

# PECULIARITIES OF THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES: FORMATION, DEVELOPMENT AND ROLE IN ARMENIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS\*

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**Abstract.** The Armenian diaspora was an essential factor in the overall process of forming the Republic of Armenia. The Armenian-American community is one of the most effective communities of the Armenian diaspora in terms of promoting Armenia's interests in international politics. It also plays a prominent role in the development of relations between the US and Armenia. The paper examines the main factors that influence the characteristics of the Armenian-American diaspora community, as well as its role and significance in Armenian-American relations. The analysis will focus specifically on the origins of the Armenian-American diaspora, briefly introducing the history and main waves of Armenian migration and formation of the Armenian diaspora in the United States, the institutions of the community that seek to homogenize Armenian identity, the main lobbying agendas and mechanisms of influence on American foreign policy, and the role of the community in the development of Armenian-American relations.

**Keywords:** *Diaspora; Armenian Community; Republic of Armenia; the United States, Lobbying; Armenian-American Relations*

## *Introduction*

One of the specific factors in the overall process of the formation of the Republic of Armenia and, in particular, the development of Armenian-American relations was the Armenian diaspora.

Formed mainly as a result of the policy of genocide and deportation of Armenians in Western Armenia and Cilicia during the First World War that was pursued by the Ottoman authorities, the Armenian diaspora is now represented by numerous communities in various countries and regions, including Russia, the United States, Europe, Australia, the Near and the Middle East, South America, and others. Currently, the Armenian diaspora numbers about 10 million Armenians

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deeply integrated into American, European, Russian, and Asian economies. They are also entrenched in the financial and political undertakings of their communities and have a certain influence on the formation of foreign policy of these countries regarding the Republic of Armenia.

Following the establishment of an independent national state, the relationship between Armenia and the diaspora, previously limited both ideologically and politically by the Soviet regime, became one of the main geostrategic factors facilitating political, economic, cultural, and informational cooperation between the newly independent Armenian state and the world. In addition, the diaspora has become a factor in actively promoting the culture of Western liberalism and democracy in the process of Armenia's emergence from the limitations of the one-party Soviet system.

The Armenian community in the United States is one of the largest (the second largest Armenian overseas community) and socially advanced elements of the diaspora, with over one million American citizens. The number of the Armenian diaspora in the United States continues to grow steadily, mainly due to immigrants from the Near and Middle East and the Republic of Armenia. The social and political orientation of the Armenian-American diaspora is heterogeneous. At the same time, the Armenian diaspora in the United States has almost always been a fragmented community, consisting of several political groupings at loggerheads with each other.

In recent decades, a large and growing body of literature has explored the concept of the diaspora (Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1999; Sheffer, 2003). The existing literature on the Armenian diaspora tended to assess the modern Armenian diaspora as an integral whole (Sheffer, 2003; Tölölyan, 2000) or as a transforming entity (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019). Research concentrated on studying its separate communities (Abramson, 2013; Ferri, 2015; Oussatcheva, 2001; Pattie, 2011) as well as focused on various aspects of the Armenian diaspora (Baser & Swain, 2009; Ishkanian, 2005). Attempts were also made in comparative studies of different communities within a single diaspora (Ter-Matevosyan, Danielyan, Siserian, Kankanyan, & Shorjian, 2017).

However, by explaining the processes that shaped the Global Armenian Diaspora, the specific features of separate communities and, in particular, the Armenian-American diaspora community, the available research does not provide an exhaustive understanding of the defining factors that influence those characteristics and the role of the Armenian diaspora in Armenian-American relations.

Based on the existing theoretical literature and newly collected empirical data, the study seeks to identify and examine the main factors that influence the characteristics of the Armenian-American diaspora community as well as its role and significance in the development of Armenian-American relations. The analysis will focus specifically on the origins of the Armenian-American diaspora, briefly introducing the history and main waves of Armenian migration and formation of the Armenian diaspora in the United States, the institutions of the community that seek to homogenize Armenian identity, the main lobbying agendas and mechanisms of influence on the American foreign policy, as well as the role

of the community in Armenian-American relations. The study will address the following research questions: First, what are the main factors that influence the origins, the institution building, and the development of the Armenian diaspora in the United States? Second, how and why the Armenian ethnic diaspora groups influence American foreign policy and what are the main mechanisms of that influence? And third, what is the role of the Armenian diaspora in the development of Armenian-American relations?

The analysis is based on methods and approaches of qualitative research design. To conduct the study, I use a case study historical-comparative research method, qualitative content analysis techniques, and fieldwork research conducted in the Washington, D. C. and Boston communities. I support the study with official data provided by the United States and Armenian state agencies, the core diasporic institutions in the United States, articles, newspapers, as well as reports and working papers produced by various institutions and think tanks.

The article argues that despite its small size, the Armenian community is one of the most influential communities in the United States that plays a prominent role in the development of Armenian-American relations and promotion of bilateral interests. The Armenian-American diaspora provides substantial support to Armenian diplomacy in promoting national interests, especially in regard to the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide and the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh (in Armenian, Artsakh) conflict. The Armenian-American diaspora also publicizes the many socio-economic problems that Armenia faces today and highlights the strengthening of Armenian-American cooperation and partnership. The article, while focusing on the characteristics of the Armenian-American diaspora, also emphasizes the transformative nature of the community and the importance of cooperation and unity of diaspora institutions in the realization of common goals. At the same time, the article asserts that fragmentation, contradictions, and competition within the Armenian diaspora, especially among its most active political organizations, on the one hand, make cooperation and integration within the community itself difficult, and, on the other hand, by acting separately, enhances the effectiveness of activities to promote the interests of Armenia through various strategies to protect their interests and additional institutions and programs.

However, the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war revealed the obvious need to re-evaluate the diaspora's policy and modernize its institutions in order to mobilize the full potential of the Armenian-American diaspora and expand its influence.

### *Origins, Development and Institutions of the Armenian-American Diaspora*

Three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining independence, the population of the Republic of Armenia is about 3 million people (World Population Review, 2022) while the worldwide Armenian diaspora numbers about 10 million people.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word “Diaspora” (Armenian analogue – Սփյուռք (Spyurq) became common and generally accepted for the collective name of Armenians living outside their homeland. The word is actively used both in scientific circulation as a term as well as in social practice and everyday speech.

The definition of diaspora has several interrelated meanings, as there is no universally accepted and unambiguous term defining the phenomenon of “diaspora”. There are many conceptual approaches and definitions that characterize the phenomenon, related primarily to the presence of specific conditions and features that forced the ethnic communities or smaller entities to leave their historical homelands. At the same time, in numerous studies covering theoretical issues on diasporas (Clifford, 1994, p. 304; Cohen, 1997, pp. 22-27) authors frequently refer to William Safran’s (1991) fundamental study on the basic attributes of a diaspora that assess whether or not an ethnic minority or a group is, in fact, diasporic. According to Safran, only those minorities that share these basic characteristics can be regarded as diasporas:

1. Dispersal from an original “centre” to at least two “peripheral” or foreign regions;
2. Retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland, including its physical location, history, and achievements;
3. The belief that they are not – and perhaps never can be – fully accepted in their host countries and so remain partly alienated;
4. The idealization of the ancestral home and its consideration as a place of eventual return when conditions are appropriate;
5. The belief that all members of the community should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness and solidarity that are “importantly defined” by continuing relationships with the homeland.

Meanwhile, in the last few years, the term “diaspora” has come to be used much more loosely as a comprehensive term for these and other types of minorities that can trace their origin to a country or region different from that in which they live.

The history of the Armenian diaspora is one of the longest and most diverse. The first communities of the Armenian diaspora were formed at the beginning of the third to fourth centuries, when the Armenians were displaced from a significant part of the territory, which they considered their homeland, and as a result of the consistent policy of the Sasanian kings and later the Byzantine Empire (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019, p. 5). During the invasion of the Seljuk Turks in 1033-1071, when most of Armenia was occupied, significant flows of displaced Armenians rushed to Cilicia – the new embodiment of Armenian statehood and the cultural centre that Armenians were able to create on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea (Tölölyan, 2005, pp. 35-46). The collapse of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia due to the invasion of the Mamluks in 1375 forced local Armenians to migrate to new places scattered around the world, creating communities in various culturally alien environments.

In the history of formation of the Armenian diaspora certain events and waves of migration were especially crucial. Among them, the establishment of the Ottoman Empire was of special importance. A large number of Armenians emigrated as a result of the policy of displacement, repressions, and forced Turkification adopted by the Ottoman Empire. A major wave of emigration began as a result of Turkish-Persian wars, which divided Armenia between the Ottoman Empire and Persia in 1639 (Boumoutian, 2006, p. 188). In 1894-1896, as a result of mass repressions and massacres committed by Abdul Hamid II against the Armenians, hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed or expelled from their homes. During this period numerous communities emerged in Russia, the United States, Canada, Poland, and elsewhere (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019, pp. 5-6).

A new massive wave of Armenian migration started after 1915 when the Ottoman Empire initiated the Armenian Genocide – an unprecedented crime in scope and consequences. Some one and a half million Armenians became the victims of genocide. Those who survived the mass killings in the Ottoman Empire were dispersed around the world finding shelter in Eastern Armenia, joining already existing communities or establishing new ones (Cohen, 1996, pp. 507-520).

Important relocations within the global Armenian diaspora took place in 1920s-1930s, 1940s, and later in 1960s-1980s when the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic organized repatriation to solve the demographic issue in Armenia. As a result, about 150,000 Armenians immigrated to Armenia mainly from Europe and Middle Eastern countries. Despite the fact that the “return to the homeland” policy has improved the demographic situation and significantly influenced all spheres of the Armenian state, the totalitarian traditions of the Communist regime and the harsh social conditions caused frustration among the returnees and forced many of them to leave Soviet Armenia and join diasporic communities yet again (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019, pp. 6-7). Moreover, mainly since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Armenians migrated to the United States and Europe from the Near and Middle East.

Another mass wave of emigration began in the early stages of Armenia’s independence in the 1990s when the catastrophic effects of the Spitak earthquake in 1988, the collapse of Soviet Union, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the economic blockade, and difficult socio-economic conditions triggered labour migration. The emigrants headed mainly toward Russia, creating the largest concentrations of Armenians outside their homeland there, but also Europe and the US.

The poor living conditions and lack of prospects in post-Soviet Armenia contributed to the brain drain and economic migration in the following decades.

Scholars on diaspora studies often list the Armenians among classical or historical diasporas, together with Jewish, Chinese, Greek, African, and Irish diasporas (Clifford, 1994; Sheffer, 2003).

In his fundamental study, after analysing more than a dozen diasporas, Cohen (2008) distinguishes five subtypes of diasporas, based on the prerequisites of their formation:

1. Victim Diasporas (Jewish, Armenian, Palestinian, African)
2. Trade Diasporas (Chinese, Lebanese)
3. Cultural Diasporas (Caribbean)
4. Labour Diasporas (Indian, Italian)
5. Imperial Diasporas (British)

Considering that the dominant prerequisites for the formation of the Armenian diaspora were repressions, persecutions, massacres, and forced expulsion, Cohen (2008, p. 48) identifies the Armenians as a Victim Diaspora along with Jews, Africans, and Palestinians.

However, as Torosyan and Vardanyan (2019, pp. 3-4) rightly assert, the collapse of the Soviet Union changed the quality of existing diasporas. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, the break-up of the Soviet Union led to the creation of the largest Armenian community in the Russian Federation, one with a labour status rather than the status of a victim. Considering the post-Soviet transformations that altered the homogenous nature and character of the Armenian diaspora, the authors supplement Cohen's classification with the "Transforming" type of diaspora and identify five groups of Armenian communities, different in their characteristics, perceptions, and approaches to homeland-hostland issues, their role, and ways to address key issues of importance to Armenia:

1. the Russian community (mostly Labour Diaspora),
2. the European community (mostly Labour Diaspora),
3. the US community (almost a balance between Victim and Labour Diasporas),
4. the community of France (mostly Victim Diaspora),
5. the community of the Middle East (Victim Diaspora).

The Armenian community in the United States is one of the most extensive (the second largest Armenian community abroad after the Russian Federation) and socially advanced diaspora elements. Notably, the exact number of Armenian-Americans living in the United States varies greatly from 308,000 to 2 million (Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, 2022; Shain, 1999, p. 64; Tölöyan, 2000, pp. 107-136; United States Census Bureau, 2020). A comparative analysis of the population of ethnic minorities in the United States shows that the Armenian ethnic community is very small (0.1% of the total number of the US population) particularly compared to the largest ethnic groups, like German (15.2%), Irish (10.8 per cent), or African (8.8 per cent) minorities that make up a significant percentage of the US population. In addition, official statistics show that Asians and Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic groups in the US (Bass, 2012; United States Census Bureau, 2000; United States Census Bureau, 2010). At the same time, the Armenian population in the United States continued to grow steadily in the post-bipolar period, mainly due to immigrants from the Near and Middle East and the Republic of Armenia.

The largest Armenian communities are located in the states of California and Massachusetts. A certain number of Armenians are also concentrated in the states of New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Rhode Island, and Texas. Approximately half of the Armenian community in the United

States is centralized in large cities – Los Angeles, New York, Boston, San Francisco, and others. (United States Census Bureau, 1990).

The social and political orientation of the Armenian diaspora in the United States is very heterogeneous. A large percentage of Armenians are engaged in trade, small and medium-sized businesses, and services. The number of doctors, engineers, scientists, artists, students, and others is also significant. A certain number of Armenians also hold public office in the White House, the State Department, Congress, and the legislative, executive, and judicial bodies of certain US states.

At the same time, the Armenian diaspora in the United States almost always represented a fragmented community, composed of several political groupings, also isolated from each other's population groups, with significant differences in their mentality, habits, views, occupations, lobbying capabilities, as well as intensity of ties with modern Armenia and understanding of its realities. They are formed, both before and today, according to their affiliation to one or another political party, a church diocese, or a previous citizenship. There is also a certain alienation between the first generation and the "new" settlers, as well as between representatives of the diaspora and Armenians living in their homeland, perhaps because, institutionally, after the collapse of the USSR no new structures have been established to adequately address the dramatically increased level of relations.

It is noteworthy that the split of the Armenian-American community led to the formation of parallel organizations – schools, churches, newspapers, social clubs, charitable organizations, lobbying groups, and others. Of course, this factor creates tension in relations between people and to a certain extent affects the productivity of the promotion of the interests of the Armenian state abroad. In some cases, the split enhances their activism and efficiency through competition, alternative mechanisms, and methods of lobbying and resource mobilization.

One of the hallmarks and important factors of the development of the Armenian-American diaspora was institution building, on both local and pan-Armenian levels. Armenian-American diaspora organizations have been formed for generations. Public organizations were established at different stages, in accordance with the challenges of their time. At the initial stage, they were mostly humanitarian organizations aimed to help needy compatriots and enhance the cultural and social life of Armenian communities by opening hospitals, schools, and various charitable institutions. One of the goals of the established institutional structures was to preserve the national identity, culture, language, and traditions of Armenians. Also, through institutional structures, conflicts and disputes between members of the community were prevented and resolved, and communication was maintained between various communities of the Armenian diaspora, as well as between Armenian diaspora and the Armenian state. The further development of national self-consciousness within the community contributed to the formation of new organizations, which made it possible to recognize and resolve political issues.

Thus, over time, the Armenian community has established its own socio-political, cultural, professional, and charitable organizations, through which it carries out its activities to organize public life, unite compatriots, and provide them with the necessary assistance. Armenians in the United States have their own media, educational institutions, churches, and travel agencies. In almost all Armenian-populated cities of the United States the pan-Armenian organizations and unions, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), cultural unions such as “Tekeyan”, “New Generation”, and others, have their centres. There are a number of other organizations, various trade unions, women’s organizations, as well as numerous compatriot unions, sports clubs, and interest and hobby clubs in the United States, such as “The Knights of Vartan”, “The Armenian-American Chamber of Commerce”, “The Gafeschyan Family Foundation”, “Analysis Research and Planning for Armenia”, “Armenian General Athletic Union”, “Armenian-American Citizens League”, and “Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America”. The main purpose of such organizations is to preserve the national identity of Armenians, solve the Armenian question, and protect the interests of the Armenian nation. The ongoing activities are also aimed at increasing the participation of Armenians in American social and political life and to involve them in the civil and economic development of Armenia.

At the same time, numerous non-governmental organizations supported by the Armenian-American community and managed from the United States are currently active in the Republic of Armenia, for instance Birthright Armenia and Armenian Volunteer Corps, whose work is dedicated to assist young diaspora Armenians’ homeland mobility – to travel, live, and volunteer in the country.

Moreover, a number of leading universities in the United States (Harvard University, Colombia University, Boston University, Tufts University, University of Michigan, University of California, etc.) offer studies on Armenian history, culture, language, and art at their Armenian Studies departments, promoting knowledge about Armenians and emphasizing their contribution to the development of world heritage. Besides, there are some important centres of Armenian Studies in the United States, for example, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), the Society for Armenian Studies, which publishes the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, the Armenian National Institute, Armenian Library and Museum of America, and others. Thanks to the efforts of the Armenian Cultural Association, founded in 1946, the Armenian Collection was created as part of the Library of Congress.

Undoubtedly, the existence of all these educational and cultural institutions and programs is an exceptional success of the Armenian minority and a manifestation of the high degree of development and self-organization of the Armenian diaspora, which also serves as another means of outreach on Armenian issues and as an element of the Armenian “soft power” in the United States.

Armenian political parties that were formed earlier and had some experience in bringing people together (as after the Genocide and the establishment of Soviet

rule in Armenia they became active in the diaspora) also played an important role in the institution building in the Armenian Diaspora. There are three traditional Armenian political parties in the United States that have a definite impact on Armenian public life: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun (ARF), the Social Democratic Party (Hnchak) and the Liberal-Democratic Party (Ramkavar), the main objectives of which are, inter alia, to solve the Armenian question, to protect the interests of the Armenian nation, and to preserve the national identity of the Armenian-American people. Various youth, scouting, women's, educational, cultural, religious, sport, and other organizations operate under the auspices of the Armenian political parties, such as the Armenian Youth Federation, Armenian Educational Benevolent Union, and others. In addition, Armenian political parties as well as public and charitable organizations publish periodicals and newspapers in the United States, including the "Armenian Review", "Armenian Weekly", "Hairenik Weekly", "Asbarez", "The Armenian Mirror-Spectator", "Massis Weekly", "AGBU Magazine", and others, many of which are available online.

However, due to certain reasons – the tendencies of hegemony in the Armenian environment, the absence of recognized party leaders and a clear program of actions, party disagreements, the fundamental transformation of the functions of these parties during their existence in the diaspora, and other reasons – the activities of the Armenian political parties in the United States did not have a sufficiently wide scope (Melkonyan, 2005). Therefore, the main activity in promoting the interests of the Armenian nation was carried out by the Armenian-Armenian diaspora through lobbying organizations.

### *The Main Lobbying Agendas and the Role of the Armenian Community in the US – Armenia Relations*

Despite the small number, the Armenian-American community is considered one of the most influential ethnic minority groups in the United States (Brzezinski, 2006). Over time, the Armenians were able to form serious institutions of influence in the United States. A characteristic feature of the Armenian diaspora in the United States has been its increasing role in the political life of the country and its growing influence on the legislative and state institutions of the nation, mainly through the structures and links created by Armenian lobbying organizations. At the same time, the Armenian government, recognizing the significant role of the diaspora in shaping the future of the country and its development, established the Ministry of the Diaspora of Armenia in October 2008 to coordinate mutual contacts and develop strategies for action.

The Armenian diaspora in the United States plays a significant role in the protection and promotion of interests of the Armenian state abroad. Such tasks as, inter alia, universal recognition of the Armenian Genocide, recognition of the right of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination and independence, advancing Armenian-American relations, lifting the transport and economic blockade imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, increasing the volume of financial and

humanitarian assistance to Armenia, suspending the adoption of anti-Armenian documents, and placing common-sense restrictions on US military and security assistance to Azerbaijan have been the focus of the community.

In the political sphere the main means of the Armenian-American diaspora to promote Armenian interests are the lobbying and activities of certain Armenians, especially those who have achieved high status in the country. The Armenian lobby is present in the legislative branch, as well as in the Presidential administration and the US government. Lobbying structures organize meetings with senators and round tables with the participation of various officials, and send letters to the US President and senior government officials.

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) are the most active Armenian-American socio-political lobby organizations operating in the United States and have a certain influence there. It is noteworthy that the very creation of two parallel lobbying organizations is perhaps the most vivid example of the political and ideological schism of the Armenian diaspora. Another specific feature is that the lobbying activities of the Armenian community are mostly based on grassroots movements: they are not funded by the Armenian government, unlike Azerbaijani or Turkish lobby organizations, which have a stable cash inflow from the state and use professional PR companies to promote their national interests.

The Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America are quite different in their origins, structure, and mode of operation. Armenian National Committee of America originates from the Armenian Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA), the organization that since 1918 has lobbied for the interests of an independent Armenian Republic, led by the ARF. The ANCA was finalized in 1983 in Washington, D.C., with the aim of coordinating the political efforts of the ARF to resolve the Armenian Cause (in Armenian – Հայ Դատ (Hay Dat) and achieve its overarching goal – a free, united, and independent Armenia (Gregg, 2002, p. 10). The organization's head office is in Washington. In addition to its national headquarters, ANCA has regional branches in Watertown, Massachusetts and Glendale, California.

Working with US government structures and a wide network of non-governmental organizations around the world, the ANCA actively promotes the interests of the Armenian nation on a wide range of issues.

The main objectives of the ANCA are:

- To promote in the American public awareness in support the independent Republic of Armenia.
- To direct and influence US policy on issues of interest to the Armenian American community.
- To represent the collective views of the Armenian-American community on public policy issues, being the “liaison” between the community and their elected officials.

The ANCA's activities also include:

- Initiating and promoting legislative acts of interest to the Armenian-American community aimed at strengthening and supporting Armenian statehood;

garnering support for the right of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination and independence; securing direct US government assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh; increasing the levels of US assistance to Armenia to promote its economic and democratic development; ensuring the appropriate commemoration of the Armenian Genocide; and encouraging Turkey and Azerbaijan to lift the transport and economic blockade of Armenia.

- Participating in the US electoral process at the federal, state, and local levels; informing elected candidates and officials about Armenian issues; and informing Armenian-American voters of a candidate's position on issues of interest to the Armenian-American community

- Publication of congressional testimony, press releases, position papers, fact sheets, and regional newsletters (Armenian National Committee of America [ANCA], 2022).

Long-term ties with the Greek, Cypriot, Kurdish, and Lebanese communities, as well as close cooperation with labour and human rights organizations, are a prerequisite for the effective operation of ANCA. These links were particularly useful in blocking the military and economic assistance of the United States to Turkey for violations of the human rights of Armenians, Kurds, and Greek Cypriots (Gregg, 2002, p. 13).

The second influential Armenian-American lobbying organization, the Armenian Assembly of America, was established in Washington in 1972. Notably, its establishment represents another milestone in the confrontation between pro-ARF and anti-ARF forces in the United States. The key founding members of the AAA were affiliated with the AGBU, a well-known anti-ARF organization.

The AAA has a more centralized structure than the ANCA. Along with its head office in Washington, D.C., the organization has regional branches in Los Angeles, California and Yerevan, Armenia.

The goals of the AAA, though less clearly stated than those of ANCA, tend to correspond to the ideals of US foreign policy. The AAA states its primary goals as: raising public awareness on Armenian issues; encouraging Armenian-American participation in the American democratic process; assisting in humanitarian and development programs in Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh); and advancing US-Armenia and US-Artsakh relations on the basis of a common vision of democracy, the rule of law, open markets, regional security, and unhindered trade.

The key issues of the Assembly's policy agenda include:

- Security for Armenia and Artsakh. Assembly's goal is to raise awareness of Armenia and Artsakh in the United States to ensure rule of law, self-governance, and a consolidation of democratic values.

- Strengthen US-Armenia and Artsakh relations. Working closely with key government agencies, officials, and charitable organizations, the AAA seeks to maximize the effectiveness of US assistance and strengthen the US relationship with Armenia and Artsakh.

- Promoting peace and stability in the South Caucasus region through the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the use of confidence-building measures to reduce tension and build trust.

- Counter Regional threat.
- Universal Affirmation of Armenian Genocide (Armenian American Assembly [AAA], 2022a).

To this end, the AAA has established several organizations and developed a number of governmental, youth, academic and other programs.

It is noteworthy that, over the years, the AAA has established very strong and unique ties with the United Nations. In 1999, the AAA obtained special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. The AAA has also developed strong ties with the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. and is working closely with the museum's staff to raise awareness of genocide issues (Gregg, 2002, pp. 13-15).

Publications and their own media are key means of outreach and mobilization, and they are used to inform and influence public opinion by both lobbying organizations. In addition, with a view to informing government officials, members of Congress, scholars, experts and analysts on foreign policy issues, and, in general, members of the Armenian diaspora on issues of importance to Armenians, Armenian lobbying organizations make extensive use of e-mails, newsletters, action alerts, and their websites and social media platforms. Both lobbying organizations also attach great importance to the mobilization of young people and their active participation in political, cultural, scientific, and sports events. To this end, various summer and Sunday schools, youth clubs, camps, exchange programs, various scholarship programs, internship programs, Olympic Games, and other events have been organized.

The two lobby groups have different approaches to resource mobilization and fundraising. Unlike ANCA, which stresses its purpose as a grassroots political organization, the AAA attracts prominent Armenian-Americans who donate funds to the organization. However, at the end of 1990, in addition to maintaining intense fundraising efforts, the AAA launched a grassroots program, the Armenian-American Action Committee (ARAMAC) – Gregg, 2002, p. 13.

At the same time, although there are significant differences in the origins, structures, cooperation alliances, and resource mobilization approaches of these lobby groups, their general goals and programs of outreach to the community members and the general public have certain similarities. Despite the existing disagreements between the AAA and the ANCA, their programs of aid and support to the Armenian state and the public on general issues related to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, economic assistance and development of Armenia are broadly similar. Moreover, the fact that both lobbying organizations have established their own structures in parallel, such as research institutes, NGOs, youth programs, recruitment programs, and publications, has undoubtedly doubled the resources of the Armenian community in the United States in promoting the interests of Armenians through existing competition, mobilizing and attracting various resources, and involving more participants.

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened new opportunities and created new challenges and tasks for Diaspora-Homeland relations and the Armenian lobby activities. At the early stages of Armenia's independence, due to difficulties in state-building, severe socio-economic conditions, the burden of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey resulting in the country's near total isolation, the country was in a post-Soviet state-building crisis. The new Armenian government, lacking the necessary resources, knowledge, and expertise to establish a new democratic system of state governance, expected support from the Armenians in the diaspora, particularly from the Armenian communities established in the West. Thus, in this period, a group of young Armenian-Americans was appointed to senior positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government structures to help in the formation and consolidation of state structures.

With the independence of Armenia, both lobby organizations began to cooperate more closely with the new leadership of the republic, supporting in every way the increase of bilateral cooperation and visits of US delegations to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

One of the priorities of the Armenian community was to ensure the provision of the US government's financial and technical assistance to independent Armenia. The beginning was the 1988 Spitak earthquake, which killed some 25,000 Armenians, leaving more than 19,000 wounded and 500,000 homeless. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Armenian diaspora in the United States provided significant assistance to the affected countrymen. In order to coordinate assistance to the disaster zone in the United States, the United Armenian Fund (UAF) was established in 1989. It was a charitable organization that combined the efforts of the major Armenian-American religious and charitable organizations operating in the United States, including the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Relief Society, The Lincy Foundation, Armenian Missionary Association of America, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, and the Armenian Catholic Eparchy and Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America.

By the time it ended its operations, the United Armenian Fund provided around \$720 million worth of humanitarian aid to Armenia and Artsakh ("United Armenian Fund to End Operations", 2015). The Lincy Foundation, led by the Armenian-American billionaire Kirk Kirkorian, greatly contributed to funding the UAF's operations ("Lincy Foundation Donates", 2011). Since Armenia's independence at least \$240 million was donated through the Lincy Foundation, making it Armenia's largest diaspora donor ("Diaspora Billionaire to Build", 2010).

In addition, by influencing the US Congress and the Presidential administration, Armenian lobbying organizations ensured that the United States provided essential support to the earthquake-affected country. According to the former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Richard Kauzlarich, it was the first substantial US relief effort in the Soviet Union since the Second World War (Kauzlarich, 2001).

An important achievement of Armenian organizations in this period was the strengthening of the Armenian lobby in the US Congress. The AAA and the ANCA played an active role in the creation of a bipartisan "Congressional

Caucus on Armenian Issues” in Congress. One of the main objectives of the Caucus, established in January 1995 by Democrat Frank Pallone and Republican Edward Porter, has been to convey to the US government the needs and aspirations of the Armenian people, the promotion of legislative initiatives concerning Armenian issues, and strengthening and maintaining the US-Armenia relationship (AAA, 2022b).

In addition to the Armenian Caucus, the Armenian American Democratic Leadership Council and the Armenian American Republican Council were founded in 1997 in Los Angeles to deal with Armenian-American issues in Congress. The Armenian diaspora also lobbied its interests in Congress through some key Armenian-oriented senators, most notably Senator Robert Dole, Head of the Senate Finance Committee, and Congressman Adam Schiff, Chair of the House Intelligence Committee, who repeatedly lobbied for official recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the US government.

It was during this period that, in addition to raising money for the disaster zone, the AAA and the ANCA began to lobby for federal aid to the newly established republic, particularly in view of the dire economic situation exacerbated by the blockade policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey. Thanks largely to the efforts of the Armenian lobbying organizations, the US government annually provided \$90 million to Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, earning for Armenia the nickname “Israel of the Caucuses”. It is noteworthy that in 1997 the US government called for a reduction in the level of aid to 75 million euros. Nevertheless, thanks to the activities of Armenian lobbying organizations and through the efforts of the Caucus, the amount of assistance provided remained the same. At the same time, Armenian-American organizations were often able to obtain funding in the form of federal grants and donations for various programs such as SESAME (Synchrotron Light Source Particle Accelerator), the opening of the American University of Armenia, and other initiatives (Gregg, 2002, p. 23).

Another priority task of both lobbying organizations was lobbying for the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence and increasing Congressional financial assistance to the enclave. Thanks to the efforts of the Armenian lobby, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has received considerable attention from the authorities and the media in the United States (Hill, 1996). Despite the fact that the United States did not recognize the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Congress decided to provide official Stepanakert with annual financial assistance. Through the efforts of both organizations in promoting recognition of the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, from 2012 to 2021, eleven US states and many cities recognized the sovereign status of Artsakh Republic by adopting relevant resolutions in support of the Artsakh people’s right to self-determination (MFA of the Republic of Artsakh, 2022).

Owing to the considerable efforts of the Armenian diaspora, Congress also condemned the policy of blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, by adopting Section 907 to the “Freedom Support Act” and the “Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act”. Section 907 was passed

in 1992 as an addendum of the Freedom Support Act specifically prohibits Azerbaijan from receiving US financial and technical assistance as long as the Azeri hostilities towards Armenians continue and the blockade against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh persists (Freedom Support Act, 1992). The maintenance of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act is an obvious example of the success of the Armenian lobby. It has remained in place until 2001, despite the fierce campaigning from opposition lobbies, including oil companies, the Turkish Caucus, and pro-Israel lobbies demanding the lifting of the restrictions of the 907 Section, and the most complete implementation of the Silk Strategy Act. It was only in October 2001, in connection with the events of September 11, that the Senate passed a bill that gave the President the power to withdraw Section 907 if he determined that it is in the interests of US national security to do so (ANCA, 2001a). In January 2002, President George W. Bush exercised this option and cancelled Section 907, despite the continued blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey and the intense protest of the Armenian community. Since then, the Armenian lobby has been fighting unsuccessfully against the oil lobby to restore Section 907.

Working with the Greek and Kurdish lobbies, the ANCA also lobbied actively to stop US economic and military aid to Turkey through the “Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act”, which prohibited the provision of US federal aid to countries that obstructs the delivery of US humanitarian assistance to third countries (Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act, 1994), as well as the “Code of Conduct” legislation, which restricts arms sales to countries where human rights are violated (ANCA, 2001b).

In addition, ANCA actively fought to prevent US assistance in the construction of the Caspian pipelines, namely “Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan” oil pipeline, which would bypass Armenian territory, thus denying the state revenue from transit fees. In June 2001, four members of the Armenian Caucus of the Congress submitted a resolution to the House of Representatives calling for no subsidies for the construction of any pipelines that would aggravate Armenia’s isolation, preventing its integration into regional projects (Gregg, 2002, p. 25).

These same lobbying groups were also very effective at getting their lobbyists in the Senate Committee on International Affairs to block those candidates for the post of ambassador to Azerbaijan and Armenia that were unfavourable to the interests of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The most striking case was the candidacy of Matthew Bryza, whom President Barack Obama appointed as US Ambassador to Azerbaijan, blocked by Senators Robert Menendez and Barbara Boxer (“Both Barbara Boxer and Robert Menendez”, 2010).

However, the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 by the US government has been the highest priority of Armenian lobbying organizations. The priority given to this issue is explained by the fact that the policy of genocide and deportation of Armenians pursued by the Ottoman Empire was the main reason for the emergence of the Armenian diaspora.

The main activities of both organizations in this matter were primarily aimed at informing American society about the Armenian Genocide. Since 1982, both

lobbying organizations have also been fighting for the adoption of a law that would officially recognize the Armenian Genocide. Interestingly enough, even with regard to the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide, named as one of primary policy objectives of both ANCA and the AAA, there have been some differences between the two lobbying groups, particularly in the tactics and strategies employed, as well as the expected results. So if the AAA has been more interested in the moral and legal side of the issue, ANCA has insisted on the return of territories and the repatriation of the Armenian people to their historical homeland. With regard to mechanisms of achievement, along with lobbying for the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide to the Congress, ANCA also has lobbied at the state and city levels. ANCA also employed a tactic of achieving the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by other countries to pressure the US to follow suit. As for the Assembly, in addition to lobbying Congress members, it has focused its efforts on raising awareness and documentation about the Armenian Genocide through supporting research and dissemination of materials, developing curriculum on the Armenian Genocide, and lobbying for its inclusion in US public schools. At the same time, the Armenian National Institute, established by the AAA, has been working on a judicial process for the compensation of Armenian Genocide survivors by insurance companies, as claimed by Jews who survived the Holocaust. (Gregg, 2002, pp. 19-20).

Through the efforts of Armenian lobbying organizations, every April a Congressional resolution honours the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Due largely to the activities of the Armenian-American community, most US states as well as some cities officially recognized the Armenian Genocide (Armenian-genocide.org, 2022).

At the end of 2019 the Armenian community and the ethic lobby achieved US House passage of Resolution 296 and the unanimous Senate passage of the Resolution 150 that recognized the mass killings of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide.

Moreover, on April 24 each year, the President of the United States addresses the Armenian people in commemoration of the tragic events. Thanks to the considerable efforts of the Armenian diaspora in the United States over the years, in 2021 President Joe Biden formally recognized the massacres and deportation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1923 as genocide, becoming the first US president who used the word “genocide” in the annual presidential speech.

The Armenian-American diaspora also focused on the current developments in Armenia and Artsakh. Both Armenian lobby organizations and a number of Armenian-American non-governmental organizations (“Armenian American Chamber of Commerce”, “Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America”, “Analysis, Research and Planning for Armenia” and others), have actively worked with the Congress, the Presidential administration, and business structures in promoting the contemporary political and economic interests of Armenia, and provided all possible support in organizing economic forums and expos and

encouraging direct investment and the development of Armenia's economic potential and direct US financial assistance to Artsakh.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, which lasted 44 days and ended in Armenia's near-total defeat, with a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement finalized on November 9th, mobilized the Armenian diaspora to fiercely advocate for the Armenian cause during the conflict. With the help of prominent Armenian-Americans including Cher, the Kardashians, Serj Tankian, and others, the Armenian-American community was raising awareness on the war, publicizing Armenia's cause in its long-running dispute with Azerbaijan to support Karabakh Armenian's security and political rights mainly through the "Recognize Artsakh" campaign. Thousands of Armenians took to the streets in Los Angeles during the war in October to protest the hostilities, blocking major freeways, gathering outside media offices, and calling for a more coverage of the war. Armenian Americans raised millions of dollars for humanitarian aid for Armenians affected by the war. Moreover, a group of Armenian Americans, including prominent physicians, travelled to the region to provide medical aid and bring humanitarian supplies. Some with dual citizenship even joined the Armenian army as volunteers. Nevertheless, despite the rigorous efforts, the community was unable to reach any tangible results from the Trump administration to prevent Armenia's devastating military defeat.

Since the outbreak of the conflict Armenian Americans, joining Armenian lobby organizations, have been holding protests, lobbying, and briefing the US Congress and the media to hold Baku and Ankara responsible for their war crimes and ongoing hostilities, taking concrete steps to protect the security and political rights of the people of Artsakh, defending Armenia's sovereignty, and strengthening the US-Armenia strategic partnership. Especially during the active phase of the conflict, leaders of the Armenian-American diaspora and some Democratic party lawmakers in Congress called on the US government to urge enforcement of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act and cease US military assistance to Azerbaijan. Given the massive use of Turkish Bayraktars in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war by Azerbaijan, the Armenian lobby organizations were also urging for more control on Turkey's drone exports and restriction of some US weaponry (particularly F-16 fighter jets) sell to Turkey.

Nevertheless, even in the wake of Azerbaijan's 2020 aggression against Artsakh and Armenia, in May 2021, the Biden administration extended the waiver of Section 907 restrictions on US aid to Azerbaijan. The president's decision drew condemnation from the Armenian-American community and Congress expressed concern. To roll back President Biden's waiver in July 29, 2021 the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to amend H.R.4373 to restrict US foreign military financing and training assistance to Azerbaijan, passing a bipartisan, ANCA-backed Pallone amendment led by Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ) with the support of twenty of his House colleagues. The Pallone Amendment states, "None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act [H.R.4373] under 'International Military Education and Training' and 'Foreign Military Financing

Program' may be made available for Azerbaijan." (Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022). The report accompanying the H. R. 4373 also called for no less than \$50 million in assistance to Armenia, "for economic development, private sector productivity, energy independence, democracy and the rule of law, and other purposes" (ANCA, 2021). It also recommends no less than \$2 million in assistance for demining activities in Nagorno-Karabakh (ANCA, 2021).

Moreover, in November 2021, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced two of the foreign policy amendments to the National Defence Authorization Act. As the primary vehicle for authorizing defence spending for Fiscal Year 2022, Menendez's amendments seek to prohibit the continued use of US presidential waiver authority of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, a provision first put in place in 2001, and utilized by successive US presidents. The second amendment calls for a Joint State Department and Pentagon report on Turkey's unmanned aerial vehicle's exports since 2018, as well as Turkey's use of US technology in its Bayraktar drones. A third amendment announced by Senator Alex Padilla from California state mandates the State Department and Defence Department report on Azerbaijani war crimes during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war (mainly the use of cluster bombs, white phosphorous, and other prohibited munitions; the hiring of foreign mercenaries to fight on Azerbaijani side) as well as the use of US technology during the attacks ("Sen. Menendez Introduces", 2021).

However, despite the community's apparent success in advancing the interests of the Armenian nation, the diaspora's failure to weigh over the balance in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabagh war and Armenia's defeat revealed the failures of diaspora politics and the urgent need to reassess its policies and reinforce institutions to mobilize the full potential of the diaspora and have a wider influence.

### *Conclusion*

The Armenian-American community is one of the most influential communities in the United States and the most active and efficient one among the Armenian diaspora's other communities in terms of promotion of Armenia's interests in international politics. Over time the Armenians in the United States were able to establish not only cultural and humanitarian institutions to preserve Armenian-American's national identity but also form influential political pressure groups to advance Armenian national interests.

As a relatively small population, the Armenian community has achieved significant results in lobbying the interests of the Armenian nation and has become an essential moderator of Armenian-American relations. The Armenian-American diaspora organizations provide substantial support to Armenian diplomacy in promoting bilateral relations as well as the interests of the Armenian nation, from informing the American society about the needs of the Armenian nation, to lobbying Congress and the Presidential administration to promote legislative

acts and initiatives in support of Armenia. Although US interests in the South Caucasus did not require that Armenia be given priority over its neighbours, Armenian-American community succeeded in pushing through billions in financial assistance for Armenia. By influencing the host country, Armenian lobby groups have initiated significant pro-Armenian legislative changes and have recently successfully achieved the goal of recognizing the Armenian Genocide at the level of the US Congress and President of the United States.

It is noteworthy that the success of the Armenian lobby can hardly be explained by its significance in US electoral policy, since the Armenian-American community is a very small and localized electorate compared to other larger and dispersed ethnic groups in the United States and therefore has relatively little influence on Congressional elections. Moreover, the massive financial infusion is also not a factor in the influence of the mainly grassroots Armenian lobby in Washington, particularly when compared to the financial capacity of the oil lobby.

The success of Armenian lobbying organizations can be explained mainly by their high degree of organization and close ties in Congress, including the Armenian Caucus, the Armenian American Democratic Leadership Council, the Armenian American Republican Council, some key members of Congress, as well as collaboration with other organizations and lobbying groups. To some extent, the effectiveness of the Armenian diaspora has also been affected by the fragmentation and some competition among major lobbying groups, which in many cases has led to a greater mobilization of resources and inclusion of alternative lobbying mechanisms to ensure the success of campaigns. Competition has promoted the causes and successes of Armenian lobby efforts because despite the existing differences and contradictions, as well as different approaches in influencing Washington, between the AAA and ANCA, they mostly agree on main policy objectives, thus represent a united front to advance Armenian interests in Washington.

At the same time, Armenia's stinging defeat in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war exposed the failures of Armenian-American diaspora politics and the urgent need to re-evaluate its policies and strengthen institutions to mobilize the full potential of the community and expand its influence.

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