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The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations of the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation in Cultural-Humanitarian Bilateral Cooperation

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Cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation constitutes an important dimension of bilateral relations, in the formation and development of which non-governmental organizations play a significant role. The article examines the historical and legal foundations of Armenian–Russian relations in the context of post-Soviet cooperation, with particular emphasis on the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed on August 29, 1997. The study analyzes the activities of non-governmental organizations operating in Armenia that are aimed at deepening cultural, educational, and humanitarian ties. Special attention is paid to the role of state humanitarian institutions of the Russian Federation, notably the Federal Agency “Rossotrudnichestvo” and the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation, as well as their cooperation with Armenian non-governmental organizations. The activities of the “Russian House” cultural center and the Russian-Armenian (Slavic) University are examined as effective instruments of Russia’s “soft power” policy. The article concludes that non-governmental organizations and educational institutions make a substantial contribution to the institutionalization, sustainable development, and strengthening of cultural and humanitarian cooperation and public ties between Armenia and Russia.

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության և Ռուսաստանի Դաշնության հասարակական
կազմակերպությունների դերը մշակութային-հումանիտար երկկողմ համագործակցության մեջ

Մելինե Պետրոսյան

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հայ-ռուսական հարաբերություններ, մշակութային-հումանիտար
համագործակցություն, հանրային դիվանագիտություն, փափուկ ուժ

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության և Ռուսաստանի Ղաշնության միջև մշակութային-
հումանիտար համագործակցությունը հանդիսանում է երկկողմ հարաբերությունների կարևոր
ուղղություններից մեկը, որի ձևավորման և զարգացման գործընթացում առանձնահատուկ դեր են
կատարում ոչ կառավարական կազմակերպությունները: Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են հայ-
ռուսական հարաբերությունների պատմական և իրավական հիմքերը՝ հետխորհրդային շրջանում
ձևավորված համագործակցության համատեքստում՝ կենտրոնանալով 1997 թ. օգոստոսի 29-ին
ստորագրված Բարեկամության, համագործակցության և փոխադարձ օգնության մասին
պայմանագրի նշանակության վրա: Վերլուծվում է Հայաստանում գործող հասարակական
կազմակերպությունների գործունեությունը, որոնք ուղղված են մշակութային, կրթական և
հումանիտար կապերի խորացմանը: Առանձնահատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում Ռուսաստանի
Ղաշնության պետական հումանիտար կառույցների, մասնավորապես «Ռոսսոտրուդնիչեստվո»
դաշնային գործակալության և Գորչակովի հանրային դիվանագիտության հիմնադրամի
դերակատարությանը, ինչպես նաև դրանց համագործակցությանը հայկական հասարակական
կազմակերպությունների հետ: Քննարկվում են «Ռուսական տուն» մշակութային կենտրոնի և
Ռուս-հայկական (Մլավոնական) համալսարանի գործունեությունը՝ որպես Ռուսաստանի
«փափուկ ուժի» քաղաքականության արդյունավետ գործիքներ: Եզրակացվում է, որ ոչ
կառավարական կազմակերպությունները և կրթական հաստատությունները էական ներդրում
ունեն հայ-ռուսական մշակութային-հումանիտար համագործակցության
ինստիտուցիոնալացման, կայուն զարգացման և հասարակական կապերի խորացման գործում:

**Роль общественных организаций Республики Армения и Российской Федерации в двустороннем
культурном и гуманитарном сотрудничестве.**

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Ключевые слова: неправительственные организации, армяно-российские отношения,
культурно-гуманитарное сотрудничество, публичная дипломатия, мягкая сила.

*Культурно-гуманитарное сотрудничество между Республикой Армения и Российской Федерацией
является одним из важных направлений двусторонних отношений, в формировании и развитии
которого значительную роль играют неправительственные организации. В статье рассматриваются
историко-правовые основы армяно-российских отношений в контексте постсоветского
сотрудничества, с особым акцентом на Договор о дружбе, сотрудничестве и взаимной помощи,
подписанный 29 августа 1997 г. Анализируется деятельность неправительственных организаций,
функционирующих в Армении и направленных на углубление культурных, образовательных и
гуманитарных связей. Особое внимание уделяется роли государственных гуманитарных структур*

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ները մշակութային-հումանիտար երկկողմ համագործակցության մեջ

Российской Федерации, в частности Федерального агентства «Россотрудничество» и Фонда поддержки публичной дипломатии имени А. М. Горчакова, а также их взаимодействию с армянскими неправительственными организациями. Рассматривается деятельность культурного центра «Русский дом» и Российско-Армянского (Славянского) университета как эффективных инструментов политики «мягкой силы» России. В статье делается вывод о том, что неправительственные организации и образовательные учреждения вносят существенный вклад в институционализацию, устойчивое развитие и укрепление культурно-гуманитарного сотрудничества и общественных связей между Арменией и Россией.

* * *

Introduction. There are allied relations between Armenia and Russia, which include cooperation in all directions, including military-political, economic, transport, energy, humanitarian, cultural and many other spheres.

This relationship between our states has been built on a rich contractual basis. The main document determining the nature of bilateral relations is the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which was signed on August 29, 1997 and is considered the cornerstone of the relations between the two countries, emphasizing the principles of mutual respect, strategic partnership and respect for the sovereignty of the parties [Republic of Armenia and Russian Federation. 30 Years of Allied Cooperation, Collection of Treaties and Agreements, Volume I (1992-2001), 304-311].

On September 26, 2000, the declaration on allied cooperation between RA and the Russian Federation confirmed the determination to deepen and strengthen the friendship between the peoples of the two countries via broad allied cooperation, intensive deepening of ties in all fields, permanent peace, stability and stability in the Caucasus and around the world. In addition, this agreement is intended to create an important guarantee for the preservation of the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Armenia, including from external threats [Republic of Armenia and Russian Federation. 30 Years of Allied Cooperation, Collection of Treaties and Agreements, Volume I (1992-2001), 454-459].

A number of non-governmental organizations operate in the public field of Armenia, which persuade goals to make a constructive contribution to the development and deepening of bilateral relations. They carry out consistent activities in the fields of Armenian-Russian cultural and humanitarian relations. These organizations make an outstanding contribution, in particular, to bilateral humanitarian cooperation. It should be noted that there are federal state structures in Russia that are called to encourage the humanitarian cooperation of the Russian Federation with foreign countries. Such are, in particular, the federal agency “Rossotrudnichestvo” (Russian Cooperation) and the Gorchakov Foundation, which allocate grants to develop the above-mentioned cooperation. For the sake of justice, it should be noted that there are no similar state structures in Armenia, but Armenian NGOs and individuals actively cooperate with these Russian organizations.

In 2008, by the decree of the President of the Russian Federation, the federal agency “Rossotrudnichestvo” was established, which is the state instrument, implementing the “soft power” of the

Russian Federation in foreign countries. “Rossotrudnichestvo” is a federal structure working in the direction of cooperation of independent states, as well as cooperation and support with compatriots living in other countries, making focus on international humanitarian cooperation. The most important areas of activity of “Rossotrudnichestvo” are the promotion of the development of education, science, and culture in the Russian language, as well as the strengthening of the position of the Russian language, support for social and youth projects [Official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation].

The budget of this organization has 4 billion rubles [The Degree of Tension Has Died." Deputy Head of Rossotrudnichestvo on "Waves of Russophobia," Artists Who Left, and the Explosion in the Central African Republic]. The representative office of “Rossotrudnichestvo” in Armenia is the cultural center “Russian House.” The center plays a role in promoting cultural and business cooperation between Moscow and Yerevan. Its programs are aimed at spreading Russian culture and the Russian language, deepening Armenian-Russian friendly ties in the humanitarian sphere, as well as supporting compatriots living in Armenia.

“Rossotrudnichestvo” actively participates in shaping a positive image of Russia among the public, particularly among the youth, contributes to achievements in the fields of education and science, which in turn are aimed at preserving and strengthening the reputation of the Russian educational system and the intellectual community [Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Armenia Rossotrudnichestvo].

In Yerevan and Gyumri, the Russian Houses organize a number of cultural events to celebrate the anniversaries of prominent cultural figures of Armenia and Russia and important historical events of the friendly countries. These centers also organize forums, conferences, exhibitions, etc.

The House of Moscow in Yerevan is an important center of bilateral cultural-humanitarian cooperation. It was created by the Moscow Municipality in order to develop multidisciplinary cooperation with Yerevan. The center cooperates with the Armenian-Russian University, the Yerevan branch of the Moscow State University named after M. V. Lomonosov, the Armenian branch of the Moscow University of Economics named after G. V. Plekhanov.

The House of Moscow is a unique platform for meeting and consolidating non-governmental organizations and various structures that are active in the field of Armenian-Russian cooperation [Moscow cultural and business center "House of Moscow" in Yerevan].

The House of Moscow in the Republic of Armenia plays a vital role in the process of development of cultural relations between the two countries by promoting the exchange of cultural and traditional values of the two countries and is a bridge for the development of cultural diplomacy, too.

The Russian-Armenian (Slavic) University, which was founded in 1997 by bilateral agreements between Russia and Armenia, is also an example of the successful demonstration of the “soft power” of the Russian Federation. The Russian-Armenian University offers baccalaureate and master’s programs in such fields as humanities, natural sciences, and technical sciences. The languages of education are Russian and Armenian. The university also promotes academic exchanges and research cooperation between Russian and Armenian scientists, deepening cultural and intellectual ties [Russian-Armenian University].

In 2004, a Garden of Gratitude was opened on the territory of the university as a sign of friendly relations between the two countries. The university has signed cooperation agreements with a number of

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prestigious universities of the Russian Federation, for example, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, which is one of the leading universities not only in Russia but also in the world, Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry (which is the oldest diplomatic academy in the world and trains specialists in the fields of international relations, international law and international economic law), etc. University graduates receive both Russian and Armenian state-recognized diplomas [Russian-Armenian University].

Thus, it can be stated that the Russian-Armenian (Slavic) University is the best example of the friendship of peoples, full-fledged cooperation, mutual enrichment of cultures and educational traditions, scientific experience, with unique scientific and educational interstate programs. It is included in the international ranking table of universities [World University rankings, Regional Ranking EECA 2021].

Armenia's leading universities actively cooperate with Russian partners. The RA National Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Sciences have developed a 13-point cooperation road map in the humanitarian and public spheres.

Many public organizations hold forums, roundtables, conferences, and scientific conferences with a goal to deepen bilateral relations [Communication modes of post-Soviet countries/friendliness rating, National Research Institute for Communication Development, Scientific Reports series, 144-145]. Thus, there are non-governmental organizations in Armenia that consistently advocate for the development and deepening of mutual cooperation. Such organizations are the Integration Development NGO, the International Organization for Humanitarian Development, the Institute for Regional Studies and Cooperation, etc [Communication modes of post-Soviet countries/friendliness rating, National Research Institute for Communication Development, Scientific Reports series, 144-145].

The Eurasian Center was recently established. The program of the center is "Discover Russia 2024." The main goal of the "Discover Russia" program is to strengthen ties between young people of the countries of the post-Soviet space, support for their ideas by expert circles and grant programs, creative and professional development [Autonomous Non-Commercial Organization for the Promotion of International Cooperation "Eurasia" "Discover Russia" program]. The goal of the center is to create favorable conditions for effective international cooperation in various fields, based on centuries-old cultural, moral and religious values. For this purpose, they carry out many cultural events, excursions with the participation of young people [Autonomous Non-Commercial Organization for the Promotion of International Cooperation "Eurasia" "Discover Russia" program]. Among the members of the center, Mika (Mikayel) Badalyan, who is known as a popular pro-Russian blogger on social media and has a huge army of followers, stands out the most [Zakharova reacted to the detention of blogger Badalyan in Armenia, RIA Novosti 07.09.2023]. Mika Badalyan actively participates in Armenian-Russian socio-cultural life with his activities, initiates many socio-cultural events. However, it should also be noted that he is politically active in Armenia. For example, he participated in the "suppression of anti-Russian demonstrations" in Armenia and was arrested [Mika Badalyan was taken into police custody again, SPUTNIK Armenia, 29.07.2022]. However, later the

court decided that Mika Badalyan was released on bail of 6 million drams [Mika Badalyan was released, SPUTNIK Armenia, 25.07.2022].

The international humanitarian organization headed by A. Ghukasyan repeatedly refers to Armenian-Russian relations. The organization holds discussions and roundtables on this topic. For example, a roundtable discussion on “Attempts to distort the historical truth and the manifestation of modern Nazism” was held recently at the initiative of the organization [Armenia is of interest to the West only as a tool against Russia, G. Qeryan, 09.07.2022]. Associate professors and political scientists made reports during the meeting. According to them, the West is carrying out destructive activities in the post-Soviet territory through various NGOs, and Armenia is no exception in this context, where there are more than a few dozen such active organizations. According to them, Armenia is interesting to the West only as a tool against Russia.

The Eurasian Expert Club is an independent, informal scientific expert platform, whose members have been advocating for the constructive participation of Armenia within the Eurasian Economic Union and the success of the Eurasian economic integration process with Armenia’s participation for 11 years [Eurasian expert club turned ten years old, Soyuzinfo 16.05.2024].

One of the founders of the Eurasian expert club is the former “Noravank” scientific and educational foundation of the EAEU Institute. The club is the first platform where socio-cultural and economic spheres are analyzed at a proper scientific expert level. The members of the club are leading specialists of Armenia: internationalists, political scientists, sociologists, economists, orientalists, philosophers, historians, defense and security specialists, public speakers and journalists.

As it is known, the Eurasian Expert Club presents press conferences with public reports twice a year, in August and February, where it summarizes the economic development index of Armenia for the year. As a result of its activity, thanks to the forecasts made regarding the economic activity growth factor and GDP, the independent and high-quality analysis became a reality, which led to the increase of the interest of the Armenian and Russian mass media, and the research materials with their predictions became an expected speech in the scientific expert reality [Eurasian expert club turned ten years old, Soyuzinfo 16.05.2024].

It is also important to note the role of the Institute of Regional Studies and Cooperation in Armenian-Russian cooperation. It was created on December 20, 2021. The main directions of activity are the study of the foreign policy of the states of the region, the analysis of integration processes. The institute actively cooperates with think tanks and non-governmental organizations of the EAEU space. In October 2024, the Institute organizes international roundtables “The role of think tanks and non-governmental organizations in the process of Eurasian integration” within the framework of the grant allocated by the Public Diplomacy Support Fund named after RF Gorchakov. The director of the institute is A. Mnatsakanyan, and the head of program implementation, G. Balasanyan.

However, the activities of the Russian centers and their related organizations are not free from shortcomings. The connection of some organizations with corruption risks gives the opponents of the further rapprochement of Armenian-Russian relations an opportunity to oppose this process.

In this regard, there are not a few non-governmental organizations in Armenia that oppose Armenian-Russian cooperation and criticize Russia’s policy.

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The NGO “Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center” was founded in July 2000 by A. Kostanyan as a “Regional Development Center” NGO, whose goal was to contribute to the implementation of political, economic and social reforms in Armenia and the region [Transparency International anticorruption centre].

Transparency International, an NGO focused on the fight against corruption, is critical of Armenian-Russian relations, because, according to the NGO, there are many corruption problems in Russian politics and this can negatively affect Armenia. According to the NGO, corruption can flourish as long as the justice systems in the countries are not able to punish wrongdoing. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks 180 countries and territories according to the perceived level of corruption in the public sector on a scale from 0 (absolutely corrupt) to 100 (absolutely clean). And on this scale, Russia scored only 26 points [CorruptionsPerceptions index 2023, Transparency International anticorruption centre, 30.01.2024].

In March 2023, the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation recognized “Transparency International” NGO as an undesirable organization. The General Prosecutor’s Office believes that the international organization is interfering in Russia’s affairs and “threatens the foundations of the country’s constitutional order and security.” I should also mention that the Russian branch of the NGO was recognized as a foreign agent back in 2015 [Transparency International has been declared an undesirable organization, 06 Mar 2023].

The “Asparez” club of journalists, a non-governmental organization whose founder is L. Barseghyan, can also be included among such organizations. The NGO was founded in 1990, and was re-registered in 2010 as a result of changes in the charter. The symbol is that the truth is more expensive [“Asbarez” Journalists’ Club].

The main principle declared by the “Asparez” club of journalists is to contribute to the protection of the right to freedom of press, speech, expression and information. The club takes steps aimed at the protection of human rights, the fight against corruption and the development of local self-government [Journalists Club Asparez, "CSO DePo: Civil Society Development Program" 13.07.2017].

The club repeatedly expresses concern about the extent of Russia’s influence in Armenia, particularly in the political and legal spheres, considering them dangerous for Armenia’s democratic institutions. According to them, this circumstance also includes the growth of corruption [The illegal activities of the Russian security bodies in the territory of Armenia should be stopped immediately “Asbarez” Journalists’ Club, 27.03.2024].

It is also important to note that some Western scientific centers also actively cooperate with RA educational and cultural programs. Among those centers are, for example, the Analytical Center of Globalization and Territorial Cooperation, the Institute dealing with International Relations and Security Issues, the European Studies Center, the American University, etc. The researches of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia are financed by American and European grants. It should also be noted that the USA plans to allocate 110 million dollars for the construction of the “Dalan Multifunctional”

technical center in Armenia [Communication regimes of post-Soviet countries/friendship rating, National Research Institute of Communication Development, Series "Scientific Reports", pp. 144-145].

Thus, from the point of view of these organizations, the close ties between Armenia and Russia can lead to an increase in the level of corruption and misuse of state funds in Armenia. According to them, these actions are directed against Armenia, a sovereign, democratic and legal state.

Based on the Armenian-Russian Agreement of August 29, 1997, the Declaration on the Strategic Alliance in 2000, Armenia's membership in EAEU, CIS, CSTO, as well as other international and regional structures, gives grounds for asserting that Armenian-Russian relations have an important place in the fields of security, stability, economic and cultural development of the Republic of Armenia. These relations come to complete the panorama of RA's multi-vector military strategy, the goal of which is to keep our country more secure in the South Caucasus. This relationship stems from the mutual prospective interests of both countries. The centuries-old ties between our countries have laid the foundation for continuous bilateral cooperation. It is noteworthy that all components of Armenia-Russia cooperation are at a high level. Cooperation in the educational and cultural spheres occupies a special place in interstate relations between Armenia and Russia. It also tends to deepen.

On April 4, 2023, ESCS Minister Zhanna Andreasyan and Special Representative of the Russian President Mikhail Shvidkoi discussed various issues related to the prospects of Armenian-Russian cultural cooperation. During the meeting, Zhanna Andreasyan said: "I am sure that there is a greater potential to develop and deepen existing relations" [Issues related to the perspectives of Armenian-Russian cultural cooperation were discussed in the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. 28.04.2023]. It is also known that it is planned to advance the issues related to the expansion of cooperation in the cultural sector, improvement of the educational environment, personnel training, and the introduction of technologies and innovations in the work of the Institutes of Higher Education and Research.

After the 2020 44-Day War and the deportation of Artsakh Armenians in September 2023 and their asylum in RA, Armenian-Russian political relations became significantly complicated. Cultural, educational and humanitarian cooperation programs were also affected in the context of mutual accusations and some cooling of relations. It is also interesting that bilateral trade and economic relations continued to develop rapidly during this period. It is obvious that Armenia has significant benefits from EAEU membership, particularly from Armenian-Russian economic cooperation. As for the political dialogue, according to their leaders, the two countries aim to solve the existing problems through meetings and dialogue. There is no doubt that the role of cultural and humanitarian cooperation is increasing in these conditions.

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