

# ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION

## ACCULTURATION OF ARMENIANS IN RUSSIA: ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND DIASPORA ACTIVITY

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Victoria GALYAPINA

*Ph.D. (Psychol.), Associate Professor,  
Leading Research Fellow, Center for Sociocultural Research;  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, School of Psychology,  
National Research University Higher School of Economics  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Oksana TUCHINA

*D.Sc. (Psychol.), Associate Professor,  
Head of the Department of History, Philosophy and  
Psychology, Kuban State Technological University  
(Krasnodar, Russian Federation)*

Ivan APOLLONOV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Associate Professor,  
Professor at the Department of History, Philosophy and  
Psychology, Kuban State Technological University  
(Krasnodar, Russian Federation)*

## ABSTRACT

**T**he Armenian diaspora is one of the largest in Russia and in the world. The Armenians living in the Krasnodar Territory are a large and active group, thus, an investigation into the problem of their acculturation is of scientific and practical importance. Based on the theory of social identity, the theory of acculturation, and the regional socio-cultural context, the study focused on the role of ethnic, regional and Russian national (civic) identities and diaspora activity in the acculturation of the Armenians in the Krasnodar Territory. The study used the scales from the MIRIPS project questionnaire (*Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies*). The sample consisted of 181 respondents. Using structural equation modeling, the ethnic and Russian national identities of the Armenians living in the Krasnodar Territory were revealed as factors that contributed to their integration, and regional identity—as factors that fostered assimila-

tion. Diaspora activity was determined by both ethnic and regional identity and predicted the Armenians' attitudes towards integration and separation. Also, diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region facilitated the interconnection of ethnic and regional identities with the separation strategy. In general, the study revealed that all identities (ethnic, regional and Russian national) contribute to a certain degree to the acceptance of the host society culture by the Armenians in the Krasnodar Territory. At the same time, diaspora activity can be an effective mechanism for the adaptation of migrants or a source of problems associated with increased impenetrability of diaspora's borders, the migrants' exclusive focus on their ethnic group and their decreased desire for sociocultural integration into the host society. It is important to take this into account when shaping the regional interethnic relations policy.

**KEYWORDS:** *acculturation, ethnic, regional, Russian national identity, diaspora activity, Armenians, Russia.*

## *Introduction*

### *Theoretical Background*

Migration in the modern world actualizes the problem of studying new ethnic communities, including diasporas.<sup>1</sup> In this study, diaspora does not merely refer to the sojourn of representatives of a certain ethnic group outside their national state as a national minority, but also denotes a special type of human relationship, a specific system of formal and informal ties, people's life strategies and practices. These connections, strategies and practices are based on the common exodus from the "historical homeland" (or the perceptions, historical memory and myths about such an exodus), as well as on efforts to maintain a way of life as a national minority in an ethnically different host society.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: R. Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2005, pp. 1-19, available at [Doi: <http://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997>]; R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1997, 240 pp., available at [Doi: <http://doi.org/10.2307/591321>].

<sup>2</sup> See: V. Diatlov, "Armiane Rossii: diasporalnye strategii integratsii," *21 Vek*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 2007, pp. 60-70.

The Armenian diaspora is one of the largest in the world.<sup>3</sup> In Russia, it numbers approximately 1,182,000 people.<sup>4</sup> There are different viewpoints in regard to the activity of the Armenian diaspora in Russia: certain researchers claim that this diaspora has a high potential and is very active.<sup>5</sup> Others, on the contrary, note that in comparison with the Armenian diasporas in non-CIS countries the Armenian community in Russia does not have a strong political, financial or organizational potential.<sup>6</sup>

According to Asia Berberian and Oksana Tuchina, the Armenian diaspora in the south of Russia, especially in the Kuban, is quite numerous (about 24% of all Armenians living in Russia) and active.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the Kuban Armenians are distinguished by their openness and readiness to interact with other ethnic groups in the region; they are actively involved in the life of the region. On the other hand, they represent a community internally consolidated along ethnic lines, and the level of loyalty to people of their ethnicity is higher than to members of the host society.<sup>8</sup>

Based on the theory of social identity,<sup>9</sup> researchers examine the strength of identification as an important factor of activity in “own” group. Thus, it was revealed that people who identify themselves with their group are more prone to prosocial behavior towards other group members.<sup>10</sup> A study conducted among Jews in Poland<sup>11</sup> demonstrated that the strength of intragroup ties, which is a component of ethnic identity, predicts diaspora involvement. A positive relationship between diaspora activity and ethnic identity was identified in a study by Martinez Damia et al.<sup>12</sup> Studies of Armenians in the Rostov region demonstrate that their diaspora activity is mainly focused on the preservation of Armenian national identity and their cultural values.”<sup>13</sup> Based on these findings, an assumption can be made that Russian national identity and orientation towards the host society will not contribute to diaspora activity.

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<sup>3</sup> See: *Armenia's Diaspora—Its Role and Influence*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office U.K. Report, 2014, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/armenias-diaspora-its-role-and-influence].

<sup>4</sup> See: O.B. Leontieva, L.G. Mkrтчian, “Armianskaia diaspora Rossii: sovremennye podkhody k izucheniu,” *Vestnik Samarskogo universiteta. Istorica, pedagogika, filologia*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2020, pp. 8-14, available at [Doi: 10.18287/2542-0445-2020-26-4-8-14].

<sup>5</sup> See: E. Minasian, “O roli armianskoy diaspori v otnosheniakh mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiei i Respublikoy Armenii: sotsialno-ekonomicheskie i kulturnye svyazi,” *Chelovechesky kapital*, Vol. 6, No. 138, 2020, pp. 29-37, available at [DOI: 10.25629/HC.2020.06.04].

<sup>6</sup> See: O.B. Leontieva, L.G. Mkrтчian, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> See: A.S. Berberian, O.R. Tuchina, “Issledovanie natsionalnoy identichnosti i istoricheskogo opyta lichnosti v titulnom armianskom etnose i sopriazhennoy armianskoy diaspore v Rossii,” *Rossiyskiy psikhologicheskii zhurnal*, No. 2, 2018, pp. 190-214.

<sup>8</sup> See: A.V. Dmitriyev, V.V. Voronov, E.A. Mikhaylova, “Prognoznnoe modelirovanie mezhetnicheskikh otnosheniy v rossiyskikh regionakh na osnove analiza identifikatsionnykh strategiy diaspornykh i zemliacheskikh grupp,” *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, No. 6, 2017, pp. 97-124, available at [DOI: 10.14515/monitoring.2017.6.06].

<sup>9</sup> See: H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in: *Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, ed. by S. Worchel, W.G. Austin, Hall Publishers, Chicago, 1986, pp. 7-24.

<sup>10</sup> See: B. Simon, S. Sturmer, K. Steffens, “Helping Individuals or Group Members? The Role of Individual and Collective Identification in AIDS-Volunteerism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 26, 2000, pp. 497-506.

<sup>11</sup> See: M. Bilewicz, A. Wojcik, “Does Identification Predict Community Involvement? Exploring Consequences of Social Identification Among the Jewish Minority in Poland,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 20, 2009, pp. 72-79, available at [DOI: 10.1002/casp.1012].

<sup>12</sup> See: S. Martinez Damia, D. Marzana, S. Alfieri, M. Pozzi, E. Marta, M.L. Martinez, “Psychological and Structural Barriers to Immigrant Community Participation: The Experience of Peruvians in Santiago de Chile,” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 2020, pp. 1-14, available at [https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12472].

<sup>13</sup> G.P. Ferenchuk, “Armianskaia diaspora i kultura formirovaniya rossiyskoy identichnosti,” in: *Armiiane Iuga Rossii: istoria, kultura, obshchee budushchee. Materialy Vserossiyskoy nauchnoy konferentsii*, Rostov-on-Don, 2012, available at [https://armeniansite.ru/armyanskie-diaspori/82-armyanskaya-diaspora-i-kultura-formirovaniya-rossijskoj-identichnosti.html].

A study of Armenians in Russia revealed that their significant ethnic identity promotes active participation in the life of the diaspora.<sup>14</sup> Researchers also note that the involvement of diasporas in the life of their regions leads to an assimilation of the norms and rules of regional and local communities and to the formation of a socio-territorial, regional identity, which in turn contributes to an increase in a diaspora's activity in the region and its consolidation.<sup>15</sup> However, there are practically no studies aimed at identifying the influence of regional and Russian national identity on diaspora activity.

A large body of previous research shows that acculturation strategies can be predicted by identities of migrants and ethnic minorities.<sup>16</sup> Based on John Berry's theory of acculturation,<sup>17</sup> many researchers have established<sup>18</sup> that when both ethnic and Russian national (identifying oneself with the host country) identities dominate, a person is focused on integration; meanwhile, when ethnic identity strongly dominates, a strategy of separation prevails, and when national identity strongly dominates—a person seeks to assimilate. As for regional identity, a study of Russian ethnic minorities in Latvia and Georgia<sup>19</sup> found that regional identity (identifying oneself with a certain place) is positively associated with an integration strategy and negatively—with assimilation.

However, the relationship between identities and acculturation strategies among members of Russia's Armenian diaspora has barely been studied.

There are few studies that reveal the relationship between diaspora activity and acculturation strategies. It has been established that the absence of the diaspora as a source of social support can have negative consequences for the acculturation of migrants and ethnic minorities.<sup>20</sup> A study of Armenians in Russia showed that those who have interacted with a community organization for a prolonged period of time have less pronounced hyper-ethnic attitudes (ethno-egoism and ethno-isolationism), which indicates an orientation towards both preservation of their culture and accepting the culture of the ethnic majority.<sup>21</sup> However, no studies have been conducted on the relationship between diaspora activity and assimilation strategies. In addition, the mediating role of diaspora activity in the relationship between identities and acculturation strategies has not been sufficiently analyzed.

This research focuses on the study of the relationship between ethnic, regional and Russian national identities, diaspora activity and acculturation strategies of the Armenians in the Kuban region. It also tests the mediation role of diaspora activity in the relationship between identities and the acculturation strategy.

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<sup>14</sup> See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Verzhinina, "Vzaimosviaz etnicheskoy identichnosti migrantov-armian i usloviy ikh prozhivaniya v prinimaiushchem soobshchestve," *Psychological Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2014, pp. 71-79.

<sup>15</sup> See: A.V. Dmitriyev, V.V. Voronov, E.A. Mikhaylova, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> See: J.W. Berry, J.S. Phinney, D.L. Sam, P. Vedder, "Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 55, 2006, pp. 303-332; K. Liebkind, T.A.E. Mähönen, S.A. Varjonen, I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, "Acculturation and Identity," in: *Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, ed. by D.L. Sam, J.W. Berry, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 30-49, available at [Doi:10.1017/CBO9781316219218.004].

<sup>17</sup> See: J.W. Berry, *Mutual Intercultural Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See: J. Georgas, D. Papastylianou, "Acculturation and Ethnic Identity: The Remigration of Ethnic Greeks to Greece," in: *Key Issues in Cross-Cultural Psychology*, ed. by H. Grad, A. Blanco, J. Georgas, Swets & Zeitlinger, Lisse, Netherlands, 1998, pp. 114-127; A. Portes, R.G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd edition, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> See: T.A. Ryabichenko, N.M. Lebedeva, I.D. Plotka, "Mnozhestvennye identichnosti, akkulturationsia i adaptatsia russkikh v Latvii i Gruzii," *Kulturno-istoricheskaja psikhologia*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2019, pp. 54-64, available at [Doi: 10.17759/chp.2019150206].

<sup>20</sup> See: C. Ward, S. Fox, J. Wilson, J. Stuart, L. Kus, "Contextual Influences on Acculturation Processes: The Roles of Family, Community and Society," *Psychological Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2010, pp. 26-34, available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-010-0003-8].

<sup>21</sup> See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Babayeva, "Transformatsia etnicheskoy identichnosti migrantov-armian, vovlecheniykh i ne vovlecheniykh v deiatel'nost natsionalno-kulturnoy avtonomii," *Vestnik RUDN, Series Psikhologia and Pedagogika*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2020, pp. 128-142, available at [DOI 10.22363/2313-1683-2020-17-1-128-142].

Based on literature analysis, the following hypotheses are set forth.

*Hypothesis 1.* Social identities will predict diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region in different ways:

- (a) significant ethnic and regional identity will contribute to diaspora activity,
- (b) significant national identity will hinder diaspora activity.

*Hypothesis 2.* Social identities will be associated with acculturation strategies in different ways:

- (a) significant ethnic identity will predict the preference for separation and integration strategies,
- (b) significant regional identity will predict the preference for the integration strategy,
- (c) significant Russian national identity will predict the preference for integration and assimilation strategies.

*Hypothesis 3.* Active participation in the life of the diaspora will be positively related to integration and separation strategies, and negatively—to the assimilation strategy.

We also formulated a *research question*: What is the mediational role of diaspora activity in the relationship between social identities and acculturation strategies of the Kuban Armenians?

## Method

### Procedure and Sample

The socio-psychological survey was carried out offline at Krasnodar Territory universities, NGOs, and in areas with large populations of ethnic Armenians. In this study, a convenient sample was used (“snowball method”). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, with no reward expected. The sample included 188 respondents (see Table 1)

*Table 1*

**Gender and Age Sample Characteristics**

Respondents	N	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	Min.	Max.	M	SD
<b>Armenians from the Krasnodar Territory</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>79 (42%)</b>	<b>109 (58%)</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>10.8</b>
<i>Note:</i> M—means; SD—standard deviation.							

### Measures

The study used the scales from a questionnaire created within the framework of the Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies (MIRIPS) project.<sup>22</sup> The respondents answered the ques-

<sup>22</sup> See: N.M. Lebedeva, A.N. Tatarko, *Strategii mezhkulturnogo vzaimodeystvia migrantov i naselenia Rossii*, Collection of scientific articles, RUDN, Moscow, 2009, pp. 10-63.

tions using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included the following scales:

*Identity.* Ethnic identity: the scale included four questions, i.e., “I am proud to be Armenian.” Regional identity (identification with the regional community): the scale included four questions, i.e., “I am proud to be a resident of the Kuban.” Russian national identity (identification with the Russian society as a whole): the scale included four items, i.e., “I feel that I am a part of Russian culture.”

*Acculturation strategies:* integration—four questions, i.e., “It is important for me to be fluent in both Armenian and Russian”; assimilation—four questions, i.e., “I prefer social activities in which only Russians participate”; separation—four questions, i.e., “I prefer social activities in which only Armenians participate.”

*Diaspora activity.*<sup>23</sup> The scale included fourteen questions aimed at identifying the respondent’s participation in various events conducted by the Armenian diaspora. For example, “I typically participate in fundraising for the activities of the Armenian community and church.”

*Demographic characteristics.* Respondents’ gender and age were controlled.

*Data processing.* The authors utilized descriptive statistics,  $\alpha$ -Cronbach to determine scale reliability, structural equation modeling (path analysis) in SPSS 22.0 with the AMOS application.

## Results

The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate that ethnic identity is the most pronounced among the three identities among the Armenians in the Kuban, followed by national, and regional identity with the least significance. The preferred strategy was integration, the least preferred—separation. Assimilation occupied the middle position, but it was weakly pronounced. Diaspora activity was quite high.

Table 2

Means and  $\alpha$ -Cronbach Indicators for All Variables

Variables	M	SD	$\alpha$
Ethnic identity	4.75	0.82	0.91
Regional identity	3.56	0.98	0.77
Russian national identity	4.05	0.99	0.82
Integration	4.42	0.59	0.64
Assimilation	2.83	0.63	0.67
Separation	2.45	0.68	0.81
Diaspora activity	4.07	0.69	0.94

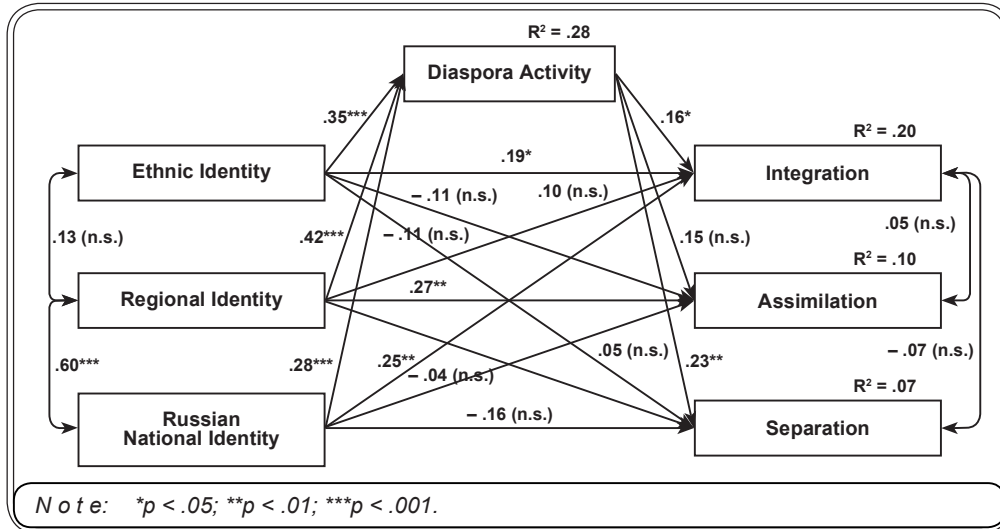
Note: M—means; SD—standard deviation.

The data was subsequently analyzed using structural equation modeling to test hypotheses and answer the research question. The results are shown in Figure 1. We controlled the gender and age of the respondents. Since they did not have significant effects on the studied variables, they were not displayed in the model.

<sup>23</sup> See: A.S. Berberian, O.R. Tuchina, op. cit.

Figure 1

Path Model of the Relationship Between Ethnic, Regional and Russian National Identities, and Diaspora Activity of the Armenians in the Kuban Region with Their Acculturation Strategies



The results obtained revealed good model indicators:  $\chi^2 / df = 0.04$ ; SRMR = 0.009; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.001; PCLOSE = 0.970. The data generally demonstrated that ethnic and regional identities were positively associated among Armenians with diaspora activity, while Russian national identity was negatively related to the latter. We also found that ethnic and Russian national identities showed a significantly positive relationship with the preference for the integration strategy, and regional identity was positively related to the assimilation strategy. Diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region predicted strategies of integration and separation. The rest of the relationships were statistically insignificant.

Mediational analysis showed a significant positive indirect effect of ethnic ( $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI: } 0.06, 0.32$ ) and regional ( $\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI: } 0.02, 0.12$ ) identities on separation via diaspora activity. Other indirect effects were not significant.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This research was devoted to the study of the relationship between ethnic, regional and Russian national identities and the Armenian diaspora's activity in the Kuban region and the diaspora members' acculturation attitudes.

The results of the study demonstrated that a significant ethnic identity contributes to diaspora activity. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies.<sup>24</sup> We also found that the regional Kuban identity predicted the dynamic activity of Armenians within the diaspora. At the same time, Russian national identity was negatively related to diaspora activity. Thus, our first hypothesis was fully confirmed. The more Armenians feel that they belong to an ethnic group and the more they feel

<sup>24</sup> See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Vershinina, op. cit.; M. Bilewicz, A. Wojcik, op. cit.

like residents of the Kuban, the more involved they become in the diaspora activities. Conversely, a significant Russian national identity contributes to a decrease in involvement in the diaspora's activities.

The ethnic and Russian national identity of the Armenians in the Kuban region predicted their preference for the integration strategy, while regional identity was positively associated with the assimilation strategy. These results partially confirmed our second hypothesis, and are consistent with data from other studies. Using the example of the repatriation of ethnic Greeks, Georgas and Papastylianou<sup>25</sup> showed that migrants with a “mixed” identity (i.e., Albanian Greeks) were oriented towards integration. In addition, the result we obtained in regard to the relationship between regional identity and assimilation strategy, is not fully consistent with the results of previous studies. In their study of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia and Georgia, Ryabichenko, Lebedeva and Plotka<sup>26</sup> revealed that place identity (regional identity) is positively associated with integration and negatively—with assimilation. This may be due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural context. For Armenians living in the multicultural society of the Krasnodar Territory, regional identity presupposes the acceptance of cultural diversity, which can lead to decreasing importance of their own cultural norms, rules, and the acceptance of the norms and traditions of the region where they live, that is, to assimilation. Similar results were obtained by Konstantinov and Babayeva<sup>27</sup> in their study of the Armenians in the Penza region, where the number of ethno-indifferent Armenians who accepted the culture of the majority in the region of residence has increased.

We also found that diaspora activity was positively associated with a preference for integration and separation strategies. These results partially confirmed our third hypothesis. The results of this study are similar to those obtained in the Russian regions<sup>28</sup> and the United States.<sup>29</sup> We can claim that the diaspora activity of the Armenians in the Kuban region contributes to both the preservation of their own culture and the acceptance of the culture of the ethnic majority.

In addition, as we sought an answer to our research question, we found that diaspora activity mediated the relationship of ethnic and regional identities with separation. This is an interesting result, which demonstrates that ethnic identity directly contributes to integration, and regional identity contributes to assimilation. However, if there is involvement in the diaspora's activities, these identities orient Armenians primarily towards preserving their own culture.

In general, the study demonstrated that both ethnic and Russian national identity of the Kuban Armenians contributed to their integration, and regional identity contributed to their assimilation. Active participation in the life of the Armenian community was determined by the significant ethnic and regional identities and mediated the relationship of these identities with separation attitudes. Thus, if the Kuban Armenians are involved in the life of their diaspora, their ethnic and regional identities determine the orientation towards separation. If they are not involved, these identities contribute to the acceptance of the host society culture. It is important to take this into account when building the regional interethnic relations policy. On the one hand, participation in the diaspora's activities is an effective mechanism for the adaptation of migrants, and a resource for their survival and social success. On the other hand, diaspora activity is a source of problems and conflict situations. For instance, this can increase the impenetrability of the diasporas' boundaries and encourage the orientation of migrants only to their ethnic group, thereby reducing their desire for sociocultural integration into the host society.

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<sup>25</sup> See: J. Georgas, D. Papastylianou, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> See: T.A. Ryabichenko, N.M. Lebedeva, I.D. Plotka, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Babayeva, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> See: V.V. Konstantinov, M.V. Vershinina, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> See: *Armenia's Diaspora—Its Role and Influence*.