For centuries, the Caucasus, which was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, has been an arena of interaction and struggle between various, often opposing, political and economic interests. Located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the region is a convenient base for the expansion of the US and the EU in the Middle East, as well as in the basins of the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas. At the same time, it is a link between these regions.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the US and the EU have increased their attention to the region, which is manifested in a significant increase in various assistance programs aimed primarily at accelerating the accustoming the South Caucasus republics to the Western values and their separation from Russia.

In particular, the EU Eastern Partnership program is focused, among other things, on the countries of the former Soviet Caucasus, also known as the South Caucasus. Despite the fact that this program is much less discussed today, the activity of European organisations in relation to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan is a factor influencing both the internal stability of these states and the interstate relations.

In addition to the active opposition of the current political élite in Washington and Brussels to Russia and its traditional ties with the South Caucasus in recent years, the interests of the Europeans here are mainly conditioned
by pragmatic considerations: developing the local markets, using natural resources, the so-called energy security, etc. Alternative pipelines and transport corridors have traditionally been seen as a key factor hindering the integration of the former Soviet republics. The desire to push Russia out of the Caucasus, the intensification of the Ukrainian-Russian gas wars, strengthening the infrastructure of influence on the local elites (led by the US, which occasionally, and deliberately, takes a back seat by giving carte blanche to the Europeans) - all of that has dramatically strengthened the position of the Western countries in Georgia, but somewhat complicated their relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Caucasus vector of the multilevel generalized European Neighbourhood Policy (from the TRASECA programs to the Eastern Partnership) has undergone a certain evolution and has its own distinctive features in relation to the different countries of the region. The European direction is quite important for the countries of the South Caucasus with their multi-vector foreign policy.

In January 2001, Armenia became a member of the European Council, reflecting its desire to integrate into the European structures. The European People’s Party, founded in the mid-1970s, is an important partner of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia. Today, Europe is associated with the general welfare, but this aspiration of Yerevan has historical roots: Armenia belonged to the Byzantine civilization area, and its culture is in many ways close to Europe. Another basis is the shared Christian religion, which became very important for the Armenians in the Middle Ages. For Yerevan, integration with Europe is facilitated by the large Armenian diaspora in European countries. The aspiration of the Armenian population to integrate into Europe can be evidenced by one of the recent polls, according to which 64% of the residents of the republic and 92% of the interviewed experts were in favor of integration into the EU.

The European Union is Armenia’s main economic partner: the EU countries account for about 40% of its trade turnover. Thus, from the economic point of view, Armenia is already quite close to Europe, and this opinion is shared by the Europeans as well.

The Armenian diaspora in the United States is probably the most important factor in the relations between Yerevan and Washington. Today, the US-Armenian relations are less developed than the Armenian-Russian relations, but they are going through an active phase. The US allocates several million dollars annually to modernize the Armenian army. Armenia itself has idealistic myths about the US as well. In this context, we recall President Woodrow Wilson and his arbitration, by whose decision the territory of the republic doubled and included most of the historical Armenia.

The Velvet Revolution, which led to a change of power in Armenia, inspires certain hopes for a radical change in Armenia’s foreign policy in the West. The most active tool to achieve this goal was the use of the religious factor and non-profit organisations, with whose help Washington and its allies are hoping to break Armenia away from Russia on the way that has already been beaten in Ukraine. On the whole, 5,000 non-profit organisations actively operate in Armenia under the control and financial support of the US, for the maintenance of which Washington annually allocates about $250 million through official programs alone. The reason for the presence of the largest US Embassy in the world on the territory of Armenia is quite understandable from this point of view.

So far there have been no shifts expected in the West in the apparent reorientation of the Armenian authorities from Russia to the US or the EU, but there is a sharp increase in the number of representatives of Washington and Brussels, who are calling for the replacement of Yerevan’s tried-and-tested multi-vector position with an unambiguously pro-Western one.

In 2019, Armenia will receive 60 million euros in grants from the European Union. Compared to the golden rain that is pouring on Georgia, it is certainly tens of times less, but there is no doubt that all this money will be primarily spent on anti-Russian propaganda. This was confirmed by the meeting between Cristian Preda, a member of the European Parliament from Romania, and a number of Romanian politicians close to him, and the Armenian delegation consisting of experts, representatives of state bodies and journalists in Bucharest on May 30. Thus, at this meeting, according to the reaction of the Armenian media, the representatives of Romania very strongly condemned the policy of Russia in the Caucasus, persistently suggesting that Armenia should make amendments to its foreign policy towards rapprochement with the West.

Valery Kulikov, expert politologist, exclusively for the online magazine ‘New Eastern Outlook’.