

Armenia's Geopolitical Double-Cross Through the Lens of the Arms Trade

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Abstract

The article examines the emerging cooperation in the field of armaments between the Republic of Armenia and France, focusing on the rapid development of military cooperation between the two countries and its specific dimensions. The varying political context of several deals with different types of arms are analysed. It is shown that in some transactions Armenia wins the favour of France, while in other cases there can be reasonable doubts that Armenia fulfils the orders of its ally – the Russian Federation. The analysis reveals unequivocally that Armenia's intentions to purchase a large number of Caesar howitzers from France weakens the possibility of long-range artillery supplies to Ukraine and directly serves Russian interests in the war in Ukraine. The role of the Armenian state and private arms dealers in favour of Russia in the race with Ukraine to search for old Soviet and Russian weapons in 23 countries around the world is examined and analysed. These circumstances are analysed in the context of the fact that Armenia continues to be a military ally of Russia, and an Armenian military contingent is fighting on the Russian side at the front in Ukraine. It has been shown that the trend of limiting Armenia's activity in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) does not reduce the country's closeness with Russia in the military field. The main lesson for the entire European Union from Armenia's policy in the last two years should be the clear assumption that Armenia is playing a double game in which it has not at all abandoned its strategic ally – Russia.

Keywords: Armenia, France, Caesar howitzer, war in Ukraine, Russian Federation, "Bastion" APCs, arms trade

JEL: F50, F51, F52

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Introduction

September 2024 marks one year since the full restoration of Azerbaijan's control over the territory of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. At the end of 2020, Armenia suffered a heavy military defeat and the authorities in Yerevan, together with the Armenian armed forces and paramilitary formations, were forced to permanently withdraw from the seven Azerbaijani administrative regions surrounding the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, which they held under military occupation for more than thirty years.

The military catastrophe of Armenia during the Second Karabakh War, also known as the "44-day war" (and called in Azerbaijan "the Patriotic War of 2020"), brought new political "ordeals" for Nikol Pashinyan's government, as well as for him personally. The political opposition, led by the representatives of the so-called "Karabakh clan" in Armenian politics, staged massive protests. Public expectations were that the defeat in the 44-day war will precipitate Nikol Pashinyan's fall from power, but contrary to such predictions, he has shown an incredible capacity for political survival. Four years later, Nikol Pashinyan continues to be the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia.

Pashinyan's survival, undoubtedly, is due to complex factors: to his exceptional ability to balance between a relatively realistic position on the issue of concluding a peace treaty with Azerbaijan and a deliberate delay of this process; to his sufficient caution in taking decisions even on the smallest steps in the direction of the peace treaty; to the ability to use the fatigue of part of the country's society from the constant confrontation with its neighbours – Azerbaijan, Turkey and even Georgia – as a counterpoint to the actions of extreme nationalists, including the "Karabakh clan"; as well as to his absolute unscrupulousness in suppressing extra-parliamentary and street actions against his rule. However, Nikol Pashinyan's survival is not least due to his skilful manoeuvring in the foreign political sphere. He usually features pro-Western statements and pro-Russian actions and has managed to create the appearance of a relatively pro-Western politician, without in any way harming Russia's interests in Armenia and the South Caucasus, while continuing to be Russia's reliable ally. At the same time, he vigorously sought patrons in France, Canada, and even the United States. Pashinyan is characterized by pro-Western speech and pro-Russian actions.

The paper focuses on some of these extremely interesting manoeuvres of the current Armenian government and personally of its Prime Minister of courting one of the great powers – France, a member state of the Security Council, while simultaneously demonstrating an irreproachable loyalty to Moscow – not in words but in actions. Particular interest in Pashinyan's approach to France is the issue of arms trade.

Arms trade, including its global dimensions, is in the focus of many studies covering the official and shadow arms trade, as well as the purely criminal dimensions of the issue. In this case, however, the Armenian-French cooperation in the field of armaments is a completely new phenomenon, which has not yet been thoroughly analysed in scientific

publications. Hence, the present analysis is mostly based on news feeds, which record the events themselves, and does not go into any deeper analyses of the phenomenon as a case study or in a comparative plan.

Armenia in the focus of France's arms trade

In mid-June 2024 an arms deal between France and Armenia was announced. It was about French Caesar self-propelled howitzers, the first delivery to Armenia being scheduled for 2026. The French Minister of Defense Sébastien Lecornu met with his Armenian counterpart Suren Papikyan during the largest exhibition of the defence industry in Europe – Eurosatory. The announcement of the meeting was made personally by the French minister on his “X” profile.

That deal, however, is profoundly different from France's previous show of solidarity with Armenia, a solidarity that is far from “pro bono”, but has been duly paid for by the Armenian side. The cooperation in the military sphere between Armenia personnel carriers and its “new big sister” – France, started with the purchase of 20 Bastion armored vehicles, which Armenia should have already received, if the electronic publication in *Forces Operations Blog* is to be trusted (Mammadov, 2024).

In a sense, this deal can be seen as a favor from Armenia to France, since Bastion armored (APCs) are not distinguished by any special qualities. They were designed and sold mostly to African countries – former French colonies, and were also used during France's recent operations in North West Africa. Indicatively, an eloquent testimony to the quality of Bastion is Ukraine's refusal to accept them as free aid, despite the heightened tension on the fronts with Russia. The first information about Ukraine's refusal to accept the armored personnel carriers came from a French source. In November 2023 Philippe Chapleau wrote: “The Bastion can carry a squad of eight soldiers, providing protection against small arms fire and mines. These 12.5-ton military vehicles were originally intended for Ukraine, but Kyiv judged them to be too weakly protected against artillery fire and anti-tank missiles” (Chapleau, 2023). In fact, the very title of the article emphasizes the change of the final delivery address: “France supplies Bastion vehicles to Armenia”. First delivery of French armored vehicles to Armenia: Bastion manufactured by Arquus went to Armenia instead of Ukraine. This will be the first delivery, as France can also deliver 50 VAB MK3 armored vehicles”.

The beginning of the deal can be traced back to the visit to Yerevan on October 3, 2024 of Catherine Colonna, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France. After the visit Colonna announced that Paris had agreed to supply arms to Armenia and to conclude additional contracts in the future for different military equipment (Mammadov, 2024). Then, on October 22 and 23, 2023, Armenia's Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan visited Paris, where he met with his French counterpart Sébastien Lecornu. Bilateral cooperation agreements were signed and rapid deliveries of military equipment were launched. At the same meeting, memorandums of understanding were signed for the sale of three Thales Ground Master

200 (GM200) radars and for the supply of the Mistral short-range air defense system. A separate contract provided for Yerevan to purchase night vision binoculars manufactured by the Safran company (Mammadov, 2024). Despite these agreements, the first delivery that took place was that of the Bastion APCs. Since Ukraine refused to receive them even for free, it must have been an accomplishment for the French country to find a buyer who counted real money for them.

The announced purchase of self-propelled Caesar howitzers by the Armenian side, however, is a transaction of a completely different nature. While the purchase of Bastion APCs can be interpreted not so much as an arms deal, but rather as a Armenian purchase of French “favor” to the current government in Armenia, the delivery of Caesar artillery systems manufactured by the French defense industrial company Nexter is in fact the acquisition of a weapon of very high quality.

Caesar is light years away from Bastion and Armenia is not a part of the freedom team

The idea that Armenia should buy exactly Caesar self-propelled howitzers raises reasonable suspicions that it is an issue of buying armaments with the idea that they would thus not fall into other hands, more precisely – they would not be used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. As revealed in this analysis, there are clearly identified cases, when Armenia bought weapons (including from Bulgaria) with the clear idea that they should not be delivered to Ukraine. Armenia is an official ally of Russia in the war in Ukraine, and not because of its problematic participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), but due to much more serious commitments.

An Armenian “volunteer” contingent is fighting on the Russian side in Ukraine. The soldiers are citizens of the Republic of Armenia and Armenians who live in the autonomous republic of Abkhazia, which broke away from Georgia. This fact has been verified by the American Institute for the Study of War, and the assessment is that an Armenian “volunteer” battalion is fighting on the Russian side. In fact, photographs of the sending off ceremony of the Arbat Volunteer Battalion, held at the Armenian Church in Moscow on July 2, 2023, are circulating on the Internet (Hassanov, 2023).

Russia’s actions in Ukraine are officially supported by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. On the eve of sending the Armenian battalion to the front in Ukraine he attended the military parade on May 9, 2023. When Ukraine called this act “immoral and unfriendly”, Pashinyan commented at a meeting of the party leadership of the ruling political force in Armenia that he had taken the right decision, taking into account the vital interests of Armenia. The Prime Minister of Armenia did not fail to remind that Armenia receives natural gas from Russia and that Moscow is a strategic partner of Yerevan. Pashinyan has stated quite openly that his possible refusal to participate in the parade in Moscow would be a “dangerous adventure”. He went so far as to state that if Russia loses the war in Ukraine, “Armenia will face the loss of its independence” (Hassanov, 2023).

Presently, the public is overwhelmed with the threats of the Armenian government that it will pull out of CSTO, but the facts point to completely different things. For example, there was a lot of noise about the withdrawal of the Russian border guards, who were guarding the Zvartnots International Airport, but Armenia's borders with Turkey and even with Armenia's ally – Iran, are still guarded by Russian border guards. Likewise, people are excited about Armenia's future in the CSTO, but no one questions the agreement between Armenia and the Russian Federation on the Gyumri military base.

An additional factor is the role of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, where the “standard bearers” of the anti-Ukraine campaign are Kremlin propagandists of Armenian origin such as Margarita Simonyan, Tigran Keosayan, Roman Babayan and Semyon Baghdasarov. The head of the Union of Armenians in Russia, Ara Abramyan, has always taken an anti-Ukrainian position and has consistently justified and excused the start of the war in Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The Armenian-Russian oligarch Ruben Vardanyan, according to the confessions of the notorious GRU colonel Igor Strelkov (Girkin), was one of the main sponsors of Alexander Borodai, the former leader of the so-called “Donetsk People's Republic”, and today an MP in the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Borodai is a person with huge responsibility for the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and for the instigation of the separatist movement and, consequently, the war in Donbass (Gassanov, 2023). The deployment of the Armenian Arbat volunteer battalion to the front in Ukraine was blessed by the Armenian Church. In the Armenian Church in Moscow, a blessing was given for Armenians to kill Ukrainians. The Armenian Church in Russia has also publicly endorsed and encouraged the aggression against Ukraine.

For whom is the Armenian government shopping?

In this context, Armenia's deal to buy Caesar self-propelled howitzers is reasonably suspected to be an operation to obstruct the supply of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. One cannot be certain of the exact number of howitzers that will be purchased, but some publications quote a number of 109 (Mammadov, 2024). Other sources report the figure of 36 self-propelled howitzers.

An inquiry into the general picture of how many Caesar howitzers are owned by the various countries that have adopted them into service in their armies reveals the following picture. Belgium has ordered 28 units. The Czech Republic has ordered 62 units. Denmark has 19 self-propelled howitzers, all of which it handed over to Ukraine (Powis, 2023). Estonia has ordered 12 howitzers. The French armed forces have 77 Caesar howitzers and have ordered another 139 (EDR On Line, 2024).² Thirty French howitzers have been handed over to Ukraine, with one confirmed loss in combat so far (Samama, 2023). Indonesia has 55 Caesar howitzers (Rahmat, 2022). Lithuania has ordered 18 of them (Lietuvos Kariuomene,

² “Ordering” a certain number of self-propelled howitzers implies that there is a signed purchase contract or memorandum of understanding for their delivery. However, they might not yet been delivered, and most likely (at least in some cases) these armaments are still to be manufactured.

2023). Morocco has 36 Caesar howitzers (Saballa, 2022). Saudi Arabia has purchased and possesses 156 howitzers (Global Defense News, 2024). Thailand has 6 Caesar howitzers (GIAT Industries, 2006).

Ukraine received 19 howitzers from Denmark and 30 from France as a donation. Separately, it has purchased six more howitzers, which have been delivered and delivery is expected of 12 more by the coalition supporting it. There are confirmed losses of one howitzer donated by France (mentioned above) and of another 5 pieces with unknown origin of delivery (Lagneau, 2023).

In conclusion, it is believed that there are currently a total of 348 “Caesar” howitzers in active service, of which 49 are in Ukraine. It can be seen that there is a huge demand for the Caesar self-propelled howitzers, figuratively speaking countries are queuing up for them. The reason is clear – lessons from the fighting in Ukraine have confirmed the exceptional role of long-range artillery systems. The question is who will get them on time?

It can be seen that the supply of even one Caesar howitzer is of significant importance in the actual military and market situation. And here comes the Republic of Armenia, which states that it wants urgently to purchase no less than thirty Caesar self-propelled howitzers. The urgent need for such an acquisition for Armenia is more than dubious. The state leadership of the country, including personally the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, as well as the administration of the Prime Minister, have stated their intention to conclude a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. They are already conducting direct negotiations, including on the issue of the demarcation and delimitation of the border that has already begun.

Even if it fully subscribes to the ancient Roman tenet “If you want peace, prepare for war”, Armenia at present hardly needs to go into such preparation. The country is facing extremely severe social and economic problems and has already ended a war that it lost on the battlefield. At the same time, the so-called tripartite statement of November 9-10, 2020, brought Armenia great benefits – opening of borders, opening of transport infrastructure, inclusion in regional development projects, etc. Then, as now, making peace is a top priority for Azerbaijan, and Armenia can exploit this situation to the utmost. No matter how controversial even hesitant, the actions of Pashinyan and his government are, they are heading in this direction.

Against this background, Armenia’s vigorous arming and purchase of expensive weapons is somewhat perplexing. If, however, considered as actions in the interest of a third party, Armenia’s interest in this weaponry purchase becomes quite reasonable and easily explained. The third party is, of course, Russia.

At a time when every unit of weapon or ammunition is important for the outcome of the war in Ukraine, Russia has a huge interest the arms industries of countries that support Kiev to sell their production to third countries. Any self-propelled howitzer that will not be delivered to Ukraine, but will end up somewhere else, for example in Armenia, is a loss for Kiev and a net gain for Moscow.

The production capacity of the howitzer manufacturer Caesar is limited to a certain number of units per year. If France decides to supply precious artillery systems as a priority to Armenia instead of Ukraine, the benefit to the Russian armed forces is obvious. The motive of the French politicians can be only one – internal political calculations related to the fact that the largest Armenian diaspora (if not in the world, at least in Europe) resides precisely in France.

The number of French citizens of Armenian descent is estimated by various French government institutions to be between 250,000 and 700,000 (Detchev, 2024). From the perspective of domestic politics, everyone would like to get their votes, and the French politicians are making huge efforts in this direction. After all, apart from foreign policy, there is also domestic policy...

In addition, the claim that by purchasing “Caesar” howitzers that could otherwise end up in Ukrainian hands Armenia in fact helps Russia is supported by other recorded cases where the Armenian side has acted similarly.

Precedents of Armenia working against Ukraine in arms markets

In the field of arms deals the authorities in Armenia work with certain loyal players like David Iloyan whether it comes to smuggling (Blacksea Caspia, 2023) or like David Galstyan when it comes to shadow arms trade. In Armenia David Galstyan is a recognized “arms baron” with the nickname of “Patron Davo”. Regardless of his chronically erupting arguments and confrontation with the central government, Galstyan is seen as closely related to Nikol Pashinyan himself. Publications in the South Caucasus, as well as north of the Main Caucasus Ridge, quote on this matter Armenia’s former ambassador to the Vatican Mikael Minasyan (who also happens to be the son-in-law of the former president of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan). According to Minasyan, David Galstyan is authorized to manage the arms business personally by the Armenian Prime Minister (Evdokimova, 2020).

To be sure, Mikael Minasyan has a conflict of interest when he comments on the personality of Prime Minister Pashinyan, who by then had already managed to make enemies in Russia. However, it should not be forgotten that such commentators are not tolerated in Armenia at all, and in order to make similar assessments, you should really have some amount of evidence. In any case, there is no evidence so far that Mikael Minasyan has been held accountable for his words, a fact that should lead us to think of a kind of “tacit consent” on the part of official Yerevan.

It is a separate matter that David Galstyan was seen next to Prime Minister Pashinyan during the ceremonial opening of a factory for the production of Kalashnikov assault rifles, the shareholder of which is “Royalsys Engineering” LLC – a company controlled by Galstyan.

Indeed, more than a year ago, the special services of Armenia and the judicial authorities literally chased David Galstyan for various offenses, but a large part of the audience in Armenia is of the opinion that this is done to “cover up the tracks”, that is, to cover up the connections between Galstyan and Pashinyan, and also with a certain educational

and didactic purpose. Suspicions arose that the “arms baron” began to steal by taking a larger share of the illegal arms trade than he was entitled to (Kerimov, 2022). That is why Pashinyan has decided to remind Galstyan, who is the prime minister of Armenia and who is just a “merchant of death” in the shadows.

In the summer of 2020, on the eve of the “Second Karabakh War”, also known as “the 44-day war”, the Russian electronic newspaper *The Moscow Post* hit Nikol Pashinyan hard by publishing a description of the schemes on which David Galstyan was working with the Prime Minister’s approval. The article was based on the allegations of Mikael Minasyan, who at that time was waging a real information war against Pashinyan with video messages, which of course were addressed much more to the citizens than to the Prime Minister himself (Evdokimova, 2020).

To give full credit to a Russian publication is not very reasonable, but the thing is that the name of David Galstyan pops up in much more serious places. For example, a 2011 report of the UN Security Council claimed that one of Galstyan’s companies – “DG Arms Corporation” illegally bought and also illegally imported ammunition into Libya in violation of international sanctions (UN, 2013).

Both the official authorities in Armenia and in Moscow were dissatisfied with the “merchant of death”. The former because of the abuse of the trust and patronage they had given to Galstyan, the latter because they had “cracked the code” of his extremely profitable deals. These profitable deals were carried out as the resale of Russian military production to third countries, while at the same time significant price discounts were used as a privilege of the Republic of Armenia being an ally of Russia in the CSTO (depending on the type of weapon in question, discounts generally ranged between 15 and 40 percent of the world market price). Of course, discounts were in effect when buying the weapons for the Armenia’ own needs, but this did not bother Galstyan at all. Based on the public data that at that time Russia had granted Armenia loans for the purchase of weapons to the amount of about 300 million dollars, it can be reasonably assumed that Galstyan managed to “draw” from Moscow’s pocket between \$60 and 90 million (Kerimov, 2022).

This is how it came to September 30, 2021, when the National Security Service of Armenia detained the former Minister of Defense of the country, Davit Tonoyan and the notorious arms dealer David Galstyan with the general explanation that the two were involved in the supply of unusable weapons to the Armenian army. Tonoyan and Galstyan were accused of embezzling 2.3 billion drams, or \$4.7 million.

It was explained to the journalists that at the bottom of this case was a deal for the purchase of missiles, and neither the seller, nor the type of missiles, nor the year of the transaction were disclosed. It was only known that the missiles were produced sometime between 1985 and 1991 (Mejlumyan, 2021).

Davit Tonoyan is a person who has spent his entire career (from late 1990s to present) in the Armed Forces and in the Ministry of Defense of Armenia. According to observers, he enjoyed “untypically high” trust from the prime minister, with his tenure lasting more than two years – a rare occurrence for Nikol Pashinyan’s ever-changing cabinet. Tonoyan

resigned in November 2020, under enormous public pressure, because of the defeat suffered in the Second Karabakh War with Azerbaijan.

Observers immediately connected the arrests of Tonoyan and Galstyan with a case that attracted attention five days earlier. On September 25, 2021 the same amount of embezzled public funds was cited and another senior officer, the head of the aviation department in the Armed Forces of Armenia, was then arrested. According to Armenia's National Security Service, the said official knew in 2011 that the missiles delivered were defective and unusable, but purchased them anyway. The Armenian special services did not disclose the name of the officer. However, informed people in Yerevan immediately recalled that in the period 2009-2019, this position was held by Major General Avetik Muradyan. "Some of the missiles were found to be unfireable soon after delivery and were withdrawn from the arsenal. The rest were not used at all, including during the 44-day war that began on September 27, 2020", read the communique of the Armenian National Security Service (Mejlumyan, 2021). The deputy chief of the General Staff of Armenia's Armed Forces was also interrogated in the case.

At that time, David Galstyan was already accused in another, similar case. Galstyan's company "Mosston Engineering", an offshore company registered in the Seychelles, was accused of misappropriating one million US dollars. The deal was supposed to be about supplying a specific type of artillery projectiles produced between 1983 and 1986. However, Galstyan's company purchased Czechoslovak projectiles produced in 1977, which, according to the prosecution, were "significantly defective". With those arrests, the pragmatic and extremely opportunistic Prime Minister Pashinyan gave temporary satisfaction to both his nervous Russian partners and the ever-boiling Armenian society. David Galstyan was seemingly taught a lesson of good behavior, though a short-lasting one.

In March 2022, the court in Yerevan released Galstyan on bail of 50 million drams – a large amount for the average Armenian and a "zero problem" for an arms dealer. Notably, Galstyan's release was largely linked to the escalation of the war in Ukraine and the opening of large arms trade opportunities. Namely, both Ukraine and NATO countries began looking for old Soviet weapons all over the world. For equally understandable reasons, the Russians began doing everything possible to prevent the purchase of such weapons by the Ukrainian side.

All the available resources of the two belligerent countries were thrown into this race, with the Republic of Armenia siding with Russia. In June 2022, Brett Forrest of *The Wall Street Journal* devoted a special journalistic investigation to the matter. He revealed that, in addition to the supply of NATO-standard weapons, it has become no less important for the Ukrainians to get Soviet-era or Russian-made weapons, with which soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are familiar. At the same time, both Western arms dealers and Ukrainian officials have also expressed concern that Russia too often succeeds to outbid in the bidding for these weapons. "If they succeed in removing certain weapons from the market, Ukraine will not be able to buy them", a former official of the US military administration, now working in the private sector, told *The Wall Street Journal*. The expert interviewed by

Brett Forrest was presented as someone who had dealt with Russian military production for decades. But even a person without such experience would follow the clear logic of his reasoning. For the Russians, it is most important that Soviet-Russian-style weapons and ammunition do not fall into the hands of the Ukrainians, who have far fewer military reserves and resources than the Russian Federation. Whether they could use them for their own purposes is a less important question (Forrest, 2022).

During a briefing in Washington in May 2022, British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace stated that the United Kingdom and the United States were investigating the 23 countries that hold stockpiles of Russian weapons and equipment about the possibility of purchasing and transferring them to the Ukrainian military. “Half of our help was answering the question, ‘Where can we find these things?’ Mr. Wallace said. “Sometimes we’ve run into the Russians, who, by the way, are looking in a number of countries, also looking for some of the stocks, because they’re running out fast” (McBride, 2022).

Again according to *The Wall Street Journal* an Ukrainian MP, well acquainted with the work on the search for old Soviet or Russian weapons, shared that Czech and Polish brokers working for Ukraine had negotiated a deal with a Bulgarian supplier for Russian-made armored vehicles and for artillery shells, when a group of Armenian buyers emerged who offered a 50 percent higher price and managed to win the contract for themselves. “We are absolutely aware that the weapons will not go to Armenia, but most likely will go to Russia”, said the deputy from the Verkhovna Rada. “They understand what we’re looking for. And they know where it is” (Forrest, 2022).

The information of *The Wall Street Journal* was picked up and practically confirmed by *The Moscow Times*. There they highlight the importance of each deal for both Ukraine and Russia, referring to competent persons. For the Ukrainian side, President Zelensky’s adviser, Mihail Podolyak, was quoted, who shared on his Twitter profile (today “X”) the following: “I’ll put it bluntly: parity in heavy weapons is necessary to end the war”. According to Podoliak, by mid-June 2022, the Armed Forces needed 1,000 howitzers, 300 rocket launchers (reactive salvo fire systems), 500 tanks, 2,000 armored personnel carriers, and 1,000 drones.

Meanwhile, according to the Ukrainian government and the Oryx blog, which tracks combatant losses of both Russian and Ukrainian sides and open-source information on arms supplies, by the same date Western countries had delivered about 250 howitzers, 50 rocket launchers and 270 tanks. At the same time, the Ukrainians are experiencing a major shortage of artillery shells.

On the Russian side, according to Bloomberg (referring to data obtained from Western intelligence services and the administration of the European Commission) in mid-2022 a hunt for conscripts and a search for weapons and ammunition took place throughout Russia. Old tanks were being de-conserved in warehouses in the Far East. As of mid-June 2022, Russia lost as destroyed, damaged, abandoned and captured 4328 pieces of combat equipment, including 774 tanks, 432 armored personnel carriers, 853 infantry fighting vehicles, 82 rocket launchers, 47 helicopters and others (*The Moscow Times*, 2022).

The mentioned case with the “interception” of the deal for armored vehicles in Bulgaria is not the only achievement of the Armenian arms brokers for the benefit of their Russian allies. Observers are convinced that their activities would be impossible without the logistical help and advice of David Galstyan, who, as mentioned above, was “prematurely” released from custody.

The “Bulgarian deal” had serious repercussions in the Azerbaijani media as well. For them, the degree of tension was further raised by the fact that there is always a doubt that, if not all, then at least part of the purchased weapons can remain in Armenia, and it is clear against whom they would be used. They very quickly remembered the information leaked to the media about significant deals between Bulgarian producers and the Armenian state in 2010 and 2018. At that time, most of the weapons purchased were re-exported to third countries, which caused the sharp reaction of the then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2010 (Kerimov, 2022).

After all, it was precisely the arms sales from Armenia to Iran, from where they ended up in the hands of the Shiite militias in Iraq and were used against the American armed forces, that led to a serious strain in relations between Washington and Yerevan in 2003, from which Russia benefited to the maximum extent (Negroponte, 2008; Negroponte, 2019).

Conclusions and lessons learned

The main lesson from the history of Armenia's activities in the arms market is that open support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), including grant aid, is much safer given the ubiquitous bidding between arms brokers working for Ukraine and Russia. When it comes to commercial and private interests, the possibility that the Russian offer (even through an Armenian or other intermediary) will prevail is quite realistic. Unlike private trade, direct state aid is not subject to negotiation and bidding.

The main lesson for the entire European Union should be the clear understanding that Armenia is playing a double game, in which it has not abandoned at all its strategic ally – Russia. Armenia maintains “volunteer forces” fighting on the side of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, including the notorious Arbat Battalion, which was blessed by the Armenian Church in the center of Moscow. Armenia also morally supports the Russian Federation regarding its war with Ukraine, with Prime Minister Pashinyan being adamant about the expediency of supporting Russia. Armenia continues to host the Russian military base in Gyumri, and Russian border guards continue to protect its borders with Turkey and Iran. As a matter of fact, Armenia's strategic partnership with Iran has never been questioned for a minute. Furthermore, **Armenian buyers, enjoying the direct support and protection of today's Armenian state leadership, are looking for and buying in the interest of Russia any armament that may be of interest to the Ukrainian country**, thus providing a real direct assistance to the Russian Armed Forces.

Armenia's “unexpected appetite” to purchase arms from France should be interpreted in the same context. Here, the effect for Pashinyan's government is twofold. On the one

hand, there is sabre-rattling before the general public and preparations are demonstrated for revenge after the defeat in the “Second Karabakh War”. Of course, the likelihood that Nikol Pashinyan has such intentions is minor, but he is “scoring points” with that part of society in Armenia that stands firmly behind the “party of war.” It is not at all easy for Pashinyan to resist the pressure of revanchists and nationalists, especially since in the summer of 2024 the Armenian Church came out of its shadowy cover and openly exposed itself as the main supporter and even motivator of the “party of war”.

For Pashinyan, the suggestions and PR effects achieved by the demonstrative purchase of French weapons of top quality should not be understated. **At the same time, however, Armenia’s attempt to “get in line” for self-propelled howitzers ahead of Ukraine is a very important direct aid to Russia in an artillery duel between the two countries.** Any less howitzers that fail to arrive at the Ukrainian front is a relief for the Russians, who still have superiority in conventional long-range artillery with their 2C7 Pion self-propelled howitzer (From the artillery installation viewed above, Russia has 800 pieces, Ukraine – 99, and Belarus – 48).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the behavior of the Armenian state leadership is dangerous and harmful. Here it is appropriate to note that the Republic of Azerbaijan, from the first day of the escalation of the war in Ukraine, reaffirmed its support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, providing the Ukrainians with a great deal of material assistance, especially in the field of energy equipment supplies for the power plants and the electric grids, which are a constant target of the barbaric shelling from the Russian side.

The logic of the French state leadership questions the regularity of supplies to Ukraine, because of the flirt with Armenia. It is clear that for official Paris, the spreading of the message that “France is Armenia’s bigger sister” is at least as important as the political and military aid to Kyiv. On the other hand, it is clear that Russia’s anger against Armenian “dissidence” is more exemplary than real. In any case, a special communiqué was issued by the CSTO General Secretariat, which explicitly emphasizes that Armenia remains a full-fledged member of the organization (Abdurahmanova, 2024).

In this sense, all dreams that Armenia should be separated from Russia remain vivid examples of wishful thinking. President Macron’s ambitions to take revenge in the eyes of the public for his humiliating withdrawal from North West Africa, where PMC Wagner has moved in and Russian influence is growing, are ill-measured and unreasonable. The only result is the sowing of additional disharmony in the foreign policy of the European Union.

As an extremely pragmatic politician and a bright opportunist, Nikol Pashinyan creates all kinds of expectations, but in the end he mostly sticks to his strategy of staying in power. Pashinyan knows very well that the division in Armenian society is along the lines of “for or against (pro or contra) the conclusion of a peace treaty with Azerbaijan”. This is the radical and cardinal division, on which he will have yet to fight with the “party of war” and with the Armenian Church, which has emerged as the main pro-war factor.

The friendship with Russia is a completely different matter. It does not create such a division as the issue of the peace treaty with Azerbaijan. The attitude that Armenia

cannot guarantee its national security without Russian help prevails in Armenian society even after the final end of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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