INFLUENCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROTECTOR STATE AND REGIONAL HEGEMON ON THE RESILIENCE OF A NON-RECOGNISED STATE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH WAR AND NON-PEACE

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Abstract

This article examines the factors of influence of relations between the protector state and the regional hegemon in terms of the resilience of the unrecognized state. The article is devoted to a comparative analysis of the lessons learned from the Nagorno-Karabakh war and non-peace.

Since the end of the Second World War new states have repeatedly emerged, secessions have occurred, and with them new conflicts. While some non-recognised states enjoy higher stability, others have great struggles in order to survive. Most of the literature focuses on the non-recognised states themselves and domestic factor, thus neglecting the role of global players as the regional hegemonn. The main objective of this paper is to find out whether hegemons (through the protector states) have an influence on the stability of the non-recognised states. A second alternative explanation emphasises the importance of the internal legitimacy of non-recognised states. Using the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, the study attempts to answer these questions through a qualitative analysis. The analysis of Armenia's foreign policy between 1991-1992 and 2020 and the resilience around Nagorno-Karabakh is the core of the empirical part.

The results suggest that indeed relations between the hegemon and the protector state have an effect on the stability of the non-recognised state. A connection between the internal legitimacy of the non-recognised state and stability, on the other hand, cannot be concluded from the work. Despite the analytical function, the paper gives a good overview on the stability of non-recognised states, security policy and some of the post-communist conflicts.

Keywords: protector state, regional hegemon, non-recognised states, stability, resilience, security policy, Nagorno-Karabakh war, Nagorno-Karabakh peace, Armenia.

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Introduction

On February 21, 2008, as cheering crowds celebrate independence in Pristina, chants of 'God Bless America' and American flags can be seen as angry Serbian demonstrators storm the USA Embassy chanting 'Stop the USA terror'. Two worlds that could not disagree more on the Kosovo issue do agree on one thing: without the role of the USA, Kosovo's declaration of independence would either not happen at all or it would be much more difficult (Mohammed 2022a, 47-81; Mohammed 2022b, 83-111; Ejdus 2020a, 7-37; Ejdus 2020b, 97-125).

Nevertheless, the political debate is more difficult. Thirteen years after the declaration of independence, Kosovo is still one of the few partially-recognised states that has achieved comparative success in the independence process. While some would argue, that domestic political factors, norms and international institutions have played the major role in this process, others would lie the focus on power politics (Radoman, 2021, 25-48).

The debate around the process of becoming independent and the stability of non-recognised states is not only young within political science, but also particularly difficult. In many debates – no matter if based on liberal or realist assumptions – the focuse lies on the non-recognised states themselves underestimating the role of the protector states and hegemons.

Yet the issue of Kosovo and the role of the USA is not an isolated issue, as there is much more at stake here. In my opinion, it is important to deal ourselves with the topic of non-recognised states not least because after the collapse of the Soviet Union the number of non- or partially recognized states has increased rapidly. About a dozen of non- or partially recognised de facto states are struggling for their survival. It is about the role of hegemons, great powers in regional politics in the broader sense, and about the stability of non-recognised states in particular. To rephrase it: Why are some de facto states more successful in the secession process and more stable than others, and what role do the hegemons play in this?

I believe one of the major factors, if not the most important one determining the stability of a non-recognised state is power politics and the shift in balance of power. Without neglecting or underestimating the domestic factors, the role of institutions in this issue, I argue that only militarily influential players can guarantee the stability of and shift the power in favor of the de facto state through the protector state. The relations between the hegemon and the protector of the non-recognised state in turn have a direct influence on stability. I argue that good relations between the hegemon and the protector of the non-recognised state should lead to more stability. In contrary, deteriorating relations should make (military) incidents more likely to happen. Thus, the varying changes in stability of the non-recognised state can be explained by varying relations between the hegemon and the protector. Power politics, the perspective of neorealism remain among the essential theories to explain conflicts, their outbreak or the non-occurrence of these wars and thus can give us a plausible answers.

Besides my neorealist explanation, I am going to take into account a second alternative argument, focusing on internal factors. One of the prominent arguments underlines the importance of the internal legitimacy/democratisation of the non-

recognised states. Not least we witness non-recognised states with more improved democracy standards and higher internal legitimacy than their parent states. The proponents of this – I would say more liberal-dominated – approach would thus argue, that higher internal legitimacy and democratisation standards should lead to a higher stability.

Using the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia the study attempts to answer these questions through a qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods give us the possibility to take into account contextual circumstances, the historical background and agreements and are characterised by greater flexibility than quantitative methods. The partly greater openness and flexibility brings the advantage of deepening, but the disadvantage of interpretivism.

The analysis of Armenia's and Albania's foreign policy from 1991-1992 to 2020 and the stability as well as the internal legitimacy around Nagorno-Karabakh/Kosovo in the same period will be the core of the empirical part. For the purpose of more variation and deeper analysis, I divide the Nagorno-Karabakh case into four time periods. In order to measure my main variables – relationship between the hegemon and the protector state, stability and internal legitimacy – many indicators ranging from agreements, cooperation, negotiations to political stability, military clashes and referendums are to be examined.

Despite the analytical function, the article gives a good overview on the stability of non-recognised states, security policy and some of the post-communist conflicts. The empirical analyses and the results support are in line with the main argument, namely the effect of the relationship between the hegemon and the protector state on the stability of the non-recognised state. More concrete, indeed both the relations between Armenia and Russia have had an impact on stability in Nagorno-Karabakh, and those between Albania and the USA on Kosovo. Jumping back to the debate on the USA role in the Kosovo conflict, I can state, that USA played a crucial role both in the stability and independence process. And having a look on the low stability of Nagorno-Karabakh (especially since 2020), I can state that the tensed relations between Armenia and Russia were one of the major factors for such an outcome. While the main argument is supported by our findings, the results do not support the alternative explanation: A connection between the internal legitimacy of the non-recognised state and stability, on the other hand, cannot be concluded from the article.

The results show that power politics and neorealist arguments provide a good explanatory basis for the stability (and subsequently independence) of non- or partially-recognised states. They also show that in cases of conflict, which is what we are dealing with in secessions, domestic factors, on the other hand, offer a weak explanation (if at all). Moreover, I am going to discuss why hegemons are at all interested in non-recognised states and how those states are instrumentalised for power politics. In the second step I am going to provide a theoretical fundament based on the neorealist theory in the first place and alternative theories emphasising the role of domestic actors.

Dimensions of political analysis and policy analysis

The issue of non-recognised states is a very complex and multifaceted topic in both international politics and science. The literature, which has only gained in popularity in recent years, deals with many questions in this context. The controversial nature of the topic is evident in the mere fact that there are no concrete terms for 'non-recognised states' and/or there is no consensual definition for these territorial units/'states'. This is related not only to science per se, but also to the social and political environment in which science finds itself. The following is intended to provide an overview of current research.

Why do secessions happen and what are the consequences?

One of the basic questions in the context of non-recognised states should be why territorial subjects break away in the first place, why this happens and what costs secessions entail. Non-recognised states basically emerge through wars of secession, whereby they seek to break away from the parent state. Those states that do not resolve themselves peacefully through wars, but through referendums, are usually recognised internationally as a result. Apart from this, we know of only a few cases of peaceful secessions or state separations in modern history in Europe - specifically Czechoslovakia on the one hand and Serbia and Montenegro on the other.

Much more exciting for us and the literature in general are the non-recognised states. The dilemma of non-recognised states is often that while they are militarily strong enough to be de facto released from the parent state either through their own resources or protectors, they are too weak to seek legal recognition from the parent state. The parent/mother state is that state, to which the non-recognised state de jure belongs. In case of Transnistria the 'mother state' would be Moldova, in case of South Ossetia or Abkhazia the 'mother state' would be Georgia, and in case of Nagorno-Karabakh would be Azerbaijan.

In the literature or political science itself, non-recognised states have for a long time been regarded either as statuses of transition or as the failure of recognition. However, Buzard et al argue that non-recognised states are per se a result of a 'form of state' and can exist over a longer period of time. Thus, non-recognised states can be kept alive over a longer period of time despite high costs and the need for resources, for example with the help of protectors and international organisations (Buzard, Graham, and Horne 2017, 579). The protector state is the state backing the non-recognised state. In the most cases the protector state is whether a hegemon as in case of Russia (on Transnistria, Luhansk, Donezk, South Ossetia, Abkhazia) or a state that is ethnically connected to the non-recognised states as in case of Armenia (on Nagorno-Karabakh) or to some extent Albania (on Kosovo). It should be borne in mind, however, that the parent states also bear high costs if the conflict is not resolved. However, these costs are not nearly as high as the costs of the non- recognised state. For the parent states, it is often a challenge to control their own state borders due to territorial conflicts and to apply sanctions against the non-recognised state in order to avoid precedents (Buzard, Graham, and Horne 2017, 580).

Why non-recognised states are not recognised?

Before talking about the non-recognition, we have to state, that non-recognised states in many respects fulfil the same functions as recognised states: This is especially true of foreign policy. Non-recognised states also have a foreign policy, whereby the highest and permanent goal of such states is the recognition issue. Non-recognition, and with it the almost non-existent access to international organisations, poses great challenges to non-recognised states (Kopeček 2017; Jakša 2017, 35-40; Caspersen 2017).

The reason why non-recognised states are not recognised has less to do with the functioning of the states per se than with the global political situation. More precisely, it is a deadlock when it comes to the recognition of new states. The difficulty lies not least in the fact that more than 190 states have already established themselves and are taking a negative stance towards new states out of fear of motivating secessions in their own countries. The countries of the Soviet Union and the original policy of the Soviet leadership have pre-programmed these problem areas – often for tactical reasons (Riegl and Doboš 2017; Iskandaryan 2015).

Generally speaking, the question recognition of non-recognised states can be approached from two perspectives: From the legal and from the political perspective. The political perspective focuses on numerous domestic mechanisms by which non-recognised states survive, but also on the strategies of the 'parent states' to prevent recognition. Non-recognised states may be fully functional and meet all the criteria of a state, but they may still not be recognised. In other ways, states may be recognised, but they may not fulfil all the criteria of a functioning state. Here, one can take the example of Somalia, which is recognised but is considered a failed state, and Somaliland, which is not recognised but is more functional.

In some cases, the non-recognised states are institutionally and democratically even better developed and more stable than their parent states. Among other things, this has to do with the fact that the non-recognised states develop more stable and democratic structures despite and because of their isolation and internal legitimacy (Laoutides 2014; Tataryn and Ertürk 2021). That is manifested on the one hand in the example of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is classified as partly free by the Freedom House Index, and Azerbaijan, which is classified as not free.

We should not forget that basically many of today's recognised states themselves broke away from other states or were unrecognised at a certain point in time. Many of the examples also point directly to European countries - from the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy and Czechoslovakia to the new states from the Balkans. For this reason, there are two ways of thinking about the status of non-recognised states: One approach considers non-recognised states to be a phenomenon, an exceptional case, while the other perspective perceives temporary non-recognition as part of the state development process (Jeifets and Dobronravin 2020; Iskandaryan 2015, 211; Chechi 2017).

Parts of the literature make concrete assumptions. Buzard et al addresses the main assumptions of the recent literature: First, the status quo of non-recognised countries is something that economic and political elites benefit from. Second, secessionists have enough military capacity to make reconquest, while not impossible, costly - to this

end, secessionists often receive support from foreign actors. And last but not least, the governments of non-recognised states are at least partially legitimate - through intra-state civic participation processes (Buzard, Graham, and Horne 2017, 583).

The approach that non-recognition per se can be seen as a separate outcome and is not an intermediate stage is supported in some literature by several arguments: On the one hand, itis said to be a question of resources, which neither allows for a reconquest of the non- recognised country, but at the same time also makes recognition impossible. This is roughly how the more recent examples of Ukraine are discussed. The areas around Donetsk and Luhansk, for example, could retain their de facto status as a long-term solution because, on the one hand, they are supported by Russia, but at the same time a direct confrontation with the West would be too costly. On the other hand, the Ukrainian side could provoke a possible annexation by Russia through a planned reconquest. In other words: Due to a kind of balance of terror, a solidification of the de facto states occurs. The protectors are also willing to support the status quo through various forms of assistance. If this support by the protector falls away, a military reconquest of the non-recognised state is a possible outcome. Another alternative to solving the problem lies in the international community.

Whether and how a conflict is resolved depends on whether the international community 1)has the will to do so, and 2) whether it is in the interest of the individual states. While this statement does not assume that a de jure achievement of independence is undesirable, but rather that the states, including the non-recognised state itself, partially accept a stable de facto independence in the long run. Nevertheless, I would like to point out one important circumstance: It may be that in those cases where the protector is the hegemon, accepting the de facto status also makes sense for security policy reasons. If, on the other hand, we look at those non-recognised states whose protectors are weaker, a proactive pursuit of independence status should be realistic, since in such cases de jure recognition is one of the few security guarantees.

Non-recognised states as geopolitical chump change

Non-recognised states are also an important instrument for global and regional hegemons to consolidate their position of power. The (regional) hegemon is that power, which is militarily, politically and to some extent financially by far stronger than all the actors in the region are. Due to the fact, one could argue that we live in a multipolar world without a clear hegemon, I would define regional hegemons rather than global. The regional hegemon inthe Caucasus region and post-Soviet region is the Russian Federation.

The cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia), Transnistria (Moldova) and Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia/Azerbaijan) are three prominent examples how non-recognised states are used as an instrument by hegemons. This instrument is primarily - but not only - used by the Russian Federation as a means of exerting pressure to better control its immediate sphere of influence. Three main political tools are used here: Russia has consolidated its influence in these two non-recognised states through

the deployment of peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its military presence on the ground has given it leverage over Georgia (Souleimanov, Abrahamyan and Aliyev 2018, 77-79).

A further instrument is the so-called passportization of the population: citizens of the non-recognised states can obtain Russian citizenship through facilitated conditions. As a result, Russia can argue on an international level that the majority of Russian citizens live in these areas and feel obliged to ensure their protection. This brings us to the third point: protecting the Russian population abroad is part of Russia's foreign policy doctrine. The argument also enjoys a certain legitimacy under international law and international law (Souleimanov, Abrahamyan and Aliyev 2018, 80-82).

Non-recognised states and the international community

Another circumstance follows from the fact that, on the one hand, there are states that enjoy greater recognition but are exposed to a perpetual existential crisis, while other states, which have been recognised by very few states, enjoy greater stability. The example of Israel on the one hand and the two partially recognised states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are good examples of this assumption.

The 'parent states' try to present the often more stable non-recognised states as an international, regional risk that needs to be combated (Irujo 2023; Heritage and Lee 2020). When it comes to the viability of the non-recognised state, the dependence on the protector, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, Armenia, is quite evident. By becoming dependent on or linked to the 'protector', non-recognised states avoid international isolation and can thus gain greater international acceptance. Another aspect is the fact that in some cases the non-recognised states are more democratic and stable than their 'parent states'. This is not least due to the fact that the non-recognised states develop more stable and democratic structures despite and because of their isolation, also because of their internal legitimacy (Caspersen 2012, 353; Freizer 2017). This is expressed on the one hand by the example of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is classified as partially free by the Freedom House Index, and Azerbaijan, which is classified as not free. Another example is Somaliland and Somalia.

Although non-recognized or only partially recognized states are not directly recognized by the international community, there are interactions between non-recognized states and international actors and organizations. Non-recognition is not an ultimate obstacle to 'intergovernmental' relations. In this context, the examples around Israel come to mind - Israel is not recognised by a number of Arab states, but de facto these states have relations with the State of Israel. One could argue in a similar way in the case of Taiwan - although it is not recognised by many states, these states have other forms of relations with Taiwan.

The role of foreign influence

Although domestic political factors and the focus on the non-recognised state dominate in the literature, there are some remarkable papers on the foreign policy, international role of both the non-recognised state itself, the 'parent country' and the 'protector country', and the international community. Thus, the protector plays an important role for the unrecognised state. In many cases, the 'patronage' countries provide political, financial and military support to the non-recognised state in order to maintain the status quo (Ó Beacháin, Comai and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016, 447-448; Krüger 2010). If one assumes a large and strong protector, such as 'Russia', the probability is high that de facto independence will be consolidated. However, if there is no protecting power for the non-recognised state, the probability is higher that the 'mother country' will 'reintegrate' the territories through military intervention.

The gap between humanism and legitimacy: the phenomenon of non-recognition

The phenomenon of non-recognised states, which has been present since the Second World War, has occupied political science for several years. To sum up, we can say that a large part of the focus is on the non-recognised states per se or the domestic political processes of these states. Political science attempts to examine domestic political aspects and strategies, but also to compare non-recognised states with recognised ones. The aspect of international politics is the second - in my view less dominant - aspect of the research area on non-recognised states. In this sub-area, too, attention is directed either at non-recognised states and the relationship to the 'mother country' per se, or focuses on major powers.

In my view, a smaller focus (yes, there is, nevertheless) is on the protector countries on the one hand and various international actors directly involved in the conflict, including international organisations and regional powers. We have to distinguish between cases, where the protector state is a regional or global hegemon and in those cases where the protector is much weaker. We should take into account the strength of the protector state and it makes more sense to focus on those non-recognised states with 'weak protector' states. Only in those cases it will make sense and possible to test the effect of the relationship between the protector and the hegemon on the stability of the non-recognised states. After we found our gap, we can formulate the following research question: *What influence does the relationship between the 'protector' state and the regional hegemon have on the stability of non-recognised state?*

In the theoretical part, a common thread for the work is to be developed. This includes, among other things, the elaboration of theories of international politics, which are primarily applied in this work. It is important to work out a bundle of factors whose influence will be analysed in more detail in the empirical part. In this context, two questions in particular arise: *How can the survivability and international policy of non-recognised states be explained? What role does contact with the protecting power play in this? How can weak (protector) states per se survive?*

Unrecognised states: The support from abroad

Although the non-recognised states have a foreign policy as well as the recognised states, the highest priority is given to two issues: The question of recognition and the question of survival. According to neorealism, the question of survival is the guiding principle for states and accordingly applies in principle to all states. Nevertheless, the question of survival plays a heightened role for non-recognised states, as they are usually small, weak and cut off fromthe international system (Tancredi 2018; Muhindo and Calenzo 2011, 149). In this context, non-recognised states - as already mentioned in the literature - are dependent on the protector. The protector usually guarantees the security of the non-recognised state - in military, financial as well as political matters. For instance, the residents of the non-recognised states are granted citizenship of the protector state so that they can travel freely (Ó Beacháin, Comai and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016, 444). More important for our work, however, is the security policy aspect.

The intensity of the non-recognised state's contacts depends on various factors, including and above all its geographical location. A look at the partially recognised states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia underlines that without a protector, these states will have a hard time surviving in the long run. The Russian Federation has considered itself a protector of these territories only since the 2000s, and increasingly so only since 2008. Before that, Russia evenimposed an embargo on the non-recognised state of Abkhazia between 1994 and 1999, partly because of fears of separatism in its own country (Ó Beacháin, Comai and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016, 448). In fact, without a protecting power, Abkhazia was initially dependent on itself and international organisations, which drastically complicated the survival of the young partially recognised state. Only with Russia as a protecting power did the situation stabilise for Abkhazia.

Relations between the protector state and the non-recognised state can be loose, strong, orthere can even be a process of integration into the protector state. On the one hand, this may be for security reasons, as in the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, or in addition to security reasons, for identity reasons, as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh with reference to Armenia. Factors such as a weak diaspora, demographic problems can be a contributory reason for greater rapprochement or even integration into the protector state (Ó Beacháin, Comai and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016, 449-450). But here, too, it is important to distinguish between non-recognised states, which are all constituted differently in terms of ethnicity than their protector state and do not have a large diaspora, and non-recognised states, which are predominantly similar in ethnicity as their protector state and have alarge diaspora, on the other side. After all, the diaspora is another instrument used by the non-recognised states to avoid international isolation. The diaspora often functions not only as a voice on the international stage, but also as a financial source.

Neorealism: How small states survive within the international system

While we first noted that the relationship between the non-recognised states and the protector states is important for the survivability of the non-recognised state, we are now concerned with the protector states per se. While in the case of hegemons like Russia, the question of their own security and survival is not superficial because of their military, political and financial strength, the situation is different for small states.

The theory of neorealism assumes that states coexist in an anarchic system and have to fight for their survival due to the lack of mutual trust. However, while classical realism focuses on wars as a result of human striving for power, neorealism focuses on the survival of the state. Neorealism assumes that states, for reasons of their own security and existence, tend to maximise their (military) power or ensure a balance of power (Mearsheimer 2001, 30-31).

Mearsheimer's offensive neorealism is often countered with the criticism that neorealism describes the actions of large players well, but does not do well enough in describing the behaviour of small states. This is because small and weak states are not always in a position to expand their power to such an extent as to fully secure their own survival. Therefore, if we assume that the protector state is not a hegemon but a small state, it is particularly important for the state to create a balance of power - for example through alliances, through stronger diplomatic relations with the important (regional) players. Alliances and blocs of political power are important in international politics in order to be able to protect against common threats (Mearsheimer 2001, 33). In the process, small states in particular benefit from larger ones and thus place themselves in a security policy dependency. If one takes a look at the NATO countries, the Eastern European and Baltic states, in particular, benefit because of the threat from Russia from the NATO alliance, and especially from the good relations with the United States. In turn, good relations between the regional hegemon and the protector state make the status of the non-recognised state more stable. Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis: *H1: The stronger the relations between the protector state and the (regional) hegemon, the more stable the status of the non-recognised state.*

But if we take up the main argument of striving for power or military strength in addition to the argument of alliance-building, we can draw a second explanation from this: Namely, the relative strength of the protector compared to the parent-state. Even small states whose security is under threat do not rely purely on alliances, but seek to expand their military power. A militarily and financially strong protector state makes it quite unattractive for the parent state to invade the unrecognised states due to the high costs. Thus, we are going to take into account the military and financially status of the protector state in comparison to the parent state.

Another aspect we are going to include into our analyses – is the relationship between the protector state and the neighbourhood. Despite the dominance of the neorealist theory regarding the security of states, the theory was criticised by various scholar and alternative explanations have emerged. As mentioned before, neorealism is partly challenged in terms of small states. A study on Sub-Saharan Africa states, that constructivist views and the internal structure may play a more important role when it comes to the behaviour of small and weak states. However, one should distinguish

between small/weak states located in a friendly neighbourhood and small/weak states surrounded by rivals.

Alternative Explanation: Internal legitimacy

While we have focused on external factors in the first to hypotheses, there are also some arguments for domestic factors. In many cases, the non-recognised states may not enjoy external legitimacy by the international community, but the internal legitimacy might be very high. Moreover, in some cases the non-recognised states have a higher internal political stability, legitimacy, transparency and democracy than the parent-state. As discussed in the literature part, the non-recognition is not an obstacle when it comes to the democratisation process. In contrary, due to the isolation, non-recognised states try to strengthen their internal legitimacy.

One could argue that internal legitimacy might also lead to some extent to a higher external acceptance and thus a more stable status of the non-recognised state. Thus, we can formulate the following alternative hypothesis: *H2: The higher the internal legitimacy of a non-recognised state, the more stable thestatus of the state.*

Research method

In this article, first of all, it concerns the influence of the diplomatic relations of the protector state on the stability of the non-recognised state. Due to the small number of cases, it makes sense to use a case study approach and to divide the cases into different time periods for the purpose of variation (Campbell and Gabriele 2022; Ruhe, Schneider and Spilker 2022, 1-12). Non-recognised states are seen, on the one hand,as a phenomenon and, on the other, as a natural process in the formation of a state. The reasoning behind the case selection is explored in the following section. The nature of the small n/case study based on the Most Similar System Design, the topic and the research question make it possible to work on the basis of qualitative methods and to look at the cases more deeply. Moreover, while on the one hand it is not a completely new topic, as there are already studies and some literature on non-recognised states, it is a deepening and a niche. More precisely, the focus is not on the domestic structure as usual, or on the parent state, but on the protector state. The qualitative research method makes it possible to go much deeper and describe individual contexts in more detail - for example by analysing contracts, statements between the protector and other players. Qualitative methods are characterised by non-standardised or only partially standardised data as well as greater flexibility than quantitative methods. The partly greater openness and flexibility brings the advantage of deepening, but the disadvantage of interpretivism.

Contextualisation comes more to the fore, subjective evaluation becomes necessary. This disadvantage of partial loss of objectivity (due to interpretivism) is countered by the advantage that qualitative methods do not only rely on numbers, but the underlying background. This is particularly important in a subject area where inter-state relations are atstake. Although interstate relations and factors such as stability can

also be determined quantitatively (e.g. through trade volume, number of treaties, etc.), these indicators are too superficial and greater depth is needed in our example. It should be mentioned that qualitative methods are not exclusively used. For example, in terms of *external stability* (Y), and *internal legitimacy* (X2), it makes sense to use partially standardised data for the sake of better comparability and to supplement this with additional qualitative information.

Protector states

After defining the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo, we have to identify the protector states of the non-recognised state because we are going to measure the relations between the protector states and the regional hegemon. Armenia, which mostly consists of Armenians is the de facto protector state of Nagorno-Karabakh. Both entities/states are sharing the same major ethnicity, language and culture. When it comes to Kosovo, I consider Albania being the protector state of Kosovo. Both Albania and Kosovo share the same language, major ethnicity and culture. It should be also underlined, that not only Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo are similar to eachother, but also their protector states. Both states share have insofar the same area, population and GDP[1]. Both states have a communist past and they are considered parliamentary republics. The similarities of both states in most of the characteristics makes the cases ideal for our Most Similar System Design approach.

Time periods for research

Once the states have been selected, time periods are established, allowing for temporal variance to be created. The general time frame for Armenia is between 1991 and 2020, with four temporal sections being useful: 1991 to 1998, 1998 to 2008, 2008 to 2018 and 2018 to 2020. The time frame for Albania ranges from 1992 to 2020 with four temporal sections: 1992 to 1999, 1999 to 2008, 2008 to 2013 and 2013 to 2020 (see Table 1). Due to historical events it is impossible to divide the temporal sections of Armenia/Karabakh and Albania/Kosovo into the same periods.

Table 1. General time frames

Armenia/Karabakh 1991-1998	Albania/Kosovo 1992-1999
Armenia/Karabakh 1998-2008	Albania/Kosovo 1999-2008
Armenia/Karabakh 2008-2018	Albania/Kosovo 2008-2013
Armenia/Karabakh 2018-2020	Albania/Kosovo 2013-2020

In terms of Armenia, the division into these time periods follows the terms of the three presidents from 1991 to 2018 and the prime minister since 2018 (due to a

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[1] The World Bank Group. 2023. "Armenia: overview." Accessed January 17, 2023. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/armenia/overview; The World Bank Group. 2023. "Albania: overview." Accessed January 17, 2023. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview.

Constitutional reform, political power has been unified to the prime minister since 2018) (see Table 1):

- The period from 1991 to 1998 marks the presidency of the first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan: This period was marked first and foremost by the armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the years of economic challenges. 1994 also marks the ceasefire agreement with Azerbaijan and the de facto establishment of the non-recognised state of Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The second and third periods, from 1998 to 2008 and 2008 to 2018, mark the terms of office of Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. With reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this period can be described as a more or less stable timeuntil 2016. However, this period also includes increased autocratic tendencies and regression in terms of democracy.
- The last period between 2018 and 2020 is very different from the second and third periods and can be seen as a turning point in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. In the course of the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the constitutional changes, there was a strong democratisation process, a fight against corruption and, in terms of foreign policy, an intensified orientation towards the West.

Regarding Albania, the time division marks on the one side the beginning of the independence movement (1992), the ending of the Kosovo war (1999), the Declaration of Independence (2008) and the last office change of the prime minister (2013) (see Table 1):

- One main difference between Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo is the starting point of the wars and the independence. However, 1992 marks an important point for Kosovo and Albania – namely a secessionist referendum in Kosovo, which was not recognisedby any other country.
- The second period between 1999 and 2008 marks to important events: On the one side, the end of the Kosovo war and the declaration of independence. Furthermore,in 2009 the protector state of Kosovo, Albania became a member of NATO.
- The last two periods between 2008 and 2013 on the one side and 2013 and 2020 on the other side mark a change of the prime minister. While Sali Berisha from the conservative party was the prime minister until 2013, the Socialist Edi Arama won theelections in 2013.

Although the separation of the time periods is not ideal, it is important to find a balance: Onthe one side, the time periods between both cases should if possible have a similar range. However, on the same time the time periods should also mark important events or a changeof the government.

Operationalization for research

Operationalization should make the defined variables concrete, i.e. translate them into indicators.

X1: Relations of the protector state with international actors.

The independent, the explanatory variable is the relations of the protector state with international actors. In a qualitative study, the relations, individual actions between the protector state and international actors, specifically states in the neighbourhood, hegemon and important international organisations, are to be examined and compared over a longer period of time.

How can the actions or relations be put into concrete terms?

In concrete terms, *agreements, cooperation, (financial, military) support, negotiations* between the protector state and the above-mentioned actors are to be examined. Since this is a qualitative work, the actions and relations can be examined in greater depth. The primary sources, such as agreements or the official sites of the individual states or organisations can be used for this.

X2: Internal legitimacy of the non-recognised state.

The third, alternative explanatory variable relates to the internal legitimacy of states. In order to better define and measure internal legitimacy, we will limit ourselves to the following factors: The *standards of democracy*, if possible *referendums on independence, popular trust in the government* and possible ongoing *surveys on the status of independence*.

Y: Stability of the non-recognised state.

The dependent variable to be explained is the stability or status of the non-recognised state. This should not be a dichotomous measurement in the sense of the status under international law (recognised, non-recognised). Rather, stability refers to a number of factors. According to the literature, non-recognised states also maintain relations and trade relations with some countries.

How can stability be measured in concrete terms?

In concrete terms, military stability in the border area between the non-recognised state and the parent state, (trade) relations, cooperation with other states, political (provocative) statements by the parent state and political stability should be taken into account. Besides our two independent variables there are two more aspects we should at least take into account in our qualitative analyses. Factors which could somehow influence our main independent variable. More specifically, military and financial strength of the protector state on the one side and the relations with the neighbouring countries. The data on military strength are based on international rankings, the *GDP of the country* on the one hand, *military expenditure* and the *military ranking* on the other.

Empirical approach

In the empirical part, a systematic approach is necessary: since we are dealing with two states, we are going to increase our case number by separation. Thus, we are able not only to compare the two states with each other but also the time periods with each other. Due to the division into four different time periods of two similar states, many factors remain the same, but there is nevertheless a variance in terms of diplomatic conditions or internal legitimacy. This enables us to compare periods in which diplomatic relations between the protector and the regional hegemon were better with other periods in which these relations were worse (or vice versa). For this purpose,

contracts, agreements, cooperation, (financial) aid and statements by the actors will be used.

For the second hypothesis, the internal legitimacy of the non-recognised state itself is used as a factor and also here the individual time periods are compared with each other.

Finally yet importantly I am going to analyse the stability of the non-recognised state during the whole period (Y). After doing so, it will be possible to measure the effect of the relations between the protector state (Armenia, Albania) and the hegemon on the stability of the non- or partially recognised state (Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo).

The regional hegemon and the neighbouring states

As mentioned before, the regional hegemon - not least because of the region's history - is Russia. Russia is a relevant military, political and financial power in the post-Soviet space. Especially the Caucasus is seen by Russia as part of its sphere of influence, also due to its history. Past military conflicts between Turkey, Russia and Iran underline the interests of the larger players. As will become clear later in the detailed analysis, Turkey's presence in the Caucasus has been growing stronger, especially in recent years - partly due to its excellent relations with Azerbaijan. After the regional hegemon has been classified - namely Russia - the relationship between the protector, i.e. Armenia, and the hegemon is analysed in detail. Before that, however, a brief overview of Armenia's relations with neighbouring states should be given. Relations with neighbouring states, namely Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia and Iran, are of course not to be neglected and play an important role in the stability question of the region as a whole and Nagorno-Karabakh in particular.

First of all, it should be mentioned that de facto and de jure relations with two of the four neighbouring states are almost non-existent. Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On the one hand, Armenia sees itself as a protector of Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerbaijan sees it as a threat to its own territorial integrity. The domestic political climate towards the respective other country continues to inflame the entire situation. Especially since Ilham Aliyev came to power, heightened war rhetoric and anti-Armenian resentment have become the order of the day. The USA Department of Justice warned in a report of cultural genocide and discrimination. The Guardian published a report highlighting the destruction of dozens of Armenian churches, thousands of tombs and other cultural assets (Sawa 2019).

Relations with the western neighbouring state of Turkey are similarly complicated. There are no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, the borders are closed. This is due to a number of historical, but also geopolitical reasons. The Armenian genocide, which Turkey (the successor state of the Ottoman Empire) still does not recognise today, is a major contributory reason for this development (Libaridian 2022; Linstroth 2022; Mollica and Hakobyan 2021). Furthermore, Turkey and Azerbaijan see themselves as related nations in two different states (Galip 2020). Both states support each other in the conflicts around Nagorno-Karabakh or, for example,

Northern Cyprus. Past attempts to establish diplomatic relations and open borders have failed (Avdaliani 2022; Davidzon 2022; Schrodt 2014).

The relationship with the northern neighbouring state of Georgia plays an important role for Armenia. Georgia is an important transport artery with access to the sea for landlocked Armenia. Relations between the two states are very changeable. The reason for this is the regional alliances of convenience of both countries. Armenia maintains relatively good relations with Russia, which in turn is in open conflict with Georgia. Georgia, in turn, is strengthening its relations with the neighbouring states of Azerbaijan and Turkey - for example, through joint train routes and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan via Georgia to Turkey.This is partly due to economic policy considerations, but also to escape regional isolation (Maass 2019; Ditel 2023). The different alliances of convenience in the region are an obstacle to relations between Armenia and Georgia, and therefore, from my point of view, the relations could be described as pragmatic and based on neutrality. Furthermore, Georgia would not support Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh, simply because of its own problems with South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Limiting the alliances to religious or cultural factors, loosely based on Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations", would be wrong and does not apply in this way (Huntington 1993, 1997). Iran, which like Azerbaijan is Shiite, has the best relationship with its neighbour Armenia. This can be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, Azerbaijan maintains very good diplomatic relations with Israel and good ones with the USA. Turkish membership in the Western Alliance is also a major concern for Iran. In addition, Iran has a large Azerbaijani minority in its own country. These are some of the reasons why Iran tends to be pro-Armenian or pragmatic. While in earlier years (for example, in the first Karabakh war) Iran's pro-Armenian position was clearer, today it is somewhat blurred due to political considerations (Poghosyan 2022). Nevertheless, in relative terms, Armenia maintains the closest economic, security policycontacts with Iran compared to other neighbouring states.

Dynamic relationship between Armenia and the regional hegemon from 1991 to 1998

Armenia's foreign policy between 1991 and 1998 was shaped by the first president of the independent republic, Levon Ter-Petrossian. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was decisive forthe foreign policy orientation during this period, but especially for the time between 1991 and 1994. It should be mentioned that the doctrine of Armenian foreign policy in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union was survival in the region and security guarantees, especially in view of the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh. The fundamental considerationof any foreign policy action for this period was to guarantee the security of the young state in a not very well-meaning environment. In view of the war between 1991 and 1994 and the fragile state of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, statehood, including national defence and foreign policy, had to be completely reorganised.

Above all, it should not be forgotten that many Armenian but also Azerbaijani officers were primarily Soviet officers before 1991 and that some of them took up service in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Armenia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as early as 1992. The CIS is considered a loose successor organisation in the post-Soviet space, primarily dominated by Russia. By joining the CIS, Armenia cemented its pro-Russian orientation for the first time. Many Soviet officers of Armenian descent then volunteered for the Nagorno-Karabakh war. This detail may seem insignificant at first glance, but it is relevant in that it underlines once again the entanglement created by the Soviet Union (Papazian 2006, 238).

The frozen situation around Nagorno-Karabakh and the conquest of a security zone around Nagorno-Karabakh triggered a protest note in Azerbaijan in the direction of Armenia, with the demand to clear the security belt. The constant existential threat cemented a pragmatic and realistic approach to foreign policy. Both leaders of the time, President Levon Ter-Petrossian and Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, spoke of a balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan that needed to be established in the region (Papazian 2006, 238 -240). Based on this realistic approach, Armenia entered into a military alliance with Russia in orderto shift the balance of power in its own favour. In my view, the alliance with Russia, the regional hegemon, should therefore be seen primarily from a geostrategic, realistic point of view and not from an ideological one. After all, to take the Russian-Armenian alliance as a given is not correct. The discussion of Armenian foreign policy orientation was not set in stone, especially in view of a loss of confidence on the part of Armenians towards Russia.

The loss of trust was due to the fact that the Soviet Army did not intervene in massacres ofArmenians in Azerbaijan between 1988 and 1991. After it became clear that Soviet forces even knowingly or unknowingly supported the Azerbaijani side during the massacres,scepticism grew among the population and politicians (Papazian 2006, 239). However, the historical friction and loss of trust were replaced by a clear realpolitik based onsecurity interests after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The personal relationship between the then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his Armenian counterpart was able to create an appropriate foundation for bilateral relations. Based on these relations, a number of treaties were signed between Armenia and Russia in the following years. The strong rapprochement with Russia had two main effects: A security guarantee in the region, but also Armenia's dependence on Russia (first and foremost militarily) (Papazian 2006, 238-239).

Thus, the friendship agreement between Armenia and Russia was already signed in 1991. In the following year, Armenia joined important organisations that still exist today: CIS and the Collective Security Treaty signed in 1992.In 1997, the Friendship Agreement for Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was signed (Papazian 2006, 239).

In 1995, the agreement on the stationing of the Russian military in Gyumri along the Turkish-Armenian border was signed. While Armenia could be a counterweight to Azerbaijan from the perspective of the time, it would need a stronger ally against Turkey. If one takes a look at Russian history in the Caucasus, the Russian protector role of the Christian peoples in the Caucasus stands out. The Russian protector role for

Armenia against the Muslim neighbouring countries was taken up again, which is why a military alliance was also obvious from a historical perspective (Shirinyan 2019, 7).

It should be mentioned, however, that Armenia tried to build good relations with other states in the region in addition to the alliance with Russia for reasons of risk. Armenian foreign policy in the 1990s was very much characterised by a lack of alternatives. Both presidents, Levon Ter-Petrossian, who held office until 1998 and was persuaded to resign, and his successor Robert Kocharyan, implemented the same policy - which they saw as having no alternative. What was and is essential is the decoupling of historical, normative points of view from purely foreign policy benefits.

The hard realpolitik alignment with Russia was also continued by his successor in office due to Armenia's limited manoeuvrability and dependence on the regional hegemon. A key difference between the Ter-Petrossian and Kocharyan administrations was Ter-Petrossian's harder realism and rejection of national romanticism and ideologies. By not focusing on the issue of the Armenian Genocide, which is one of the essential national issues for Armenians, the Ter-Petrossian administration wanted to at least normalise relations with Turkey from a realpolitik point of view. The successor Kocharyan also wanted to start talks with Turkey without preconditions, but prioritised the issue of the genocide more strongly, which led to greater disagreement between Armenia and Turkey.

The fact that the rapprochement with Russia did not necessarily happen for normative but, as already mentioned, for realistic reasons, can also be seen in various currents within Armenian decision-makers: The lines of conflict are lost not least in the Foreign Ministry itself, since after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Armenia primarily Western diplomats, i.e. people from the Armenian diaspora who come from Western countries, were put in the service of the Foreign Ministry. The Western orientation of the diplomatic squad on the one hand and the hard pragmatism and political lack of alternatives on the other led to a dilemma situation with a rapprochement with Russia (Papazian 2006, 248).

New stability and framework internal legitimacy

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh itself - both of internal legitimacy and stability is clearer in the 1990s than in the years following. Internal legitimacy can largely be traced back to an important referendum in December 1991. This is because the Soviet Constitution provided the right for autonomous territorial units to leave the respective republic (in this case the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic) through a referendum. In the case of a republic (such as Azerbaijan itself), the Soviet constitution provided for the right to leave the Soviet Union only through the consent of all autonomous regions. In other words: According to the constitution, Nagorno-Karabakh had to hold a referendum to leave Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan itself would have to obtain the consent of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan to leave the Soviet Union. In accordance with the Soviet Constitution, a referendum was held in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991. The independence referendum itself took place and out of 82% of the participants, 99% voted for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite the constitutional

procedure, the referendum was not accepted by the government in Baku, which in turn led to a military conflict (Yavuz and Gunter 2023; Novikova 2012; Engel 2013).

The 1991 referendum can be seen as an indication of great trust, of a high degree of internal legitimacy within Nagorno-Karabakh. However, apart from the referendum, which we use for internal legitimacy, there is a second essential method: the Freedom House Index reports, whereby Nagorno-Karabakh has been specifically listed among the disputed territories since 1994. If we look at the 1994-1995 Report, Nagorno-Karabakh is classified as 'non-free'. The de facto non-inclusion of political rights in Nagorno-Karabakh are mainly attributed to the state of war, the martial law. Although a president is elected in 1994 who appoints a prime minister and the legislature is also partially empowered, de facto Nagorno-Karabakh suffers from martial law in 1994. This leads to extensive restrictions in the press (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

After the referendum, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1992 and elected Artur Mkrtchyan as president, who was shot dead in April of the same year. The armed conflicts between 1991 and 1994 can be categorised as large-scale military conflicts. In 1992, Azerbaijani forces attacked the capital of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. This was followed by a counter-offensive, in the course of which Armenia was able to conquer a corridor between Karabakh and Armenia in order to establish a connection to the 'protector', on the one hand, and to bring large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh under its control in 1993, on the other. Of particular interest is the fact that political opinion between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh itself diverged in 1993 and 1994. While the fighting was going on, there were several attempts at mediation in 1993, for example through the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

In the course of several meetings, the Russian, American and Turkish sides presented a peace plan that provided for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Armenian forces from some areas. It is worth mentioning that this proposal was made to all three sides - not only to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh was perceived as a separate side in the negotiations in the 1990s. While Armenia and Azerbaijan accepted the peace plan, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians rejected it - citing a lack of security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian President Ter-Petrossian travelled to Nagorno-Karabakh in an attempt to convince the government there of the new agreements, but failed. Although a ceasefire was subsequently reached, it was immediately interrupted by an incident with the Afghan Mujahideen (who were fighting on the Azerbaijani side) (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b). Only after renewed attempts at negotiations with the help of Russia and the USA could rapprochements begin. Prisoners of war were exchanged and a ceasefire was agreed at the climax of the negotiations - but without a status for Nagorno-Karabakh. The stationing of international peacekeeping troops was rejected by Russia. In general, it can be said that Russia was given a leading role in the conflict resolution - also by the international community (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

In the following years, the tense situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is assessed in the same way, with few improvements. Individual border areas could not be governed by the central office in Nagorno-Karabakh, and martial law is in force in some areas. However, there have been some improvements in terms of civil liberties. The

parliamentary elections in 1995 and the presidential elections in 1996 and 1997 are described by the Freedom House Index as free and fair in principle (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b). Between 1994 and 1998, however, there were far-reaching improvements in political and civil rights despite the state of emergency, according to the Freedom House Index (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

In 1998, there were renewed OSCE demands to place Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani administration. The de facto independent state of Nagorno-Karabakh rejected these proposals. However, a demilitarisation of important zones was achieved between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh status issue was postponed and general 'package solutions' were sought (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

Strengthening relations between Armenia and the regional hegemon from 1998 to 2008

The presidency of Robert Kocharyan, the successor of Levon Ter-Petrossian, was structurally marked above all by one essential circumstance: The strengthening of presidential power at the expense of the judiciary and parliament. Kocharyan's presidential power was largely consolidated, especially after the assassinations of the then Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and the Speaker of Parliament Karen Demirchyan in 1999. Both of the aforementioned politicians were in opposition to the incumbent president on some foreign policy issues (Brady and Thorhallsson 2021).

Through the assassinations of the aforementioned politicians, Robert Kocharyan was able to expand his own power base to a large extent. His style of government is generally considered more authoritarian than his predecessor's government (Aberg and Terzyan 2018, 157-160). While the style of government and hyper-presidentialism may not have a direct influence on Armenia's foreign policy, it does have an indirect one. Similar to the case of the predecessor, it is not possible to clearly identify a Western or Eastern orientation, but a tendency can very well be identified over the years. In Kocharyan's early years, a stronger orientation towards the West was pushing through, although maintaining relations with Russia was still considered a priority. Nevertheless, the motto of Armenian foreign policy was to develop a multi-vectoral foreign policy, which is why Kocharyan pushed Armenia in the direction of European integration. Armenia's admission (2001) to the Council of Europe, for example, can be seen as a major achievement. The symbolic rapprochement with NATO - for example, during a visit to a jubilee - also points to Kocharyan's balance policy. However, the stronger orientation towards the West, the 'European way', was increasingly displaced by a rapprochement with Russia in the following years (Brunnbauer 2021; Aberg and Terzyan 2018, 157-160).

This has not least to do with a change in Russian foreign policy: Russian foreign policy in the 2000s again tried to focus on Russia's claim to power in the region. Above all, Russia's sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space had to be restored. In doing so, the Kremlin resorted to a range of instruments, including the creation of a financial and economic dependency, but also a dependency in the security sector.

Through pro-Russian organisations such as the CIS, Moscow tried to gather a belt of pro-Russian states around itself (Aberg and Terzyan 2018, 157-160).

A rapprochement with the West was followed by a rapprochement with Russia, which subsequently led Armenia into economic dependence. Unlike his predecessor, Kocharyan also prioritised the question of the recognition of the genocide, which led to disagreementswith Turkey, and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which put Armenia in a further security dilemma (Aberg and Terzyan 2018, 158).

In order to obtain security guarantees from Russia, Armenia positioned itself as 'the best ally' in the South Caucasus and attempted to sign a series of military-related agreements under Robert Kocharyan between 2000 and 2008. The culmination of one of these agreements was the creation of the CSTO in 2002, a Russian NATO counterpart, with Armenia also being part of the CSTO to this day. By creating and reactivating the CIS and the CSTO, Russia was able to tie the post-Soviet space more closely to itself politically and militarily. It is worth mentioning that the CSTO hosts other post-Soviet states in addition toArmenia and Russia, which in turn maintain good relations not only with Armenia, but alsowith Azerbaijan (Halbach 2013; Brunnbauer 2021).

A possible rapprochement between Russia and Azerbaijan/Turkey was observed with suspicion in Armenia, as it could shift the balance of power in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflictin favour of Azerbaijan. Not least, this idea led Armenia increasingly away from the pro-Western path and pushed the country more into the Russian sphere of influence. Whether a rapprochement with Russia was without alternative is another question: in neighbouring Georgia, revolutions led to a rapprochement with the West and in 2008 to a final break with Russia. However, the security situation is not the same either.

Thus, it can be said that the Russian doctrine of the 2000s, Armenia's security concerns andthe reactivation of post-Soviet organisations increasingly pushed Armenia from a pro-Western course to a pro-Russian one. On the one hand, the period was marked by milestones in European integration, but at the same time important military agreements were signed between Armenia and Russia, which still have an important significance today (Shirinyan 2019, 7-14; Harutyunyan 2017).

Armenia's increased dependency on Russia since the 2000s pushed Armenia into a dilemma: due to the increased dependency, other relations could not be developed equally and the alliance between Armenia and Russia became increasingly asymmetrical.

The 2000s, especially 2002, were also marked by economic dependence on the part of Russia. In 2002, Russia cancelled Armenia's debts for shares in state-owned enterprises. Due to the increasing economic dependence, Armenia has been increasingly tied to Russia in terms of energy policy since 2002. The strong ties narrowed the state's manoeuvrability in terms of independent economic and energy policy. For example, contracts with Iran on other terms could not be concluded due to Russia's monopoly position in Armenia (Shirinyan 2019, 8; Pegolo 2021).

A special role in the Armenian-Russian relationship of the 2000s is played by the relationship between Turkey and Russia on the one hand and Azerbaijan and Russia on the other. Due tothe strategic and pragmatic partnership between Russia and Turkey,

partnerships of convenience developed between Russia and Turkey despite conflicts of interest. The partnership of convenience between Turkey and Russia challenges, first and foremost, the Armenian foreign policy doctrine that sees Russia as a protective power vis-à-vis Turkey. The strengthened partnership between Azerbaijan and Russia - for example in the economic sphere - can also be seen as a threat to Armenian foreign policy. Nevertheless, despite pro-Western ambitions, Armenia's foreign policy is essentially without alternative with regard to Russia (Shirinyan 2019, 9; Pegolo 2021).

The relationship of proximity and dependence during this period can also be illustrated by the military cooperation between Armenia and Russia (Brunnbauer 2021). For example, between 2007 and 2011, 96% of Armenia's military purchases were made through Russia. At the same time, it should be mentioned that at the same time more than half of Azerbaijan's military imports came from Russia (Shirinyan 2019, 9).

Stability and internal legitimacy

In the period from 1999 to 2000, the political elite and the military leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh were actively redistributing resources. After the assassination attempt in 2000, a wave of arrests swept the then President of Nagorno-Karabakh. Internal political power struggles have weakened the reputation of the de facto republic. The assassinations of high-ranking politicians in Armenia itself on October 27, 1999, when the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament were killed, also weakened the entire negotiation process on Nagorno-Karabakh. The subsequent elections until 2004 were described as fair by the international community, and key international institutions called for the elections to be cancelled. Thus, the elections were deemed illegal by many organisations, including the EU, as Nagorno-Karabakh was considered part of Azerbaijan (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

The military situation escalated briefly in 2003 when small-scale clashes and mutual accusations took place. It is worth mentioning that no 'major' shootings took place at the border between 1994 and 2003. After the aforementioned warnings to hold the elections in 2004 and 2005 - although the elections themselves were basically considered fair - several talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan took place in 2005. While no substantive successes can be identified during these meetings, the fact of these meetings themselves testifies to at least a modicum of stability (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

2003 also marks another important domestic political turning point for Nagorno-Karabakh. Unlike its de jure parent state Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh is for the first time classified not 'not free' but 'partly free' by Freedom House Index, making it one of the few partly free territorial entities in the region (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

In 2007, there was a peaceful transfer of power in Nagorno-Karabakh in new elections, with Bako Sahakyan being elected. More important for the period around 2007, however, is the fact that while the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents announced convergence in their positions during talks, Azerbaijan reached the billion mark in military spending for the first time in 2007. If we take a look at internal

legitimacy, there was a constitutional referendum in Karabakh in 2006. The referendum can be used as an indicator of 'internal legitimacy' for two main reasons: Firstly, because of the content of the referendum itself and secondly, because of the turnout.

The core content of the referendum was the definition of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent, self-governing, democratic republic based on the rule of law. The referendum was primarily intended to underline the independence of the non-recognised republic.

The stability issue within Karabakh became increasingly difficult, with isolated military clashes with few fatalities in 1999. The political situation itself is also classified by Freedom House Index as unfree or not very free for the years after 1997-1998. During this period, the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh sides tried to find a solution to settle the conflict. Common solutions were a large autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan. Some solutions - for example, by some OSCE Chairmen - even referred to a joint state between Azerbaijan and Karabakh, which in turn would enhance Karabakh's position. Azerbaijan rejected these proposals on the grounds that this would not give it sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. Instead, the Azerbaijani side demanded the withdrawal of Nagorno-Karabakh troops and the demilitarisation of the border areas. Only then could the status issue be discussed, according to the Azerbaijani side (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

The advanced age of the Azerbaijani president and the desire to solve the problem during hisown term of office, so that his intended successor (his son) does not have to inherit the conflict, increased the time pressure for a possible solution. Although the many meetings between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents underline the willingness to talk, the negotiations failed each time to find a compromise (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

Turbulent relations between Armenia and regional hegemon from 2008 to 2018

In the period between 2008 and 2018, President Serzh Sargsyan succeeded Robert Kocharyan in Armenia. Apart from 2020, the period between 2008 and 2018 can be considered the most turbulent in Armenian foreign policy - especially with the turning point in 2013 from amore pro-European course to a strongly pro-Russian one.

As mentioned before, the substantive level of Armenian foreign policy cannot be clearly described as pro-Russian. Both presidents before Serzh Sargsyan had a partly pro-European agenda, but this was overshadowed by political realities and, due to the lack of alternatives, pushed the country into the Russian sphere of influence. The term of office of Sargsian can be described similarly, who on the one hand wanted to advance the European integration process, but at the same time became more closely tied to Russia.

A number of foreign policy decisions can be evaluated during this period. The most important decisions relate to the Association Agreement with the EU and accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In 2013, despite previous efforts to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, a turnaround occurred due to pressure from

Moscow. The agreement with the EU was not signed, and at the same time Armenia joined the Russian-led EAEU (Shirinyan 2019, 3).

In the field of military policy, too, the agreement on the military base in Gyumri was extended in 2010 for another 35 years until 2044. As previously mentioned, the Russian military base in Gyumri on the border with Turkey fulfils a strategically important role in the region and is partly regarded by Armenia as a 'guarantor' on the Armenian-Turkish border (Shirinyan 2019, 10).

The strong division of countries into pro-Western and pro-Russian has become a bane especially for Armenia. The non-signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2013 confirmed Armenia's pro-Russian position, as seen by some European representatives. In the process, the political context of the decision was not, or hardly, taken into account. The 'Armenian turn' was largely perceived by the EU as unreliable and disappointing. From the Armenian perspective, the EU's unwillingness to compromise by signing only part of the treaty was perceived as unfair. Only months later, the EU agreed to sign only certain parts of the agreement on Ukraine (Shirinyan 2019, 14-15).

Between 2010 and 2013, Armenia underwent a process of Europeanisation - not only in the preparations for the signing of the Association Agreement, but also in other reforms. However, despite stronger cooperation with the EU and NATO, Armenia - in contrast to Georgia - never expressed interest in joining either the EU or NATO, in line with the balance policy. The passive engagement with the EU and NATO and parallel pro-Russian orientation allowed the country to establish at least basic cooperation with the West without leaving the Russian sphere of influence (Shirinyan 2019, 16-17).

Another turning point in the relations between Armenia and Russia and Armenia and Azerbaijan may be 2016 and the Four-Day war in the same year. The war in April 2016 is considered the largest military conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh since the ceasefire in 1994. The war had a negative effect on Armenian-Russian relations due to the seemingly passive behaviour from the Russian side. However, the anti-Russian sentiment and the cooling of relations were already consolidated by several incidents in 2015: After the murder of a family by a Russian soldier from the military base in Armenia, the Russian authorities refused to hand over the suspect. In another example from 2015, the so-called 'Electric Yerevan' demonstrations, which started as protests against rising electricity prices and increasingly turned against the political establishment and corruption, took place. As Russia was/is the owner of the respective electricity utilities in Armenia, it played a central role, but considered the demonstrations to be an 'Armenian Maidan'. Both incidents at least cooled the relationship and made the Armenian public increasingly critical of Russia (Shirinyan 2019, 20).

The Association Agreement, which was not signed in 2013, was resumed from 2015 and signed in a slightly different form as CEPA in 2017 and is considered a milestone in EU-Armenia relations. This allowed Armenia to expand its own manoeuvrability between the two parties and deepen integration with the EU, while remaining a member of Russian-led organisations (Shirinyan 2019, 22).

The Armenian dilemma in foreign policy is not least the West's perception that Armenia is too pro-Russian and Russia's perception that Armenia is too pro-Western. Thus, while Armenia is a member of the EU, it also has an 'association agreement' with the EU. Thus, while Armenia is a member of the Russian defence alliance CSTO, it also maintains close relations with NATO countries and participates in individual NATO-led peacekeeping missions. Armenia's manoeuvring and above all its relationship with NATO is observed with suspicion, not least by Russia (Shirinyan 2019, 23).

The year 2018 and the associated turbulence within Armenian domestic politics, as a result of which Serzh Sargsyan had to resign, are also significant. In 2018, Armenia underwent controversial constitutional changes, in the course of which Armenia was transformed from a presidential republic into a parliamentary one. The purpose of the constitutional change was to bypass term limits, which meant that Serzh Sargsyan could now continue to govern even further as prime minister (previously state president). The constitutional changes and the associated lack of transparency triggered mass unrest in Armenia, with demands for Serzh Sargsyan's resignation. The leader of the mass movement was the opposition member Nikol Pashinyan, who is considered pro-Western in general outline. Despite Nikol Pashinyan, there were no foreign policy demands during the mass unrest - unlike in Ukraine or Georgia, for example. The Russian media have described Armenia as a kind of 'Maidan', although it is significant that Russia did not support the incumbent head of government, Serzh Sargsyan. The absence of active Russian intervention to prevent a more 'pro-Western' oppositionist is not very characteristic for Russian foreign policy in the region (Shirinyan 2019, 21-24).

Fragmented stability and internal legitimacy

Although 2008 is not a turning point in three respects, it is an important year for Nagorno-Karabakh's (in)stability and status. First, in 2008 there were skirmishes and new waves of escalation in the border zone. While this may not seem like much compared to more recent clashes, in this respect it is an important indicator, since from 1994 to 2008, with rare exceptions, the level of military clashes was rare. In the same year, the UN General Assembly called for the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh (UNGA 2008).

However, the year is particularly important because three partial recognitions took place in other regions of the world - namely the recognition of Kosovo by the West and the partial recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia. It should be mentioned that the recognition of the de facto republics mentioned is not due to a conviction about their content, but took place for geostrategic reasons. This is indicated by the fact that Russia recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia but protested against the recognition of Kosovo. The same applies to the Western community with regard to Kosovo's recognition and the criticism of the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On the one hand, these partial recognitions set precedents on which Nagorno-Karabakh could rely, while at the same time Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh

and Russia announced that they would not put the question of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence on the political agenda. Despite peace talks, 2008 also saw increased military spending on both sides (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

A historic agreement between Armenia and Turkey, signed in 2009, was not ratified in 2010 and failed because of Ankara's precondition to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Talks between Baku and Yerevan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region also failed after military clashes with Azerbaijani forces in Nagorno-Karabakh itself, which left six people dead (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

The wave of military friction continued in the following years, with major clashes in 2012, but especially in 2014 and 2016. In 2014, even before 2008, the highest level of escalation since the end of the 1994 war. The military clashes put immense strain on the peace and negotiation process of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan and placed Nagorno-Karabakh under a military threat. 2012 also saw elections in Nagorno-Karabakh similar to 2010, with the incumbent Bako Sahakyan winning in both cases (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

A new dimension of military clashes occurred in 2016, when more than 100 people on each side - both in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan - died in the so-called Four-Day war. For the first time since the 1994 ceasefire, there were not only direct military clashes but territorial changes as Azerbaijan was able to conquer a few square kilometres. After the Kremlin's interference, the conflict was settled and military clashes ceased (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

In the same year, amendments were proposed and a new constitution was drafted. The intention was to switch from a semi-presidential to a presidential system. The referendum itself was proposed in 2016 due to security considerations and approved by a majority of voters in 2017. The holding of a corresponding referendum underlines the internal legitimacy of the de facto Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

Non-resilient responses to geopolitical challenges: restrictions for regional hegemon

The years 2018 to 2020 must be viewed in a special light, as they are seen in the public perception as a domestic and foreign policy turnaround. To what extent this applies to foreign policy orientation can be determined in the course of the following evaluation. First of all, it should be mentioned that the Velvet Revolution took place in 2018, in the course of which Nikol Pashinyan, who is regarded as pro-Western, became prime minister.

Regarding the revolution itself, it is interesting to note that Russia, which views such revolutions in its immediate neighbourhood with great scepticism, has been relatively passive. The first steps of the new government were to underline the importance of relations with Russia and the West alike. Thus, instead of 'pro-Russian', 'pro-European' or 'pro-American', the term 'pro-Armenian' or 'Armenia-centric' became established in political language. With this, the newly elected government partly wanted to appease the Russian government (Kopalyan 2018).

This can also be reflected in the foreign policy statements. Although Pashinyan, as an opposition politician, sharply criticised the EAEU, calling it inefficient, he became a supporter of the project during his term in office. He spoke out against an exit. In 2019, Pashinyan even initiated a free trade agreement between Singapore, Vietnam and the EAEU after visiting these countries. Similar to other heads of government, this underlines the tight manoeuvrability of Armenia's foreign policy and illustrates that despite symbolic and presumably election-related guests, even politicians who are considered more pro-Western are pushed into the Russian sphere of influence (Kucera 2019a). In this context, another event from 2019 is interesting for Armenian-Russian relations. Russia requested assistance in the Syrian conflict from its own allies in 2019. The Armenian side was the first to respond, offering the deployment of deminers and medics for a mission in Syria. The background, similar to the case of the position towards the EAEU, is appeasement towards Russia. The deployment of Armenian forces to Syria had a relatively damaging effect on the otherwise good Armenian-American relations. The USA side sharply criticised the decision, stating that it would not tolerate any support - military or civilian - for Assad (Kucera 2019b).

Russia's gas price increases to Armenia for 2019 from $150 to $165 per thousand cubic metres also led to strained relations. Dependence on Russia in the energy sector is part of Armenia's energy reality (Giragossian 2019).

Another tension that lasted for a longer period of time was the anti-corruption struggle of the Armenian government against old rulers, military officers and oligarchs. In particular, the arrest of Robert Kocharyan, the second president, as well as some other former officials/politicians led to disgruntlement between Moscow and Armenia. The arrest and trial of Robert Kocharyan is special in that the relationship between Robert Kocharyan and Vladimir Putin is characterised by a long-standing friendship. Russia, among other things, protested - albeit indirectly - against these trials via political talk shows on state broadcasters and perceived them to be conditionally Russophobic (Berglund 2012).

Despite Armenia's policy of appeasement, there have been major disagreements with Russia, especially over anti-corruption measures against former pro-Russian politicians, including former President Robert Kocharyan. In the Russian media, such arrests and trials were sometimes presented as politically, even geopolitically motivated trials. It is worth mentioning that Robert Kocharyan, Armenia's second president, has friendly relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. While Russia criticized Armenia during the first arrest, there was surprisingly silence during the second arrest of Kocharyan.

In the same year, there was a turnaround in Armenia's Nagorno-Karabakh policy. Although socially Nagorno-Karabakh is de facto considered part of the Armenian world, for political reasons all previous heads of government did not refer to it as part of Armenia but as a separate and self-governing or independent republic. On August 5, the Armenian Prime Minister said at a rally 'Artsakh is Armenia, that's it'. With this he initiated a paradigm shift, which was criticised domestically by large parts of the opposition and perceived as a provocation abroad, especially in Azerbaijan. In the following subchapter on Nagorno-Karabakh, we will discuss in more detail the reaction on the part of Azerbaijan (Kucera 2019c).

The year 2020 marks the low point of Armenia's security and foreign policy. Two main conflicts can be identified. On the one hand, the conflicts in July between Armenia and Azerbaijan and, on the other hand, the second Nagorno-Karabakh war between September and November 2020. The former conflict has a special status in that it is not a military conflict in or around Nagorno-Karabakh, but for the first time in history a conflict on the internationally recognised Armenian-Azerbaijani borders. In July, there was mutual firing inthe Tavush region that lasted several days and resulted in several deaths. Although the conflict was brought to an end under pressure from Russia, Russia itself and the CSTO reacted little or not at all, even though a member country of the alliance was attacked (Davidzon 2022, 153-183; Lukin and Novikov 2021; Sakwa 2021).

The escalation in the July conflict reached its peak when the Azerbaijani side indirectly threatened a possible military strike on the nuclear power plant in Armenia. The July 2020 conflict, as mentioned above, is interesting not only because of the fact that it is taking placein the Armenian-Azerbaijani border area. A much more important aspect for this work is Russia's non-intervention on the Armenian side despite a military alliance. Although Armenia did not submit a corresponding request to the CSTO or Russia, Russia's political reaction was also rather neutral and mediatory.

On September 27, 2020, the war started by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh with the support of Turkey and the involvement of terrorist groups lasted 44 days (The Government of the RA 2021). The Second Karabakh War lasted 44 days and most of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was forced to leave the escalation zone and the area of military operations (The Government of the RA 2021; Pashinyan 2021). This conflict is not a small-scale military conflict, but a large-scale war with the use of all heavy guns, tanks as well as drones. Different positions were formed at the international level.

Pakistan and Turkey, traditionally very friendly to Azerbaijan, took a clearly pro-Azerbaijani position. Several states (Russia, France and the USA) confirmed the presence of Syrian jihadists in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the Azerbaijani side. The French side assumed that these were Syrian jihadists close to Turkey. According to media reports, at least high-ranking Turkish officers were involved in the conflict.

A more pro-Armenian role can be identified in the case of Cyprus, Greece and France. It should be mentioned that these states have traditionally maintained very good relations with Armenia and are opposed to Turkey. As a sign of solidarity, Greece withdrew its own ambassador from Azerbaijan, Cyprus condemned the Azerbaijani aggression and in France,Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination was voted on in both chambers as a proposal to the government.

A more mediating, neutral role was played primarily by the United States on the one hand and Russia and to some extent Iran on the other. In the course of the war, ceasefire agreements were signed on the initiative of both Russia and the United States. In all these cases, these agreements were broken - both sides accused each other of not abiding by the agreement (Zolyan 2020).

The situation only calmed down on 10-11 November when a ceasefire agreement was signed and the Armenian side had to accept a de facto military victory of Azerbaijan. In the course of the war, the Azerbaijani side was able to bring large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas under its own control by using military drones. Several points were set out in the new ceasefire agreement, the most

important being the following: Ceasefire between both sides, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in those areas of Nagorno-Karabakh that remained under the control of Armenian militants. It was also decided to return several territories captured by Armenian troops in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War as a 'security belt'. Another essential point was the creation of a corridor between Nakhichevan (an exclave of Azerbaijan) and the core area of Azerbaijan via Armenian territory, as well as a route to connect Armenia with Russia (via Azerbaijan).

Revolutionary factors of stability and internal legitimacy

In and around Nagorno-Karabakh itself, the events in Armenia had a major impact. The Velvet Revolution in Armenia also led to revolutionary sentiments and demonstrations in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2018. Many protesters wanted changes in Nagorno-Karabakh as well because of the revolutionary successes in Armenia. However, even the Armenian prime minister mediated so that the demonstrations stopped. The background for this attitude are and were security concerns in Nagorno-Karabakh. Due to the external danger, the society tried to consolidate itself domestically - partly at the expense of democracy. Several high-ranking government and security officials resigned in the wake of the demonstrations. The incumbent president Bako Sahakyan promised not to run again in 2020. It is also important to mention in this context that Nagorno-Karabakh's elites were linked to Armenia's old pre-revolutionary elites, which led to political tensions between Armenia's new leadership and Nagorno-Karabakh's leadership (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

Far-reaching consequences for tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the security of Nagorno-Karabakh were the aforementioned statement of the Armenian Prime Minister in 2019 'Artsakh is Armenia, that's it'. This phrase and paradigm shift were perceived very negatively by the Azerbaijani side. Azerbaijani news sites commented that with this position the Armenian prime minister had a more radical approach than his predecessors. A prompt, condemnatory reaction followed from the Azerbaijani government side, saying that Armeniawas occupying Azerbaijani territory and that the prime minister's statement was damaging to the peace process. This reaction, in turn, was softened to some extent in Armenia after it was stated that the statement was to be understood in an election-related context.

The Armenian Prime Minister's statement was strongly condemned by many politicians within Armenia, as a paradigm shift from 'Artsakh is independent' to 'Arstakh belongs toArmenia' would damage the entire negotiation process.

Nagorno-Karabakh itself is classified as 'partly free' during this period, similar to previous years, and thus freer than the de jure mother state Azerbaijan. Freedom House Index rates the freedom/democracy situation in Nagorno-Karabakh at 31/100 points for 2018, 34/100 points for 2019 and 35/100 points for 2020. In comparison, Azerbaijan is rated as unfree and given a score of 10/100 (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

Conclusion and discussion

In the following step, let us take a look at Armenia, the four subordinate time periods and examine the relationship between our two x variables and the y variable. In other words: We assume that better relations between Armenia and Russia lead to a more stable situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, we assume that the internal legitimacy or the standard of democracy of Nagorno-Karabakh itself should also have a contribution to the stability of the non-recognised state. Of the four time periods, however, the period between 1991 and 1998 must be considered separately. Including and classifying this war as an indicator of 'poor stability' in Nagorno-Karabakh would lead to false causal relationships, as this military conflict is not the result of good or bad relations between Russia and Armenia. For this reason, the first Nagorno-Karabakh war is not included in the category of stability between 1991 and 1998.

If we look away from the Nagorno-Karabakh war at the situation in the 1990s, we can make a fundamental observation: Between 1991 and 1998, a pro-Russian course was established in Armenia for geostrategic-real-political reasons, despite pro-Western diplomats within the administration. The 1992 accession to the CIS, the 1995 agreement on the stationing of Russian troops in Gyumri, the military alliance with Russia as well as the friendship agreement and the mutual assistance agreement of 1997 are clear indications of this. Despite individual agreements with the EU (PCA) and NATO (PfP), no disgruntlements can be detected in Russian-Armenian relations.

The situation of democratic standards and internal legitimacy, on the other hand, is more difficult to classify. The independence referendum of 1991 and the very high voter turnout are clear indicators of high internal legitimacy. The classification of the elections between 1995 and 1997 as basically fair and free as well as the improvements in civil and political rights between 1994 and 1998 speak for internal legitimacy. The classification of Nagorno-Karabakh as 'unfree' according to the Freedom House Index speaks against this - among the reasons given is the state of war emergency. For these reasons, the situation of internal legitimacy for this period can be described as medium, also in view of the historical context, since on the one hand the referendums and elections speak in favour, and the FHI categorisation against. If we look at the situation around stability, we can see the following for this period: If we were to include the military conflict between 1991 and 1994 in its entirety, it would greatly distort the results as already mentioned and lead to a false conclusion.

Leaving aside the military conflict, it can be said that a more or less stable peace was concluded between the two sides in 1994. For the stability of Nagorno-Karabakh, the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh co-signed the Bishkek ceasefire as a party to the conflict is particularly noteworthy. While it may seem a minor detail, it is nevertheless an indication that the Azerbaijani side at least recognised Nagorno-Karabakh as a separate party to the conflict at that time. Between 1994 and 1998, no significant potential dangers can be identified between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan - not even military incidents. Since 1994, the conflict can be described as frozen. Thus, it can be said that the external stability of Nagorno-Karabakh can be classified as comparatively high due to the lack of conflicts after 1994 and the signed ceasefire. For the period between 1991 and 1998, it can thus be stated that relations between

Armenia and Russia were very good on the one hand, internal legitimacy can be described as medium and stability was comparatively high in this period around Nagorno-Karabakh (see Table 2).

Table 2. Relations between Armenia and Russia from 1991 to 1998

	X1 Relations Protector/Hegemon	*X2 Internal legitimacy*	*Y Stability*
1991-1998	• 1992: CIS membership • Military alliance with Russia • 1995: Agreement on the stationing of Russian military in Gyumri • 1997: Friendship Agreement for Cooperation and Mutual Assistance	• 1991: Independence referendum • 1994/1995: 'non free' partially due to martial law • 1995-1997: Elections described as free and fair in principle • 1994-1998: Improvements in political and civil rights	• Military conflict between 1991- 1994 • 1994: Bishkek-Protocols • Frozen conflict since 1994 • No (major) military clashes since 1994

The period between 1998 and 2008 can be divided into two time spans - on the one hand, the period up to 2002 and, on the other hand, between 2002 and 2008. It is important to say that until 2002 Armenia attempted a balance course with a pro-Western bias: This includes membership in the Council of Europe and symbolic guests as well as rapprochement with NATO. At the same time, it should be mentioned that a partial rapprochement with the Westwas not perceived as an anti-Russian act per se in Russia during this period. Apart from the disagreement between Armenia and Russia over the visit of the Armenian President to a NATO anniversary event, no other headlines or major problems in the mutual relations can be identified.

The period from 2002 onwards, on the other hand, can be seen as a clearly pro-Russian period. The main reasons for this are the deepening of military relations and Armenia's greater economic dependence on Russia. This period includes the establishment and membership of the Russian-led CSTO in 2002, the transfer of numerous state shares in the energy sector in exchange for partial debt relief, and the strong economic and military dependence (especially since the 2007 arms build-up). Between 2007 and 2011, 96% of the weapons were purchased from Russia, which speaks for a very high level of dependence, andin some cases a monopoly position, on the part of Russia. For the period between 1998 and 2008, very good relations between Russia and Armenia can be observed on the whole. On the one hand, the rather pro-Western course up to 2002 did not lead to an anti-Russian course, and on the other hand, the rapprochement and dependence from 2002 onwards wasall the greater.

The internal legitimacy issue can also be divided into two sub-sections. On the one hand, theinternal power struggles, assassination attempts and arrests until 2000 and the period thereafter. With regard to the Freedom House Index, it can also be said that Nagorno-Karabakh was classified as 'unfree' until 2003 and as 'partly free' throughout the period since 2003 (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b). The 2004 elections were classified as free and fair, and the transfer of power from the old to the new ruler in

2007 can be classified as peaceful. An important indicator of high internal legitimacy is the 2006 and 2007 referendum, which should be considered separately due to its content, turnout and outcome. The referendum, which was intended to underline, among other things, the independence of the non-recognised state, was held with a turnout of 87%, with 99% of voters in favour of the reforms. In this case, too, I would classify the situation with regard to internal legitimacy as high, similar to the situation between 1991 and 1998, due to the power struggles on the one hand, categorisations of FHI as well as the referendum (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b). A major difference between the first and the second period might be that between 2003 and 2008 Nagorno-Karabakh was categorised as 'partly free' (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

The period between 1998 and 2008 can be described as broadly stable and secure in terms of Nagorno-Karabakh's external security, with two turning points. On the one hand, more intensive negotiations took place until 2002. In 2003, the first military escalation occurred between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, this military escalation remained the exception rather than the rule for this period. No significant results were achieved in the negotiation process between 1998 and 2008. However, Nagorno-Karabakh lost its de facto status as a separate party to the conflict, and Azerbaijan now negotiated directly with Armenia. This can be seen as an - albeit indirect - weakening of external stability. From 2007 onwards, a massive increase in military spending by Azerbaijan can be observed. The period between 1998 and 2008 would be classified as stable both purely from the perspective of military conflicts, but the non-recognition as a party to the conflict and the increased military spending by Azerbaijan exclude very high stability. Thus, I would classify this period as high compared to other periods. For the period between 1998 and 2008 (see Table 3), it can thus be said that relations between Armenia and Russia can be classified as good, the internal legitimacy of Nagorno-Karabakh as high and the stability of the non-recognised republic as high.

Table 3. Relations between Armenia and Russia from 1998 to 2008

		X1 Relations Protector/Hegemon	*X2 Internal legitimacy*	*Y Stability*
1998-2008		• Until 2002: Balanced but more pro-Western approach • 2001: Admission to the Council of Europe • Symbolic rapprochement with the NATO • Since 2002: Rapprochement with Russia • 2002: the CSTO membership • 2002: Transfer of most of energy sector to Russia in exchange of debt release • Since 2002: Stronger economic dependence on Russia 2007-2011: Dependence on	• 1999-2000: Power struggles within the government, assassination attempt on president • 2004: Elections described as fair • Until 2003: Classified as 'unfree' • Since 2003: Classified as 'partly free' by FHI • 2007: Peaceful transfer of power •2006-2007: Referendum to underline the independence - 87%	• 2003: Escalation of the military situation, small- scale clashes; first serious clashes since 1994 Since 2007: Massive increase of military expenditures by Azerbaijan

	military cooperation; 96% of Armenia's military purchases through Russia	turnout, 99% support for the referendum	

The period between 2008 and 2018 is one of the most turbulent periods - both in terms of Russia-Armenia relations and the stability issue. The extension of the contract for the Russian military base in 2010 is an indicator of the maintenance of good relations. On the other hand, Armenia underwent a Europeanisation process between 2010 and 2013. The break-off of the EU Association Agreement in 2013 and Armenia's subsequent accession to the EAEU happened for political reasons from Moscow, especially since Armenia had criticised the EAEU as inefficient. The signing of a 'light association agreement' in 2017 and the omission of political passages also happened under pressure from Moscow. During this period, the Russian side perceived Armenia to be on a pro-Western course. The anti-Russian sentiments of 2015 and 2018 during demonstrations were seen in Russia as a kind of 'Maidan'. Although relations can be described as stable on a formal level, they are still characterised by many frictions and a mutual loss of trust. Therefore, relations between Armenia and Russia between 2008 and 2018 can be described as medium. Internal legitimacy, aside from the usual power struggles, can be described as high due to the Freedom House Index rating of 'partly free' between 2008 and 2018 and a 2016-2017 referendum (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b).

The highest frequency of military escalations occurred between 2008 and 2018. In 2008, 2010 and 2014, there were military incidents with deaths on both sides. In 2016, there was even a Four-Day war. In addition, there were difficulties in the negotiation process due to the incidents. External stability can therefore be assessed as unstable. Thus, we can say, that in the period between 2008 and 2018 the relations between Armenia and Russia can be described as medium (see Table 4), the internal legitimacy of Nagorno-Karabakh as high and the external stability as 'unstable'.

Table 4. Relations between Armenia and Russia from 2008 to 2018

	X1 Relations Protector/Hegemon	X2 Internal legitimacy	Y Stability
2008-2018	• 2010: Agreement on the Russian military base extended until 2045 • 2010-2013: Process of Europeanisation • 2013: Cancellation of the signing-process of the Association Agreement with the EU • 2013: EAEU membership • 2015: 'Electric Yerevan' demonstrations considered in Russia as "Armenian maidan" • 2015: anti-Russian sentiments in Armenia because Russian authorities refused to hand over a Russian	• 2008-2018: Karabakh classified as 'partly free' by FHI • 2016-2017: New constitution draft through referendum establishing a presidential system	• 2008: The first serious border clashes since 1994 (and 2003) • Despite the partial recognition of Kosovo, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it had no effect on Karabakh • 2010: Military clashes with 6 dead people • 2014: Military

soldier in Armenia who murdered a family • 2017: Signation of a lightversion of the EU Association Agreement CEPA • 2018: Large anti-government protests led to the resignition of the government - described as 'Armenian Maidan' by the Russian media		clash • 2016: Four-Days-war with more than 100 dead people on both sides 2012-2016: Immense strain on the peace process due to military escalation

The short period between 2018 and 2020 led to a series of foreign policy actions and escalations. First of all, it is worth mentioning that the 2018 revolution and the subsequent election of Nikol Pashinyan, who was considered pro-Western, was viewed with scepticism from the Russian side. Despite previous strong pro-Western orientation, the new prime minister spoke out in favour of the Eurasian Union, even acting as a mediator between this union and other countries. In addition, Armenia supported - albeit as a symbolic gesture - the Russian military operation in Syria. The increase in the price of gas, but above all the arrest of President Kocharyan, who was close to Russia, led to strong upsets in relations.

Russia's subsequent non-reaction to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in July 2020 can be seen as a breach of trust. Relations during this period can be considered goodat the official level, but medium at the unofficial level.

On the issue of democracy and legitimacy, mass protests against corruption and the government associated with the old elites in Armenia also took place in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2018. In 2020, there was a peaceful transfer of government. In the two/three years, Nagorno-Karabakh was classified as 'partly free', with the situation improving every year - even in the year of war. The internal legitimacy and democracy issue can nevertheless be classified as medium due to the mass protests.

Together with the period between 2008 and 2018 (see Table 5), this initially rather calm period can also be determined as highly unstable. Reasons for this are, on the one hand, the paradigm shift of the Armenian side in Nagorno-Karabakh policy and the negative reaction of the Azerbaijani side, as well as the full-fledged 44-Day War in 2020. External stability can be assessed as highly unstable apart from 2018. Thus, it can be said that relations between Russia and Armenia should be rated as medium (tense), internal legitimacy as medium and external stability as highly unstable.

Table 5. Relations between Armenia and Russia from 2018 to 2020

	X1 Relations Protector/Hegemon	X2 Internal legitimacy	Y Stability
2018-2020	• 2018: After the Velvet Revolution Nikol Pashinyan, who is considered pro-Western, became prime minister • Despite the pro-Western perception the government appeased the Russian	• 2018: Large protest movements againstthe government • 2020: New	• 2019: Negative perception of Azerbaijani side on Pashinyan's "Artsakh is

government • 2018-2019: Armenia deepened its role in the EAEU and initiated trade agreements • 2019: Armenia deployed forces to Syria on Russian request; this had a damaging effect on the US-Armenian relations • 2019: Russia's gas price increase led to strained relations • 2019: Arrest of former president Robert Kocharyan led to serious tensions with Russia • 2020: Little or no reaction from the Russian side on the July 2020 conflict • 2020: Only mediating Russian role during the war in September - despite the CSTO membership 2020: Russian brokered peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, deployment of Russian peacekeepers	government, peaceful transfer of power 2018-2020: Karabakh described as 'partly free' – rating improvement between 2018 and 2020	Armenia, that's it" 2020: the 44-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh

H1: Relation between protector-hegemon-relations and the stability of the non-recognised state.

The individual hypotheses formulated at the beginning are now discussed on the basis of the analyses and conclusions of the individual sections. Corresponding assessments have already been made in the partial conclusions of Armenia/Karabakh and Albania/Kosovo. In addition to the general results, which are presented in tabular form for better illustration, it is important to include the respective historical context of the two cases in the conclusion. In our first hypothesis, we first asked ourselves whether and how the relations between the protector and the hegemon affect the stability of the non-recognised state. If we take a look at our two country examples and the eight case studies that follow from them, we can see the following: Especially in the Armenian case, it suggests that good relations tend to lead to higher stability and comparatively worse relations to comparative instability. In fact, in the Armenian case study we see that relations between Armenia and Russia were very good between 1991 and 1998 and good between 1998 and 2008. In the same period, we see - apart from the Nagorno-Karabakh war, which has not been included for reasons of bias (see the respective chapter for more details) - a high level of stability around Nagorno-Karabakh. Between 2008 and 2018 and 2018 and 2020, on the other hand, we find only 'medium' relations between Armenia and Russia - this correlates with low or very low stability between 2008 and 2020 (see Table 6).

Table 6. Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh

	X1 Relations Protector/Hegemon	*Y Stability*
1991-1998	Very good	High
1998-2008	Good	High
2008-2018	Medium	Low
2018-2020	Medium	Very low

If we look at the Albanian-Kosovar example, however, a correlation is not directly evident, or if so, then only weakly. In fact, between the periods 1992 to 1999 and 1999 to 2008 there was an improvement in relations from good to very good and at the same time there was also an improvement in stability from medium to high (see Table 6). Between the periods from 2008 to 2013 and 2013 to 2020, on the other hand, there has been a constant (very high) stability, but between the same periods the relations have 'deteriorated' from very good to good (see Table 6).

Thus, at first glance, one would rather find a weak (if any) correlation in the Albanian case. However, in this context it is important to include two contextual issues: On the one hand, the variation in terms of the variable of relationships in the Albanian-American case is rather small, since it only distinguishes between 'very good' and 'good'. Moreover, it is much more difficult per se to make a categorisation between 'very good' and 'good' - here the subjective evaluation of the author plays a certain role. Secondly, especially in the Albanian-Kosovan example, it must be borne in mind that good relations with the USA played an immense role and that our analysis shows that without good USA-Albanian relations, Kosovo's status (both in the military, de facto and de jure sense) would at least be delayed for a very long time. Based on these two arguments and the contextuality, I tend to see a connection between the good Albanian-American relations and the stability issue of Kosovo.

We can thus state that the relations between the protector and the hegemon have an influence on the stability issue of the non-recognised state. At the same time, it should be noted that this influence varies depending on the case. In our study, this effect is more pronounced in the Armenian case than in the Albanian case. Thus, the main hypothesis can be confirmed.

H2: Relation between internal legitimacy and stability of the non-recognised state.

A look at the second hypothesis, namely whether internal legitimacy, such as internal standards of democracy, have an influence on the stability of the non-recognised state, shows a clearer picture. Both in the example of Nagorno-Karabakh and in the example of Kosovo we see that there is no correlation. In addition, it is worth mentioning that in the Kosovo example, medium internal legitimacy was classified in all four cases. But also in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, where internal legitimacy varies between time periods, we cannot find any correlation (see Table 7).

Table 7. Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh

	X2 Internal legitimacy	**Y Stability**
1991-1998	Medium	High
1998-2008	High	High
2008-2018	High	Low
2018-2020	Medium	Very low

Thus, the alternative hypothesis can be rejected. Thus, there is no influence of the internal legitimacy of the non-recognised state on stability. In addition to the analyses of the two hypotheses to be confirmed or rejected, the article also offers a detailed summary, time analysis and background analysis of the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo and compares these cases and the associated factors with each other. The selection of the two case studies may not correspond to the ideal image of the Most Similar System Design, but it comes closest to it and also offers good comparability when viewed retrospectively.

Through the reports of the Freedom House Index, both case studies could be examined with regard to internal legitimacy and external stability (Freedom House 2023a, 2023b). The use of the same sources for both case studies provides a better basis for subsequent comparability. At the same time, it is important to mention challenges and inconsistencies in the analysis and results of this work. First of all, there are the indicators of the variables: For all three variables, there are many indicators that could be used in the work. Depending on the definition of these variables and the choice of indicators, the results may be different. Of course, it should be mentioned that the limitation of the variables to a few indicators was necessary in order not to go beyond the scope of the work and to be able to guarantee comparability at all. Especially in the case of the variable 'internal legitimacy', different indicators can be used depending on the definition - from democratic standards, referendums, the work of the institutions to statements by leading politicians. The limitation to democratic values and referendums was made for reasons of comparability and the range of sources.

Another challenge of the analysis lies in the conclusions of the two sub-sections or the evaluation of the individual variables in the individual time periods broken down into 'very good/very high', 'good/high', 'medium', 'low', and 'very low'. This was done for reasons of comparability, not only to better illustrate the analyses, but also to make them more tangible for the final results. It is important to mention that such evaluations always entail a subjective character of the researcher or the author and such evaluations can turn out differently depending on the person. For this very reason, contextuality and other information were taken into account in addition to the tabulated results themselves.

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