



Positions: to the North or West? Findings of public opinion survey

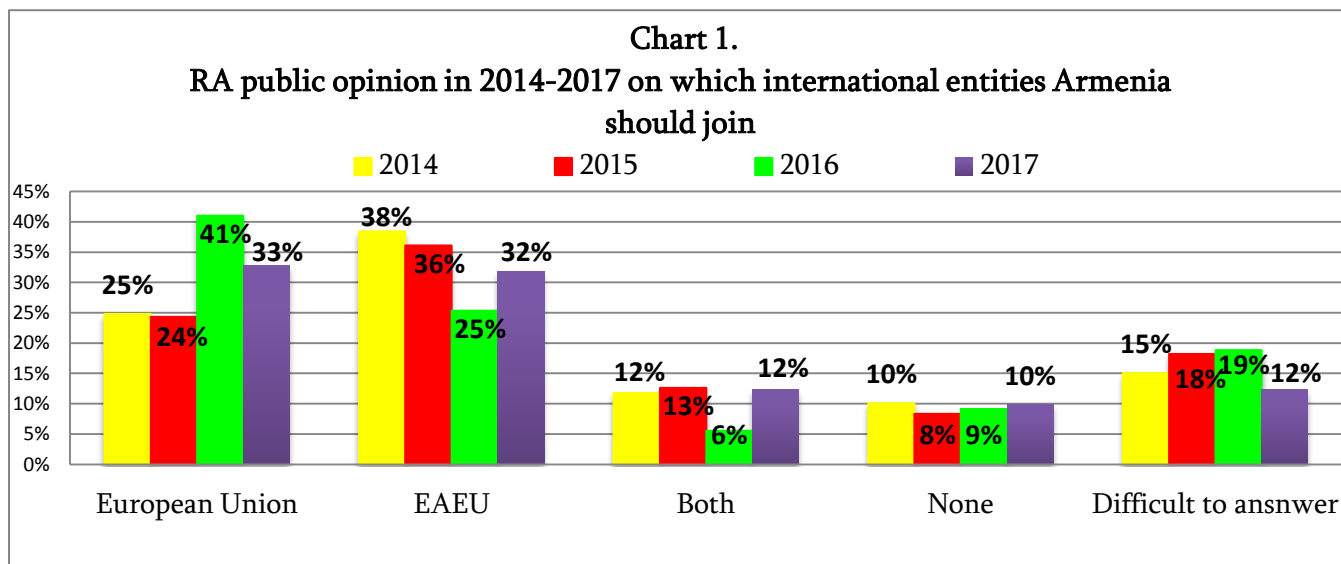
Comparative data of repetitive survey, 2014-2017

In May 2017, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor, with the participation of 'Advanced Public Research Group' (APR Group) NGO, carried out a sociological survey throughout the Republic of Armenia (in Yerevan city and all the regions (marzes). Among others, one of the survey objectives was to find out the public positions on the international entities namely the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), i.e. the public preferences in RA to the North or West and Armenia's orientation to the North or West.

The Survey covered 1200 respondents (95% reliability, $\pm 2.8\%$ margin of error) by the method of semi-structured interviews and through CAPI techniques. The data collected in 2017 were compared with the findings of similar surveys carried out in the previous 3 years (2014 and 2015 and 2016).

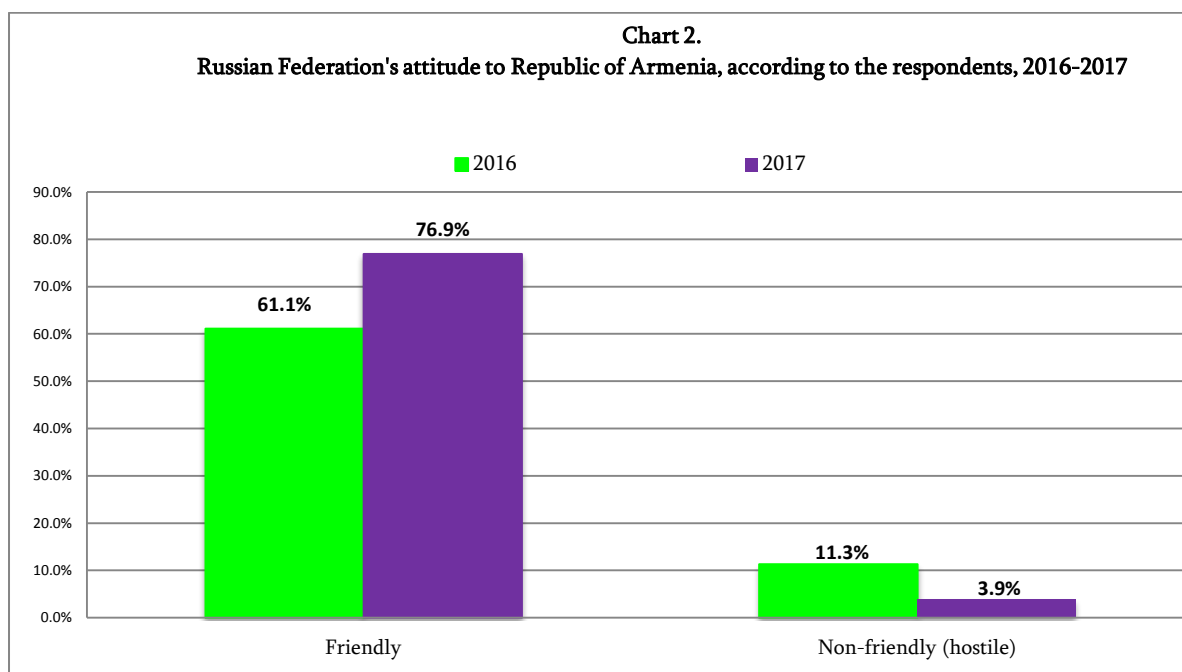
The respondents' opinions on Armenia's desirable membership of international organizations showed the picture below: 33% believe that Armenia should join European entities (European Union), 32% believe that it should join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), 12%: both the European Union and the EAEU, and 10% are against Armenia's joining any of those organizations. 12% of respondents found it difficult to answer this question.

As compared with the findings of similar surveys carried out in the previous 3 years, there are clear changes in respondents' preferences to the international entities for Armenia to join. The findings are presented in Chart 1.



The Chart suggests that as compared to 2016, in 2017 the number of those who stand for Armenia’s joining the European Union (EU) dropped (from 41% to 33%) and the number of the EAEU supporters rose (from 25% to 32%). Note that while the number of the European Union supporters dropped in 2017 as compared to 2016, it is still higher than that number in 2014-2015. At the same time, the number of those who stand for joining the EAEU is higher in 2017 than in 2016 but is still lower than in 2014-2015. **Thus, in 4 years, except for 2016 (which will be considered separately), the number of those who stand for joining the European Union rose while that of the EAEU supporters dropped.**

The data of 2016 clearly differ from the said regular findings of the public opinion in 2014-2017. We believe that such difference is conditioned by the only major occurrence in the foreign policy in 2016, namely the hostilities of April 2-5 in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, with its coverage and discussions mostly focused on the supply by Russian Federation of large quantities of arms to Azerbaijan. In 2017, the public does not focus on the discussion of the said issue as firmly as before and as a result, the level of the negative attitude towards Russian Federation dropped in 2017. This also caused changes in the public perceptions of Russian Federation. The shift in the public perception of Russian Federation is also shown in the findings of the surveys in 2016 and 2017 as to whether, according to the respondents, Russian Federation shows to Armenia a non-friendly (hostile) or friendly attitude (see Chart 2).



We also considered the public attitude to joining international entities, by evaluating particular countries' policies to the Republic of Armenia.

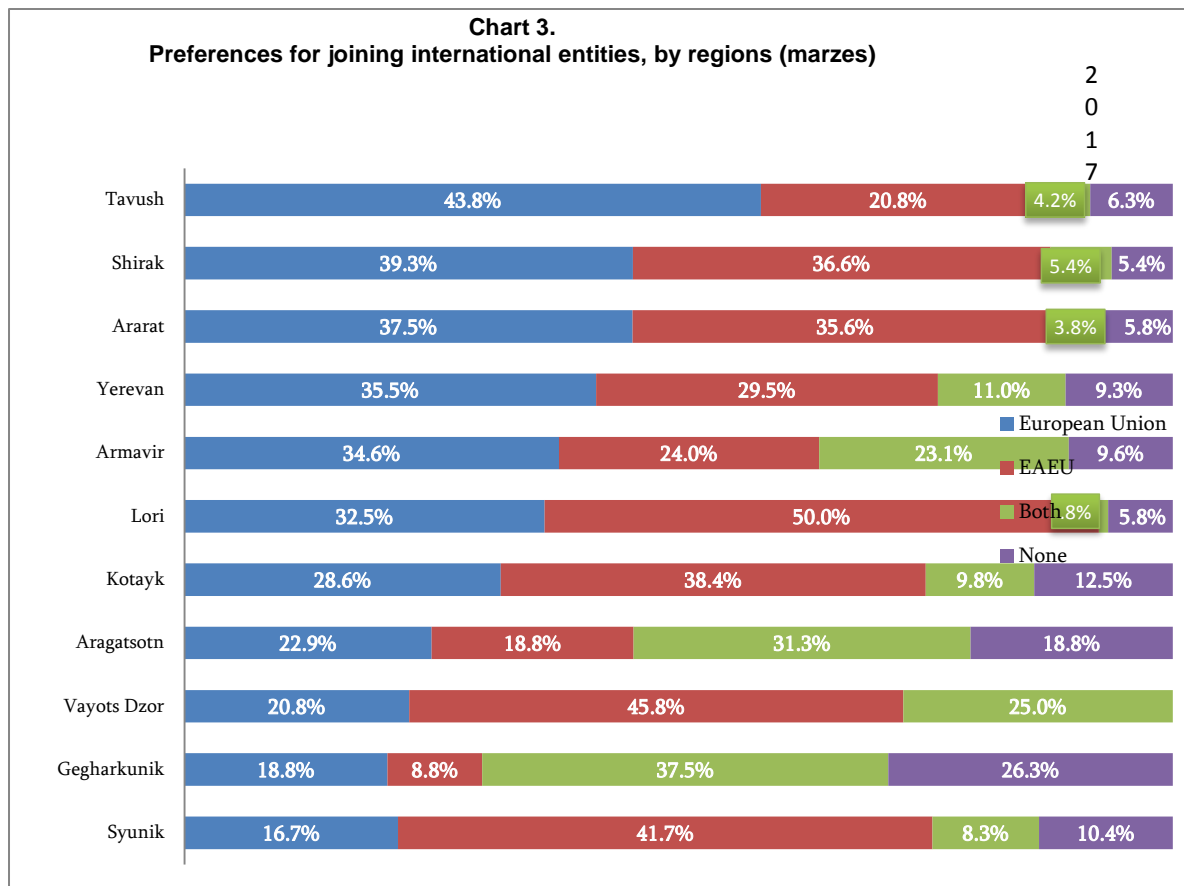
Thus, according to the findings of the survey in 2017, among the respondents considering primary EAEU state namely Russian Federation a non-friendly (hostile) country, 46,8% prefer joining the European Union and 14,9% prefer joining the EAEU and among the respondents viewing Russian Federation a friendly country, 36,1% stand for joining the EAEU and 31,6% for joining the European Union.

The average share of those who prefer joining the European Union within the number of the respondents considering Russian Federation a non-friendly country exceeds by 3.1 times that of the EAEU supporters. There is no such difference in the proportion between the supporters of the European Union and the EAEU among the respondents considering Russian Federation a friendly country. However, it should be noted that about 1/3, i.e. 31.6% of those who consider Russian Federation a friendly country still stand for joining the European Union.

Thus, it becomes obvious that the public attitude to the EAEU is essentially influenced by the public opinion of Russian Federation. At the same time, it should be noted that those who have a positive attitude to Russian Federation also show a tendency towards the European Union. In other words, the public opinion has obviously shifted towards joining the European Union and the impact of the positive attitude towards Russia on the public opinion has considerably weakened.

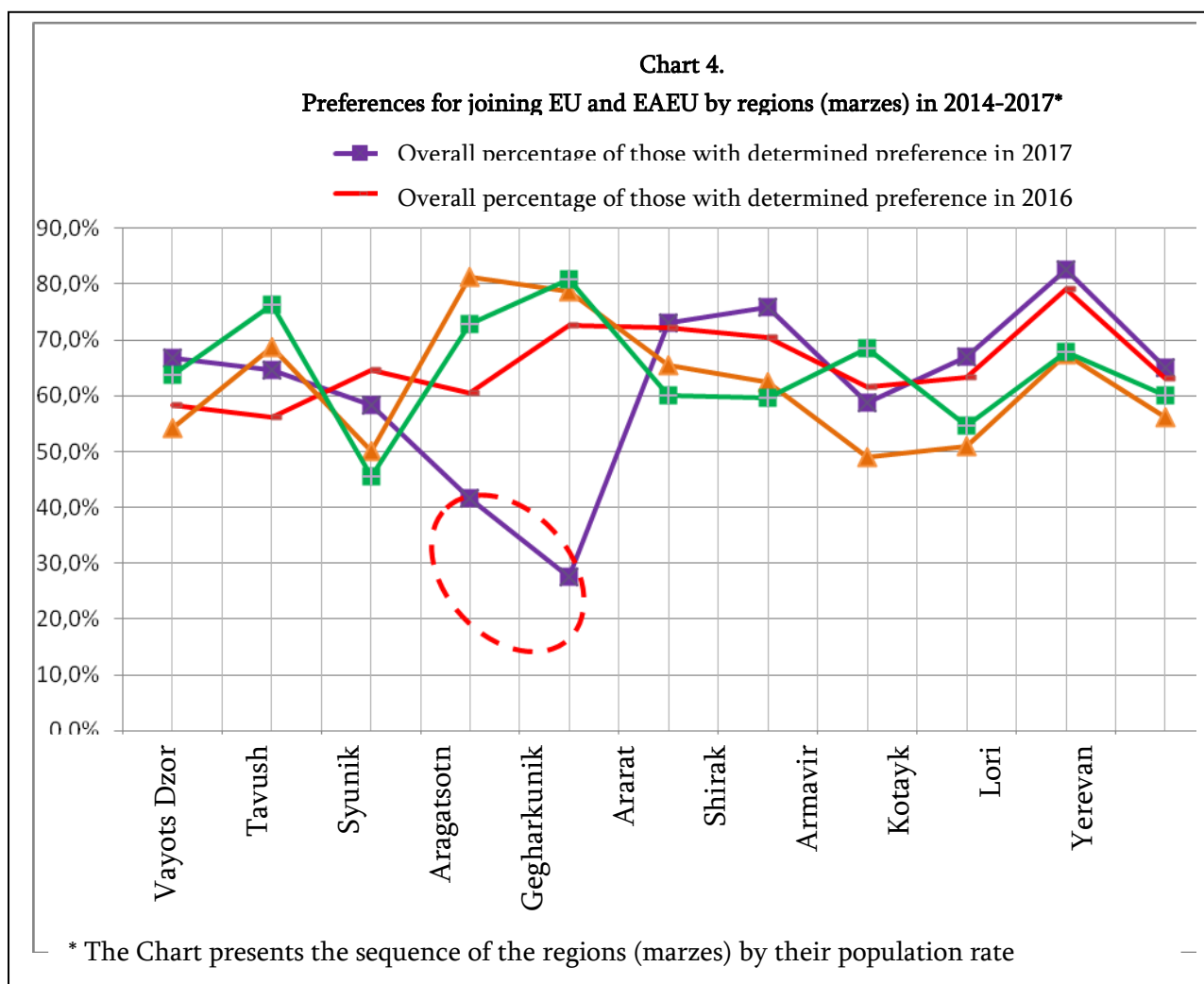
Interestingly, according to the public opinion, among the responders considering France the friendliest country, the numbers of supporters of the European Union and EAEU are almost equal, 34.9% and 32.5%, respectively. Thus, the position of those who speak for joining the European Union is significantly influenced by the negative attitude towards Russian Federation.

The data of the conducted survey also considered the preferences for Armenia’s joining international entities, by regions (marzes) (see Chart 3).



As shown in Chart 3, the number of respondents who favor joining the European Union is the largest in Tavush (43.8%), Shirak (39.3%), Ararat (37.5%) regions (marzes) and in Yerevan city (35.5%). Those who preferred joining the EAEU make the largest number in Lori (50%), Vayots Dzor (45.8%), Syunik (41.7%) and Kotayk (38.4%) regions (marzes).

Consideration of the data obtained in 2014-2017 on preferences for Armenia’s joining international entities by regions (marzes) identified a number of trends (see Chart 4).

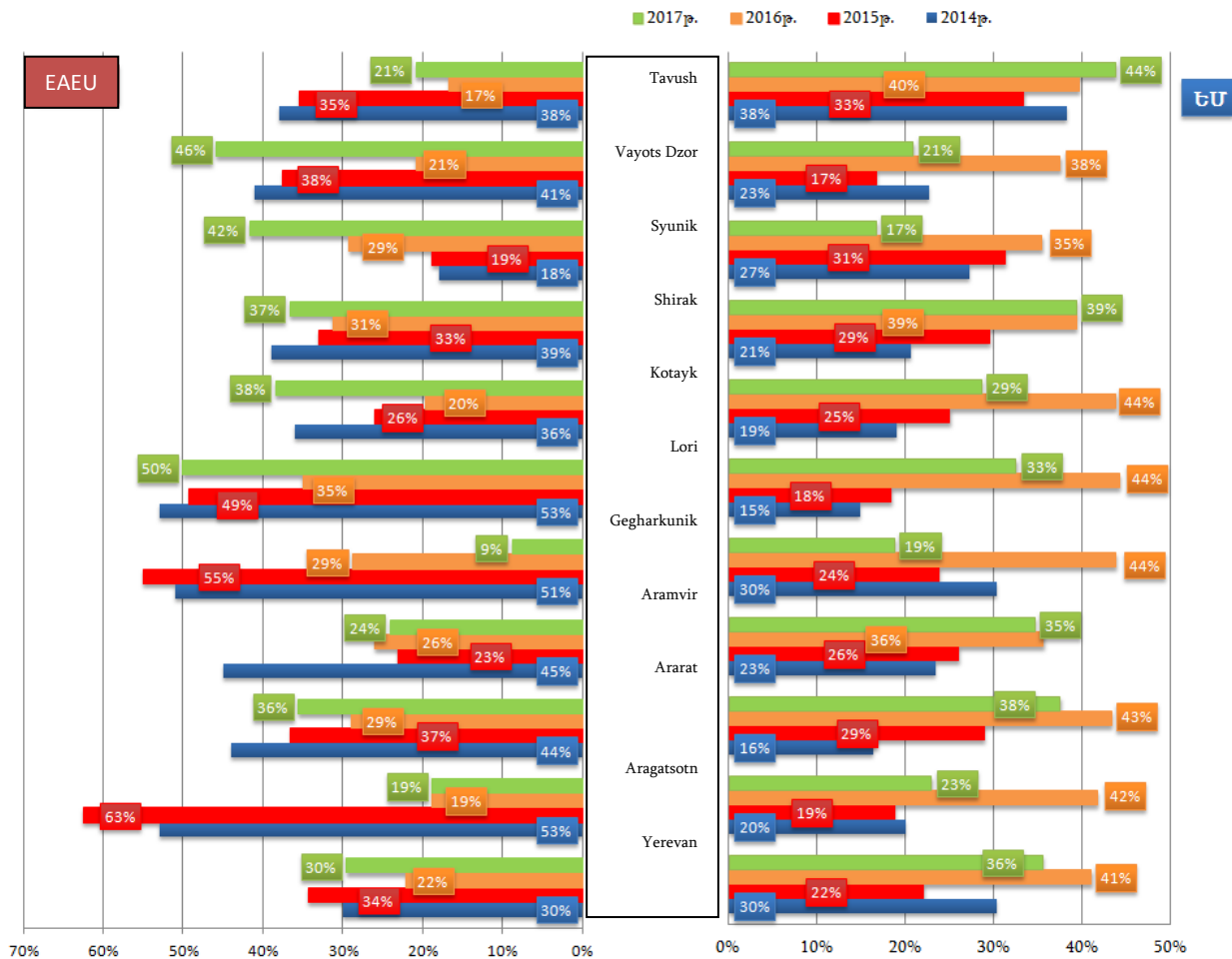


The survey data suggest that throughout the period (2014-2017) when surveys were carried out, the total number of respondents who preferred joining international entities namely the EU and EAEU was the highest in Lori, Shirak, Ararat and Kotayk regions (marzes) and Yerevan city that can be considered regions with most firmly determined preference (the number of EU and EAEU supporters exceeds 50%). There was no such tendency only in Gegharkunik and Aragatsotn regions (marzes) where, on the contrary, the respondents mentioning the options "both" and "none" made a higher number.

The findings of the surveys of 2014-2017 provide grounds to state that the percentage of those respondents who support joining the European Union rose in almost all the regions (marzes) and in Yerevan city, except for Gegharkunik (dropped by 12% in 2017 as compared to 2014), Syunik (dropped by 11%) and Vayots Dzor (dropped by 2%) regions/marzes (see Chart 5). And on the contrary, the percentage of the EAEU supporters fell almost in all the regions (marzes),

except for Syunik (rose by 24% in 2017 as compared to 2014), Vayots Dzor (rose by 5%) and Kotayk (rose by 2%) regions/marzes (See Chart 5).

Chart 5. Distribution of EU and EAEU preferences by regions (marzes) in 2014-2017



While tracking the findings of the surveys 2014-2017, we would like to focus on the generalized characteristics (ideal types) of the supporters of Armenia’s joining the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, based on the socio-demographic determinants of the respondents (see Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic determinants of supporters of joining international entities

Title of determinants	European Union	Eurasian Economic Union
Age	18-45	above 45
Gender	Female	Male
Place of residence	Urban	Rural
Average monthly family	Above 150.001 AMD	Up to 150.000 AMD

Thus, respondents who favor joining the European Union are mostly aged 18-45 and female living in the capital and towns in the regions/marzes, with average monthly family income above 150.000 AMD.

As for the respondents who favor joining the EAEU, most of them are above 45 and male living in rural areas, with average monthly family income below 150.000 (one hundred and fifty thousand) AMD.

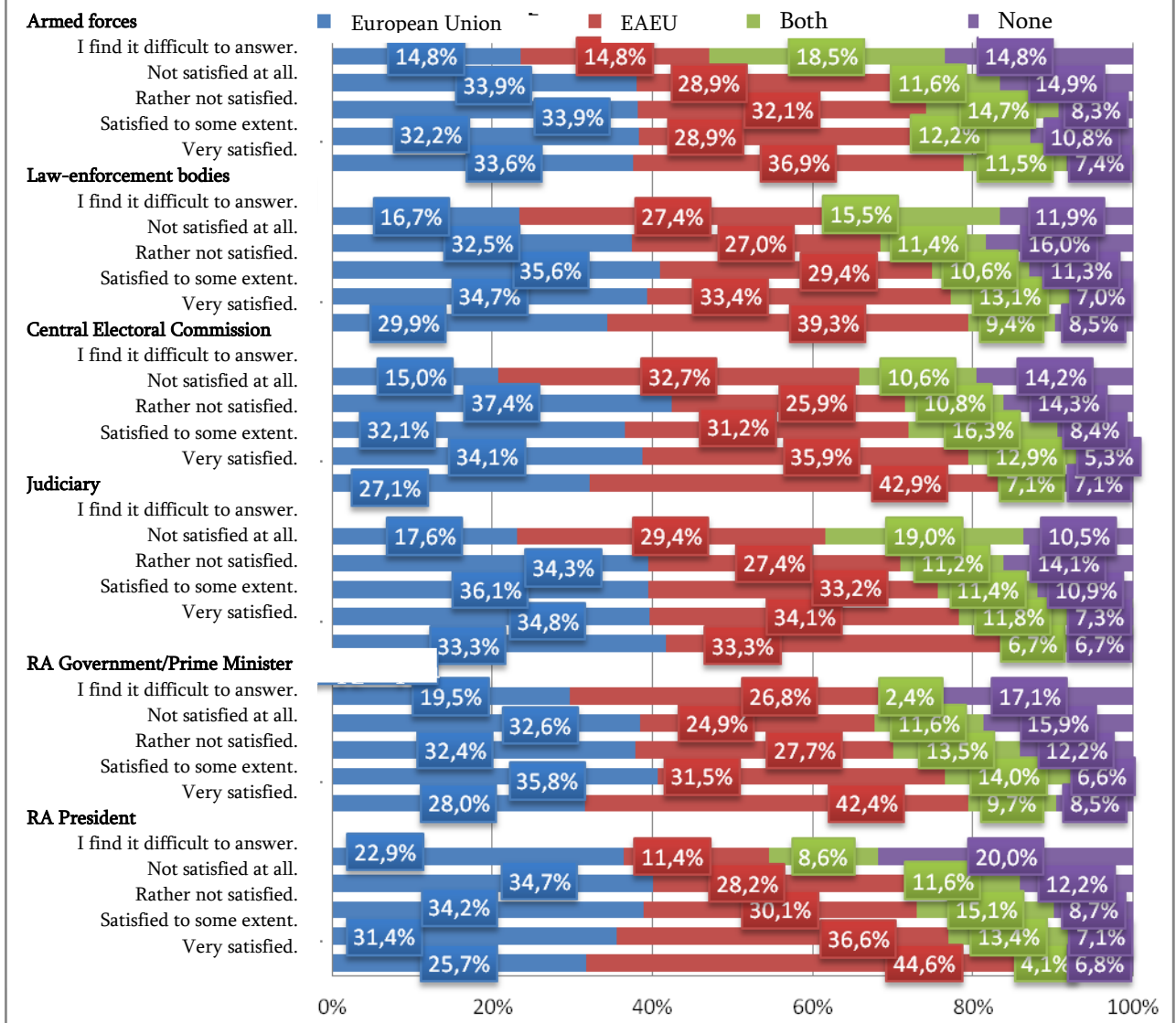
We believe that the said difference in the preferences by age groups is conditioned by the fact that representatives of older age groups, who lived in the USSR period, speak for joining the EAEU by expressing their desire to restore the past. The difference in preferences by place of residence can be explained by the difference in the migration trends among its population: people from rural communities mostly leave for Russian Federation for migrant work and are more likely to support joining the EAEU.

It should be stressed that the presented trends continued throughout the survey of 2014-2017.

We also assessed the impact that the degree of satisfaction with the work of a number of political/state institutions may have on the preferences for joining international entities.

Thus, most of the respondents who prefer joining the European Union are not satisfied mostly with the work of the RA President, RA Government /Prime Minister, the judiciary, Central Electoral Commission, law enforcement bodies (Police, Prosecutor's Office, SIS (Special Investigation Service) and Armed Forces. The respondents more satisfied with the work of such institutions prefer joining the EAEU (See Chart 6).

Chart 6. Cross analysis of answers to the questions: “How satisfied are you with the work of the institutions below?” and “Do you think Armenia should join?”



This tendency is more clearly outlined in 2017, unlike the previous years.

It can be concluded that those who prefer joining the European Union expect improved activity of the RA political/state bodies.

It should be noted that that according to the 2017 survey data, the respondents’ orientation to the European Union and EAEU is essentially influenced by their sources of information on the political events.

Thus, among the respondents mentioning television as their main information source, 28.0% prefer joining the European Union and 35.2% prefer joining the EAEU. Among the respondents mentioning the print media as their main information source, 50.0% prefer joining the European Union and none of them expressed preference for the EAEU. Among the respondents getting information from online media, 37.5% prefer the European Union and 28.2% the EAEU. Among the respondents mentioning social media as their main information source, 43.6% prefer joining the European Union and 27.7% prefer joining the EAEU. Among the respondents who get information at their workplace, 14.3% prefer the European Union and 43.9% the EAEU and among those who get information at meetings and public discussions, no one mentioned the European Union and 66.7% preferred the EAEU.

Thus, the supporters of joining the EAEU prevail among respondents getting information from television, information source controlled by the authorities with the largest audience, and supporters of joining the European Union prevail among those who get information from social media, an information source slightly controlled by the authorities.

The preferences for joining the international entities are also influenced to some extent by the public perceptions on the attitudes to the Republic of Armenia of the member states of those entities. The 5 countries below are considered to be most friendly to the Republic of Armenia: France (77.9%), Russia (76.9%), Iran (51.8%), Greece (50.1%) and Germany (48.8%).

The estimation of the averaged results of perceptions of friendly and hostile states shows that positive perceptions of European Union member states prevail over those of the EAEU member states (Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).

These figures almost did not change as compared to the results of the survey 2016.

Preferences for joining international entities are also influenced by migration moods among the respondents.

In response to the question: "Would you leave the Republic of Armenia permanently if you could?", 37% of the respondents answered "definitely yes", 37% "definitely no", 17% "probably yes" and 9% "probably no". It should be noted that as compared to 2016, in 2017 the number of respondents willing to emigrate dropped (by 5%), and that of the respondents not willing to emigrate rose (by 4%).

The 2017 survey data show that among the respondents who favor joining the European Union, people willing to emigrate prevail with the answers below: "definitely yes" 42.3%,

"probably yes" 19.9%, in total 62.2%. People not willing to emigrate make only 37.2% among those respondents. As for the respondents supporting the EAEU, people intending to emigrate (who answered "definitely yes", 34.9%, "probably yes", 13.9%, in total 48.8%) and those not intending to emigrate (who answered "definitely no" 40.7%, "probably no" 10%, in total 50.7%) make almost equal number.

Thus, the EU supporters are more likely to emigrate than the EAEU supporters.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the findings of the public opinion survey 'Positions: to the North or West?' we can conclude as follows:

- After September 3, 2013 when RA declared on the highest level joining the Customs Union and later the Eurasian Economic Union, the number of the people in the Republic of Armenia who favored joining that international entity dropped in the past 4 years, namely in 2014-2017 while the number of those who favor joining the European Union grew.
- In 2014-17, the factor of considering Russian Federation a friendly state lost most of its impact on the supporters of joining the Eurasian Economic Union.
- In the past 4 years, the Armenian society has shown a clearer position on joining those 2 international entities. Younger population and mostly women in urban areas and Yerevan, with average monthly family income above the national average, prefer that the Republic of Armenia joins the European Union.
- The respondents who favor joining the European Union expect improved operation of the RA political/state institutions and at the same time show a high tendency to emigration.
- The media with largest audience provide more information on the Eurasian Economic Union than on the European Union.

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The views in the Survey are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funding organization.