was the prevalent attitude projected, latterly the need to deliver results began to be cautiously hinted at.

However, this should not be interpreted as a U-turn, since these 'suggestions' are framed as preventive actions against pro-Russian spoilers, namely the neutral parties, rather than as a direct request from the elected government. In conclusion, even though some changes in Georgia's external self-projection can be observed, it would be incorrect to classify these as radical changes.

Conclusion: foreign policy, conflict and international mobility

The analysis of the strategic narratives confirms that the main pillar of Georgian foreign policy, namely the primacy of the westward dimension, is sustained by reasons of both identity and pragmatism. In addition to being consistent with the "European identity" of Georgia, the political discourse frames NATO and the EU as being more beneficial for small states than gravitating around the Russian orbit would be. However, this unbalanced unilateralism seems more suited to small EU member states than it is to peripheral "external partners". Indeed, whereas small EU member states have been successful in binding bigger actors within the framework of a postmodern entity, Georgia, in spite of its voluntary contributions to several NATO operations, has been unable either to secure membership for itself or to obtain a visa-free regime with the EU. In the absence of any prospects of integration into Western organisations, Georgian interests are not well served by having a strained relationship with Russia. In the words of Professor Alexander Rondeli: "*We know from international relations theory that the biggest disaster for small countries is to be a neighbour of a giant, and it's worse if that giant is your former master. It's in Georgia's interest to be friendly with Russia, to have it as a healthy and wealthy neighbour*" (Tatum 2010). The validity of this statement is reinforced by an assessment of recent history. While Mr Saakashvili's vociferous pro-European stance secured Georgia numerous development and civil society grants for Georgia, the virtual absence of alternatives (and of formal integration) has considerably limited Georgia's leverage over its Western allies. This emerges from the analysis of the post-war discourse, which is characterised by a certain pragmatism: although a more muscular support from the Euro-Atlantic community was hoped for than was received, this feeling was never voiced by political elites. Even more significantly, while the general support of the West was described as desirable, it was the backing of individual larger countries, first and foremost Germany, that was proactively sought. Looking at the choices made in subsequent years, the process of normalisation with Russia, proposed by "Georgian Dream", can be interpreted as an attempt to address this situation without either reversing Georgia's external priorities or issuing

declarations that would be incompatible with the Georgian political landscape. Furthermore, the ongoing territorial conflicts impede significant breakthroughs in the relationships with both the EU and Russia.

While the conflict in 2008 provides an excellent case of Georgia interacting with external powers, similar elements can be observed in situations of softer dynamics, such as the issue of visa policy. While the Georgian establishment has always voiced its desire to be granted a visa-free regime with the EU, the continuous delays have not resulted in the state blaming Brussels or any of the individual EU member states. Instead, in the framing of the quest for the visa-free regime an element of novelty emerges: judicious use of the Russian factor in order to speed up the process. This rhetorical choice could be interpreted as a reminder to the EU of the necessity to deliver some tangible result in order to "keep Georgia on track". Therefore, while these remarks remain limited, an observation can be made about the use of strategic narratives shifting from unconditional declarations of pro-Western feelings to the formulation of indirect requests. Acknowledging broader Georgian political discourse and the domestic constraints, this work interprets these "Russia-related remarks" as an attempt to depart from the behaviour of an eager prospective-EU member, who in reality had an extremely limited chance of gaining membership in the medium-term, and suggesting instead the need for the EU to deliver some tangible result. In sum, this analysis suggests that Georgia, while remaining firmly pro-western, has sought to introduce some corrective measures into the asymmetric relationship with the EU.

The Georgian experience, and the related narratives, highlight a foreign policy dilemma for small states: while an unbiased external direction might bring about some short-term gains, it nonetheless reduces strategic options and reinforces the inequality embedded in the relationship. It also illustrates the trade-off between strategic alignment and other core interests, as the protracted territorial conflicts prevent Georgia both from joining the Euro-Atlantic structures and from pursuing full normalisation with Russia. These kind of constraints, together with the particularities of the Georgian political environment, can be hypothesised as contributing to the prudence of the strategic narratives adopted.

CHAPTER 5: Azerbaijan – a *sui generis* small state in the South Caucasus?

Azerbaijan tends to represent itself as a *sui generis* small state. For example, in 2015 the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev declared that: "*Azerbaijan is a small country, but we have enough power to have our say and influence the developments unfolding in the region and on the continent".* In other circumstances, Mr Aliyev declared that, due to its remarkable wealth and demography, the country should be conceived of as a medium-sized state.[1] Similarly, it is argued that, due to its independence from economic patrons, the country is able to pursue a foreign policy that is in line with its best interests rather than with diktats imposed by others. In the words of the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev: "*Economic independence has led to political independence. Why can Azerbaijan confidently pursue its policy in the region and the world?* (…) *Today, Azerbaijan pursues a truly independent policy".*[2] However, given the relational definition of small states adopted by this thesis, Azerbaijan can be considered a small country vis-à-vis its greater external counterparts, namely Russia, the West, Turkey[3] and Iran. In keeping with the scope of this work, and to provide comparability with the other states under consideration here, this work will focus solely on the former two, both of which are in any case crucial external actors for Azerbaijan.

To understand the way in which Azerbaijan navigates the asymmetries vis-à-vis the West and Russia, attention must be paid to its assets and their role in the external relations of the country. On the one hand, Azerbaijan is the only South-Caucasian country to be blessed by extensive energy resources. This provides some contractual strength vis-à-vis both the West and Russia. Indeed, the US gave their full political support to the construction of the BTP pipeline in 2007. Similarly, Baku and the EU Commission signed a joined declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor in 2011. Turning to Moscow, its underground resources have made Baku much less vulnerable to

[1] President of Azerbaijan. 2015. "Closing speech by Ilham Aliyev at the conference on outcomes of the first year of implementation of the 'State Program on socio-economic development of districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2014-2018'", 27 January, http://en.president.az/articles/14302 .

[2] President of Azerbaijan. 2011. "Ilham Aliyev participated in an official reception marking the 20th anniversary of the restoration of state independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan", 17 October, http://en.president.az/articles/3327.

[3] Analysing the Turkish-Azerbaijani relationship goes beyond the possibilities of this thesis. However, in spite of a narrative which emphasises the brotherly ties between the two countries, their energy relations have been articulated around economic interest rather than around a pan-Turkish agenda. Additionally, the signature of the (unratified) Zurich protocol put the ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey under considerable strain (Kardas 2011).

"energy blackmail" than the other South Caucasian countries. More generally, it has been observed that its energy assets enable Azerbaijan to conduct a multi-vector foreign policy (Delcour 2014; Strakes 2013), which sees the state dealing with multiple actors without committing to binding cooperation formats. While the drop in energy prices in 2016 undoubtedly hit the local economy,[4] its oil and gas resources ensured that Azerbaijan retained a remarkable competitive advantage. The significance of the Azerbaijani position and of its resources has also been pointed out by external actors. For example, while saying that: "*Azerbaijan pursues a very realpolitik policy",*[5] Matthew Bryza, the former U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, added that: "*This is a very small country on a very significant piece of real estate".*[6] Whereas the importance of oil and gas is undeniable, energy alone does not enable Azerbaijan to achieve its avowed main goal of the territorial reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh, as the maintenance of status quo seems to be favoured by Russia. In fact, there is a belief that Russia has been manoeuvring to maintain some strategic parity among the contenders and thus to preserve the stalemate (Shiriyev 2014; Abushov 2009; Tolstrup 2009; Baev 2001). The findings of several focus groups suggest that the Azerbaijani population at large holds this same belief.[7] Furthermore, Baku perceives external public opinion to be biased against Azerbaijan and over-influenced by the powerful Armenian diaspora. In sum, in spite of Azerbaijan's substantial energy assets, the Nagorno-Karabakh impasse does not seem any closer to a solution.

In addition to this lack of concurrence between means and ends, some inconsistency can be observed in the way Azerbaijan projects itself as a foreign policy agent. On the one hand, there is some emphasis placed on representing the country as a pragmatic actor that acts on the basis of national interest. For example, in his inauguration speech in 2013 Ilham Aliyev declared that: "*Our policy is based on national interests. Our policy is aimed at strengthening the independence".*[8] On the other hand, Baku seems to be active in trying to seduce an external audience. For the past number of years, Azerbaijan has implemented a public diplomacy strategy

[4] Loda, C. 2016. "Azerbaijan – Fall in oil price, economic crisis and possible political consequences", *Presidential Power Blog*, 27 January, http://presidential-power.com/?p=4374 .
[5] Savodnikfeb. P. 2013. "Azerbaijan Is Rich. Now It Wants to Be Famous", *The New York Times Magazine*, 8 February, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/magazine/azerbaijan-is-rich-now-it-wants-to-be-famous.html .
[6] Ibid.
[7] Garagozov (2012), reflecting on the most effective way to readdress the narrative about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, proposed three possible conciliating narratives of the conflict to different focus groups (composed only by Azerbaijanis): ''Common suffering'', ''Common cultural traits'' and ''Blame the Russians''. If the first two narratives were rejected, most participants of "Blame the Russians" group agreed with the idea that the conflict was externally fomented.
[8] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Speech by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the inauguration ceremony", 19 October, http://en.president.az/articles/9683 .

based primarily on grand sporting events and international conventions. Additionally, expressions like "*change the energy map of Europe"*[9] have been often resorted to in discussions on the energy strategy. In other words, when looking at both energy diplomacy and public diplomacy a mix of pragmatism and long-term ambition emerges. Whereas these two issues could be seen as diametrically different, the Azerbaijani narrative tends to represent them as two sides of the same coin. For example, President Ilham Aliyev declared that: "*Today, Azerbaijan is a young state. But look how many friends and partners we have in the world. We pursue our energy diplomacy. We pursue our cultural diplomacy".*[10] Similarly, Novruz Mammadov, deputy head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration and chief of the administration's foreign relations department, declared that: "*Today, the energy factor has a major impact on interstate relations and foreign policy*. *Azerbaijan is also a cultural hub between the East and West*". The interviews carried out with regional experts as part of the field research for this thesis are in line with these findings. For instance, Elnur Soltanov[11] clearly said that the entirety of Azerbaijan's diplomatic activity, energy and branding strategies included, is aimed at the eventual resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In order gain further insight into this contradictory foreign policy behaviour, characterised by both an avowed pragmatism and attempts to seduce, this chapter looks first at Azerbaijani energy policy and then at Azerbaijani public diplomacy. In order to explore Azerbaijani energy policy, this work will focus on the discourse and practice around the TAP and TANAP pipelines. These infrastructures will allow for the direct shipping of gas to Italy through Turkey, thus securing the long-term future of energy relations. In the second section, Azerbaijani public diplomacy strategy will be outlined. While these public diplomacy initiatives are aimed at a Western audience, the contradiction between the efforts invested in these diplomatic approaches and the anti-diplomatic reaction to any criticism of Azerbaijan will be discussed. The decision to focus predominantly on the European dimension rather than on the US perspective was taken on the basis of the specific topics selected. In the case of energy diplomacy, the infrastructural component of the Southern Gas Corridor naturally focuses largely on the European continent.[12] Even though the counter-acting of the actions of the well-organised Armenian diaspora in North-America is an absolute

[9] See for example: President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Press Statements by President Ilham Aliyev and President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso", 21 June, http://en.president.az/articles/8508.
[10] President of Azerbaijan. 2012. "Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of a new educational facility of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy", 12 September, http://en.president.az/articles/6268 .
[11] Interview with Elnur Soltanov, Baku (2015, 3 June).
[12] In general, and taking American support for the BTC pipeline into account, Mehdiyeva (2011) considers that Azerbaijan has tendend to value cooperation with the US more than cooperation with Europe.

priority for Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani lobbying strategy is well-developed in Europe also. The approaches taken towards the EU and Russia are remarkably different, the latter apparently being given much less attention than the former. Considering the leverage of Moscow in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its close relationship with Armenia, this might seem counter-intuitive. This work argues that two possible complementary explanations can be identified: the different degree of mutual understanding at elite level and a concern about Russia's coercive capacity.

TAP, TANAP and Shah Deniz II: Changing the Map of Europe, Keeping in Good Standing with Russia

In his speeches Ilham Aliyev often emphasises that, despite its limited size, Azerbaijan is not merely a recipient of external directives. As a result of being blessed by energy resources and a strategic location, it is argued that the country can negotiate on more equal terms with greater powers. In a departure from his father's conciliatory narratives of the 1990s, Ilham Aliyev has often stressed the link between political independence and oil-funded wealth. For example, in his inauguration speech of 2008 he declared that: *"Our energy policy gave us economic independence".*[13] Similarly, when re-elected in 2013 he reaffirmed that: *"Our independent policy is underpinned by our economic independence".*[14] In other words, energy resources are not represented merely as sources of revenue but rather as an instrument of leverage in international relations. Similar points are also made by other politicians. With reference to the former US ambassador Richard Morningstar and his alleged meddling in Azerbaijani affairs, the head of the Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev commented: "*Azerbaijan is not anybody's colony, but a completely self-reliant state".*[15] In brief, in its efforts to project itself as an international actor whose small size is mitigated by material assets, Azerbaijan approaches its dealings with external powers from the position of a peer rather than as a subordinate.

These elements are also relevant to the way Azerbaijan projects itself towards an international audience. In fact, some parallels can be seen between wealth and national self-confidence. Ismayilov (2014, 92) points out that the increase in oil revenue has stimulated the sense of self-reliance of the country, to the point of becoming convinced of its ability to ignore the preferences

[13] Heydar Aliyev Foundation. 2008. "Speech of the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in the Oath Taking Ceremony," 24 October, http://lib.aliyevheritage.org/en/7871416.html.
[14] Heydar Aliyev Foundation. 2013. "Official inauguration of Ilham Aliyev, re-elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan," 19 October, http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/35593458.html .
[15] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2014. 'Another senior Azeri official slams US envoy over "blatant meddling"', 25 May (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

of external actors. In addition, this increased self-confidence can be detected in a progressive disregard of external criticism as the country, relying on its energy relevance, comes to feel progressively less constrained by external opinion (ICG 2010, 21). For instance, whereas in 2000 international criticism of the Azerbaijani elections led to a revision of the results (Cornell 2001, 128), the 2013 OSCE/ODIHR report of the presidential elections was simply dismissed by top-ranking state officials as biased and unreliable.[16]

This section, which looks at the energy strategy of Azerbaijan in relation to Europe and Russia, outlining the singularity of each relationship, concludes by pointing out that, despite the emphasis placed on the link between energy and independence, the preferences of Moscow represent a significant constraint. This work is organised as follows. Firstly, it provides some context on Azerbaijan's energy history, programmes and policies. Secondly, it looks specifically at the TAP, TANAP and Shah Deniz projects. Thirdly, it focuses on the relationship with the EU. Finally, the Russo-Azerbaijani dynamics are explored.

Azerbaijan: Land of Fire, Oil and Gas

Azerbaijani political discourse often emphasises the fact that the devising and implementation of a wise energy policy saved the country from political instability and extra-electoral turmoil. While the celebratory tones may occasionally come across as excessive, the shift from disarray to prosperity was nonetheless remarkable.

While the extent of Azerbaijani energy resources was well-known even before the Soviet era, the transition to independence was characterised by several years of political instability, mostly related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Bolukbasi 2011; Geukjian 2012, 44). In 1992, the first president of post-Soviet independent Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov, was ousted as consequence of popular protests following the Khojaly massacre (Tokluoglu 2012; Ipek 2009). In 1993, his successor Elchibey, the proponent of a pan-Turkic external orientation (Mehdiyeva 2003), was toppled in a coup, allegedly sponsored by Russia (Kubicek 2013), and replaced by the former Politburo-member Heydar Aliyev (Sadri 2003), who had much a better understanding of power games and equilibriums. Thus, one of the main differences between Aliyev and his predecessor was the awareness that Azerbaijan could not cope with a hostile international environment. That

[16]BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "Azeri senior official hits at US, OSCE position on presidential election", 22 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

Aliyev took great care not to alienate Moscow, even though the West was the most sought-after external partner, can be seen in the signing of the 1994 "Contract of the Century". This deal involved the creation of a joint international venture (that also included Russia) for the exploration of the Shah Deniz gas field resources. On that occasion, American companies (Amoco, Pennzoil, Unocal and McDermott International, holding respectively 17%, 9.8%, 9.5% and 2.5% of the shares) and the Russian Lukoil (holding 10% of the shares) were included (Bayulgen 2010, 93). The involvement of Iranian investors, initially contemplated, was soon ruled out due to the strong American hostility to the idea (Giragosian 1998, 63). The deal seemed to strengthen both the hold on power of Heydar Aliyev, who since 1996 had been virtually unchallenged by domestic competitors (Cornell 2001), and the economic growth of the country, which on the wave of the global rise in energy prices experienced a double-digit rate of growth.[17] In 2003, the death of Heydar Aliyev and the appointment as president of his son Ilham did not change the situation dramatically. In these years, notwithstanding the tense relationship with Russia, the Azerbaijani energy strategy benefited from the support of the United States in the realm of energy security, which was crucial in the realisation of the BTC pipeline in 2007.[18] As might be expected, Russia was unhappy with the move and threatened a substantial price increase for its gas exports to Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan reacted by halting its gas imports from Russia (Mehdiyeva 2011, 148-149). In 2008, the Russo-Georgian war gave a clear indicator of the importance of improving the relationship with Moscow. On that occasion, while Azerbaijan continued to supply Georgia with gas, the leadership refrained from taking sides in the conflict. That war was also followed with interest by Europe and spurred the conviction of the need to accelerating energy diversification away from Russia. To this end, Azerbaijani energy resources started to be looked at with interest.

In January 2011, President Aliyev and the then-President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso signed a Joint Declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor. The declaration consisted for the most part of a strategic initiative to diversify the European energy market through the importation of Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Caspian gas.[19] Later that same year, the EU adopted a mandate for the negotiation of a legally-binding treaty between the EU, Azerbaijan and

[17]Between 2005 and 2007 Azerbaijan registered one of the most impressive rates of growth in the world. The peak was in 2006, when an impressive 34.5% was registered (ICG 2010, 3).
[18] Interview with Anar Valiyev, Baku (2015, 2 June, 2015).
[19] EEAS. 2017. "EU-Azerbaijan relations", 2 February, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4013/eu-azerbaijan-relations_en (Last accessed 13 April 2017).

Turkey, aimed at the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline.[20] As regards the implementation of the project, the designated developer was "Nabucco", a consortium of energy companies from Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria, committed to the construction of a pipeline bringing gas to Europe from the Caspian and the Middle East. The pipeline, strongly supported by the US, would have been partly funded by the EU (Freifeld 2009). Although the project had originally been conceived as being more extensive, and due to the uncertain status of the Caspian region, in 2012 the Nabucco consortium decided to downsize the project into a smaller pipeline, Nabucco West. This involved importing gas from Azerbaijan only and hence reducing the pipeline's capacity from 31 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year to 16 bcm (Kusznir 2013). However, this project was finally halted by the Shah Deniz II consortium (named after the gas field in Azerbaijan), which in mid-June 2013 decided to ship Azerbaijani oil[21] through an alternative pipeline: the Trans-Atlantic Pipeline (TAP), running through Greece and Albania and arriving into the Apulia region of Italy. Even though Nabucco was the EU's most favoured outcome, as it would have eased the gas dependency of East European countries on Russia (Sartori 2013), the European Commission expressed its support for the decision, in the hope that other suppliers would be later included. Notably, a few days before the formal choice of TAP, the Energy Commissioner Oettinger made public the following statement: "*We will continue our negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the construction of the TransCaspian pipeline and expect that an agreement can be reached on this in the very near future".*[22] The following week, while expressing the satisfaction of the Commission with the current form of the Southern Gas Corridor, he also added: "*We thus encourage countries in the region such as Turkmenistan and Iraq to build contractual relations with Europe despite a certain amount of political influence from outside".*[23]

On its side, the Azerbaijani narrative tended to use celebratory tones and refer to the project with the grand title of "the Contract of the 21st Century", drawing a direct parallel with the successful contract signed by Heydar Aliyev in 1994. For instance, in an effort to express continuity between these two projects, Ilham Aliyev commented: "*The contract of the 20th century is successfully*

[20] European Commission. 2011. "EU starts negotiations on Caspian pipeline to bring gas to Europe", *Policy brief*, 12 September, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-1023_en.htm?locale=en .
[21] The Turkish sector will be served by another pipeline, TANAP, which will be linked with TAP. For some information on the Turkish perspective, see: Tagliapietra (2016).
[22] Roberts, J. 2013. "Crunch time for Southern Corridor", *Platts International Gas Report*, 17 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[23] BBC Monitoring Europe. 2013. "Germany: EU commissioner sees pipe project as door opener to Caspian gas fields", 4 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

implemented and the contract of the 21st century has been signed".[24] According to this discursive framing, the decisions taken concerning the Southern Gas Corridor represent a further milestone in a path of national development. As recalled by President Ilham Aliyev, the signing of the "Contract of the Century" in 1994 opened the way for new projects such as the Shah Deniz field in 1996, the construction of the BTC pipeline in 2006, and the memorandum of Strategic Partnership with the EU in 2011.[25] Even though the continuity between these events is outlined, emphasis is also put on the dramatic changes that came about in the contractual position of Azerbaijan. While the "Contract of the Century" needed the support of a large number of investors, the agreement on the Southern Gas Corridor is depicted as a revolutionary project, initiated and largely financed by Azerbaijan. In the words of President Aliyev: "*TANAP is a project that changes the energy map of the region. Azerbaijan is the main investor, the main initiator and the main contractor of the project".*[26] In this way, Azerbaijan does not depict itself as a weak actor in desperate need of recruiting suitable external patrons but rather as a pivotal energy actor, able to both initiate and finance a project that will directly benefit its neighbours. Additionally, by mentioning the "energy map" of the region, the geostrategic significance of gas pipelines that, since they cannot be rerouted, bind producers, consumers and transit countries to a long-term relationship, is hinted at (Freifeld 2009).

As this section shows, the Azerbaijani narrative tends to frame these energy developments as a sign of the international relevance and success of the country. However, the implementation of these projects involves a complicated web of external interactions. Therefore, in addition to dealing with foreign partners, Azerbaijan needs to consider the potential reactions of its neighbours, foremost of these being Russia. Keeping in mind the concepts of size, asymmetry and strategic manoeuvring, the next pages will look at some elements of the Azerbaijani approach towards Europe firstly and then towards Russia.

Energy ties with the EU: between cooperation and asymmetry

As an energy market, the European Union is crucial to Azerbaijan. In fact, the twenty-eight EU countries absorb more than 50% of Azerbaijani exports, constituted almost exclusively by

[24] President of Azerbaijan. 2014. "Ilham Aliyev attended a conference dedicated to the implementation of state programs on the socioeconomic development of regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan", 5 February, http://en.president.az/articles/10960 .
[25] President of Azerbaijan. 2013."Ilham Aliyev attended the signing ceremony of the final investment decision on Shah Deniz-2", 17 December, http://en.president.az/articles/10521 .
[26] President of Azerbaijan. 2017. "Ilham Aliyev attended an official reception on the occasion of the national holiday of Azerbaijan – the Republic Day", 27 May, http://en.president.az/articles/11828 .

petroleum and petroleum products. These EU export figures dwarf the export share to Russia, the US and Turkey, which accounting for 3.6%, 3.6% and 2.7% respectively.[27] Furthermore, and due to the deteriorating relationship with Russia, the European Commission is clearly interested in energy diversification. In the early 2010s, the President of the Commission Barroso and the energy Commissioner Oettinger repeatedly showed their support for energy projects involving Azerbaijan and, ideally, Turkmenistan. Additionally, an understanding of EU regulations and legislation is crucial to Azerbaijani energy plans. Notably, in November 2014 the EU Commission launched an in-depth investigation to determine if the possible acquisition of the Greek gas transmission system operator DESFA, by the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), would comply with EU merger regulation.[28] In spite of some occasional misunderstandings, the energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU seems sustained by a long-term time vision. Given that Azerbaijani oil reserves could be exhausted within two decades, shipping gas to Europe may represent a crucial income source in the future (de Waal 2016). As highlighted by Ilham Aliyev: "*the major natural gas markets for us are Turkey and Europe, because our other neighbors Iran and Russia have a wealth of natural resources themselves, while the Georgian market is quite small*". However, notwithstanding the critical importance of the European market, the Azerbaijani narrative towards Brussels, rather than being deferential, is structured around the concepts of "equal partnership" and "pragmatic relationship".

In the process of dealing with the EU, Azerbaijani authorities tend to emphasise their search for an equal partnership based on sectoral cooperation, first and foremost on energy issues. The attention paid by Mr. Barroso to the country in the 2010s, which translated into high-level visits and personal contacts, did not affect this narrative of "mutually-beneficial cooperation". As clearly stated by Ilham Aliyev in an interview given to a Hungarian media outlet: "*Our relations with the European Union must be based on a pragmatic approach. What can we provide to each other? What are the areas of mutual interest?".*[29] As suggested on many occasions, energy security represents the main area in which interests converge, since Europe needs to diversify its suppliers and Azerbaijan has consistently proved itself a reliable partner. Notwithstanding this emphasis on

[27] In 2016, Azerbaijani exports to the EU totalled €7,605 million. Of that, €7,454 million comes from petroleum and its derivatives (European Commission. 2017. 'European Union, Trade in goods with Azerbaijan', *Directorate-General for Trade*, 17 February, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113347.pdf).

[28] European Commission. 2014. 'Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into proposed acquisition of Greek gas transmission system operator DESFA by SOCAR', *Press Release Database*, Brussels, 5 November, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1442_en.htm .

[29] President of Azerbaijan. 2014. 'Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Hungarian National Television', 11 November 11, http://en.president.az/articles/13381 .

the "common energy interest", an analysis on the Azerbaijani narrative indicates that there is some discomfort in dealing with the EU institutions. In this regard, it should be noted that the terms EU or European Union are only seldom used, with this limited use mostly reserved for dedicated events. Examples include joint declarations with high-ranking EU officials such as the former president of the EU Commission Barroso and the former President of the EU Council of Europe Van Rompuy. Even on these occasions, the focus tends to be put on member states. For example President Aliyev, on the occasion of his meeting with Mr. Van Rompuy, after having said that: "*All these years are remembered for active cooperation between Azerbaijan and European institutions*" promptly added *"I note also that Azerbaijan has good bilateral relations with countries of the European Union."*[30]

Similar points can be inferred by looking at the speeches of other cadres. For instance, in an answer to an interview question, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mammadov, after saying that: "*Azerbaijan favors equal cooperation with the European Union*", immediately added: "*Azerbaijan has signed agreements on strategic partnership with eight EU states".*[31] Hypothesising the reasons behind these rhetorical choices, these elements might suggest that Azerbaijan feels more comfortable in dealing with certain individual European countries than with the EU institutions. In some cases, this is framed as the result of an anti-Azerbaijani prejudice. According to Ali Hasanov, the adviser to the President of Azerbaijan on Public Political Issues, in spite of the positive ties with Europe and with many European countries, Azerbaijan is unhappy that some members of the European Parliament try: "*to dictate some unacceptable rules to Azerbaijan* (…) [which is] *not going to be dependent on any country".*[32] In other words, notwithstanding the crucial importance of Brussels, Azerbaijan seems uncomfortable in dealing with Europe's institutional dimension.

A possible explanation for this discomfort could lie in the objective asymmetry between Azerbaijan and the EU institutions. More specifically, notwithstanding the benefits associated with cooperation with the EU, Azerbaijan is undeniably the "smaller partner" in the relationship. In fact, if drawing on Azerbaijani energy resources alone, TAP could cater for no more than 2-3%

[30] President of Azerbaijan. 2012. 'Joint press statements of Presidents of Azerbaijan and of the European Council', 5 July, http://en.president.az/articles/5326 .
[31] Azeri-Press news agency (APA). 2016. 'Top Azerbaijani official: Int'l community has forgotten int'l law', 7 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[32] Azer News. 2015. "Azerbaijan keeps EU energy security goals", 16 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

of the gas needs of the EU.[33] As hinted at in the introductory paragraph, while the EU is unquestionably in need of some energy diversification, Azerbaijan equally needs Europe to buy its energy resources. In his speech at ADA University, Jose Manuel Barroso raised this point by saying that: "*50% of your exports go to the European Union, and 30% of your imports come from the EU".*[34] Making a similar point in clearer terms, a member of the EU Delegation in Baku told this author that: "*The EU-Azerbaijan relationship takes place between a country of ten million inhabitants and 28 countries of 500 million inhabitants. How that can be equal*?".[35] In sum, in spite of Azerbaijan being aware of the crucial nature of the partnership with the EU, an analysis of the Azerbaijani narrative suggests there is some attempt to downplay the institutional dimension. While this could be interpreted as reflecting Azerbaijan's lack of interest in joining binding organisations, this work also hypothesises that it indicated some dissatisfaction with being undisputedly the smaller party in the relationship. This point seems supported by the fact that it is predominantly geographic Europe, rather than institutional Europe, that is mentioned in the presidential narrative. The following quote constitutes an example of that: *"Azerbaijani gas is expected in the European region and we are working on that".*[36] From this, two points can be highlighted. Firstly, the importance of bilateral relations with *some* EU members it is *de facto* hinted at. Secondly, and less apparently, attention is drawn to the non-perfect coincidence between the European Union and the European region. The latter is presented not as a sub-section of the EU, since it also includes also Albania and Montenegro, but rather envisaged as an energy region resulting from Azerbaijani-sponsored energy infrastructures. The next sub-section will provide a detailed account of these points.

The European countries: bilateral ties and alternative cooperation formats

In the implementation of regional energy projects, bilateral relations are obviously crucial. Even though Azerbaijani officials, if directly asked, tend to say that the country gives equal importance

[33] Compared to a European demand of 500 Billion Cubic Metres (BCM) of natural gas, Azerbaijan could supply only 10 BCM of this [Jamestown Foundation. 2013. "Azerbaijan and the Southern Gas Corridor to Europe Implications for U.S. and European Energy Security", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Conference Report, 13 September, https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Conference_Report_-_Azerbaijan_and_the_Southern_Gas_Corridor_-_FINAL_web_version.pdf].

[34] PMS. 2014. 'Speech by President Barroso at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy University', European Union News, 16 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[35] Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan, Baku (2015, 29 May).

[36] President of Azerbaijan. 2012. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the fourth meeting of the heads of diplomatic service", 21 September, http://en.president.az/articles/6304 .

to both bilateral and multilateral ties,[37] President Aliyev has often declared bilateral relations to be the favoured foreign policy approach of the country.[38] For example, in 2014 he said: "*We are working with our neighbors in this direction in bilateral and multilateral formats (…) Of course, we give preference to the bilateral format. We stand for equal and mutually beneficial relations with all countries*".[39] This quotation is remarkably similar to one dating from two years before: "*Our main line in foreign policy is bilateral (…) Because equitable relations in the bilateral format are the only possible relations".*[40]

A plausible reason for this preference for a bilateral format is that it does not involve the unpleasant situation of "28 v 1". Additionally, while some EU member states share only limited ties with Azerbaijan, some others have a remarkably close economic relationship (Kobzova and Aliyeva 2012). For example, 26.3% of the total Azerbaijani exports go to Italy.[41] Similarly, British Petroleum (BP) is a major partner in the Southern Corridor project. Additionally, smooth bilateral ties are crucial for the realisation of this Southern Corridor project. Reflecting this emphasis on positive bilateral relations, meetings with Greek or Italian partners have always been followed by friendly declarations. In 2014, on the occasion of a meeting with the Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, Ilham Aliyev expressed his gratitude to the "*Government of Greece for supporting the relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union.* (…) *We view Greece as our main partner and friend in the European Union".*[42] Similarly, on the occasion of a visit of the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, President Aliyev emphasised that Rome was the largest trading partner of Azerbaijan and that the TAP pipeline would further enhance bilateral ties.[43] While this could be interpreted as standard "diplomatic buttering up" between trade partners, the language used with reference to the failed Nabucco pipeline highlights some strategic behaviour. For example, before ultimately choosing the TAP pipeline over Nabucco, the President was cautious about not

[37] See for example: Gotev, G. and Billot, O. 2017. "Ambassador: Azerbaijan wants a solid foundation for EU relationship", *Euractive, http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/video/ambassador-azerbaijan-wants-a-solid-foundation-for-eu-relationship/.*

[38] President of Azerbaijan. 2012. "Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of a new educational facility of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy", 12 September, http://en.president.az/articles/6268 .

[39] President of Azerbaijan. 2014. "Ilham Aliyev attended the 5th session of the heads of Azerbaijani diplomatic services", 7 July, http://en.president.az/articles/12264 .

[40] President of Azerbaijan .2012 . Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the fourth meeting of the heads of diplomatic service, 21 September, http://en.president.az/articles/6304 .

[41] The World Factbook. 2017. "Azerbaijan", https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html .

[42] President of Azerbaijan. 2014. "Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Greece Antonis Samaras met with top business people in Athens", 16 June, http://en.president.az/articles/12092 .

[43] President of Azerbaijan. 2016. "Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by Italian Minister". 7 November, http://en.president.az/articles/21593 .

indicating any preference. After the decision was announced, Aliyev prudently refrained from comment.

Additionally, in spite of the impossibility that Shah Deniz II alone could refurbish a web of pipelines, some Azerbaijani politicians and experts kept insisting that the Nabucco West project was not cancelled but only postponed. In July 2013, Rovnag Abdulayev, the President of SOCAR, declared that after the completion of TAP in 2020, the Nabucco project could be resumed.[44] This was in spite the fact that since Azerbaijan has committed most of its gas to export through TAP, growing domestic consumption would requires either the timely discovery of new gas fields or an import agreement with Iran, Turkmenistan or Russia for this to be feasible.[45] Nevertheless, when asked by the Italian paper "Il Sole-24 Ore" whether the Nabucco project was definitely over, the Azerbaijani Energy Minister Natig Aliyev expressed his confidence that new gas fields, yet to be discovered, would enable the construction of additional pipelines.[46] Two explanations of this discrepancy between declarations and objective possibilities are possible. The first of these relates to a desire to nurture the EU Commission's expectations of a further extension of the project (as previously analysed in this chapter), the second concerns an effort to avoid further exasperating those EU members unhappy with the defeat of Nabucco, the foremost of these being Romania and Bulgaria. For example, following the collapse of the Nabucco project the then-President of Romania Basescu voiced his unhappiness with the decision and with the work of the European Commission.[47] Perhaps with these tensions in mind, during the ceremony for the signing of the final investment into Shah Deniz II, Ilham Aliyev seemed to address these concerns directly by highlighting that: "*I hope that in the coming years we will carry out together with our partners in Romania, Hungary and Austria active work to extend the pipeline in this direction".*[48] Recapitulating, while the capacity of Azerbaijan to supply additional partners remains in dispute, the narrative chosen suggests a conscious attempt not to alienate the dissatisfied parties.

[44] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "Azerbaijan finalizing agreements on transporting gas to Europe", 14 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[45] Platts Energy Economist. 2016. "Azerbaijan's SOCAR: balancing projects and problems", 1 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[46] BBC Monitoring Europe. 2013. "Azeri energy minister sees greater future capacity for exporting gas to Europe", 28 September (Retrieved through Lexis Nexis).
[47] BBC Monitoring Europe. 2013. "Romanian president criticizes European Commission for Nabucco project failure", 2 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[48] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Ilham Aliyev attended the signing ceremony of the final investment decision on Shah Deniz-2", 17 December, http://en.president.az/articles/10521 .

In an attempt to go beyond a dichotomous division between bilateral and EU ties, this chapter argues for a third dimension, which is neither that of the EU institutional dimension nor the mere sum of bilateral relations. Thus, rather than emphasising a pre-existing institutional dimension, Azerbaijani narrative often focuses on the new energy map to be developed around the TAP and TANAP pipelines. In February 2016, at the Second Advisory Council of the Southern Gas Corridor, President Aliyev confidently declared that: "*The Southern Gas Corridor project is changing the energy map of Europe (…) that will happen because all the projects, which Azerbaijan initiated during the last twenty years, were successful".*[49] However, after praising the role of the European Commission and of Federica Mogherini, who was also in attendance at the Council meeting, he added: *"We established very close relations with neighbors, with many countries of European Union (…) we all now are one team: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Italy".*[50] It can be inferred from this that, although Azerbaijan acknowledges the role of the European institutions, the real interest is in those area within the reach of the pipelines. Far from having been limited to this one specific occasion, the Azerbaijani presidential narrative has consistently emphasised the Southern European "gas region". On the occasion of the signing of the final investment decision on Shah Deniz II, Ilham Aliyev, discussing the future construction of the TAP and TANAP pipelines, pointed to the crucial role of *"Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Italy and Bulgaria".*[51] From this extract, an idea of a Europe that goes from the East Mediterranean to the Western Balkans, all areas which Azerbaijan reaches with its pipelines, emerges. Remarkably, on the occasion of a meeting with Greek business and political actors,[52] Ilham Aliyev pointed out that the TAP project: "*Will further strengthen the relations between Azerbaijan, Greece, Italy and Albania. We will create a new format for broad regional cooperation of the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and Europe*". These words imply that Azerbaijan, as the main energy provider for the Southern Gas Corridor, would have outstanding leverage in this new regional forum.

In conclusion, the analysis of Azerbaijani political narratives suggests that Azerbaijan feels comfortable with a particular conception of Europe that is relevant to Azerbaijan. The analysis

[49] President of Azerbaijan. 2016. "Closing speech by Ilham Aliyev at the second meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council", 29 February, http://en.president.az/articles/18120 .
[50] Ibid.
[51] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Ilham Aliyev attended the signing ceremony of the final investment decision on Shah Deniz-2", 17 December, http://en.president.az/articles/10521 .
[52] Azertag. 2014. "Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Greece Antonis Samaras met with top business people in Athens", 16 June, https://new.azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_and_Prime_Minister_of_Greece_Antonis_Samaras_met_with_top_business_people_in_Athens_VIDEO-91563 .

shows that although the discourse might refer to "Europe" special relevance is given to those South European states, whether EU members or not (i.e. Albania), that play a significant role in the energy strategy of Azerbaijan. In so doing Baku, rather than showing enthusiasm for an institutional entity that clearly exceeds Azerbaijan in size, prefers to refer to "strategic energy areas", so-defined by virtue of Azerbaijani energy resources. This emphasis on the Southern energy region can be interpreted as a defensive strategy used to downplay the evident asymmetry between Azerbaijan and the EU. In addition, the over-assertive language used towards Europe can also be seen as resulting from the unfamiliarity of the Azerbaijani elites, most of whom were socialised in a Soviet environment,[53] with a supranational entity. By contrast, some preference for either bilateral ties or issue-based cooperation formats emerges from the political narrative. The next sub-chapter will show that there is a much clearer "silent understanding" in the relationship with Russia.

Azerbaijan, Russia and Energy: Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

As already pointed out in the introduction, Nazrin Mehdiyeva (2011, 26) looks at the way in which Azerbaijan, a smaller actor vis-à-vis Russia, practices "strategic manoeuvring". This entails maintaining good ties with Moscow, by means of a degree of cooperation, while avoiding binding ties and unfavourable foreign policy choices. In this specific case, even though energy assets and a competent diplomatic policy have allowed Azerbaijan to disregard somewhat Russian preferences, open confrontation is carefully avoided. For instance, even though some Azerbaijani stakeholders have clearly indicated that Russia is not the main destination for Azerbaijani gas, Baku has agreed to sell a limited amount of gas to Russia, allegedly mainly for PR reasons (Mehdiyeva 2011). In brief, Azerbaijan seems eager to cooperate with the West without jeopardising the relationship with Russia. Building on Mehdiyeva's (2011) work, the validity of these conclusions seems to hold also in the case of the Southern Gas Corridor. More specifically, it will be shown that, even though the need to construct the TAP pipeline was generally explained without making reference to Russia, some considerations are in order. Additionally, the extremely prudent attitude towards the Trans Caspian pipeline is analysed.

The expert debate on Azerbaijani energy strategy has often analysed the way that Russia factors into the equation. In particular, the limited relevance of the TAP pipeline in terms of energy diversification has been noted. This is because TAP will terminate in the well-diversified Italian

[53] This point emerged in an interview with Anar Valiyev (Baku, 2015, 2 June) and Kavus Abushov (Baku, 2015, 29 May).

market without challenging the de-facto monopoly of Gazprom in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. This much is not denied by Azerbaijani experts. For instance, the political analyst Natiq Miri[54] declared that TAP, even though hardly an inconvenience for Azerbaijan, is also relatively in line with the preferences of the Kremlin. He also adds that the disparity of size between Russia and Azerbaijan makes it absolutely normal for the former to make concessions to the latter. Despite the importance of Russia in Azerbaijani energy choices, it is interesting to note that the presidential narrative is almost completely Russia-blind. When President Aliyev states the importance for Europe of diversifying energy suppliers, he never mentions, not even indirectly, any specific geopolitical tensions. For instance, even though comments like: *"We have never used our oil and gas opportunities for any other purposes"*[55], are made, President Aliyev refrains from describing concrete cases of energy blackmailing. Additionally, although it is repeatedly stated that importance of Shan Deniz II, TANAP and TAP lies in the fact that they represent "*a new route and a new source*"[56] and that they will "*provide not only a new route for gas supplies to Europe, but also, most importantly, a new source of gas*",[57] the reasons (i.e. Russia) that makes it dangerous to rely solely on traditional energy suppliers is never hinted at.

In addition to these discursive omissions in the broader narrative, some additional elements emerge from the analysis of the discursive material aimed at a Russian audience. For example, when explicitly asked about energy, President Aliyev tends not to present the issue in competitive terms. For example, in an interview for ITAR-TASS in 2011, notwithstanding some statements like: "*Today, no project can be implemented in the region without the participation of Azerbaijan – be it energy, transport or political*",[58] he clarified that the Russo-Azerbaijani relationship was

[54] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. 'Azerbaijan reportedly offers Russia share in energy projects', 10 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

[55]Similarly, at the ceremony marking the 90th ceremony of ASOA, Ilham Aliyev said: "We have never used and will never use our energy resources for other purposes" [President of Azerbaijan. 2010. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the ceremony marking the 90th ceremony of Azerbaijan State Oil Academy (ASOA)", 23 November, http://en.president.az/articles/1144]. However, this comment does not have to be read as directed exclusively at Russia. In fact, in September 2014 the Minister of Energy Natig Aliyev declared that Azerbaijan, which is not an OPEC member, would maintain the existing extraction level in order to respect the commitments already undertaken [Gulf News. 2014. "Friday Azerbaijan will not stem oil production" 26 September (retrieved through LexisNexis)].

[56]President of Azerbaijan. 2014. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the 21st International Exhibition "Caspian Oil and Gas" in Baku", 3 June, http://en.president.az/articles/12019 .

[57]Azertag. 2014. "Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Greece Antonis Samaras met with top business people in Athens", 16 June, https://new.azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_and_Prime_Minister_of_Greece_Antonis_Samaras_met_with_top_business_people_in_Athens_VIDEO-91563 .

[58] President of Azerbaijan. 2011. "President Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by the first deputy director-general of ITAR-TASS, Mikhail Gusman, for ITAR-TASS news agency and 'Russia-24' TV channel", 26 December'6, http://en.president.az/articles/8059 .

"*a cooperation, not a competition*". Similarly, in 2015 when asked by "Russia24" about the TAP pipeline, Ilham Aliyev played down the relevance of the project by referring to the cost of the infrastructure and the low market price of gas. He also added that the gas shipped through the Southern Gas Corridor would not challenge the primacy of suppliers such as Norway, Algeria or Russia, as if to imply that Azerbaijan should not be considered a fully-fledged competitor.[59] Finally, both the President and the pro-government press refrain from mentioning that Russia actively boycotts the construction of TAP. For example, the official political narrative has not suggested that Russia could be behind the environmental protests in the Italian region Apulia, where the TAP pipeline is due to be built. In spite of the lack of official comment, rumours of this kind circulate among insiders. For example, under condition of anonymity, a BP Senior executive declared that: "*There is plenty of rumours the Russians are behind it. But that would come as no surprise to anybody, because Russians don't want any gas coming from any route apart from their own route".*[60] Similarly, Elshad Nashirov, a SOCAR vice president, subtly insinuated that: "*In the end, the campaign against TAP gas pipeline will suit Russia".*[61]

The following paragraphs will consider the significance of a related dynamic: the lukewarm attitude of Azerbaijan towards the development of a Trans-Caspian Pipeline. This work will attribute this lack of enthusiasm to an awareness of Moscow's hostility towards a pipeline that, bypassing the Russian Federation, brings Caspian gas to Europe. As already mentioned, the Southern Gas Corridor will have only limited effect on the diversification of the energy sources of the EU. It is no secret that once a pipeline system has been constructed to connect the Shah Deniz II reserves to Europe, Azerbaijani resources on their own are not likely to fulfil more than 2% of European energy needs. What really makes the project desirable, from a European energy security point of view, is the possibility of a future connection to other Caspian states (Lupu 2013, 7), in a way that would resemble the original Nabucco project. On paper, this perspective should be extremely attractive to Azerbaijan which, in addition to profiting financially through the collection of transit fees, would further consolidate its significance on the Euro-Caspian energy map. As stated emphatically by Anar Valiyev: "*Oil is money, gas is politics".*[62] Given the support

[59] President of Azerbaijan. 2015. 'Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by "Russia-24" channel', 29 April, http://en.president.az/articles/14954 .
[60] Gotev, G. 2016. "Southern gas corridor on time, BP executive says", *Euractiv*, 12 May, http://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/thurs-southern-gas-corridor-on-time-bp-executive-says/ .
[61] Kucera, J. and Shiriyev, Z. 2017. "Azerbaijan: Energy Hopes vs. Italian Olive Groves", Eurasianet, 20 January, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/82061 .
[62] Interview with Anar Valiyev, Baku (2015, 2 June).

that the EU has pledged to the project since 2011,[63] being both a gas supplier and a transit country would likely increase Baku's leverage over Brussels. In spite of these unquestionable benefits, Azerbaijan has been consistently cautious in expressing its support. As stated by Professor Elnur Soltanov,[64] Azerbaijan is somewhat interested in but will not fight for the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Similarly, a member of the EU Delegation in Baku said though Azerbaijan might be interested in the project it would not fund it.[65] A possible explanation for this reluctance is that the project would encounter the firm opposition of Moscow and Teheran.[66] With particular reference to the former, Azerbaijan seems conscious of the perils related to pursuing energy infrastructure projects that are disliked by Russia[67] and not sufficiently supported by other players. Despite having constructed the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in 2007, strongly backed both by Turkey and the United States, Azerbaijan remains aware of the importance of not overstepping in cases where they are lacking powerful supporters. Given that the external support to the Trans-Caspian pipeline is not comparable to the support given by the West to the BTC pipeline,[68] and taking into account the different preferences of the EU member states,[69] it can be hypothesised that Azerbaijan is acting cautiously in order not to upset Moscow. Some evidence for this emerges from the presidential discourse, which tends to omit any reference to cooperation with Turkmenistan.

At the end of November 2014, Turkmen state TV reported that talks were taking place between the president of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and the First Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Yagub Eyyubov about the possibility of strengthening energy and transport cooperation.[70] A few days before, Rovnag Abdullayev, the President of the Azerbaijani State Oil company SOCAR, had announced the readiness of Azerbaijan to provide the infrastructure needed

[63] Brussels, which is highly interested in the direct delivery of the Turkmen resources, has since 2010 signalled its commitment to the project by sending personalities such as the then-President of the EU Commission Barroso and the then-energy Commissioner Ottinger on official visits to Ashgabat and also by asking the EU Commission to contribute in case of a negotiation on the realisation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline (Petersen and Barysch 2011, 53).
[64] Interview with Elnur Soltanov, Baku (2015, 3 June).
[65] Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan, Baku, (2015, 29 May).
[66] CEE Energy NewsWatch Today. 2017. "Gazprom's 'iron embrace' comes with a sting in the tail", 17 February (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[67] Moscow, which in Soviet times was the final destination of all the pipelines of the Union, has never regarded with favour the construction of new energy routes (Kubicek 2013) nor, consequently, the signature of relevant energy contracts with Western countries (Petersen and Barysch 2011). In particular, Russia appreciated the fact that neither Kazakhstan nor Turkmenistan signed contracts for the direct shipping of their gas to Europe (Kubicek 2013).
[68] Interview with Anar Valiyev, Baku (2015, 2 June).
[69] As observed by Dr. Elnur Soltanov, the UK feels energy secure, Germany is reliably supplied by Russia and France mostly relies on nuclear energy (Interview with Elnur Soltanov, Baku (2015, 3 June).
[70] Trend. 2014. "Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan are ready to strengthen energy and transport cooperation", *Oil & Gas,* 23 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

to cooperate with Turkmenistan in the gas sector. He also added that TANAP's initial capacity of 16 billion cubic meters could be expanded to 31 billion cubic meters (in a way that would include Turkmenistan). Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan had also declared several days previously that the TANAP pipeline could carry Turkmen gas to Europe.[71] The importance attributed to these developments by international partners was in sharp contrast to the limited coverage they were given in Azerbaijan. In fact, these meeting and declarations, which were not mentioned at all on the presidential website, received only limited attention in the Azerbaijani local press. Additionally, in spite of his supposed interest in the issue, President Aliyev refrained not only from travelling to Ashgabat but also from releasing any declaration on the issue. A possible explanation for this is the manifest hostility of Moscow to the project. In relation to these bilateral talks, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov declared that: "*The project of the trans-Caspian gas pipeline falls into the category of projects that affect the interests of the countries that do not participate in the talks on its creation".*[72] Additionally, he added that "*Azerbaijani and Turkmen friends*" were fully aware of the relevant international law-related[73] issues.[74] These words hinted not only at some possible procedural obstructionism but also at unspecified future retribution from Russia. It follows that the quiet attitude adopted by Azerbaijan could be plausibly interpreted as the acknowledgment of that red line.

This case sheds some light on the attitude of Azerbaijan towards the EU and Russia. Even though being connected to Turkmenistan would undoubtedly enhance the international relevance of Azerbaijan, the absence of genuine proactivity in that direction suggests that, lacking unequivocal external political support, the fear of upsetting Russia prevails over economic advantages (i.e. transit fees) and geo-strategic advantages. As Anar Valiyev commented, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and assessing the "safe possibilities" is a crucial component of the Azerbaijani foreign policy strategy towards Russia.[75] Ultimately, despite the narrative emphasis on "political independence" and "energy-acquired international status", this section's findings suggest some clear asymmetry between Azerbaijan and Russia.

[71] Trend. 2014. "SOCAR ready to offer oil and gas transport infrastructure to Turkmenistan", *Daily Economic News*, 19 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[72] ITAR-TASS. 2014. "Trans-Caspian gas pipeline affects Russia's legitimate interests – Lavrov", 19 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[73] This refers to the unsettled legal status of the Caspian, which limits the opportunities for energy cooperation (Kubicek 2013).
[74] Ibid.
[75] Interview with Anar Valiyev, Baku, (2015, 2 June).

Energy diplomacy: concluding remarks

Through the assessment of certain aspects of Azerbaijani energy diplomacy, some observations can be made about its size, both in absolute terms and in relation to the West and Russia. Firstly, the Azerbaijani narrative emphasises the link between the country's energy assets and its independence from external pressure. Thus, it is often argued that, while in the past the country had to be conscious of the preferences of external powers, the implementation of an effective energy strategy has enabled Azerbaijan to act according to its own best interest. Acknowledging that energy resources have, without a doubt, increased the leverage enjoyed by Azerbaijan, this chapter nonetheless points out some asymmetries in the relationships with the EU and Russia.

In the case of dealings with the EU, which represents a crucial energy market, it can be observed that Azerbaijan constantly reiterates its desire for an equal relationship, based on shared interests and some mutually-beneficial cooperation. This attitude can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it could be seen as a sign of unease at having to deal with an unfamiliar actor, namely a supra-national organisation. This point is supported by the fact that Azerbaijan seems more familiar with the diplomatic etiquette of bilateral formats, as shown by a more strategic use of political speeches in these contexts. Secondly, it could be seen as an attempt to play down a clearly asymmetrical situation of "28 v 1". In this regard, it can be observed that Azerbaijan feels more comfortable in the environment of energy summits, perhaps because of its pivotal role as an energy supplier. In the case of dealings with Russia, the attempt to be as unconfrontational as possible is evident. For example, the Southern Gas Corridor is never framed as a (more reliable) alternative to Russia. Additionally, while the construction of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline would enhance the significance of Azerbaijan on the global energy market, Baku has been lukewarm in regard to the project. Mehdiyeva (2011, 249), assessing Azerbaijan's size vis-à-vis Russia, argues that, in spite of its energy niche, Azerbaijan is still a small state "*which needs to remain extremely sensitive and attuned to changes in its external environment*". This statement seems fully in line with the findings of this sub-chapter, which shows that the benefits resulting from the Southern Gas Corridor are carefully weighed against the potential damage to the relationship with Russia.

Searching for a niche role? Public diplomacy, multiculturalism and consistency

"*Today, Azerbaijan is a young state. But look how many friends and partners we have in the world. We pursue our energy diplomacy. We pursue our cultural diplomacy. Look how many cultural events are held abroad. (…) This area should be in the spotlight because it unites people and*

creates full understanding of the country".[76] With these words, Ilham Aliyev seems to be hinting that both energy diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are important in fostering the international visibility of Baku. A firm belief of the part of Azerbaijani authorities in the utility of public diplomacy seems confirmed by the massive and varied investments in that direction. At the beginning of 2010s Azerbaijan, previously a country largely unknown to the wider international public, suddenly became the topic of numerous (state-sponsored) books and the host of various cultural events. In 2012 the Eurovision Song Contest proved to be the first in a series of Grand Events, culminating in the European Games in 2015 and the hosting of a round of Formula 1 Race in 2016. In parallel, a message of tolerance and multicultural coexistence has been consistently crafted and projected. Notably, 2016 was designated by President Aliyev the "Year of Multiculturalism" (Cornell et al. 2016, 7). Far from being a limited and distinct set of activities, public diplomacy can be interpreted as an attempt on the part of a small state to ameliorate its global reputation. In considering this status-seeking strategy as an attempt to mitigate the asymmetry between the Self and a greater external actor, this work considers that an analysis of this topic could contribute to answering the research question: *"How does Azerbaijan navigate its relative asymmetry vis-à-vis Russia and the West?"*

Several points can be gleaned from the analysis. Firstly, the contradictory strategy of Azerbaijan towards the West emerges. For example, the spending on grand events seems at odds with the enraged reaction to any form of external criticism. For example, the OSCE-ODIHR condemnation of the electoral process in 2013 was followed by an angry reaction from Azerbaijan.[77] Similarly, while on the occasion of the Eurovision Song Contest some high-profile jailed journalists and civil activists were pardoned by the president and released (Kobzova and Aliyeva 2012), surprisingly[78] no similar move was undertaken before the European Games in 2015.[79] While some not-so-famous political prisoners were pardoned that year on the occasion of the national holiday of Novruz, this move was barely reported on official channels.[80] As a result, the effects of the public diplomacy strategy appear somewhat limited. Indeed, the European Games held in summer 2015, seem to have brought more scrutiny than praise to the country, as can be observed from the fact that no

[76] President of Azerbaijan. 2012. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the fourth meeting of the heads of diplomatic service", 21 September, http://en.president.az/articles/6304 .
[77]As will be pointed out later on, such reaction came mainly from various Azerbaijani high-ranking politicians but not from President Aliyev, who remained almost silent about this issue.
[78] Interview with Anar Valiyev, Baku (2015, 2 June).
[79] While some not-so-famous political prisoners were pardoned that year on occasion of Novruz, this move was not widely advertised on official channels (Loda 2016).
[80] Loda, C. 2016. "Azerbaijan - F1 and the limits of public diplomacy", *Presidential Power*, 16 July, http://presidential-power.com/?p_5165 .

European leaders, apart from Prince Albert of Monaco and the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, attended the opening ceremony.[81] Turning to the press reports, the foreign media focused more on the issue of Azerbaijani political prisoners than on the brand-new stadiums.[82] More recently, and due to the drop in energy prices, it appears that this high-profile public diplomacy is undergoing some partial reconsideration, with this observation supported by the relatively low profile of the Formula 1 race that was held in Baku in June 2016.[83]

In addition to these elements, the analysis of Azerbaijani public diplomacy shows that even though winning international support over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict constitutes the main goal of the public diplomacy strategy (Ismayilov 2012, 842), most public diplomacy initiatives seem to be targeting the West as the main interlocutor. In contrast, it emerges that, in spite of its relevance to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, no comparable effort is made to win over a Russian audience. Indeed, in spite of the emphasis on countering the lobbying effort of the Armenian diaspora, the Azerbaijani political narrative remains silent regarding the role of Moscow in the conflict.

Public diplomacy: a softer attempt to readdress an imbalance?

Public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it is mostly aimed at the general public (Wolf and Rosen 2004) and can be understood as a set of actions implemented by a government in order to transmit to a foreign public not only national values, institutions and cultures but also relevant national goals and policies (Wang 2006). Nye (2008) defines it as the: "*Instrument that governments use to mobilise these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries*". Even though countries do not have perfect control over the way they are perceived worldwide, it is reasonable to say that part of the perception stems from the message projected to an international audience (Yarchi et al. 2013). In this regard, two elements seem particularly important: the 'target audience' and the 'credibility' of the country. In this regard, Nye (2008) deems it critical to understand the nature of the target public, keeping in mind that what resonates with a domestic constituency could be rejected by an international public. On the issue of credibility, Nye (2008) considers this to be the element that distinguishes public diplomacy from propaganda. Public diplomacy campaigns are plagued by a lack of credibility in cases in which

[81] Politico.com. 2015. "Live, From the Fifth Most Censored Country, It's the First Ever European Games", 16 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis)
[82] Targeted News Service. 2015. "Azerbaijan: European Games Legacy Tainted by Repressive Crackdown", 26 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[83] Loda, C. 2016. "Azerbaijan - F1 and the limits of public diplomacy", *Presidential Power*, 16 July, http://presidential-power.com/?p_5165 .

there is no consistency between the narrative proposed and the way in which a country conducts its affairs. For example, in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the credibility of the American narrative on democratisation was severely compromised by the ties Washington had with Middle-Eastern authoritarian leaders (Van Ham 2005). Similarly, during the Vietnam War, and in spite of the massive communication efforts to defend the legitimacy of the mission, the brutality of some of the combat actions cast doubts on the whole operation. To gain a better understanding of public diplomacy, other sub-properties can be introduced. Firstly, rather than being a generic principle (such as the normative nature of the EU), public diplomacy involves strategic orientation and a long-term outlook. Secondly, and in contrast to Noopolitik, which stems from the cooperation between state and non-state actors, public diplomacy is carried out by the state (Arquilla et al.1999). In the act of implementing public diplomacy strategies, numerous tools can be used: media outlets aimed at an international audience; youth and student exchanges; participation in and organisation of high-profile initiatives; teaching of the language; and the establishment of local associations aimed at the development of cooperative international ties (Gilboa 2006). As a matter of fact, Azerbaijan is active in most of these fields. Aghazada (2013), who conceives of public diplomacy as a strategy involving the crafting of a message and the creation of personal contacts, provides a detailed assessment of the Azerbaijani experience. In particular, he observes that public relations (PR) are expected to contribute to a favourable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Instead of looking at public diplomacy as a stand-alone issue, this work considers it to be an attempt to self-project as a prestigious actor and, therefore, to mitigate an imbalance with the external environment.

Azerbaijan as organiser of international events and promoter of cultural activities

Over recent years, public diplomacy has been a crucial feature of Azerbaijani foreign policy. As stated by President Ilham Aliyev: "*International cooperation plays a special role in the development of relations among countries. In recent years, we have hosted numerous international events with this purpose*".[84] In order to outline the main features of Azerbaijan's public diplomacy efforts, this section will first deal with the main public diplomacy initiatives and then with the organisational style.

[84] President of Azerbaijan. 2016. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of the Fifth Baku International Humanitarian Forum", 29 September, http://en.president.az/articles/21234 .

In recent years, the organisation of grand events[85] has been a distinctive trait of Azerbaijani public diplomacy. Since 2012, Azerbaijan has committed huge resources to hosting grand international events. That year, $721 million was invested in the organisation of the Eurovision Song Contest. In comparison, Norway, spent only $37 million when hosting the contest in 2011.[86] At the time, such lavish spending on a cultural initiative was interpreted as an attempt to move away from a purely oil-funded state legitimacy (Ismayilov 2012, 844). Far from being a one-off event, the Eurovision proved to be the first of a series of other spectacular events. After losing bids to host the Summer Olympics for both the 2016 and 2020 Games, Azerbaijan settled for hosting the less-coveted first European Games. Notwithstanding the fact that Baku was the only bidder, the presidential discourse framed the hosting in 2015 of the European Games as an open endorsement of Azerbaijan by the international community. In Ilham Aliyev's words: "*It is a result of the fact that Azerbaijan is recognized as an economically and politically stable country. It is a great responsibility, a great honor and a great trust".*[87] Looking at the numbers, opposition sources estimated the European Games to have cost more than $8 billion,[88] spent largely on infrastructure and event management. For two consecutive years following the 2015 European Games, a Formula 1 race took place in Baku's old city. The pharaonic investments made in preparation for these events have often been depicted as an attempt to enhance the prestige of the country. In addition to organising this kind of event, Azerbaijan has also hosted forums of policy makers and influential personalities, of which the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, held in 2016 for the fifth time and attended by more than 400 international personalities, was the most remarkable example.[89] In the Forum's opening address, Ilham Aliyev pointed out that at a time when Europe was struggling with the migrant crisis and some related episodes of intolerance the Forum could serve as signal against Islamophobia and racism.[90] In sum, over the past several years, Azerbaijan has tried to highlight its position on the world map not only as an energy-producing country but also as a significant cultural and humanitarian hub.

[85] See for example Militz (2014) and Ismayilov (2012).
[86] Loda, C. 2015. 'Public diplomacy and intransigency in domestic affairs: the Azerbaijani Model and its limits', *Presidential Power*, 20 July 2015, http://presidential-power.com/?p=3612 .
[87] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Closing speech by Ilham Aliyev at the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on the results of socioeconomic development in 2012 and objectives for 2013", 15 January, http://en.president.az/articles/7080 .
[88] Turan Information Agency. 2016. "Islamic games would cost $100 million", 27 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[89] Baku International Humanitarian Forum, http://bakuforum.az/ .
[90] President of Azerbaijan. 2016. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of the Fifth Baku International Humanitarian Forum", 29 September, http://en.president.az/articles/21234 .

The aforementioned "grand-event hosting" is not a stand-alone strategy. In parallel, Azerbaijan has also promoted the forging of long-standing ties with certain populations. In this regard, educational policies, based on the model of the post-war Franco-German reconciliation,[91] are deemed to be an extreme powerful tool to achieve this goal. In practical terms, this involves sponsoring the study-abroad programmes of both Azerbaijani and foreign citizens. Indeed, Azerbaijan has instituted a special scholarship that covers the tuition fees and living expenses of a considerable number of Azerbaijani students who are completing their education abroad.[92] For instance, due to this initiative 408 Azerbaijani students were enrolled in the US for the academic year 2014/2015.[93] One of the eligibility conditions states that the recipients of the grants are expected to return to the home country and develop a career there (as it stands, this provision is not enforced[94]). Another form of intervention, closely connected to this previous one, is the funding of the education in Azerbaijan of foreign students. In this case, the rationale for granting scholarships is the hope that the recipient will "*return to their motherland with good impressions about Azerbaijan".*[95] In addition to sponsoring the education of young people, Azerbaijan also funds international scholars interested in conducting research about Azerbaijan. In practical terms, the local embassies have made agreements with some universities, such as Cambridge University in England and Rome-La Sapienza in Italy, to institute research programs about Azerbaijan. Furthermore, and in British universities for the most part, the establishment of Azerbaijani societies it is greatly encouraged.

Focusing on the practicalities of how this form of public diplomacy is conducted, the role not only of the president but also of the presidential family and of "government-friendly[96]" NGOs and groups, based for the most part abroad, is striking. Looking at the role of the presidential family in the public diplomacy process, the two most prominent figures are Mehriban Aliyeva, first lady of Azerbaijan, and Leyla Aliyeva, first daughter of the presidential couple. In fact, Mehriban chairs the resource-rich "Heydar Aliyev foundation", which includes among its goals *"support to*

[91]The Élysée Treaty, signed between France and Germany in 1963, contained innovative provisions about Youth Mobility. As a result, after a decade, roughly 1 million citizens had enjoyed the opportunity to get to know their French/German counterparts (Defrance 2013).

[92] Ministry of Education 2014. *Information on implementation of the "State program on education of azerbaijani youth abroad for the years of 2007-2015".* Baku, Azerbaijan.

[93] Loda, C. 2016. "Azerbaijan - F1 and the limits of public diplomacy", *Presidential Power*, 16 July, http://presidential-power.com/?p_5165 .

[94] Personal communication to the author from a former grant recipient.

[95]President of Azerbaijan. 2010. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the ceremony marking the 90th ceremony of Azerbaijan State Oil Academy (ASOA)", 23 November, http://en.president.az/articles/1144.

[96] Aghazada (2013), examining their relationship with official bodies, observes how the various international organisations work 'in harmony' with the government for the implementation of an effective public diplomacy.

promotion of Azerbaijan's image worldwide" and *"communication of true information on Azerbaijan"*.[97] The generous contribution given to various initiatives abroad, such as funding the reconstruction of Strasbourg Cathedral and of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, resulted in overt gratitude being shown to the foundation and to its president. For example, in 2010 Mehriban Aliyeva was awarded the French "National Order of the Legion of Honour" and in 2011 she was received by the president of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano.[98] First Daughter Leyla is editor-in-chief of "Baku Magazine". The magazine, freely available online,[99] was launched in 2011 and is in a similar style to fashion magazines such as "Vogue" or "Cosmopolitan". Fashion photo-shoots featuring models in semi-traditional Azerbaijani attires seem to suggest that the glamorous capital, with its peculiar mix of tradition and modernity, need not envy London or Paris. While leisure topics might dominate, the magazine has repeatedly given space to more political themes.[100] For example, in 2013 it published a joint interview with President Ilham Aliyev and the First Lady.[101] Similarly, on the occasion of the European Games a special sporting issue was published.

In addition to the presidential family, some foreign NGOs, the positions of which are remarkably consistent with those of the government,[102] are another tool for spreading information about Azerbaijan. The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS) constitutes the most remarkable example of these external NGOs. TEAS is a well-established international NGO that, in addition to its London headquarters, has offices in Azerbaijan, Turkey, France, Belgium and Germany. The association, which is committed to "*Raising awareness of Azerbaijan and fostering closer economic, political and cultural links between that country and the nations of Europe",*[103] is very active in organising events, spreading information about the country and convening diaspora meetings. Even though the Society is officially independent, a leaked cable has confirmed that its

[97]For the full list of the goals of the foundation, see:
http://www.heydar-aliyefoundation.org/en/content/index/48/Goals_of_Foundation
[98]All these facts are reported on the English version of official website of the foundation: http://www.heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/
[99] The magazine can be read on-line at the following address: http://www.baku-magazine.com/
[100]Sometimes the link is not immediately obvious. For example, in the Editor's Letter of the 2014 Winter Issue, the upcoming "European Games" are mentioned. Remarkably, this topic was given relevant space also in the discursive production of President Aliyev.
[101] Trend News Agency. 2013. "Interview of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva to Baku Magazine (PHOTO)", 9 February, http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2117698.html .
[102] Aghazada (2011), examining their relationship with official bodies, observes how the various international organisations work "*in harmony'* with the government for the implementation of an effective public diplomacy".
[103] TEAS. Nd. "Introduction" http://teas.eu/introduction (Last accessed on 3 March, 2017).

initiatives are perfectly consistent with the preferences of the government.[104] Its president and founder, Tale Heydarov, is the son of Kamaladdin Heydarov, the Minister for Emergency Situations, who is considered one of the most powerful people in Azerbaijan. Similar to other foreign policy agents, TEAS is active in fields such as education and event organisation. For example, in 2016 TEAS founded the pioneering "Teachers Development Centre" in Baku.[105] Furthermore, the link between public diplomacy and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is often emphasised. For example, Heydarov, commenting on both Azerbaijani multicultural policies and the contribution to NATO campaigns, bluntly pointed out: "*We ask only that the West does not forget around one million refugees and IDPs who are the ongoing casualties of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and that they help us work towards a diplomatic solution to the conflict with Armenia".*[106]

In addition to these initiatives, TEAS uses unorthodox methods, such as gifts, fully-paid trips and astronomical consultancy remunerations, to win the support of influential personalities in England.[107] Rather than being a practice confined to TEAS, the use of "remarkable generosity" to win over foreign stakeholders seems to be an established *modus operandi* of Azerbaijan. Indeed, the German Think Thank ESI (2012) labelled as "Caviar Diplomacy" the longstanding efforts of the Azerbaijani government to win supporters within the Council of Europe. These diplomatic practices consist mostly of inviting foreign political actors to Azerbaijan, offering them holidays and precious gifts, like kilos of caviar (hence the appellation) and expensive carpets. Moreover, balancing carrot with stick, another component of this strategy involves harsh criticism, sometimes at a personal level, of those who question the positive image of the country. For example, the impartiality of the Swiss politician Andreas Gross, who was a rapporteur on Azerbaijan for several years and often expressed perplexity about Azerbaijan's democratic credentials, was openly questioned in the aftermath of his resignation.[108] While such practices are not fully ascribable to the public diplomacy realm, the bitter reaction to such allegations of weak democracy are an

[104] Stone, Jon. 2014. "British MPs Taken On "Caviar Trail" By Lobbyists Close To Azerbaijan's Corrupt Dictatorship", *Buzzfeed*, 20 June, https://www.buzzfeed.com/jonstone/the-caviar-trail?utm_term=.txG1Yr2q0#.wbyw6K5Vj .
[105] Global English. 2016. "Azerbaijan Takes Major Leap in Teacher Training Development", Middle East and North Africa Financial Network, 18 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[106] Azer News. 2013. "TEAS does great job in promoting Azerbaijan abroad", 5 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[107] Doward, J. and Latimer, C. 2013. "Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs", *The Guardian*, 24 November, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps .
[108] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2006. "Azeri MPs say European rights watchdog resigned due to bias", 29 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

indicative example of the incongruent communication style of Azerbaijan, creating a certain inconsistency between efforts to seduce a Western audience and overreaction to any form of criticism.

The Public Diplomacy Message

In addition to sponsoring a wide range of events, Azerbaijan has tried to use these events to deliver some consistent messages, of which multiculturalism and the "counter-narrative on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" constitute the most significant examples.

Multiculturalism is often presented as a cornerstone of the Azerbaijani state, whereby "*representatives of all nationalities and religions have lived in Azerbaijan in peace, tranquillity and brotherhood at all times".*[109] By virtue of these prerogatives, the country has been a suitable place for the meeting of different cultures and religions. It was for this reason, as is repeatedly stated by the president, that the "International Humanitarian Forum" was set up after the 2008 'Baku Initiative', which consisted of an invitation to the leaders of the Muslim World and the Council of Europe to meet. Given the success of the initiative, the country felt encouraged to reproduce it on a larger scale. Therefore, shortly following the initial event, steps were taken to organise the subsequent annual meetings of the Humanitarian Forum. According to the official narrative, the Forum and its activities reflect the multicultural nature of the state, which has always welcomed different ethnicities, faiths and cultures.[110] This point is stressed not only by Ilham Aliyev but also by his wife Mehriban Aliyeva who in an interview for Baku Magazine said that: "*For us the concepts like tolerance, tolerability and multiculturalism are not merely catchy words of the day. This is a centuries-old philosophy and lifestyle of the Azerbaijani people".*[111] Azerbaijani discourse does not limit itself to stressing the multicultural nature of the country; it also includes references to the implications of this multiculturalism.

It is often reiterated that Azerbaijan, not being exclusively part either of Europe or of the Islamic world, can play the role of bridge across civilisations and that the strategic position of the country

[109] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of the Third Baku International Humanitarian Forum", 31 October, http://en.president.az/articles/9894 .
[110] The importance of the 'Baku Process' is often remarked upon in presidential speeches. However, outside of Azerbaijani media outlets, this initiative received almost no coverage.
[111] Azertag. 2013. "Interview with Mr Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Lady, to Baku Magazine", 7 February, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Interview_of_Mr_Ilham_Aliyev_the_President_of_the_Republic_of_Azerbaijan_and_Mrs_Mehriban_Aliyeva_the_First_Lady_to_Baku_Magazine-230013 .

is important to the achievement of such a goal. This is exemplified by the following quotation from President Aliyev: "*Azerbaijan's geographical location has certainly had an impact on the country's development. Azerbaijan is a country where cultures and civilisations meet and blend".*[112] This narrative was intensified by the declaration of 2016 as the "year of multiculturalism". In his speeches, Ilham Aliyev often declared that multiculturalism was not only a long-standing national tradition but also a value to cherish in difficult times, such as during the current situation of the migrant crisis.[113] Furthermore, the potential positive effects on global affairs of Azerbaijan's multiculturalism was commented upon. Samad Seyidov,[114] the chairman of the committee on international and inter-parliamentary relations of the Azerbaijani Parliament, pointed out that the good relationship between Sunni and Shias, in addition to being a positive element in and of itself, could serve as example for positive inter-faith cohabitation and thus inspire others. This seems to suggest that, by projecting a message of multi-faith and multi-ethnicity cohabitation, Azerbaijan is attempting to carve out a sort of niche role for itself in the international arena. However, constraints on the practice of the Islamic religion, as outlined in the next section, seems to conflict with this "multicultural narrative".

The second theme observed is the attempt to establish a counter-narrative about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Even though its pertinence to the public diplomacy sphere may be a matter of dispute, Aghazada's (2013, 228) contention in his analysis of Azerbaijani public diplomacy is significant: "*The question of settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the frame of the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders has always been and is the major field of activity for the diplomatic service bodies*". Moreover, it has often been noted that the ultimate goal of Azerbaijani public diplomacy is the establishment of a favourable narrative around Nagorno-Karabakh (Aghazada 2013). The following quote from President Aliyev signals the Azerbaijani commitment to raising the issue continuously at both the institutional and individual level*: "We strive to increase further international attention to the Karabakh issue. It means that this matter should not be dropped off international agenda, and should be kept in memories and on agenda of international organizations on constant basis".*[115] In an attempt to raise the awareness of a foreign audience of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, some clear actions

[112] President of Azerbaijan. 2011. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of the International Humanitarian Forum", http://en.president.az/articles/3310 .
[113] See for example: President of Azerbaijan. 2016. "Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of the 4th Global Baku Forum", 10 March, http://en.president.az/articles/18049.
[114] Azer News. 2016. "Year of Multiculturalism to be a message to whole world", 13 January (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[115] President of Azerbaijan. 2010. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening ceremony of a new settlement for IDP families in the region of Agdam", 11 November, http://en.president.az/articles/1058?locale=en .

have been mandated. Firstly, diplomatic personnel assigned to the various Azerbaijani embassies around the world have been told to be proactive in the promotion of the Azerbaijani counter-narrative and invited to publish: "*Material […] in the language of different countries*."[116] Secondly, the 'narrative war' is often framed in Manichean terms, as can be seen from the great emphasis given to the need to counter the Armenian narrative. For example, diplomats are reminded of the need to expose Armenian "lies" and to present the "truth" about the ancient presence of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, the presidential family engages in the international promotion of the Azerbaijani version of events in Karabakh. For example, over the years the Heydar Aliyev foundation has organised initiatives such as photo exhibitions (including in the European Parliament in 2009). In an interview published in the Milli Majlis Magazine, Mehriban Aliyeva[117] reiterated the commitment of the organisation to the cause of advancing the Azerbaijani cause. Furthermore, Leyla Aliyeva often attends commemorative events abroad to promote the "Justice for Khojaly" campaign, which aims to achieve global recognition of the Khojaly massacre (1992) as an act of genocide, She also published a two-volume book entitled *Justice for Khojaly*,[118] which presents Azerbaijani civilians as victims of Armenian brutality.[119] The central message that these initiatives seek to promote is the status of Azerbaijan as a victim twice over, firstly of the Armenians and then of the biased international community, as evidenced by the absence of sanctions imposed onArmenia.

Finally, this insistence on "countering diasporic lobbyism" indicates that the Western countries are the ultimate target of the diplomacy policy since, although the Russian Federation is home to roughly 1.5 million Armenian economic immigrants, the organised groups of the Armenian diaspora are based primarily in the United States and France (Cavoukian 2013). In fact, it is mostly in these countries that the influential Armenian diaspora has a longstanding tradition of political lobbying (Zarifian 2014). Consequently, it is mainly in Washington, and to a lesser extent in Paris, that their action must be countered. Given the importance attributed to this element of public diplomacy policy, President Aliyev has often pointed out the need to counteract the lobbying action of the Armenian diaspora, which, compensating for the financial weakness of the

[116] President of Azerbaijan. 2011. "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Third Congress of World Azerbaijanis", 5 July, http://en.president.az/articles/2717 .
[117] Mehriban Aliyeva Website. 2014. "Interview with Milli Majlis Magazine", 8 May, http://www.mehriban-aliyeva.org/en/article/item/5619 .
[118] News.az. 2014. "Two-volume book. Leyla Aliyeva: Justice for Khojaly!", 18 February, http://news.az/articles/society/86598 .
[119] See the "Justice for Khojaly" website, at: http://web.justiceforkhojaly.org/en/ (last accessed on 2016, 18 December).

government in Yerevan, acts as a diplomatic agent on behalf of the central state.[120]. Finally, looking at the practice of Azerbaijani lobbying, it emerges that some strategies mimic the Armenian style. Anar Valiyev, when asked if the Azerbaijani public discourse mirrored the Armenian one, promptly confirmed this. Additionally, as stated by Özkan (2008), since the mid-1990s a process of "Armenianisation" of the Azerbaijani discourse was started, as is evinced by the campaign for the recognition of the Khojaly genocide. One example of this is the book *Khojaly Witness of A War Crime: Armenia in the Dock* (Peart and Machlachlan 2014), published by TEAS. Throughout the volume, the fact that the international community, biased in favour of Armenia, has failed to fully acknowledge the magnitude of that tragedy is emphasised.

The next sub-section will provide more evidence for the assertion that a Western audience is the main target of the public diplomacy strategy.

Audience: Targeting the West

Azerbaijan seems committed to projecting internationally an image of itself as a modern, wealthy and self-confident international actor, able to interact with all other powers from a position of parity. Therefore, one would expect Azerbaijani public diplomacy efforts to target a plurality of actors in largely equal measure. Indeed, although NGOs and organised groups are mostly active in the Western countries, there are some initiatives specifically aimed at the Russian Federation and the Islamic world. Considering also the country's commitment to a multi-vector foreign policy, Azerbaijan should be expected to target different audiences with the same intensity. However, some indicators suggest that the Western audience is by far the primary target. This section will provide evidence for that.

The agents of public diplomacy, as identified in the previous sections, seem to have completely adopted the Western Style. The fashionable first lady Mehriban Aliyeva has been said, in a leaked US diplomatic cable, to wear "dresses that would be considered provocative even in the Western world",[121] while Leyla Aliyeva, in an article extremely critical of the presidential family, has been described as a sort of Azerbaijani version of Kim Kardashian, and Tale Heydarov is reported to be friendly with Prince Harry.[122] In other words, it is likely that all would feel more comfortable

[120] As is shown in the sub-chapter focused on the Armenian diaspora, it is incorrect to conceive of it as an obedient agent of the Armenian government.
[121]Agence France Presse. 2013." The Aliyevs: Azerbaijan dynasty holding tight to power", 9 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[122] Weiss, M., 2014. The Corleones of the Caspian. *Foreign Policy*, *10*.

in London than in Amman and there are no equivalent "cultural ambassadors" who direct their efforts at other regions of the world. A close observation of "Baku Magazine" corroborates these findings. According to the editor-in-chief Leyla Aliyeva, the magazine, which claims to have both an educational and informative function, *"is published in order to familiarize a broad international audience with our beautiful Baku, where the architectural masterpieces and ancient facades of houses* (…) *match with the unique modern complexes*".[123] However, looking at the magazine features, such as the fashion shoots or the photo stories, both the fashion attires worn and the issues covered seem to suggest that, despite geographic distance, the shimmery Baku has much more in common with any Western capital than with Teheran.[124]

Additionally, the public diplomacy discourse seems primarily to target Western audiences. In fact, themes like "multiculturalism" and "bridging between civilizations", while occasionally raised in non-Western forums, appear to address mainly the cultural sensitivities of a European and American audience. This claim about the prioritisation of the Western audience may seem at odds with the plurality of initiatives explicitly meant for an Islamic public. Indeed, 2017 was proclaimed the "Year of Islamic Solidarity" and in May of that year the Islamic Solidarity Games were due to take place. Commenting the relevance of these initiatives, President Aliyev said that: "*This is an important initiative we put forward to contribute to greater unity of all Muslim countries.* (…) [The Islamic Solidarity Games] *will be a great sporting event, as well as a reflection of our friendship".*[125] In addition to participating and promoting other religious initiatives, in 2015 the whole Aliyev family went on a (photo-documented) pilgrimage to Mecca.[126] However, in spite of all these initiatives, other elements suggest that a Muslim audience is not the primary target of the public diplomacy strategy of Azerbaijan. In spite of the fact that in several speeches President Aliyev mentioned solidarity and cooperation among Muslim countries, certain restrictions are applied to the practice of the Islamic religion. For instance, there is a prohibition on praying outside mosques, limits on the eligibility criteria for mullahs (only Azerbaijani citizens educated in the home country are permitted to be mullahs) and a headscarf ban in high-schools and universities. Additionally, domestic observers agree that the Middle Eastern public is not the main focus of President Aliyev's public diplomacy efforts. ADA scholar Kavus Abushov[127] has dismissed the

[123] Azer News. 2015. "Leyla Aliyeva: Heydar Aliyev Foundation aims to be where people need support (interview)", 3 July (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[124] All the issues of Baku Magazine can be consulted on-line: http://www.baku-magazine.com/
[125] Global English (Middle East and North Africa Financial Network). 2017. "President Aliyev: Azerbaijan doing great job in area of Islamic solidarity", 6 April (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[126] Lomsadze, G. 2015. "Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev Goes to Mecca", *Eurasianet*, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/72916 .
[127] Interview with Kavus.Abushov, Baku (2015, 29 May).

aforementioned initiatives as "low politics". This statement is supported by figures related to costs. Remarkably, while the European Games in 2015 officially cost $1 billion (with unofficial estimates as high as $8 billion), the budget for the Islamic Solidarity games is only $100 million,[128] roughly as much as spent on the opening ceremony of the European Games.[129]

The primacy of the Western audience emerges not only in comparison to the Middle East but in comparison to Russia. Initiatives openly targeting the Russian Federation are less resourced and less striking than the initiatives tailored for the West. For example, in 2010 the first Russo-Azerbaijani humanitarian forum was organised, which the successive year was transformed into an international event. However, even though several conventions of the Azerbaijani-Russian interregional forum were held, these all received limited attention from media outlets. Additionally, they were not personally attended by President Aliyev, who did not go beyond sending a letter of congratulations. Looking more generally at the presidential narrative, the references to humanitarian ties with Russia made both by the president and his entourage[130] are generic and sporadic. Notably, in bilateral forums Ilham Aliyev has often made reference to humanitarian cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia. Similarly, in an interview centred on the Azerbaijani-Russian ties Ali Hasanov, a senior official of the Presidential Administration, emphasised the 327 bilingual schools and the 16 Russian-medium schools in the country.[131] However, it is more appropriate to consider these as isolated comments rather than as representative samples of a broader narrative.

This non-incisive strategy may seem counter-intuitive when it is considered that the ultimate goal of public diplomacy is territorial reintegration. Given the leverage of Moscow in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Russian public should be the main target of a soft-power strategy. However, this prudent attitude seems in line with the findings of the previous sub-chapter, which emphasises the care taken by Azerbaijan to avoid unnecessary provocation. In this regard, tensions could be triggered by President Putin's likely hostility not only to such a mobilisation of the Russian public

[128] Turan Information Agency. 2016. "Islamic games would cost $100 million", 27 December (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[129] The Associated Press. 2015. "European Games ceremony cost over $95M, minister says", 13 June (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[130] As stated by the foreign minister Mammadov: "*One of the characteristic features of Azerbaijan-Russia relations is humanitarian ties. It is worth mentioning the scientific, educational, cultural relations, cultural tours from Russia to Azerbaijan, the promotion the culture of Azerbaijan in Russia, student exchanges and particularly, people-to-people contacts*" (Azertag. 2014. "Azerbaijan has further strengthened its position as developing and prospering space of cooperation". Azertag, 25 December. https://azertag.az/en/xeber/821067).
[131] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2014. "Senior Azeri official says relations with Russia a foreign policy priority", 26 June (retrieved through LexisNexis).

but also to the fact of having Moscow's role in the conflict mentioned. In this regard, the structuring of the relevant narratives shows the full extent of the sensitivity to these red lines. The loss of Nagorno-Karabakh is always referred to as the "civil war" and attributed to the chaotic phase that characterised the early years of post-independence Azerbaijan. While sometimes the incompetent leadership of the time is openly blamed, no reference is made to any external forces contributing to this territorial disintegration. For example, Ilham Aliyev, in a speech celebrating his father's achievements, declared that the sudden transition: "*Started a civil war and shed fraternal blood. (…) As a result of the occupation of Shusha and Lachin in May 1992 and Kalbajar in April 1993, a geographical connection appeared between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia".*[132] Significantly, it is never said in official speeches that Moscow either sided with Armenia or had a role in the destabilisation of the region. The only detectable criticism comes in the form of certain sporadic comments about the ineffectiveness of the Minsk Group, of which Russia is part, or about Azerbaijan paying for weapons at market price[133] (without any reference to the CSTO rate enjoyed by Armenia).

In conclusion, while in principle public diplomacy may be seen as a sui generis field, the cautious approach to Russia is fully in line with broader Azerbaijani foreign policy. Additionally, even though the West represents a crucial audience, some discrepancy can be identified between the targeting of this public and the demand for an "equal relationship". The next pages will shed further light on that.

Targeting, not worshipping

The fact that the West is the main target of its public diplomacy does not mean that Azerbaijan plays the role of an obsequious actor. To fully understand the attitude of Azerbaijan, it must be noted that the Azerbaijani leadership has often emphasised that international relations should be based on mutual non-interference, as clearly stated by Ilham Aliyev: "*I have repeatedly said that Azerbaijan recognizes only equal relationships. If someone thinks that they can impose their will on us, they are mistaken".*[134] This decisiveness does not seem to be consistent with the coordinated effort to impress an external audience, especially that in Europe and in the United States. This

[132] News.az. 2013. "Heydar Aliyev is a great historical personality – President", 11 Saturday, http://news.az/articles/official/79639 .
[133]President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by 'Russia24' television channel", 14 April, http://en.president.az/articles/7811 .
[134] President of Azerbaijan. 2013. "Speech by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the inauguration ceremony", 19 October, http://en.president.az/articles/9683 .

inconsistency becomes apparent when looking at the overall behaviour of Azerbaijan, which, in spite of the sponsoring of glamorous events, harshly opposes any external criticism on civil liberties and the state of its democracy. The Azerbaijani attitude on the occasion of the European Games constitutes an example of this. In that instance, the establishment refused to free prominent political opponents as a token gesture of goodwill. Domestic analysts were surprised by this move, as they were aware that democratic scrutiny would result from the hosting of such a large international event. A local expert, under condition of anonymity, bluntly pointed out that: "*Politicians simply do not understand that, with all the attention on political prisoners, the Games will not bring any advantage to Azerbaijan".*[135] Indeed, after the Games, local experts (who often mentioned their belief in the existence of a certain anti-Azerbaijani bias) had to admit that the results of this public diplomacy exercise were not in line with expectations.[136] Rather than confined to this one specific event, this intransigence and confrontational attitude has deeper roots. A remarkable example of that is provided by the international monitoring of the 2013 presidential election.

After the presidential elections in 2013, the ESI (2013) research institute published a report extremely critical of the fact that the different monitoring missions on the ground had produced extremely contrasting assessments of the fairness of the process.[137] While the OSCE/ODIHR challenged the validity of the ballot, other bodies, such as the OSCE Parliamentary Mission and the European Parliament mission, spoke in favour of the electoral outcome.[138] Since mechanisms such as the use of a common standardised observation form are in place to prevent this kind of situation arising, over the past decade different electoral missions have always managed to agree on a common report (Fawn 2006). Therefore, the irreconcilable disagreement that emerged between the OSCE/ODIHR and the rest of the observers was surprising. The ESI (2013) report points out that some of the electoral observers who had endorsed the election as free and fair had in the past been invited to Azerbaijan and offered, in addition to free travel and a luxurious stay,

[135] Interview with Azerbaijani expert, Baku, (2015, 31 May).
[136] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2015. "Senior Azeri official accuses Europe of double standards", 1 November (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[137] In that report, Azerbaijan was accused of having bribed some observers, more or less directly, in order to prevent the likelihood of a negative assessment of the electoral operations.
[138] The OSCE/ODIHR is much more authoritative than the others in evaluating voting practices since it is the only agency to employ long-term observers who do not limit themselves to monitoring only Election Day but who also study in advance the electoral regulations. In this way, by looking at issues like the approval process for candidates and electoral thresholds, they operate in light of a detailed knowledge of the electoral context.

expensive gifts to bring back home as a token of the generous Azerbaijani hospitality.[139] Furthermore, the ESI (2013) also criticised the lack of transparency in the appointment procedures of some observing delegations, whose members sometimes failed to communicate that their presence was the result of government invitation.[140]

Since, as attested to by the numerous past and forthcoming events, the country has invested so much in public diplomacy, Azerbaijani elites might have been expected to try to play down these controversies. Instead, although the President refrained from commenting on the issue, other members of the Azerbaijani establishment have been remarkably harsh in dismissing the OSCE/ODIHR assessment as a biased and isolated voice. For example, Ramiz Mehdiyev, head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Elections, said that: "*We don't accept the assessment of the U.S. Department of State and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on the presidential election and regard it as disgraceful, biased and unworthy*"[141]. Furthermore Mr Mehdiyev,[142] openly challenging the impartiality credentials of the organisation, said: "*According to our information* (...) *the report* (…) *was prepared beforehand in Warsaw*". In addition to raising doubts on the general conduct of OSCE/ODIHR, he also challenged the competency of the Italian rapporteur Tana de Zulueta by saying that she: *"came to Baku as the head of the observer mission of the OSCE ODIHR with no basic notion about Azerbaijan*".[143] Another issue frequently raised, closely connected to the previous one, is the hypocrisy of the West when recommending good practices to Azerbaijan. Firstly, it is said that the negative assessments of the Azerbaijani democracy are at odds with the positive endorsement of the Armenian presidential election.[144] Furthermore, it is pointed out that the democratic requirements imposed on Azerbaijan are much stricter than those practiced by Western powers. In fact, while the 22-day long electoral campaign was assessed as too short, "*this period takes 11 days in Denmark, 15 days in Poland, 20 days in Serbia, 20 days in Latvia, and so on*".[145]

[139] Doward, J. and Latimer, C. 2013. "Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs", The Guardian, 24 November, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps .
[140]Robert, A. 2014. "Parliament probes MEPs over azeri mission", *Euractive.Com*, 11 February, http://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2014/news/parliament-probes-meps-over-azeri-mission/ .
[141] APA. 2013. "We don't accept the assessment of the U.S. department of state and the OSCE/ODIHR on the presidential elections. Azeri Press News Agency", 14 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[142] BBC Monitoring Trans Caucasus Unit. 2013. "Azeri senior official hits at US, OSCE position on presidential election", 22 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).
[143] Ibid
[144] The issue of a double standard is a common topic in the political discourse of Ilham Aliyev.
[145] Trend Daily News. 2013. "Head of Azerbaijan's presidential administration: U.S. officials advised us to have fake elections", 15 October (Retrieved through LexisNexis).

Public Diplomacy: an inconsistent strategy?

Over the last number of years, public diplomacy has been a significant component of the foreign policy strategy of Azerbaijan. In addition to sponsoring a large number of initiatives, a "humanitarian narrative" has also developed. Whereas, in principle, public diplomacy should target different audiences with the same intensity, this analysis outlines that most initiatives are designed for a Western public. However, as shown by the intransigence of Azerbaijan on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, this attention paid to the West does not suppress the assertiveness of Azerbaijan. This attempt to simultaneously promote the country to a Western public and to resist any form of interference could be interpreted as inconsistent foreign policy strategy. Turning to discursive omissions, the limited focus on the Russian public could be a matter of contention, due to the fact that the raising of awareness of Azerbaijani grievances in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represents the primary motivation behind the Azerbaijani public diplomacy strategy. The limited targeting of Russia, despite the painfulness of the current stalemate, is interpreted as being a product of the desire not to create any unnecessary tension with Moscow, the nature and limits of which are well-known to the elites in Azerbaijan.

In conclusion, public diplomacy dynamics should not be understood as a stand-alone approach but rather as fully consistent with a broader foreign policy pattern, which involves Azerbaijan being more assertive with the West than with Russia.

Conclusion: foreign policy, energy diplomacy and public diplomacy

This chapter looks at the way in which Azerbaijan, here conceived of as a small state, attempts to cope with its condition of asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia by means of its strategic narratives and related discursive omissions. In light of this analysis, it can be said that Wivel's (2016) claim about small states adjusting their foreign policy behaviour to the nature of the relevant greater counterparts holds in the case of Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan's interaction with the West, focusing specifically on the EU, some inconsistency between the relevance of the European interlocutor and the firmness in asking for an "equal relationship", in the face of the apparent disparity of forces, emerges. This phenomenon, which is clearly visible both in the case of energy strategy and public diplomacy, is the cause of some perplexity in Brussels. In spite of the pragmatic attitude of the EU towards energy diversification, as exemplified by Mr. Barroso's trips to Baku and Ashgabat in 2011, the attitude of Azerbaijan is sometimes seen as inconsiderate and unnecessarily arrogant. As said by a member of the EU Delegation in Baku: "*Azerbaijan tries to*

manoeuvre the EU without understanding that its room for manoeuvring is very small".[146] He also added that Azerbaijan needs Europe, both as a trade partner and as a geopolitical ally. As can be inferred from its assertive speeches, Azerbaijan seems trapped between the awareness of the importance of Europe and the unwillingness to act as the weaker party in the relationship.

Turning to Russia, in both the realms under analysis the Azerbaijani behaviour seems in line with Mehdiyeva's (2011) analysis, which outlines the way in which Azerbaijan, fully aware of the disparity of size between itself and the Kremlin, tries to maximise its strategic advantage without engaging in unnecessary provocations. This is clear from the analysis of the Azerbaijani narrative that, both in the cases of energy diplomacy and public diplomacy, limits the references to Russia. As regards the 'political implicatures' related to these discursive omissions, these can be seen as the silent acknowledgement of the undisputable "comparative greatness" of the Kremlin. In brief, these silences can be interpreted as the conscious avoidance of unnecessary and dangerous tensions. As stated by De Waal (2014), there is no trust between Azerbaijan and Russia but there is understanding. It appears that, due to the similar mentalities of their post-Soviet elites, Azerbaijan has a clear understanding of the room for manoeuvre allowed by Russia and, consequently, of the red lines not to be crossed. On the other hand, in its relations with the West Azerbaijan seems less aware of elements such as the disparity of size and the need to cater for this. As a result, some inconsistencies in the foreign policy strategy can occasionally be observed.

[146] Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan, Baku, (2015, 29 May).

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

The research question: "*How do the South Caucasian countries mitigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia*?" allows this final conclusion to develop on three levels: the dynamics characterising each country under analysis, the cross-country and regional commonalities, and the foreign policy making of small states. Over the following pages, the different forms of contribution will be outlined in detail.

The state level

In light of the analysis of the foreign policy behaviours of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, two avenues of original contribution emerge. At the empirical level, the review of a large number of political speeches and archival sources, such as portions of local newspapers and press releases, enriches the body of knowledge available in the English language and provides some original insights. For example, it offers a detailed description of the relationship between the Armenian state and its diaspora, outlining the delicate balance between the maximising of diasporic support and the preserving of the state's exclusive foreign policy prerogatives. Similarly, the dynamics of Azerbaijani public diplomacy are accurately spelled out, providing an original assessment of the peculiar mix of grand events, educational initiatives and intransigence to any form of criticism. Quite apart from offering detailed insights about each of the South Caucasian countries, the analysis of their strategic narratives also allows conclusions to be drawn on the manner in which they project themselves vis-à-vis the West and Russia. Thanks to an accurate reconstruction of the context, which allows for the attribution of meaning not only to words but also to silences, new insights emerge about these countries, the international asymmetry they face and their various coping strategies.

Armenia can be understood as a small country that, perfectly aware of its smallness vis-à-vis the West and Russia, uses its external rhetoric to signal its willingness to maintain positive relationships with them both. For example, the following declaration by President Sargsyan: "*I believe in friendship between people, nations, states, and countries",*[1] suggests a certain commitment to developing friendly ties with as many players as possible. However, there is a sort

[1] President of Armenia. 2013. "Toast by the President of the Republic of Armenia Mr Serzh Sargsyan at the dinner in honour of the Guests Participating at the Inauguration Ceremony", 9 April, http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/04/09/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-dinner-on-the-occassion-of-inaguration-toast/ .

of hierarchy in the importance of international partners, which translates into considerable differences in the way Armenia approaches Russia and the West. Russia, which is the main security and economic "partner" of the country, is notoriously disinclined to tolerate unrestrained behaviour from a minor ally. Accordingly, Armenia refrains from unnecessary provocation. This reinforces existing arguments about the Russo-Armenian alliance being plagued by some unequal dynamics (Giragosian 2014; Galstyan 2013; Mirzoyan 2010, 53; Minassian 2008). An example of the power dynamics at play between the small state and the big ally is provided by the sudden withdrawal of Armenia, after a meeting between President Sargsyan and President Putin, from the Association Agreement talks in September 2013. In that case, political cadres denied that joining the Eurasian Union was a choice forced upon Armenia, referring instead to some unspecified benefits for the country. However, the analysis of the political discourse highlights that, in spite of the EEU having a predominantly economic outlook, the rationale for joining it was clearly related to security concerns. Therefore, this case illustrates the nature of the Russian leverage over Armenia. More broadly, Armenian political elites generally avoid voicing open complaints even in situations hardly in keeping with a strategic partnership. Examples of this are given by the case of Russia selling weapons to Azerbaijan or imposing disadvantageous economic conditions on Armenia, such as the appropriation of substantial shares of national companies in exchange for the restructuring of the debt. Similar dynamics can be observed in apparently less sensitive situations, such as the relationship of Armenia with its broadly-scattered diaspora. While the elites in Yerevan address their Western diaspora often, they are much more cautious in dealing with issues concerning the Russo-Armenian community. For example, even though Russo-Armenian businessman are invited to explore investment opportunities in Yerevan, no comments are made about more delicate dynamics, such as the precarious situation of Armenian migrant workers. In sum, this mix of discursive omissions and deferential language seems to suggest a consistent attempt on the part of Armenia to act prudently vis-à-vis Russia and thus to avoid unnecessary tensions. Turning to the approach to the West, even though this vector is not as crucial as the Russian one, the national strategic narratives signal the willingness to keep the relationship as cordial as possible. This is due to the fact that the EU, unlike Russia, has often proven its utility as a partner for modernisation, eager to facilitate the adoption of advanced regulatory standards. In this regard, after the U-Turn in 2013 Armenian political cadres stated, on various occasions, that this choice did not mean ending the cooperation between Armenia and the EU. According to these statements, the decision instead created new opportunities, since Armenia could serve as a bridge between the EU and the EEU. Even though these declarations seem to have had limited impact, they indicate the willingness to keep some cooperation alive, albeit in a different format.

Similarly, the attempt to sideline the diaspora in issues related to Turkey and Nagorno-Karabakh can be seen, in terms of 'political implicatures', as the reiteration of a moderate foreign policy outlook. Recapitulating, Armenia seems fully aware of the differing natures of its international interlocutors and, despite the constraints it faces, remains committed to maximising its opportunities for complementarity.

The Georgian chapter, which covers events from 2003 to 2013, emphasises some elements of continuity and rupture in the national foreign policy strategy. This in turn provides some insights into the way in which Tbilisi projects itself vis-à-vis the West and Russia. The section about the Russo-Georgian war focuses on the use of strategic narratives during the conflict, in its aftermath and before hostilities broke out. In so doing, the elaborate rhetoric of President Saakashvili is outlined, revealing features such as the Europeanness of the Georgian people and, after August 2008, the engagement in a battle of narratives with Russia in which each contender tried to make the case for its own legitimate behaviour vis-à-vis the other's criminal acts. Throughout the chapter some points, related to 'political implicatures', emerge as preponderant. Firstly, between 2003 and 2008, and in spite of the unequivocally pro-western orientation of Georgia, some restraint was exhibited in the discourse towards Russia. Georgian elites refrained from framing their relationship with Russia as *a priori* antagonism and therefore as the principled refusal of any form of compromise. This narrative choice, not always matched by empirical behaviour, is here interpreted as the attempt not to over-antagonise Russia and, at the same time, to show the West that Georgia, if included in NATO, would not behave as a trouble-maker. Secondly, immediately after the war Mr Saakashvili tended to frame the conflict not as a mere territorial dispute but as a "clash of civilisations", featuring Russian imperialism versus Western values. At the same time, he avoided complaining about the lack of substantial support given by the West. Indeed, in spite of the excellent relationship with Washington, the American ally failed to offer any muscular support while the EU merely provided mediation services. This apparent contrast between vocal identitarian stances and lack of recrimination can be reconciled if it is considered that on that specific occasion the US and Europe were the only possible allies for Georgia. Therefore, it was wise to remember the importance of these ties and thus to avoid any possible tension. However, notwithstanding this discursive moderation, the Russo-Georgian war and the subsequent lukewarm international support cast some shadow on the effectiveness of this unrestrained unilateralism. Thus, it is that this unpleasant experience of "being in a tight corner" could be related to the successive political developments of the country, such as the end of the Saakashvili era and the more moderate discourse of the Georgian Dream administration which, while not

deviating from the pro-Western foreign policy orientation, sought a more balanced relationship with Russia (a relationship that has been only partially normalised). Similar dynamics are also visible in the softer case analysed, namely the liberalisation of the visa-free regime. In the years of the Saakashvili government, in spite of the asymmetry embedded in the unreciprocated travel regime, the discourse was almost completely articulated in terms of a desire for a greater freedom of mobility. In a partial departure from that approach, in recent times the Georgian Dream administration has begun to suggest that this provision would favour both the territorial integrity of the country and the marginalisation of pro-Russian parties. This can be interpreted as a "gentle reminder" about the utility of delivering something tangible in order to maintain the unwavering pro-Western orientation of Georgia. In other words, while during the tenure of the Saakashvili administration the country represented itself as unconditionally pro-European, some elements of strategic balancing were later introduced. In brief, the analysis of the narrative shows some new elements in the interaction with the West and, more indirectly, with Russia. However, Georgian policy-makers are cautious not to be too outspoken in this regard, not only due to a logic of smallness and asymmetry but also due to the constraints posed by the Georgian domestic environment.

Azerbaijan represents an example of an international player that has a limited understanding of its different interlocutors. More precisely, while the preferences of Russia appear to be clear, Azerbaijan seems occasionally uneasy in dealing with the West and, even more so, with a supranational entity such as the EU. This results in a partially inconsistent use of strategic narratives in foreign policy. According to the political rhetoric, the principles of "equal partnership" and "non-interference" should be the cornerstone of the relationship with all the external actors. However, from the case studies it emerges that Azerbaijan is overassertive with the West and, on the other hand, extremely cautious in its approach to Russia. More specifically, Azerbaijan seems to give mixed signals to Europe and the US, trying to impress them with grand events while refusing any form of criticism. At the same time, Azerbaijan shows a perfect understanding of the red lines, both implicit and explicit, not to be crossed with Russia. This thesis attributes this uneven approach to Azerbaijan's different degree of understanding of the two actors. While Moscow appears as a familiar actor, due to the shared post-Soviet legacies, the West (and especially the EU) is not fully comprehended. This occasional misunderstanding of the West, accompanied by a much higher awareness of Moscow's terms and preferences, can be inferred from both of the case studies under analysis, namely energy diplomacy and public diplomacy. In the former case, on the occasions of its contacts with Western players, Azerbaijan seems relatively

at ease in bilateral or energy-centred multilateral forums. Examples of that are the good-natured press conferences with leaders of energy partner countries or the declarations, given on occasions such as the Advisory Council of the Southern Gas Corridor, about being a team committed to the redrawing of the energy map of Europe. By contrast, more defensiveness is visible in its interaction with the institutional EU, when it is made clearly in Azerbaijan's statements that mutual interest is the bedrock of the relationship. A possible explanation for this is the greater familiarity of Azerbaijan with traditional diplomatic actors rather than with a supranational entity. Conversely, the level of attention taken not to enrage Moscow is striking. For instance, in spite of the indisputable advantages linked to the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline, which would bring gas from Turkmenistan to Europe, Azerbaijan does not champion the project, apparently due to the likely resultant tensions with the Kremlin, which would resent infrastructures that, in bypassing its borders, would allow for the direct shipment of gas from Eurasia to Europe. Similar observations can be made about the public diplomacy strategy of the country, which is aimed at winning over the West by means of pharaonic events such as the Eurovision in 2012 and the European Games in 2015. This public diplomacy strategy has not prevented the relationship with the West from being affected by some misunderstanding and the issuing of requests of non-interference in the domestic affairs of the country. For instance, in the aftermath of the controversial presidential election in 2013 Azerbaijani cadres dismissed criticism emanating from abroad as improper meddling in domestic affairs. Ultimately, this mix of grand events and questionable domestic choices seems to be of limited effectiveness, as visibility comes with scrutiny, which Azerbaijan does not seem fully equipped to deal with. In spite of this remarkable (albeit inconsistent) attention paid to the West, the public diplomacy strategy of Azerbaijan focuses only to a limited degree on Russia, whose public is not predominantly targeted by this kind of initiative. In the attempt to hypothesise a reason for the different treatment of Russia and the West, it can be argued that Azerbaijani elites seem to be more used to dealing with the Kremlin, whose coercive resources and preferences result are crystal clear, than with a relatively new supranational foreign policy actor.

In different ways, these three countries seem to acknowledge that the West and Russia are different actors, each requiring a tailor-made approach. By virtue of this, their foreign policy strategies are characterised by some similarities.

The region

Chapter 1 discusses the uneven approach to the study of the South Caucasian countries within the debate on whether they are foreign policy objects or foreign policy subjects. The region is often explored in a collective fashion when it is treated as the target of external strategies, such as the geopolitical aims of Russia or the allegedly normative preferences of the EU external action. On the other hand, works looking at the foreign policy behaviour of the different South Caucasian countries tend to focus on the specificity of each case, without including the regional element. Acknowledging the extreme weakness of the regional dimension, which is mostly due to the intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this work hypothesises that since Russia and the West are the external partners most relevant to all three of the South Caucasian states it should be possible to observe some cross-country patterns and dynamics. Therefore, on foot of a detailed assessment of the strategic narratives of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan and of the relevant 'political implicatures', some common patterns can be identified.

At first, no remarkable cross-country pattern seems to emerge. Indeed, even though all three countries describe themselves as small states, their foreign policy behaviours seem to be utterly different: Armenia searches for friendly ties with as many players as possible, Georgia represents its pro-Western foreign policy as an identitarian mission and Azerbaijan voices an independent and pragmatic foreign policy. However, upon closer examination, patterns shared both by particular country pairings and at a regional level emerge.

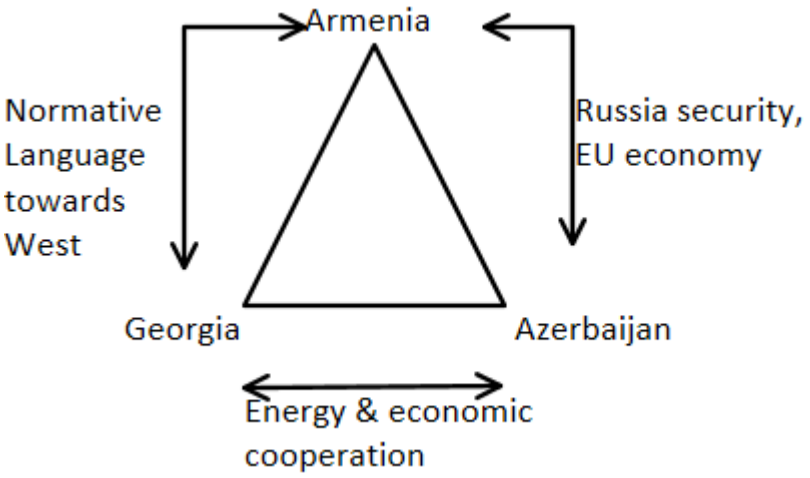

Figure 2: The foreign policy commonalities shared by pairs of South Caucasian countries

Figure 2 summarises the patterns shared by pairings within the three countries analysed. Notably, it shows that in both the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU represents a crucial economic actor, either as an energy partner or a moderniser. Additionally, in both cases interaction with the EU cannot happen without some acknowledgement of the preferences of Russia. Thus, even though the room for manoeuvre of Azerbaijan and Armenia is remarkably different, Moscow's security leverage over both countries makes them extremely conscious about not crossing red lines. Turning to the similarities between Georgia and Armenia, they both address Brussels using "normative tones" that, instead of focusing on the mutual benefits of cooperation (as in the case of Azerbaijan), emphasise aspects such as common roots and civilisation. In other words, both Armenia and Georgia seem to have understood the specific nature of the EU and, consequently, adjusted their rhetoric to it. Another aspect shared by these two countries is the care taken not to create tensions with their main patrons, even in potentially strained situations. Examples of this are provided by the silence of Armenia in regard to the overbearing attitude of Russia and the lack of significant complaints by Georgia following the limited engagement of the West during the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. Finally, even though it is not the primary focus of this thesis, the energy and security cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan represents one of the most solid forms of partnership in the area (Lupu Dinesen and Wivel 2014).

This thesis also reveals some relevant common elements at the regional level, these being a similar understanding of the specific nature of the West and Russia and an analogous relationship between hard power and soft power. Wivel (2016), who makes an argument about the foreign policy freedom of small states being influenced by their greater neighbours, argues that the foreign policy behaviour of Georgia is influenced by the specificities of the "postmodern West" and "modern Russia". In addition to providing additional evidence in the case of Georgia, this thesis demonstrates that these findings hold true also in the cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Firstly, in spite of the remarkable differences between these three players, they all seem to acknowledge the contrast between the two external players, one being a purely Weberian agent and the other a multi-governance actor. This much can be inferred from the analysis of the strategic narratives of all three South Caucasian countries. Regardless of their relationships with the West, they all seem to recognise its open and "good-tempered" nature. As mentioned previously, both Georgia and Armenia use some normative language in their interactions with the EU and, to a certain extent,

with the United States. Azerbaijan, which tends to stick to realpolitik language, occasionally resorts to words and actions suited to the West. Events such as the European Games in 2015 and the related rhetoric about multiculturalism are examples of this. Additionally, the spiteful reactions of Azerbaijan against any alleged meddling in domestic affairs can be taken as a sign of the perceived "forgiving" nature of the West and, therefore, of the affordability of being daring in its regard. In brief, Brussels seems to be regarded as a distinctive actor, with the foreign policy narratives adjusted to its specificities. In contrast, all three countries seem aware of the more irascible nature of Russia, as can be inferred from the fact that all three mention it less than they do the EU and that, with the partial exception of Georgia, these limited mentions of Russia are mostly made in dedicated forums. Furthermore, throughout the chapters it can be seen that most "discursive omissions" concern Moscow. This is observable not only in the case of Armenia, which refrains from voicing its displeasure about the unfavourable terms of the partnership, or Azerbaijan, which cautiously avoid putting the spotlight on initiatives that could displease Moscow, such as the Trans-Caspian pipeline. More surprisingly, is also observable in the narratives of Mr Saakashvili who, in spite of his poor relationship with the Kremlin, often limited the tone and the scope of his speeches towards Russia. For instance, Mr Saakashvili was always careful to highlight that there was no resentment towards the Russian people and that, should the Kremlin change its attitude, Georgia would be delighted to explore some forms of cooperation. Returning to Wivel's (2016) argument about the modern nature of Russia and the post-modern nature of the West, the analysis of the strategic narratives of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan seems to support the validity of this point and its usefulness as an analytical benchmark

Additionally, there are some similarities in the use of hard and soft approaches. In all three cases, soft power does not seem to function as a separate sector but rather as a "continuation of harder power by other means". In the case of Armenia, care is taken not only to act in line with complementarity guidelines but also to limit the influence of the diaspora (and the hard-line stances that can be anticipated from this cohort) in order to remain a "good member of the international community". In other words, both in harder and softer situations, Armenia tends to project itself externally as a conciliatory player, who understands the limits to be respected. In the case of Azerbaijan, the desire to be treated as an "equal partner" is demonstrated in energy forums as well as during grand events, which (should) showcase the status of the country. Ultimately, although differentiating its approach towards the West and Russia, in both the harder and in the softer case Azerbaijan adopts a consistent approach to the relevant partner. Finally, it is also true of the case of Georgia that there is some consistency in the final goals, be these pursued through

hard or soft means. Indeed, after years of unconditional pro-Western unilateralism, the Russo-Georgian conflict in August 2008 showed the potential downfalls of such an approach. As an openly multi-lateral foreign policy was being reviewed as unsuitable to the Georgian domestic political environment, political elites seemed to be attempting to rebalance their international relations while resisting any possible "pro-Russian" label. The examination of the soft case, namely the quest for Schengen visa liberalisation, shows a similar mix of increased assertiveness and caution. In sum, both the softer and the harder case demonstrate the desire for a more balanced foreign policy, albeit one that would not deviate from a Western orientation. Recapitulating, this work illustrates that there are some common regional elements in the way in which external actors are approached, using both hard and soft means. These commonalities suggest that, in spite of an almost inexistent level of regional cooperation, the fact of having to deal with the same external actors results in some similarities in the foreign policy behaviour of the three countries. While these findings do not support an argument about a "grand theory" of the foreign policy of the South Caucasus, there are nonetheless some shared features at the regional level. Far from being conclusive, these findings complement the debate, reviewed in Chapter 1, about the South Caucasus being understood as a region in negative terms (German 2012a) or as largely sharing common cultural features (de Waal 2013).

These observations on the regional dimension could be reinforced by the assessment of some additional case and sub-case studies. Due to the space limits, this thesis cannot be expanded at this point. While there is confidence about the robustness of the findings, further examination of additional events and dynamics could serve to further corroborate these findings. Additionally, in order to better argue about the validity of these findings, it should be investigated whether they might hold for the remaining Eastern Partnership Countries (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine). In light of this, it could be explored whether the aforementioned dynamics are valid in the specific case of the South Caucasus or whether it would be more correct to talk about common features across the "near abroad".

The foreign policy of small states

The wording of the research question and the broader research design both rest upon the assumption that small states, in spite of their weakness vis-à-vis other actors, still have some scope for strategic behaviour, albeit constrained. As observed by Wivel (2016, 1): "*The strategic options of small states are dependent upon how much action space they are allowed by other states, in particular the great powers, in their close vicinity*". Similar considerations can be identified in the

literature on mediation studies, which shows that small states can engage in strategic bargaining.[2] Notwithstanding these points, the conceptualisation of this strategic element, beyond on a case-by-case basis, remains elusive. In the attempt to fill this gap and therefore to offer a methodological solution, this work proposes considering foreign policy speeches as a conscious act of self-projection towards external audiences. In this regard, even though the multi-level nature of foreign policy making is acknowledged (especially in Chapter 1), and occasionally dealt with in the empirical analysis, this thesis adopts a systemic focus. In keeping with this approach, both the agents and the audiences are treated as corporate actors. In other words, instead of merely looking at three South Caucasian countries projecting a message to foreign populations, this work considers Russia and the West to be: "*Real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs, and intentionality"* (Wendt 1999, 197). This point is emphasised here as studies on strategic communication rarely delineate the nature of the targeted public, often failing to specify whether it is a corporate audience, a state audience or a mix of these. As well as overcoming this vagueness, this theoretical specification allows for the scope of this research to be defined as three small corporate actors that, using strategic narratives vis-à-vis greater corporate actors, try to maximise their own foreign policy preferences and goals.

Considering the disparity in size between the actors under analysis, the simple thematic analysis of political speeches would have been unsuitable in addressing the research question. Firstly, considering the particular setting in which most international interactions take place, relevant portions of speeches could be classified as "diplomatic buttering-up". Secondly, this approach does not allow for meaning to be attributed to the absence of political declarations. In other words, paying attention solely to the wording of speeches does not allow for the asymmetric setting in which international interactions take place to be fully grasped. Acknowledging these limits and aiming to overcome them, this thesis argues that the strategic dimension of narratives can be identified through the analysis not only of rhetorical themes but also of 'political implicatures' (Van Dijk 2005), which are the pragmatic considerations related to the conveying of a certain message. For example, for Qatar the hosting and funding of the broadcaster "Al-Jazeera" not only facilitates the dissemination of certain news stories but also allows Qatar to project itself as a Gulf country *sui generis*. In addition to identifying this dual function of political declarations, as both semantic and pragmatic, an accurate reconstruction of the context allows for a careful interpretation of silences. For instance, the choice of Azerbaijan not to openly support the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline is extremely telling of the dynamics in place between

[2] For further insight, see Zartman (2008).

Azerbaijan and Russia. Throughout the chapters, the observation of 'political implicatures', related to the strategic narratives of the South Caucasian countries, provides some robust insight into the way these countries navigate the situation of asymmetry that results from having the West and Russia as international interlocutors. For example, the emphasis that Georgia puts on the fact of being an ancient European country can be interpreted not only as an identitarian statement but also as an act of signalling the country's commitment to a pro-Western alignment. Additionally, this thesis shows that 'political implicatures' can be identified not only from the analysis of verbal declarations but also from relevant discursive omissions. For instance, the prudent approach adopted by Armenia when addressing the Russian-based diaspora could be seen as an attempt not to create tensions with the Kremlin.

Going beyond this specific object of investigation, this thesis also provides a theoretical contribution to the observation and study of foreign policy making. Miskimmon et al. (2014) argue for the need to advance the study of strategic narratives within a framework of international relations. Throughout this thesis it is established that strategic narratives, as per this operationalisation, are more than a tool suitable for the spreading of the influence of powerful international players. Instead, as largely demonstrated in this thesis, smaller actors can resort to such strategic narratives in order to navigate conditions of asymmetry with greater external powers. Therefore, in bridging the literature on small states and on strategic narratives this thesis contributes to the study of foreign policy as follows. Firstly, it advances the knowledge on the strategic use of rhetoric in a situation other than that of prominent actors spreading influence. Secondly, it offers a practical approach to the detection of the constrained agency of small states. Ultimately, these findings are suitable for wide replication and/or further theoretical development.

Recapitulating the main findings

The answering of the main question *How do the South Caucasian countries navigate their relative asymmetry vis-à-vis the West and Russia?* necessitated an engagement with the following subset of questions:

How does asymmetry change across the various cases? How do the specific natures of Russia and the West influence the foreign policy behaviour of each South Caucasian state? Are there any shared dynamics to be observed? What is the relationship between smallness, strategic behaviour and narratives?

In light of this thesis's findings and this final discussion, the following points can be made:

- In line with Wivel's (2016) analysis, all three South Caucasian countries adjust their foreign policy rhetoric and behaviour to the specific natures of Russia and the West.

- Such adjustments are connected to the relationship between each South Caucasian actor and the external players. Examples of this are the over-dependence of Armenia on Russia and the imbalanced pro-Western orientation of Saakashvili's Georgia.

- Looking at the overall approach of the South Caucasian countries towards the West and Russia, some common patterns can be identified. Notably, they all seem to acknowledge the "modern" nature of Russia and the "post-modern" nature of the EU. These commonalities contribute to the debate on the regional dimension of the South Caucasus.

- Beyond the study of the South Caucasus, this work shows that the agency of small states vis-à-vis external players can be detected through their "strategic narratives", here understood as messages consciously articulated to *also* take into account external corporate actors.

- The study of strategic narratives does not involve only the thematic analysis of political speeches but also the observation of their 'political implicatures', which are the related pragmatic elements (Van Dijk 2005). The detection of these political implicatures involves looking at both political declarations and context-informed discursive omissions.

Directions for further research

Looking at the prospective for further research, this approach could inspire other researchers interested in small state studies, beyond the South Caucasian area and the already-mentioned EaP experience. As postulated in Chapter 1, despite their empirical relevance, the conceptualisation of small states remains a matter of dispute. Even if the understanding of smallness is restricted and small states thus defined as the weaker/est party in an asymmetrical relationship (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010; Knudsen 2002), there lacks sufficient direction for systematic investigation. This is because this definition provides conceptual clarification but not methodological guidelines for the assessment of concrete cases. Throughout the chapters, the research design proposed in this work contributes to the filling of this gap. Therefore, beyond being valuable in the study of the post-Soviet region, the analysis of small states' strategic narratives could be used to investigate completely different situations, such as cases featuring only extra-European actors. In other words, it is argued that concepts such as 'political implicatures' and 'corporate actorness', clearly defined in Chapter 2, could be used by other researchers either to set up a similar research design or to

adjust this design to a different research question. For example, if the use of media were part of the investigation, the primary focus on a "corporate audience" could be enriched by some discussion of a "grassroots audience". It follows that, quite apart from being a stand-alone piece of research that could appeal to a range of readerships, this work and its findings could inspirenew investigations, whether focusing on a deeper understanding of the foreign policy dynamics of the South Caucasus or offering an assessment of a broader range of small states.

In brief, the replicability of this work's structure and methodology is enhanced by its multi-object research design. As well as being committed to the investigation of the South Caucasian countries and region, this work aimed to fill a theoretical gap (clearly identified in Chapters 1 and 2): the lack of in-depth debate on the coping strategies of small states. In other words, the pre-existing literature offers a convincing argument about international smallness resulting from the relationship with greater counterparts. However, in order to move forward from the simple empirical assessment of case studies, this theoretical point needed to be complemented by a suitable methodology. In this regard, this thesis proposes an accurate methodological approach which, as already explained, involves the analysis of the strategic narratives and the related 'political implicatures'.

Furthermore, as this concluding chapter makes clear, quite apart from allowing for the assessment of the foreign policy behaviour of individual small states, this approach facilitates some reflection on cross-country patterns and dynamics. Notably, it was shown that since Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan have to deal with the same external interlocutors, the specific nature of these interlocutors triggers similar forms of behaviour, such as adjusting to the relatively "tolerant" nature of the West and taking countermeasures against the manifested assertiveness of Russia. These findings suggest that, when confronted with the same foreign counterparts, the choice of small states might bear some similarities. The fact that these similarities in behaviour can be noticed in the case of the South Caucasus, despite the negligible level of regional integration, suggests that similar cross-country patterns could emerge also in different geographic areas populated by a mix of great powers and small states.

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Interview with Blaice Lafebbre, Scholar, Baku, (2015, May 31)

Interview with Kavus Abushov, Scholar at ADA University, Baku (2015, May 29)

Interview with local scholar, Baku (2015, June 01)

Interview with Member of the Italian embassy to Azerbaijan, Baku (2015, May 27)

Interview with West European diplomat, Baku (2015, May 28)

Interview with youth activist, Baku (2015, June 2)

Georgia

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Interview with Kornely Kakachia, Georgian scholar, Tbilisi (2016, October 01).

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Interview with West European diplomat 1 (in Georgia), Tbilisi, (2016, 26 September)

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Interview with West European diplomat 3 (in Georgia), Tbilisi, (2016, September 30)

Interview withTimothy Blauvet, Scholar based in Georgia, Tbilisi (2016, September 25)