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# **DISCOURSE OF RUSSIAN COLONIALISM REGARDING ARMENIA**

Edgar Vardanyan and Mikayel Zolyan

**ANALYSIS**



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### Discourse of Russian Colonialism regarding Armenia – Vardanyan, E. and Zolyan, M.

This study deals with the specific case of political domination, the case of contemporary Russian neo-colonialism and colonialism regarding Armenia and the narratives used to justify and sustain it. A discourse analysis of speeches by Russian officials and propagandists in this publication shows that the Kremlin's rhetoric towards Armenia exhibits characteristics of both colonialism and neocolonialism with their own peculiarities. The publication also offers recommendations for addressing Russian colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Armenian, as well as the broader post-Soviet context.

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# Table of contents

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	6
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	7
<b>3. RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE IN POST-SOVIET ARMENIA: OVERVIEW</b> .....	10
<b>4. THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE KREMLIN'S RHETORIC TOWARDS ARMENIA</b> .....	18
4.1 Historical right to influence and control .....	18
4.2 Russia as "the peacemaker" .....	23
4.3 Economic dependence .....	25
4.4 Anti-Western rhetoric and Geopolitical Exclusivism .....	26
4.5 Accusations of ingratitude.....	27
<b>5. CONCLUSION</b> .....	31
<b>6. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	34
<b>7. ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b> .....	43

The paper shows the main narrative blocks Russia uses in Armenia when promoting 'its truth'. The significance of the study is in the revelation of many Russian narratives that are reproduced daily and have become so common that it is difficult to perceive them as colonial. Interestingly, with some changes, such Russian narratives might also be found in other ex-Soviet countries. This research aims to reach broader audiences to allow them to reflect on their everyday media content using such narratives. The study is an addition to the postcolonial discussion regarding the Soviet Union and Russia specifically. Traditionally, the literature on postcolonial studies is mainly focused on other regions. Still, it is worth mentioning that more and more is being implemented concerning the Soviet and post-Soviet legacy of Russia.

Specifically, the understudied topic concerning Armenia requires more research and discussion. In this paper, the authors try to make a valuable addition to the debate on Russian colonialism in Armenia. Finally, people may re-analyze manifestations of the Russian foreign policy in Armenia, reproduced within a paradigm of the Russian colonial logic.

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## 1. Executive Summary

The paper reveals the colonial/neo-colonial nature of Russia's policies toward Armenia through an analysis of Moscow's rhetoric and propaganda. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin's propaganda has been advancing the idea that Russia is fighting against Western colonialism, imperialism, global domination, etc. The case of Armenia, which for decades has been heavily dependent on Russia in the political, military, economic, and cultural spheres, shows that the Kremlin's policies are based on a paradigm of colonialist/neo-colonialist domination.

The Kremlin's message to Armenia is based on the idea of Russia's historically exclusive position, legitimizing Russia's domination, as well as threats aimed at preventing Armenia from developing independent policies. It also includes a claim of Russia's exclusive role in Armenia (i.e. other geopolitical actors, especially the West, do not have the right to any involvement with Armenia), as well as accusations of "ingratitude" of Armenians, when referring to attempts by Armenia to reduce dependence on Russia. The Kremlin's rhetoric also advances Russia's claim to be the only peacemaker (in

the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict), the only guarantor of peace and security in the region, as well as justification of the economic dependence of Armenia on Russia and claim that this dependence is beneficial for Armenia. The Kremlin's neo-colonial policies in Armenia also include disinformation campaigns and anti-democratic propaganda.

It is crucial to address the nature of the current policies of Moscow to deal with Russia's neo-imperialist policies, i.e., to qualify them as colonial/neo-colonial. The international community should assist Armenia's government, media, civil society, and other actors to counter the Kremlin's colonialist/neo-colonialist policies, including disinformation campaigns and anti-democratic propaganda. It is also important to encourage research and discussion on the issues of Russian colonialism/neo-colonialism in the post-Soviet space, in particular, to facilitate the creation of networks of scholars, journalists, activists, and social media influencers within post-Soviet countries, as well as between post-Soviet countries, the West and the Global South, to spread information about Moscow's neo-imperialist policies.

## 2. Introduction

In this paper we shall look at a specific case of political domination, the case of contemporary Russian neo-colonialism and colonialism over Armenia and the narratives that are used to justify and maintain it. Like most cases connected with the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, this case has so far mostly slipped from the attention of scholars of colonialism and post-colonialism. Historically, when social scientists and scholars started theorizing and studying the phenomena of colonialism and post-colonialism, the majority of authors had focused on the cases of Western European colonial empires (as well as the USA, though in a somewhat different light)<sup>1</sup>. This is neither the time nor place to discuss the reasons for this omission, we shall simply state the fact that the Russian Empire, its successor state the Soviet Union, and modern Russia were hardly ever the focus of the studies that dealt with colonialism and post-colonialism. Indeed, there have been attempts to use the post-colonial lenses to analyse the

experience of countries and peoples that have become the object of Russia's imperialist ambitions, but these have mostly been confined to academic circles and marginal political groups. Today, in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the situation is beginning to change and more and more scholars, politicians, activists, and artists are beginning to speak about Russian colonialism and neocolonialism. Our paper will be an attempt to apply these lenses to Armenia's experience and to show, using Armenia's case, how the discourses of contemporary Russian domination operate in the post-Soviet space.

Jean Jacques Rousseau in his seminal *Social Contract* writes that "the strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty" (Rousseau, 2021, p. 21). Rousseau's observation is the key to understanding various systems of domination that have been used since times immemorial to ensure one group's power over others. While these systems are usually based on force, which one side uses to subdue the other, they are also based on a certain discourse that justifies these systems

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<sup>1</sup> Authors like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakraworty Spivak, and others, whose background was tied to countries that have experienced colonialism of the Western colonial empires, first of all British and French colonialism.

in the eyes of both the oppressor and the oppressed. One of these systems is colonialism, in its various forms, whether in its “classic” forms typical for previous centuries, especially the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, or its current, neo-colonial form. It would hardly be an overgeneralization to say that whenever there was a case of colonial domination in history, it was never established and maintained by sheer force alone. While force always plays an important, or as some might argue, even a decisive, role in colonial domination, no colonial domination would have been possible without its ideological basis, without the narratives and discourses that justify colonial domination. These narratives and discourses explain both to the colonizer and the colonized why colonial domination is just and good. And when these narratives start to crumble and stop making sense either to the colonizers or the colonized, no amount of force is enough to maintain the colonial domination, at least in the long-term.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the issue of Russian colonialism (and neo-colonialism) has finally become a topic of conversation, if not globally, at least in the post-Soviet space. However, many people around the globe, especially

in the global south, still do not see the conflict in Ukraine as a colonial/neo-colonial war. Moreover, the Russian leadership itself is trying to frame its actions as part of an anti-colonial struggle against the West. In fact, the anti-colonial discourse has been appropriated by the current Russian leadership and has become an efficient tool of Russian propaganda and “soft power”, particularly in the global South (Sabanadze, 2021, p. 21). Surprisingly, this discourse finds its adherents around the world, not just in the Global South, where there are legitimate grievances connected to the heritage of Western colonialism, but also in the Western countries, and, even more surprisingly, in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. i.e., countries that have historically been the victim of Russian colonialism and are the object of Russia’s neo-imperialist ambitions today. This situation is extremely frustrating for peoples and countries that have been subjected to Russian colonialism and/or neo-colonialism, whether in the post-Soviet space or in the non-Russian periphery of Russia.

One of the countries that has been subjected to Russian colonialism in the past, and continues to be its object today, is Armenia. Today Armenia is struggling to overcome its dependence on Russia, and, in this



context, Armenia has been subjected to hybrid attacks, including disinformation campaigns, which aim to stifle Armenia's drive for democracy and sovereignty and preserve the Kremlin's influence in the country. In our paper we shall identify the tools of the Kremlin's domination, including cultural narratives and propagandist schemes.

It is important to clarify the meaning of the terms "colonialism" and "neo-colonialism", as used in this paper. In our view, colonialism is a policy based on the direct use of force (or threat of use of force) and coercion, aimed at establishing partial or total control over a country. Neocolonialism is the policy of establishing or maintaining influence over another country, using cultural, political, economic and other means, rather than direct force.

### 3. Russia's influence in Post-Soviet Armenia: Overview

Russian-Armenian relations in the post-Soviet period have many of the characteristics of post-colonial or neo-colonial dependence. In particular these include Armenia's membership in Russia-dominated political, economic, and military alliances, disproportionate political, economic, media, linguistic, and cultural influence of Russia in Armenia, Russian ownership of strategic assets, existence of military bases inside Armenia, and patterns of widespread work migration from Armenia to Russia.

Thus, Armenia has been a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since its formation in 1991, of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) since its formation in 2002 (and previously of the Collective Security Treaty), and of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) since 2015 (though Armenia announced its intention to join the union earlier, in 2013). In 2024 Armenia announced that it was "freezing" its membership in the CSTO, but it still remains a member of the other two organizations. Interestingly, the CTSO does not have an option to "freeze" membership but the Armenian government has been re-

luctant to withdraw from it due to fear of possible repercussions from the Russian side. However, the military influence of Russia in Armenia is not limited to Armenia's membership in the CSTO. It is based on bilateral agreements, concluded in the 1990s, which making Armenia Russia's "ally", giving Russia the right to military bases in Armenia, delegating the protection of Armenia's borders with Iran and Türkiye to Russian border guards.

Economic influence of Russia in Armenia throughout most of the post-Soviet period has been overwhelming. Russia has been Armenia's biggest trade partner throughout most of the post-Soviet period. Even before Armenia started the process of joining the EEU, in 2012, Russia was Armenia's biggest trade partner and its biggest investor: trade with Russia stood at \$1.2 billion, while Russian investments came to \$3 billion (Gotev, 2013). In terms of labour migration, Russia has been the single biggest destination of Armenian economic migrants and the biggest contributor of remittances to Armenia. In the early 2010s, according to the IMF, the lion's share of remittances, as high as 89% in certain years, were

from Russia (Ghazaryan and Tolo-  
sa, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

Russia also enjoys dominant positions in the Armenian economy, through Russian-owned assets and companies. These include Armenian Electric Networks, first owned by RAO EES and since 2015 controlled by a Russian businessman of ethnic Armenian origin, Samvel Karapetyan<sup>3</sup>. Another strategic asset, Armenia's railroad infrastructure, is under the control of the South Caucasus Railways, a subdivision of Russian Railways, which in 2008 acquired the management of Armenia's railroads for 30 years through a concession agreement. Gas import and distribution is controlled by Arm-RosGazProm, a subdivision of Russian Gazprom, which monopolizes the gas market. Three Russian companies, Beeline, MTS, and Rostelecom, dominated the communications sphere until the 2020s, while the only Western company in this field, the French firm Orange, left the Armenian market in early 2016 (Telegeography,

2015). It is necessary to note, however, that in this field the situation changed after the revolution of 2018, and today Armenia's main telecommunication companies are locally owned. Finally, Russian TV channels were broadcast along with the national Armenian ones throughout most of the Soviet period, ensuring that the Armenian public was subject to Russian media and cultural influence even after the breakup of the USSR.

This short overview of Russia's influence shows that many of the factors that are usually considered part of neo-colonial dependence are present in the Russian-Armenian relationship. It is not difficult to imagine what kind of anti-colonial diatribes would have been used by Russia Today or other Russian propagandists if the same kind of relationship existed between a Western country and one of their former colonies. However, when it came to Armenia, Russian state-owned media and politicians have not found anything wrong with this kind of dependence. In fact, they were quite open in praising the sort of relationship that emerged in the post-Soviet period between Armenia and Russia, using terms that would have made some of the most ardent European colonialists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century proud. Thus, in one of the most publicized cases, in 2004 during a visit to Armenia, the

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2 The estimate is based on the 5-year average of non-commercial net inflow via the banking system.

3 The Russian state-owned company Inter RAO UES, which owned Armenia's electric grid network, sold its assets to the ethnic Armenian businessman Karapetyan after mass protests took place in Yerevan in 2015, which are known as "Electric Yerevan" or "Electro-maidan". See Avedissian (2015) and Hetq.am (2015)

head of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, stated that Armenia is Russia's outpost in the South Caucasus ("forpost" in Russian) (Regnum, 2004). Gryzlov's statement created a public outcry in Armenia, as it openly questioned Armenia's status as an independent country. Since then, Russian officials were more careful in their wording, at least until the revolution of 2018 in Armenia, when the nature of the Russian-Armenian relationship started to change.

Before 2018, the Kremlin's rhetoric towards Armenia was largely positive (at least compared to today's), though with some serious exceptions: for example, the critical statements of officials and propagandists on the occasion of the opening of the monument to the Armenian "national hero" Garegin Nzhdeh in 2016<sup>4</sup>. The fact that the Kremlin's rhet-

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4 Nzhdeh, who is often compared to a Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera, was one of the military leaders of the first Armenian republic in 1918-1920, who led the resistance against Bolsheviks in Southern Armenian region of Syunik in 1920-1921, which earned him the position of "a national hero" in Armenian history narratives. The Republican Party of Armenia, which was the ruling party in 1998-2018, emphasized the role of Nzhdeh as its predecessor. However, Nzhdeh is also a controversial figure, since after the fall of independent Armenia, he also developed ultra-right-wing views and is even accused of cooperation with the Nazis during World War II. See for instance Kucera (2018).

oric toward Yerevan before the revolution of 2018 was largely positive or neutral is quite understandable, since Armenia did not take major steps that would have caused criticism from the Kremlin. Or, in those rare cases when such steps were made, as a rule they were retracted due to Moscow's informal pressure. The most obvious example: prior to 2013 Armenia led negotiations with the EU on an Association Treaty, which also included provisions on joining the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area). However, practically in one day, under pressure from Moscow, the Armenian leadership announced the decision to join the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (which later became the Eurasian Economic Union). Obviously, membership in this Russia-dominated union made it impossible to sign the DCFTA agreement with the European Union which Armenian and European politicians and specialists had been working on for several years. This U-turn significantly harmed Armenia's relations with the EU.

The Kremlin's rhetoric towards Armenia started to undergo significant changes after the velvet democratic revolution of 2018. Although Putin and other officials continued to speak largely positively about Armenia, the rhetoric of the Kremlin's propagandists toward Armenia ac-

quired distinct negative tones. This happened in spite of the fact that the new authorities did not revise Armenia's foreign policy and did not try to overcome Armenia's dependence on Russia. The most probable reason for this was that the new government feared that such steps would lead to grave consequences, particularly Russia's giving the green light to Azerbaijan to use force to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, the very fact of the democratic revolution, the policy of conducting democratic reforms, and the struggle, albeit sluggish, with the remnants of the old corrupt, authoritarian system caused concern for the Kremlin<sup>5</sup>.

It did not take long for Kremlin officials to start openly expressing their dissatisfaction with the processes taking place in Armenia. The reason for this were the charges brought by the Special Investigative Service of Armenia against a number of high-ranking officials. Thus, former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan was charged with overthrowing the constitutional order within the framework of the criminal case on the dispersal of protests on March 1,

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5 On the first steps of the post-revolution government and the conundrum it faced regarding foreign policy see Edwards (2018) and Zolyan (2018).

2008. The former head of state was arrested for two months. A former Minister of Defence, Mikayel Harutyunyan, was also charged in this case and was put on the "wanted" list<sup>6</sup>. In addition, a charge of overthrowing the constitutional order was brought against the acting Secretary General of the CSTO, Yuri Khachaturov, who had been serving in the Armenian Armed Forces in 2008. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that in this matter, "The events in Armenia run counter to the statements of the new leadership of the country about the refusal to persecute political predecessors" (Ria novosti, 2018). By this, Moscow accused the democratic authorities of Armenia of a policy inherent to authoritarian authorities – the persecution of people for political reasons. The Kremlin was very unhappy with the fact that people representing the pro-Russian military-political elite, people who were friends of Putin and people from his circle, would be tried.

The rhetoric of the Kremlin propagandists has also changed. For example, Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Russian state-controlled broadcaster RT, as well

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6 It is interesting to note that Mikayel Harutyunyan also held Russian citizenship and was residing in Russia at the time. Please see OC Media (2018); News.am (2018).

as the state-owned media group Rossiya Segodnya, initially spoke neutrally about the change of power in Armenia and stated that she did not see any prerequisites for “Armenia to turn in the other direction and for anti-Russian sentiments to prevail in it”. Soon, however, especially after Lavrov’s statements, she took a sharply critical position regarding what was happening in Armenia and of its authorities.

The Kremlin began to view Armenia as a territory that was gradually slipping out of its control. The Kremlin’s rhetoric gradually acquired the form and content seen today, the study of which allows us to fully reveal the essence of the Kremlin’s policy towards Armenia. This rhetoric incorporates colonial and neocolonial elements, as well as elements that may be inherent in the colonial and neocolonial policies of exclusively authoritarian countries. We found in this rhetoric theses that are inherent in entities pursuing a policy of domination over another, formally sovereign, state. Such components are inherent in both colonial and neocolonial rhetoric. This is especially interesting in today’s context when official Moscow positions itself as an international leader in the fight against neocolonialism. As Russian

President Putin stated, “We are now fighting for the freedom of not only Russia, but the entire world.” Referring to these words, the Director of the Department of Foreign Policy Planning of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alexey Drobinin, writes: “along with the special military operation, our country’s contribution to the struggle for justice is the debunking and overthrow of neocolonialism.” (Drobinin, 2024)

In recent years Armenia has made some steps aimed at reducing Russian influence. However, two recent events show to what extent Russian domination remains a powerful force which Armenia has to deal with. In the first case, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs interfered in Armenia’s internal affairs in order to change the wording of a history textbook which did not align with the Russian version of Armenia’s history. In 2024, a new school history textbook described the events that led to the incorporation of Armenia into the Russian Empire as an “annexation”. This led to a diplomatic scandal, as the Russian MFA demanded changes to the textbook’s wording. It is a testimony of the degree to which Russia’s domination is still a factor in Armenian politics that the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science quickly retracted

its position and announced that the wording of the textbook would be changed (Khulian, 2024).

Another case is much more serious, it concerns allegations of a failed coup d'état against Armenia's democratically elected government, sponsored by Russian special services. In September 2024, Armenia's Investigative Committee announced that an attempted conspiracy to overthrow the government was uncovered. According to Armenian prosecutors, Moscow paid and trained a ring of insurgents in a bid to overthrow Armenia's government during 2024 but local security forces disrupted this alleged plot. The conspiracy was connected to the policies of the Armenian government, which are perceived as a pivot to the West, in an attempt to reduce Russia's influence (Gavin, 2024).

Influential Armenian intellectuals who we interviewed for this study noted that Russia's policy towards Armenia completely falls under the definition of neocolonialism. "When a country is sovereign, so to speak, according to its papers, there is another country, probably its former imperial master, which tries to project its influence here. Not by direct conquest, but in various ways, with economic ties, imposing one's

viewpoints, imposing a certain path of development, of culture, etc. Of course, formally the weaker country remains independent, but is it really independent? And that fully describes the relations between Russia and Armenia. For example, scientific connections. You are a small country, you cannot develop your science on your own, but when Russia is your main reference point, you become dependent" (Y.A., Personal Communication, July 4, 2024).

Armenian assessment of the role of Russia in the history of Armenia has changed over time. Before the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, positive assessments of the role of Russia prevailed. The approach of the Armenian political elites toward the Soviet past can be characterized as "Mnemonic ambiguity" (Zolyan, 2023). Soviet dominance was not seen as occupation and Soviet Armenia was seen as a stage in the development of Armenian statehood (referred to as a "second republic"), but certain aspects of Soviet policies were criticized (e.g., the pro-Azerbaijani approach to the Karabakh question in the early 1920s, the Stalinist repression, etc.). After the revolution of 2018, critical approaches to Russia's role in Armenian history started to be more widespread, even though, for

example, only a few referred to the so-called “Sovietization” of Armenia as occupation<sup>7</sup>. However, an increasing number of people now talk about the fact that even during the existence of the USSR, Yerevan was colonially dependent on Moscow. Many note that during the Soviet period, the relations between Armenia and Russia were characterized as relations between “a younger and an older brother”, which implies that these relations were not equal, and Russia dominated Armenia. “For example, the history of the USSR was taught in schools, more than Armenian history, and under this name, it was actually the history of Russia” (A.T., Personal Communication, July 2, 2024).

According to some Armenian intellectuals the predominance of the Russian language in Armenia by itself has had a detrimental effect on our identity. “Because of the Russian language, we have become a copy of a copy. The presence of the Russian language deprived us of the opportunity to be...” (D.I., Personal Communication, July 1, 2024). According to one of our interlocutors, who has been studying the problem of colonialism in the Armenian context, Armenia has been colonized

by Russia, but we have not fully realized this fact and have not learned to speak with the colonizer: “Exoticization and orientalisation of Armenia has taken place, which is one of the main signs of colonization. Armenians did not choose this path” (D.I., Personal Communication, July 1, 2024). Some Armenian intellectuals believe that Russia’s policy towards Armenia includes both neo-colonial and purely colonial elements. As one of our interlocutors said. “Russia talks about “its sphere of influence”, this is classic colonialism” (D.I., Personal Communication, July 1, 2024). Some are of the opinion that the policy of Russia is exclusively colonial. “Russia is an aggressive state that doesn’t like soft power, it doesn’t even like capitalist exploitation, Russia is an empire that takes as much as it can, even if it doesn’t need it.” (A.I., Personal Communication, July 8, 2024). In Armenia, there is a growing belief among Armenian intellectual circles in the need to fight against Russian propaganda aimed at undermining Armenia’s sovereignty, though some still believe that Putin has a stable audience. “A part of Armenian society is part of the internal audience of the Russian Federation, either they are citizens of the Russian Federation, or they live there for part of the year. Putin wants to

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<sup>7</sup> See Vardanyan (2018).



convince that audience that the Soviet Union has not gone anywhere. As time passes, the Soviet Union returns, the Russian Empire returns” (A.I., Personal Communication, July 8, 2024).

## 4. The Main Components of the Kremlin's rhetoric towards Armenia

### 4.1 Historical right to influence and control

One of the elements of neocolonial rhetoric is the hidden or explicit message that the former imperial state has a historical right to influence or control certain territories. In the texts of the Kremlin representatives, it was very often noted that historically the interests of the Armenian and Russian peoples had coincided, that these peoples are “fraternal”, and in general, a reference to “a common history” is often made. These theses were presented in connection with an idea that Russia, unlike other states, has brought and continues to bring benefits to Armenia, moreover, without Russia, Armenia could not exist. The thesis that Russia has created Armenia, for which Armenia should be grateful, is also often promoted. Let us analyse a number of such texts which have been produced since the velvet revolution in 2018 and show that they contain the message about the historical right to exert influence (to say the least) on Armenia.

In January 2024, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Russia to Armenia, S.P. Kopyrkin, in an interview with the RIA Novosti

agency stated: “Relations between Russia and Armenia continue to remain those of an alliance. Our strategic interests also objectively converge in their main parameters, which has been proven by both ancient and modern history. You know, we have many historical ties. It is unnecessary to talk about what has connected our peoples for many centuries of history. Therefore, I think it is absolutely right that the Russian side is clearly setting out that our relations, despite all the problems, some misunderstandings, and attempts by external players to create cracks between our relations [sic.] in their opportunistic, geopolitical interests, they [i.e. the relations] retain and should retain an allied, strategic character. I mean that it is not by Russia's will that they are trying to introduce here the geopolitical confrontation that we have in the world. I repeat, this is not the desire, the initiative, nor the will of Russia. But this is happening, and as a result we see the activation of systemic attempts using fairly advanced technologies to influence people's minds in order to solve, right now, opportunistic, geopolitical problems that have absolutely nothing in common with the interests of the Armenian and Rus-

sian peoples, nor with the interests of the countries and peoples of the region, and, ultimately, nothing in common with the interests of peace and stability throughout the world". (Ria Novosti, 2024).

The ambassador claims that, historically and objectively, the strategic interests of Armenia and Russia coincide. The ambassador's words imply that he knows what is in the interests of the people of Armenia and what is not, and if it turns out that the people have a different position regarding their own interests, then this means that some dark foreign forces, with the help of certain technologies (it is not clear which ones), have corrupted people, depriving them of the opportunity to independently determine their interests. In addition, the passage implies that Russia, unlike other external actors, has a certain exclusive position in Armenia. The ambassador's thinking implies that Russia is not merely one of the many foreign countries that can have a certain relationship with Armenia as an independent country, but that it is an exclusive partner, and that this exclusive, special relationship is based on history, "both ancient and modern". Only at first glance does it seem that the ambassador is talking about the coincidence of interests of the two

countries, about allied relations, and that there is no direct assertion that historically Russia has rights to Armenia. But in fact, what is said is a classic neocolonial discourse about the fact that a state located on the territory of what was once part of an empire cannot have at least an independent foreign policy and must subordinate its interests to the interests of the former imperial ruler.

Here is another example from another statement by the Russian ambassador to Armenia in 2024: "At the same time, of course, we cannot remain indifferent to what is happening in the South Caucasus. Historically, Russia is one of the Caucasian states and, moreover, the only country in the region and in the world that maintains allied relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia. We are bound to the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan by centuries-old ties of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance. This is a priceless asset. We value it. We proceed from the fact that the fate of the South Caucasus should be determined by those for whom it is a common home. No one from the outside will open the way to sustainable peace and stability in Transcaucasia. Relying on "miraculous" Western aid is illusory and dangerous. The examples of Serbian Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, the derailed

Middle East settlement (which was effectively monopolized by the United States), and Ukraine clearly show what the interference of well-known “democratizers” and “reconciliators” is fraught with. The scheme is simple: first they will get in somewhere under beautiful slogans, destroy everything, and as soon as things start to get “hot”, they will run away, leaving behind a scorched field. And, as a rule, there is no one left to bear responsibility. Washington has long made no secret of the fact that it views the South Caucasus as a foothold for opening a “second front” against Russia. All this fundamentally contradicts the true interests of the peoples of the region (Ria Novosti, 2024).”

The ambassador claims that something bad is happening in the South Caucasus, he does not directly say what exactly is bad, but hints that the West is turning Armenia against Russia. The ambassador does not provide any specifics or evidence to support his words. But it is clear that the very fact that other international actors are somehow active in the South Caucasus is viewed as a negative phenomenon, implying that only Russia can have a legitimate right to be a political actor in the region. In other words, for reasons which to the ambassador seem

self-evident, Russia has a legitimate right to perform certain political actions in the region, while other international players, especially from the West, don't have this right. If they do anything, this is “interference”, which, by default, is negative. On the contrary, it is obvious, according to the ambassador, that Russia has a legitimate right to participate in the processes taking place in the region (though he does not specify here what this participation entails). What gives Russia legitimate rights to act in the South Caucasus, a right which other actors, particularly from the West, in his opinion, don't have? Apparently, the reason given for the impossibility of Russia's “indifference” to the South Caucasus is that “Historically, Russia is one of the Caucasian states.” But the “processes” that the ambassador is talking about are not happening in Russia, and the South Caucasus is not in Russia. And what does history have to do with it? Moreover, the ambassador hints that it is only Russia that understands what is in the interests of the peoples and what is not. Based on this logic, it turns out that Russia can interfere in the internal affairs of the South Caucasian states in order to direct them along the right path, along the path that Russia considers correct.

The following examples from the statements (made in 2023) of one of the Kremlin's propagandists, Margarita Simonyan, the head of state-owned Russia Today (RT) media holding, contain more direct messages about Russia's historical right to Armenia and that only thanks to Russia does Armenia exist: "There is no doubt that the Russian military base will soon be asked to leave. And who cares that our military base is the only thing that ensures not just security, but the very fact of Armenia's existence, surrounded by states that have been trying to swallow it for centuries." "...No one has ever helped Armenia except Russia. And no one will ever help. Not knowing this means not wanting to know. Not wanting to know is voluntary idiocy. And voluntary idiocy, as a rule, is cruelly punished by history (Simonyan, 2023)." "...So why didn't you want to live with us? What was so bad about it? For most of you, your statehood emerged thanks to us, culture as such emerged thanks to us. Who oppressed you? Who touched you? (Simonyan, 2023) " ... "I hope the Armenians will not follow the example of the Ukrainians, who are uprooting monuments to Catherine the Great, who founded Odessa. And they will remember what Armenia became thanks to being part of Russia, and what it would have been, or rather,

would not have been long ago, if this had not happened. Both physically and culturally (Simonyan, 2022)." "...Any Armenian who dares to criticize Russia now should go and cut out his dirty tongue" "...In fact, after everything you've done, Russia has every moral right to spit on you and grind you down. But it won't do that. I'm sure. It will help this time too. Because that's what Russia is. Magnanimous and noble, my beloved Motherland (Simonyan, 2020)."

Here we encounter a narrative according to which Russia has been Armenia's saviour, while its neighbours have always wanted its destruction. As usual, propaganda is not based on complete fabrication, but includes some facts, which are then manipulated to create a narrative that suits the propagandist. Armenia's history of relations with Russia is quite mixed, and it included periods when many Armenians saw Russian domination as beneficial, or at least, as the lesser evil, compared to other empires that sought to dominate the country. It is hard to deny that during certain periods of time a Russian presence was quite beneficial for Armenians, especially if we compare Russia's treatment of Armenia with the state of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. When Russia conquered Eastern Armenia

from Iran it was beneficial for many Armenians, who, as Christians, had more opportunities in the Christian Orthodox Russian Empire than in the Muslim Iranian or Ottoman Empires. These feelings were captured by the Armenian writer Khachatur Abovyan, who described the misery of Armenians under Persian and Turkish rule prior to the Russian conquest<sup>8</sup>. The perception of Russia as a beneficial force for Armenians, or, at least, as a lesser evil, became even more entrenched after the large-scale massacres of Armenians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Türkiye in 1915. Also, the Soviet era was a period of positive demographic and social change in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, which was combined with the development of Armenian national identity and national culture.

However, this is only a part of the picture. Armenia's history of relations with the Russian Empire and its Soviet successors is full of episodes of oppression and persecution. These include the persecution of Armenian intellectuals in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempts to hijack the property of the Armenian Church and to close Armenian

schools during that same period, mass killings and arrests during forced "Sovietization", violent collectivization, mass repressions and deportations under Stalinism, to mention just some of the most dreadful episodes. And, even looking besides these episodes, the very inclusion of Armenia into the Russian Empire, and later in the Soviet Union, was not an act of "voluntary accession" ("dobrovolnoye prisoyedineniye"), but of imperial conquest, even though at the time it might have been considered as beneficial by some Armenians<sup>9</sup>. This version of the past is so important to the Russian government, that, as mentioned above, Russia even interfered in the internal affairs of Armenia in 2024 in order to protect it (Khulian, 2024).

It is also worth paying attention to the style and context of the above statements. The extreme emotionality and moralizing nature of the texts immediately catches the eye. Their author, Margarita Simonyan, head of RT and one of the most prominent Kremlin propagandists, expresses her exceptional dissatisfaction with the policy pursued by the Armenian leadership, which, in her opinion,

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8 On Khachatur Abovyan and his ideas see Panossian (2006, pp. 143-144).

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9 On the complicated experience of Armenia within the Russian Empire and Soviet Union see Panossian (2006), Suny (1993) and Zolyan (2023).

has become pro-Western and clearly anti-Russian. This propagandist regards the actions of the government in Yerevan to strengthen relations with the West as betrayal. The emotionality of her statements may also be dictated by the fact that Yerevan has repeatedly criticized Russia's actions towards Armenia, which, according to Simonyan, owes its existence exclusively to Russia. In addition to the emotionality and moralizing in the above texts, it is impossible not to notice the language of threats ("I hope the Armenians will not follow the example of the Ukrainians", "cruelly punished by history") and insults ("voluntary idiocy", "dirty tongue", "spit on you and grind you"). Another detail worth noting is that Ms Simonyan herself is ethnic Armenian, though she was born not in Armenia proper, but in the North Caucasus to a family of ethnic Armenians whose ancestors came to the region as refugees from the 1915 genocide. Ms. Simonyan herself often references her ethnic background to legitimize her speaking out on Armenian issues.

Of course, Ms. Simonyan is by far not the only Kremlin speaker who expresses such ideas in a similar fashion. In general, the thesis that Armenia has statehood thanks to Russia is found in statements by

many other Kremlin speakers<sup>10</sup>. There are also frequent statements that Russia has always helped Armenia, and that the Armenian and Russian peoples are fraternal. For example, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated: "Throughout history, we have repeatedly lent a shoulder to the fraternal Armenian people, and we intend to do so in the future" (Tass.ru, 2024).

#### 4.2 Russia as "the peacemaker"

One of the characteristics of discourses of imperialism and colonialism is the claim that the empire provides peace to the peoples of its colonies. Bringing peace is often among the main justifications of colonial rule. The discourse of Russian colonialism (and neo-colonialism) in Armenia is not an exception. The claim that Russian presence in Armenia provides peace and security to Armenia and the region is one of the key elements of the Russian official and semi-official rhetoric. Russia positions itself as a peacekeeper and justifies its military presence in Armenia by the claim that, thanks to Russia, Armenia enjoys security and stability. Let us examine several such examples from statements by officials and propagandists.

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<sup>10</sup> See for example 1tv.ru (2024)

"In the fall of 2020, the efforts of the Russian Federation and personally by President V.V. Putin prevented Armenia's complete defeat (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023)." "...Today, our military is a key element in ensuring peace in this region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024)." "...Russian soldiers and officers continue to effectively ensure peace and security not only in Armenia [...] but also stability in the entire South Caucasus. We consider any discussions about our military presence in the republic to be harmful and inappropriate". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023)." "...We are convinced that, unlike the pseudo-observers of the European Union missions, which deal with issues far removed from their stated goals, the CSTO is capable of playing a stabilizing role in the South Caucasus". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024)." "...The Armenian leadership must change the pro-Western course [...] and realize that the sole real defender of Armenia can only be Russia, not the EU and NATO (Boikov&Leonova, 2024)".

It is striking that almost all of the above examples contain the thesis that there is no alternative to Russia as a force ensuring peace and security in Armenia. It should be noted that most of these statements were made as a response to certain actions and statements by Yerevan to strengthen and deepen relations with Western structures and countries, as well as against the backdrop of Yerevan's harsh criticism of Moscow over its anti-Armenian actions. The texts of the Kremlin speakers convey dissatisfaction with Yerevan's policies. The tone of the Kremlin speakers' statements is openly didactic, often irritated, and to some extent threatening. It should also be noted that positioning itself as a peacemaker occurs against the backdrop of a protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By the way, though officially an ally of Armenia, Russia has supplied and continues to supply weapons to Azerbaijan, and over the past few years has never criticized Azerbaijan's actions, even when the latter took military action on the territory of Armenia. It should also be noted that Russia is simultaneously hinting that, in the event of a change of its pro-Western course, Armenia can allegedly count on patronage. Naturally, such an approach con-



tradicts the declared “peacekeeping policy.”<sup>11</sup>

### 4.3 Economic dependence

In the policy of domination over countries, economic leverage play a major role. Economic dependence is an effective tool for exerting political pressure. Threats to raise prices for supplied resources, to stop supplying something important or to revise profitable contracts, etc., can always be used in the policy of domination over countries. At the same time, on the level of discourse, the dominating power claims to be bringing prosperity and development to the country or region that it dominates. This claim is one of the characteristic elements of colonialism and neo-colonialism in many cases, and the case of Russian domination in Armenia is not an exception.

Kremlin speakers drew attention to the fact that Armenia’s economy is closely linked to Russia’s, and that economic growth in Armenia is largely due to this factor. The idea was put forward that there is no alternative to close economic rela-

tions with Russia. Armenia was criticized for deepening its economic relations with the West, among other things. Let us give several examples:

“...the largest Armenian diaspora is in the Russian Federation, large amounts of money are transferred from Russia, trade is primarily conducted with our country – all this does not quite fit with integration into the EU (Khamova, 2024)”. “...Over time, Yerevan will also be required to leave the EAEU, where the republic is one of the main beneficiaries ... (Vorobyev, 2024).” “Gazprom Armenia supplies natural gas for \$177 per thousand cubic meters. In the West they pay 2-3 times more. And if they want to heat Armenia with their gas, I don’t know how it will be. If they, as the Americans want, close the nuclear power plant and replace it with their small modular reactors... The South Caucasus Railway has had preferential rates for passenger transportation, infrastructure investments, and much more all these years. The Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Plant is the main contributor to the Republic’s budget. Therefore, those who are trying to create a “picture” of the exploitation of “little Armenia” by the Russian Federation and the EAEU should think about this (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,

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11 On the Russia-Armenia relations following the 2020 war, particularly Russia’s reluctance to aid Armenia in the confrontation with Azerbaijan and Armenia’s reaction to this policy, see Zolyan (2023), Antonyan (2024) and de Waal (2024).

2024).” “...the rapid growth of the Armenian economy in recent years – by 12.6% in 2022 – and the increase in the well-being of its population are largely due to the close trade and economic cooperation with Russia... (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023).”

It should be noted that most of the statements were made against the background or within the framework of the discourse that Armenia is moving towards the West. That is, the Kremlin speakers are threatening Armenia, frightening it by saying that it will have problems and lose a lot if it deepens its relations with Western countries. Here are a few words and phrases from the above texts that confirm this thesis: “I would like to remind you”, “we need to think about this”, “I hope that Armenians understand”, “Armenia will lose the opportunity”.

#### **4.4 Anti-Western rhetoric and Geopolitical Exclusivism**

One of the components of the rhetoric of dominance over countries is criticism of geopolitical competitors, in other words, the policy of discrediting countries that are considered competitors in the matter of establishing influence. Of course, criticism of the West is quite common in the global South and in the

West itself. However, the specificity of the Kremlin’s rhetoric is that anti-Western attitudes are combined with what can be called geopolitical exclusivism, i.e., the idea that only Russia has the right to exert influence in the region and over Armenia. In other words, Kremlin’s officials do not see a problem in Russia’s influence in Armenia, on the contrary, they consider it positive and necessary for Russia to continue to exert influence in post-Soviet space. They only see a problem when other players, particularly the West, become active in the region. Moreover, this kind of thinking completely excludes the subjectivity of Armenia and/or of the Armenian people itself. In this ideological framework, post-Soviet countries like Armenia do not have the right to choose which international partners they align with, they can and should be aligned with Russia and attempts to choose another geopolitical vector are unacceptable.

The Kremlin or pro-Kremlin discourse on Armenia included extremely emotional criticism of the West with the aim of discrediting Western institutions, values, and specific countries. Russia was positioned as the only entity capable of ensuring stability in Armenia. The West was presented as an en-

tity sowing chaos in the region and wanting to involve Armenia in the geopolitical confrontation between the West and Russia, an entity wanting to turn Armenia into an instrument for squeezing Russia out of the region. Here are several examples:

“Pashinyan is being asked to turn Armenia into an outpost of Western influence in Transcaucasia and take openly Russophobic positions (Karpovich, 2024).” “...The Armenian leadership must change the pro-Western course [...] the only real defender of Armenia can only be Russia, not the EU and NATO (Boikov & Leonova, 2024).” “...Focusing on the EU without Tehran, Moscow and Ankara will be able to turn the region not into a crossroads of the world, but into a platform for geopolitical competition. Consequently, in the struggle for European prospects, Yerevan risks leaving one bank without ever landing on the other (Markedonov, 2024).” “...Do we have mechanisms to clearly and fundamentally tell America and the European Union that Russia will not tolerate Western interference in the internal affairs of Georgia and Armenia? (1tv.ru, 2024)”

As can be seen from the examples given, the Kremlin speakers, in particular, promoted narratives that the

head of the Armenian government is a puppet in the hands of the West: “Pashinyan is being asked to turn Armenia into an outpost of Western influence” and will be abandoned by them: “US does not care about the Armenians.” There are also direct indications that Armenia must change its policy: “The Armenian leadership must change the pro-Western course.” There are also warnings addressed to the Armenian leadership: “Yerevan risks leaving one bank and not reaching the other.”

#### 4.5 Accusations of ingratitude

Another element of the colonial discourse is the accusation of the people on the periphery of ingratitude, of an inability or unwillingness to appreciate “the gifts” that the colonial power has brought (e.g., peace, security, economic and cultural development, etc.). The Kremlin’s domination rhetoric is operating with narratives that Armenians have “forgotten” or “do not appreciate” the aid and support that Russia has provided to Armenia. It can be assumed that these narratives are used to exert moral pressure and to claim “betrayal” by an ally and as a justification for Russia’s “retaliatory” actions. This kind of narrative was one of the prevailing ones in the Kremlin’s dominance rhetoric. Let us give examples:

“It may turn out that the attempts of Pashinyan and his team to follow the Ukrainian-Moldovan path, destroying the foundation of dialogue with Russia, will bring even more serious consequences to Armenia. Having sacrificed fraternal ties for the sake of a Euro-Atlantic pat on the back, Pashinyan may ultimately leave his fellow citizens who trusted him in vassalage to forces that do not care about the interests of the Armenian people, but exclusively about using weak and spineless regimes as part of a hybrid war against our country (Karpovich, 2024).” “In response to the many years of goodness and protection that you have received from Russia, you have not recognized Crimea. You have flooded the country with anti-Russian NGOs ...” (Simonyan, 2020).

“So Pashinyan you can keep French-kissing the French, who betrayed Karabakh, but give up everything, give up the lands you got thanks to Lenin, give up Ararat... (Hakobyan, 2023)” “...In 2018, Pashinyan came to power with a very clear goal – to cut Armenia off from Russia and move to the West (Izvestia, 2024). Unfortunately, under the influence of Western narratives [...] unfounded criticism of Russia, the CSTO, and the existing security system is increasingly heard from

Yerevan. This is, at the very least, unconstructive and short-sighted (Vorobyev, 2024).” “...Yerevan is creating additional difficulties for Russia in the South Caucasus, which cannot but irritate Moscow. Instead of becoming a corridor for bypassing anti-Russian sanctions and extracting financial benefits from this, Yerevan, by inviting the West, is inclined to collect the discontent of all regional players at once: Russia, Iran and Türkiye, the expert emphasizes” (Khamova, 2024). “...hopes that Yerevan will not choose the path of the Kyiv regime in its relations with Moscow...” (Izvestia, 2024). “...It is an obvious attempt to shirk responsibility for failures in domestic and foreign policy, shifting the blame to Moscow. The latest statements by N.V. Pashinyan [...] inspired by the West and spurred on by official Yerevan, are not episodic, but have a systemic character” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). “...trying to destroy the multifaceted and centuries-old ties between Armenia and Russia and making the country a hostage to the West’s geopolitical games...” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). “Today, our military is a key element in ensuring peace in this region. Recently, Yerevan has been developing cooperation with NATO [...] this cannot

but cause concern for us. We have repeatedly drawn the attention of our Armenian colleagues [...] I hope that Yerevan is aware ...” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024). “...there was a consensus in Armenian society on the EU mission. It was promised for two months, but now it is indefinite. The Canadians and other NATO members already want to go there too. This is no longer an EU mission. This will be a NATO mission” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023).

“Apparently, the Armenian authorities have forgotten that the country’s prosperity was largely based on the bonuses received from cooperation with Russia ... These are real figures and facts, unlike many empty statements and promises made by the West...” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024). “...Put your arguments on the table, except for hysteria and now, insults.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024) “...This step cannot but look like a concession to those who are increasingly vocal in favour of breaking the traditional, mutually beneficial and mutually respectful allied relations between Russia and Armenia.” (The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Armenia, 2023)

The above examples provide the most emotional narratives. Kremlin orators, without mincing words: “put your arguments on the table except for hysteria and now, insults” accused the Armenian authorities of betraying the interests of their own people and of acting against the Kremlin: “came to power with a very clear goal – to cut Armenia off from Russia and move to the West.”

They stated that the Armenian authorities had fallen under the influence of the West “due to the influence of Western narratives”, were “inspired by the West” and were being used by the West against Russia. On the other hand, the idea was promoted that Armenia itself was doing everything possible to get the West to support it (“Yerevan, inviting the West”). And here we find the presence of the language of threats: “Armenia has long been repeating the path of Ukraine” or “It may happen that the attempts of Pashinyan and his team to follow the Ukrainian-Moldovan path... will bring even more serious consequences to Armenia.” This is a hint that Russia will pursue the same aggressive and forceful policy towards Armenia if it does not abandon the policy of European integration. Or “apparently, the Armenian authorities have forgotten...” or “But give up everything,

give up the lands that you received thanks to Lenin, give up Ararat..." or "In response to the many years of goodness and protection that you received from Russia, you did not recognize Crimea." This rhetoric of the Kremlin speaks for itself.

One could argue that it is natural that Kremlin officials show an extremely negative attitude to what they perceive as Armenia's attempts to establish close relations with the West, due to the fact that Russia is involved in a conflict with the West. However, there is more to it. It is much more than the Kremlin's dissatisfaction with the fact that Armenia is drifting to its geopolitical competitor. The tone and content of these statements also shows that Kremlin officials' thinking about Armenia is based on the idea that the country should not and cannot pursue an independent foreign policy, at least whenever that policy contradicts Russian interests. This becomes especially clear when we compare the Kremlin's reaction to Armenia's quite timid steps toward rapprochement with the West, with the policy Russia itself pursues in regard to Türkiye and Azerbaijan, countries that have been in open conflict with Armenia for the last decades. Kremlin officials do not conceal the fact that they consid-

er Azerbaijan a close ally, citing the Declaration on Allied Cooperation of 2022 and other similar documents. Russian-Azerbaijani cooperation has included political, military, economic and other aspects, including massive arms supplies to Azerbaijan in the run-up to the Karabakh war of 2020. Russia-Türkiye cooperation is also quite significant, including energy sector (Russian nuclear agency is building a nuclear reactor in Türkiye), the military sector (Russia's sales of S-400 anti-aircraft systems to Türkiye) and other fields. Apparently, in spite of the fact that Armenia is supposed to be a Russian ally, this fact does not stop Russia in any way from close cooperation with these countries. With Azerbaijan, Russia has even formed a strategic alliance. Moreover, as we have seen, some Russian officials even boast of the fact that Russia "is the only country in the world and the region that has an alliance both with Armenia and Azerbaijan". Yet, much more moderate attempts by Armenia to diversify its relations, including relations with countries that Russia considers unfriendly, results in harsh reactions, insults, and threats. As founders of another empire used to say "quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi"<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Latin "what is permitted for Jupiter is not permitted for a bull".

## 5. Conclusion

As we can see, the rhetoric of Moscow toward Armenia shows elements of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It reflects an ideology of domination, articulated so openly that it would have received compliments from ardent representatives of 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism. While in message of the Kremlin to the countries of the global South, as well as to certain parts of the public in the Western countries, it is fighting colonialism, imperialism, the West's global domination, etc., the Armenian case shows that Kremlin's message to post-Soviet countries is quite different. It is about Russia's historically exclusive position in this region, about the supposedly deep historical links that justify Russia's domination in this region. And in case of refusal to accept Russia's dominance, the Kremlin's message includes threats, thinly veiled or completely open. What we see here is a rejection of the idea that the post-Soviet countries can be their own subjects and decide their destiny, rather than being Russia's minor partners in whatever course Russia has decided is best for itself and its former colonies.

This rhetoric is being employed in a context, in which post-Soviet Armenia finds itself under the political, military, economic and cultural influence of Russia. These narratives are an important factor that contribute to Russia's (neo) colonial policies towards in Armenia today. As our paper has shown, the discourse includes several key elements, which have been analysed in this paper:

- Russia's historical right to influence and control over Armenia
- Russia's claim to be the peacemaker, the only guarantor of peace and security
- Justification of the economic dependence of Armenia on Russia and claim that this dependence is beneficial for Armenia
- Claim that other geopolitical actors (especially the West) do not have the right to any involvement with Armenia, and a claim of Russia's exclusive role (a claim that implies lack of subjectivity of Armenia and Armenians)
- Accusations of "ingratitude" of Armenians when referring to attempts by the Armenian government and public to reduce dependence on Russia.

The analysis of the Russian official and semi-official discourse over Armenia shows that this discourse encompasses all these elements. In their communication with the Armenian government and society, Russian elites are quite honest: They do not even try to conceal their attitude that Armenia is not an independent sovereign country, but a part of the Russian sphere of interest, part of the Russian periphery, Russia's own backyard so to speak. This honesty is especially striking against the background of Kremlin's propaganda efforts directed to the Global South and part of Western public, in which it seeks to paint today's Russia as the leader of the global fight against global imperialism and colonialism. The Kremlin, which has used the idea of "double standards" to the utmost, when it comes to fighting its propaganda war against the West, especially, in the countries of the Global South, is itself manifesting double standards.

In the light of everything said, it becomes obvious that the contemporary leadership of Russia is conducting a (neo) colonial policy towards Armenia, as it does in other post-Soviet countries as well. In order to counter these policies the following suggestions can be made:

- For politicians, media, the expert community, and other voices that shape public perceptions, it is important to address the nature of the current policies of Moscow, i.e., to qualify them as colonial and neo-colonial.
- For international organizations, donors, and other stakeholders to assist Armenia's government, media, civil society, and other actors to counter Kremlin's (neo) colonialist policies, including disinformation campaigns and anti-democratic propaganda.
- To encourage research and discussion on the issues of Russian colonialism and neo-colonialism in the post-Soviet space; also research of the post-colonial heritage of the post-Soviet societies themselves, in Armenia as well as in other post-Soviet countries.
- To facilitate the creation of networks of scholars, journalists, activists, and social media influencers in post-Soviet countries, who are interested in the issues of (neo)colonialism, post-colonialism and decolonization, and who are interested in countering Moscow's propaganda and disinformation campaigns.
- To facilitate communication between scholars, activists, journalists, and influencers of the post-Soviet countries and the



countries of the Global South (especially the ones affected by Moscow's "anti-colonial" propaganda) to spread information about Moscow's (neo) colonial policies, rhetoric, disinformation, and propaganda with regard to post-Soviet countries.

- To establish similar contacts between scholars, activists and other actors from post-Soviet countries, and representatives of Western academic circles, political forces, and civil society organizations with an interest in issues of decolonization and post-colonialism.

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