

## EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

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# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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**Abstract:** *This article covers the period of November 2023-June 2024 of the internal developments in Armenia, the foreign dynamics shaping the international relations of Armenia, the ongoing process of signing the Peace Agreement with Azerbaijan and the bilateral relations of Türkiye and Armenia in the light of the process of normalisation of their relations.*

*The period under review has been a time frame where acts have been put into motion that can be qualified as a breaking or turning point both internally and externally. The administration of the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has undertaken some courageous and risky steps, breaking with established taboos. However, words and promises have not necessarily been carried out to deeds, at least not during the period under review.*

*With a view to overcoming past bigoted concepts, the initiatives encouraged or condoned by the Pashinyan administration to make changes or amends in the Constitution, national hymn and symbols, school curriculum, and genocide narrative, which help cement the past and cause rupture with the present, has led to reactions. Internal reactions have come from partisans of the former government, extreme nationalists and most importantly the Church, while external reactions have come from the militant organizations*

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*of the Diaspora who perceive their survival and livelihood in provoking radical and militant nationalism, and third party states wishing to use this as a vehicle to put political pressure on Türkiye. On the other hand, Christian fundamentalism that appeared in the West has endeavored to project Armenians as a symbol of Christian solidarity, thus to base assistance to Armenia on ideological grounds. Some states, allowing the tail to wag the dog, have seen political advantages in fulfilling these initiatives and demands.*

*Anachronistically and in total disregard of separation of church and state, the Apostolic Church of Armenia took the lead for the opposition in the person of an archbishop, who announced his candidacy for replacing Pashinyan as Prime Minister. The support of the diaspora in the West for the opposition continued undiminished, raising the spectre for the West, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.*

*Following the termination of the occupation of Karabakh, the major obstacle to achieving a lasting peace with Azerbaijan has been removed, limiting the issues for negotiations to border demarcation and transport connections and facilities. Türkiye has shown support for the negotiations. This has been confirmed during the period again at the highest level, in a communication between Turkish President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Pashinyan.*

*Distancing itself from Russia to align with the West as Russia was not in a position to open a second front as the war with Ukraine was going on, Armenia has come to realize the necessity to normalize its relations with Türkiye, the neighbor to provide its connections with the West. Türkiye had been sincerely supporting the process of normalization of relations from early on. However, Türkiye has considered this in a regional perspective, to coincide with the normalization of Armenia's relations with Azerbaijan, within the regional stability with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.*

**Keywords:** Pashinyan, Mirzoyan, Putin, Lavrov, Blinken, Erdoğan, Fidan, Macron, Raisi, Karekin II, Archbishop Galstanyan, Dashnaksutyun (ARF), Zangezur corridor, CSTO, EAEU, NATO

**Öz:** *Bu incelemede Kasım 2023-Haziran 2024 tarihleri döneminde Ermenistan'daki iç gelişmeler, dış dinamikler, Azerbaycan ile Barış Anlaşması sürecindeki gelişmeler ile Türkiye-Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkiler ve normalleşme sürecinin seyri ele alınmaktadır.*

*Dönem Ermenistan'ın gerek iç, gerek dış politikası bakımından kırılma noktası veya dönüm noktası sayılabilecek bir hareketliliğin yaşandığı bir zaman dilimi olmuştur. Ermenistan Başbakanı Nikol Paşinyan'ın yönetimi yerleşik bazı*

*tabuları yıkma yönünde cesaretli ve riskli başlangıçlar yapmıştır. Ancak, hiç değilse dönem içinde, Paşinyan'ın beyanları sözde kalmış, fiiliyata geçirilememiştir.*

*Paşinyan yönetiminin geçmişin bağınazlıklarından kurtulmak üzere; geçmişe kilitlenmeye neden olan ve günümüz gerçeklerine ters düşen Anayasada, ulusal amblemde, milli marşta, okul müfredatında ve soykırım iddiasında değişiklik yapma girişimleri olmuştur. Bu girişimler içte eski rejim yanlılarını, aşırı milliyetçileri ve en önemlisi Kiliseyi; dışta ise, varlıklarını ve geçim kaynaklarını aşırı milliyetçiliği körüklemekte gören militan Ermeni diaspora örgütlerini ve bunu Türkiye üzerinde siyasi baskı aracı olarak kullanabilmeyi düşünen üçüncü devletleri harekete geçirmiştir. Ayrıca, Batı'da gündeme gelen kökten dinci Hristiyanlık akımı, Ermenileri Hristiyan dayanışmasının sembolü haline getirmeye ve Ermenistan'a yardımı ideolojik bir çerçeveye oturtmaya çalışmıştır. Bazı ülkeler, kuyruğun başı yönlendirmesine olanak sağlayan bir zafiyet içinde, bu girişim ve taleplere boyun eğmeyi siyasi kazanım tercihi olarak görebilmiştir.*

*Ermenistan Apostolik Kilisesi çağ dışı bir yaklaşımla, din ve devlet ayırımını hiçe sayarak, Başbakan Paşinyan'ı devirmek üzere Başbakanlığa adaylığını ilan eden bir başpiskoposun kimliğinde muhalefetin liderliğine öncülük yapmıştır. Batıdaki diasporanın muhalefete desteği azalmadan devam etmiş, bu durum Batı'nın tavşana kaç, tazıya tut yaklaşımı görüntüsünü vermiştir.*

*Karabağ işgalinin bütünüyle sona erdirilmesiyle Azerbaycan ile kalıcı bir barışın önündeki en büyük engel kalkmış, müzakere konuları sınır tespiti ve ulaşım bağlantı ve kolaylıklarına odaklanmıştır. Türkiye bu müzakereleri desteklemiştir. Bu yaklaşım dönem içinde bir kez daha en yüksek düzeyde, Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan-Başbakan Paşinyan görüşmesinde teyit edilmiştir.*

*Ermenistan'ın Ukrayna Savaşı nedeniyle ikinci bir cepheye mücadeleyi göze alamayan Rusya'dan uzaklaşma olanağı bulması ve Batı yanlısı bir çizgiye geçmesi, Batı ile bağlantısını oluşturan komşusu Türkiye ile ilişkilerini normalleştirme gereğini ortaya koymuştur. Türkiye normalleşme sürecini esasen baştan beri samimiyetle desteklemiştir. Bununla beraber, Türkiye bunu bölgesel bir çerçevede göre gelmiş, Ermenistan'ın Azerbaycan ile ilişkilerinin de eş zamanlı normalleşmesinde, Gürcistan-Ermenistan-Azerbaycan bölgesel istikrarında değerlendirmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Paşinyan, Mirzoyan, Putin, Lavrov, Blinken, Erdoğan, Fidan, Macron, Reisi, II. Karekin, Başpiskopos Galstanyan, Daşnaksutyun (EDF), Zangezür koridoru, KGAÖ, AEB, NATO*

## 1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

During this period, the domestic developments in Armenia influenced its foreign affairs, primarily with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan establishing its sovereignty over the remaining occupied region of Karabakh through its military operation on September 2023, the choice of the Armenian population living in the region to migrate to Armenia instead of living in Karabakh as Azerbaijani citizens under Azerbaijani rule, the struggles that this migrating population is facing in Armenia and the failure to meet their expectations, and attempts of the opposition against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to exploit this population have caused problems for Armenia's administration. The amendments required for the Armenian legislation in order to realize the peace agreement, especially the Constitution, further aggravated the opposition. The radicalized domestic opposition, largely supported by the Armenian Diaspora and receiving the support of the Armenian Apostolic Church, went beyond calls for the resignation of the administration to accusations of treason. The fact that the opposition has become more vocal and that militant outbursts have become more rampant does not necessarily mean that their public support has increased. On the other hand, it remains to be seen whether the full-fledged support and participation of the Church in the protests with an archbishop campaigning to topple the government and to become the prime minister himself will be able to tilt the balances.

The “President of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh”, who fled to Armenia in response to Azerbaijan reclaiming the rest of its occupied territories through the Operation of 19 September 2023, announced on 28 September that the so-called state had ceased to exist. However, after receiving support, and even incentive from the Diaspora, some Western countries and some pro-Russian oppositional parties, he declared on 22 December that he had canceled this decision and decided to form a “government in exile” in Yerevan. This decision put Pashinyan, who was in the midst of peace talks and attempts to normalize relations with his neighbors, in a difficult situation, and also played into the hands of the administration's opponents.

By presidential decree, the Armenian Minister of High-Tech Industry R. Kachatrian was dismissed and replaced by M. Hayrapetyan on 29 December.<sup>1</sup> The Minister of Economy V. Kerobyan was dismissed on corruption charges on 14 February and arrested afterwards.<sup>2</sup> He was replaced on 5 March by 37-year-old G. Papoyan, Deputy Chairman of Pashinyan's Civil Contract party.<sup>3</sup>

1 “Mkhitar Hayrapetyan Appointed Minister of High-tech Industry”, *ArmenPress*, December 29, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1127198.html>

2 “Armenia's Former Economy Minister Charged with Corruption”, *CivilNet*, February 19, 2024, <https://eurasianet.org/armenias-former-economy-minister-charged-with-corruption>.

3 “Gevorg Papoyan Appointed Armenian Economy Minister”, *ArmenPress*, March 5, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1131752.html>

On 14 February 2024, major changes were made in the Armenian military forces' upper echelons. In a statement, it was noted that the military's weapons procurement was being altered and that the previous management style would change. On 15 February, the administration decided to appoint military attachés to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) missions.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the adversity between the Pashinyan administration and the Church, instead of diminishing, turned into an open confrontation was observed once again when Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II's customary New Year's message was not allowed to be broadcasted on state television on 31 December 2023.<sup>5</sup> Speaking at the Christmas ritual celebrated by the Armenian Apostolic Church on 6 January 2024, the Catholicos emphasized that the Armenian people of "Nagorno-Karabakh" would continue to fight for their rights and would never forget the state from which they were forcibly removed. Thus, with the proclamation from the highest authority, the Church determined its position in favor of radical nationalists and against government policy.

The efforts to sign a Peace Treaty and the process of normalizing relations with its neighbors have created the need to also make changes in Armenia's domestic legislation. Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan officially announced the idea of amending the Constitution, which he had been voicing for some time, during a meeting held at the Ministry of Justice on 18 January. He stated that "Armenia needs a new Constitution, not amendments to the Constitution".<sup>6</sup> Pashinyan assigned the Ministry of Justice to work on this issue. Pashinyan reiterated the same views at the party meeting two days later.

Adopted in 1995, the current Armenian Constitution ratified the "Declaration of Independence" adopted by the Armenian parliament in 1990 as an integral part of the Constitution. The 1990 Declaration of Independence also ratifies the 1989 Unity Law adopted during the Soviet Union period, which states that the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region is part of Armenia. Thus, these documents, which are binding components of the Constitution and are still valid, deny Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in Karabakh, reject the 1921 Moscow and Kars Agreements with the territorial claim of "Western Armenia" and do not recognize the border with Türkiye. On the other hand, it stipulates

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4 "Armenia Establishes Defense Attaché Positions in NATO and OSCE Missions", *ArmenPress*, February 15, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1130398.html>

5 Shoghik Galstian, "Armenian Church Head's New Year Address Not Aired By State TV", *Azatutyun*, January 2, 2024, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32756257.html>

6 "We Must Have a Constitution that Makes the Republic of Armenia More Competitive and Viable in the New Geopolitical Conditions. Prime Minister", *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/01/19/Nikol-Pashinyan-Report-Ministry-of-Justice/>

the international recognition of the “1915 genocide of Armenians” as one of the main duties of Armenia.

On 10 October 2009, two protocols were signed by the foreign ministers of Türkiye and Armenia in the presence of international observers, initiating the process of normalization of bilateral relations between the two countries. According to the relevant article of the Armenian Constitution, before international agreements were submitted to the Parliament for ratification, the protocols were sent to the Constitutional Court to evaluate their constitutionality. The court approved the protocols on the condition that Armenia would not give up its efforts for the worldwide recognition of the “Armenian Genocide” and that the implementation of the protocols did not alter the non-recognition of Armenia’s existing border as established by the 1921 Treaty of Kars. Naturally, this approach resulted in the nullification of the protocols. Undoubtedly, this is now an undesirable precedent for a possible peace agreement with Azerbaijan. In fact, Pashinyan criticized the Declaration of Independence in August 2023, stating that it incited conflict with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, contradicted the government’s peace agenda, and reflected Soviet mentality aimed at spreading seeds of discord among regional neighbors.<sup>7</sup> The opposition, as usual, vigorously accused the administration of being pro-Türkiye and pro-Azerbaijan, and emphasized that Azerbaijani pressure was the reason behind the constitutional amendment initiative. Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan acknowledged at a press conference on 23 January 2024 that Azerbaijan had concerns in this regard. In a speech on state television on 1 February, Pashinyan again criticized the Declaration of Independence, emphasized the need to remove the reference to the Declaration from the Constitution, and stated that “If so, it means we will never have peace. Furthermore, it means that we will now have war”.<sup>8</sup> The issue was also brought to the parliamentary agenda, and in a Q&A session in the Parliament on 7 February, Pashinyan reiterated his views, saying that “The world changed since the adoption of the current Constitution”.

The head of the Armenian Public Radio Company also joined the opposition parties and the Church in opposing Pashinyan’s views. On 7 February, he stated “The premier wants to destroy one of the pillars of our political identity and to stop us from being who we are. We are being told that the Turks are strong and the Armenians weak, and they will massacre us when war breaks out. The natural conclusion to be derived from this assumption should have been ‘let’s get stronger,’ but what is said instead is ‘let’s stop being Armenians.’”<sup>9</sup> The radio chief was removed from his post in response to these statements.

7 “Pashinyan Criticizes Armenia’s 1990 Declaration of Independence”, *Oragark*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.oragark.com/pashinyan-criticizes-armenias-1990-declaration-of-independence/>.

8 “Pashinian Again Criticizes Armenia’s Independence Declaration”, *Azattyun*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32801656.html>

9 Astghik Bedevian and Ruzanna Stepanian, “State Radio Chief Censured After Criticizing Pashinian”, *Azattyun*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32809279.html>



The issue was not limited to the amendment of the Constitution. In January, the Speaker of the Parliament and the administration's authorized mouthpieces brought to the agenda proposals to change the lyrics of the national anthem, which contains the words "killing" and "death" and lacks a national character. Additionally, proposals were made to change the state emblem, which includes Ağrı Mountain (Mount Ararat), on the grounds that it does not fit the realities of the present.<sup>10</sup> As one might expect, these proposals provided the opposition with rich material for accusations of treason. Another area of controversy and accusation arose in the school curriculum. The administration proposed to change the title of history books from "the History of Armenians" to "the History of Armenia". While the administration justified this as a step to shift away from clinging to the past and towards the present, opponents perceived this as an attempt to sever ties with the past and to forget the past, including the "genocide".

The statement by a prominent member of the ruling party, the chairman of the Parliamentary Defense Committee, that the verification of the number of those who lost their lives in the "genocide" by revealing the names of the victims one by one would help to solidify the allegations further intensified the opposition's criticism and led to accusations that Turkish views were now being supported even in the Armenian parliament. Although the deputy later declared that this view was his own personal approach,<sup>11</sup> it was reported in the press that High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs under the Prime Minister's Office Zareh Sinanyan also supported this proposal with the understanding that it would lead to "a much more scientific and objective realization of the genocide discussion". Moreover, the press stated that Pashinyan was also in favor of the proposal.

Pashinyan's pose in front of the photo of "Aragats", Armenia's highest mountain at 4090 meters, which appeared on social media, was also the target of intense criticism by the opposition. It was seen as an attempt to make people forget Ağrı Mountain and another blow against the national identity.

In his response to these criticisms, Pashinyan stated that historical Armenia and real Armenia are different, even contradictory concepts, that historical Armenia does not recognize the territorial integrity of real Armenia, thus endangering its existence. He expressed that the internationally recognized territorial integrity of Armenia is 29,743 square kilometers, and that it is time

10 "Armenian Parliamentary Speaker: National Anthem, Emblem should be Replaced Sooner or Later", *InterFax*, January 30, 2024, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/98903/>

11 Ruzanna Stepanian, "Pashinian Ally Says Remarks on 'Listing' Genocide Victims His 'Personal Approach'", *Azatoryun*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/32907554.html>

for Armenians to accept this fact.<sup>12</sup> Pashinyan, likely targeting the diaspora members who intervene in Armenia's affairs without even being able to speak Armenian, explained, "You say we are renouncing our values. The greatest of our values is our language. And if someone asks me what is the reason why I continue to be the Prime Minister of Armenia after the things you mentioned, I will say, in my opinion, because I possess one of our most important national values: the Armenian language—and not only the letter, but the soul, the spirit, the emotion with which I sense the emotions of the citizens of Armenia". Referring to the Karabakh issue, Pashinyan said, "What happened in Nagorno-Karabakh was not really about Nagorno-Karabakh, but another conspiracy to bring Armenia's statehood to its knees. Russia used Nagorno-Karabakh as a leash on Armenia."

On 25 January, a Yerevan court ruled in favor of the application of four Dashnaktsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation-ARF) members of French citizenship who had been prevented from entering the country and sent back from the airport in July 2022, and lifted the ban on their entry into the country.

On 29 January, the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Sinanyan announced the ten-year (2023-2033) Armenia-Diaspora Partnership Strategy. In a statement to the press, Sinanyan described the strategy's vision as a "state-centered and pro-state" diaspora. Considering that the opposition to the Pashinyan administration includes the Armenian Church as well as the radical-militant Diaspora wing, Sinanyan's following statements are noteworthy:

"We expect to work with the Diaspora based on principles of respect, based on the objective of further deepening the ideology of statehood-building and state-centeredness. Today, this is very weak in the Diaspora. Understandably, the Diaspora was formed in conditions of absence of statehood. While Armenians living in Armenia have the sense of nationhood and statehood-building, Diaspora Armenians don't necessarily have that notion. We want the Diaspora to focus exclusively on the state. This is not out of egoism or thinking only of ourselves. We see the state as a guarantee not only for Armenians in Armenia, but also for the continuity of the Armenian nation and the Diaspora. Without a strong state, nothing can happen."<sup>13</sup>

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12 "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Speech at the National Assembly during the Discussion of the Implementation of the Government Action Plan (2021-26) for the year of 2023", *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2024/04/10/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/>

13 "Armenia Develops 2023-2033 Diaspora Partnership Strategy Ahead of 2nd Global Summit", *ArmenPress*, January 29, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1129041.html>



High Commissioner Sinanyan explained that this strategy stemmed from the first Global Diaspora Summit in 2022 and that the second Global Diaspora Summit is planned to be held in Armenia in September 2024.

The leaders of the Social Democratic Hunchak Party, the ARF, and the Armenian Democratic League (Ramgavar party), which are among the radical-militant groups of the Diaspora in the US, held a joint meeting on 22 January. At the meeting, where the situation in Armenia and Karabakh was evaluated, it was stated that the Armenian nation and homeland were in a vital struggle and pledged to serve the cause in unity and in partnership.

The ARF subsequently issued a statement on 5 February, targeting the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization talks and a possible peace agreement, demanding the restoration of the “Nagorno-Karabakh-Artsakh republic” to its former status, which contradicts facts and reality.

The head of the ARF bureau in Armenia was received by Catholicos Karekin II in Etchmiadzin on 8 February. In a statement issued at the end of the meeting, it was noted that the two leaders highlighted the need to expand cooperation between national institutions and deepen the role of the Church in the life of the Armenian people in order to promote national unity and respond to the threats.<sup>14</sup>

The US-based ARF bureau issued a harsher statement on 28 March, claiming that the unilateral concessions of Pashinyan and his administration have not and will not end, that there is an urgent need to unite all steady forces in Armenia and the Diaspora, and that the only item on the agenda should be the salvation of the Armenian statehood.<sup>15</sup> The ARF’s “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic-Artsakh” bureau also held a regional meeting in Yerevan on 1 April and published a statement declaring its decision to continue the struggle for the return of the population of the so-called republic and the defense of their “inalienable rights”.

In a special session on 16 April, the Parliament declared 3 August as the day of commemoration of the Sinjar Yazidis, who are described as being victims of a Daesh/ISIS instigated genocide in 2014.<sup>16</sup> The media stated that Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt such a resolution. In a message

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14 “ARF Bureau Chairman Meets with Catholicos Karekin II”, *Asbarez*, February 9, 2024, <https://asbarez.com/arf-bureau-chairman-meets-with-catholicos-karekin-ii/>

15 “Declaration of the ARF-Dashnaksutyun Bureau”, *The Armenian Weekly*, March 28, 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/03/28/declaration-of-the-arf-dashnaksutyun-bureau/>

16 “It is proposed to mark August 3 as a Memorial Day of Sinjar Yazidis Genocide Victims in 2014”, *National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia*, April 16, 2024, [http://www.parliament.am/news.php?cat\\_id=2&NewsID=20433&year=2024&month=04&day=16&lang=eng](http://www.parliament.am/news.php?cat_id=2&NewsID=20433&year=2024&month=04&day=16&lang=eng)

posted on social media, the French Ambassador to Yerevan expressed his contentment with the decision and claimed that the “martyrdom” of the Sinjar Yazidis was a repetition of the “genocide of Armenians in 1915”, a hundred years later.

On 19 April, the decision to return four border villages in the Tovuz region to Azerbaijan in accordance with the agreement reached as a result of border negotiations with Azerbaijan turned into an anti-government demonstration. The demonstration was instigated and led by the highest religious authority of the region, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanian, who led his followers on a 170-kilometer march to Yerevan and reached the capital on 9 May.<sup>17</sup> The Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin did not hide its support for the movement. The Catholicosate of Cilicia (located in Antelias/Lebanon) came into the picture as well, and in a telephone conversation between the heads of the two catholicosates on 30 April, the necessity of firmly maintaining Armenia’s territorial integrity and the Church’s indispensable commitment to it were emphasized.

Afterwards, the Armenian Apostolic Church announced its support for one of its senior priests to lead the protests against the government’s decision to cede disputed border regions to Azerbaijan and called on Prime Minister Pashinyan to take into account the “legitimate” demands of the demonstrators. In his response statement, Pashinyan argued that the protesters’ aim was to overthrow him with the support of the opposition and “foreign powers” and that the actual leader of the process was Catholicos Karekin II himself.

At a rally in Yerevan attended by 30-40,000 people, Archbishop Galstanian demanded Pashinyan’s resignation and gave him an hour to do so. Of course, this childish approach did not bring any results. The Archbishop, who also has Canadian citizenship and previously served as Archbishop in Canada, has close ties with the ARF. As if to confirm his ties to the ARF, he posed hand in hand with the murderous terrorist Hampig Sassounian at demonstrations in Yerevan. Moreover, he described Sassounian, who assassinated Türkiye’s Consul General in Los Angeles in 1982 and settled in Armenia after his unwarranted release from a US prison, as a “hero”. Even though the movement mobilized a section of the population for a populist cause and had the Church’s support, it became clear that it would not yield results. The police arrested 171 demonstrators, including the terrorist Sassounian.

Archbishop Galstanyan’s movement, which began in late April with demands to halt the delimitation of the border, but then shifted to demanding the

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17 Karine Simonian, “Armenian Border Protesters March Toward Yerevan”, *Radio Free Europe*, March 5, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-border-protest-yerevan-kirants-galstanian/32934139.html>

resignation of the Prime Minister and the administration, despite dwindling numbers, from the peak of 30,000 of the first demonstration to 11,000 and 9,000, kept continuing with weekly demonstrations. On the eve of the Republic Day of 28 May, his movement organised another rally attended by some 23,000 people, calling for obstructing the official ceremonies the next day. The protesters led by Archbishop Galstanyan spent the night at the memorial site to disrupt the anticipated ceremony. The official ceremony, with the attendance of Pashinyan and top state officials took place, not in the morning as is the tradition, but in the afternoon, after the protesters left. Though an awkward incident happened. The head of the Apostolic Church in Armenia, Catholicos Karekin II also came to the area during this time and was stopped at the gates until the end of the official ceremony. As to be expected, this gave rise to inflammatory accusations by the Church and the protesters.<sup>18</sup> Well known radical, militant diaspora organisations did not lose time to sympathise with the Church with provocative declarations. Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) of the United States statement indicated; “When agents of state fail to respect the highest authority of their national church, this is cause for concern and an affront to all Armenians of good faith”. ARF of Western US stated;

“For the last four years our homeland and nation have been set on an unending trajectory of self-destruction by the Pashinyan regime, whose policies and approaches have systematically diminished and degraded all that is core and foundational for our entire nation [...] The ARF Western USA Central Committee strongly condemns the Pashinyan regime’s anti-democratic, unconstitutional and effectively anti-Armenian and anti-Church policies and reaffirms its total and unequivocal support to Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and his movement”.

Archbishop Galstanyan, the movement’s candidate, also endorsed by the opposition, for prime minister, adamantly says “We will not leave the streets in the coming months. The street struggle will continue”.

In a statement released at the end of November, it was reported that remittances sent to Armenia in the first nine months of the year amounted to \$1.3 billion, indicating a 20% decrease compared to January-September 2022 net remittances of \$1.8 billion. The World Bank also reported in January that net remittances decreased by 82% in November 2023 compared to November 2022 and by 68% in November 2023 compared to October 2023, mainly due to a 29% decrease in remittances from Russia.<sup>19</sup>

18 “Worldwide Armenian Church Leaders Express Dismay In Statement”, *Armenianchurch.us*, May 29, 2024, <https://armenianchurch.us/13932-2/>

19 Robert Zargarian, “Private Remittances To Armenia Dwindle In 2023”, *Azatutyun*, November 24, 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32697880.html>

Armenia's budget for 2024 was adopted on 7 December 2023 after parliamentary deliberations, with the help of the votes of the ruling party. Budget revenues are projected at 2 trillion 723 billion drams (approximately 6 billion 700 million USD) and expenditures at 3 trillion 206 billion drams (approximately 7 billion 900 million USD). The highest tax on budget revenues was again paid by the Zangezur Copper mining company. In second place was the country's tobacco company, and in third place was Gazprom-Armenia.

On 21 December, Armenian media, citing International Monetary Fund (IMF) data, reported that Armenia has the highest per capita income in the South Caucasus with \$8,280, followed by Georgia with \$8,160 and Azerbaijan with \$7,530.

The head of the Ministry of Economy's Tourism Committee stated on 8 January 2024 that the number of tourist arrivals in 2023 was 2,300,000, which is an increase of 30% compared to 2019 and 39% compared to 2022. It was explained that the majority of tourists came from Russia, followed by Georgia and Iran, and then the United States.

According to the Ministry of Economy on 15 January, Armenia's exports in January-November 2023 amounted to \$6 billion 946 million 382 thousand Dollars. This is a significant increase compared to the exports in 2022 worth 4 billion 800 million 308 thousand Dollars. More than 3.3 billion Dollars of exports were made to the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The most prominent country was Russia, with a share of over 90%.<sup>20</sup> Media reports pointed out that exports to Russia were not driven by an increase in domestic traditional production, but by the export of imported goods. In particular, there has been a large increase in second-hand car exports. In January-November 2023, used car exports reached \$533 million, up from \$217 million in 2022.

According to a statement by the Minister of Finance on 31 January, Armenia's state debt was approximately 48.3% of GDP by 2023.<sup>21</sup>

In 2023, humanitarian aid to Armenia totaled \$35.6 million, a 58.8% decrease compared to 2022, with the largest amounts coming from the US (\$8.1 million), Italy (\$3.8 million), and Switzerland (\$2.8 million), followed by Germany (\$2.1 million), China (\$1.8 million) and France (\$1.3 million).

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20 "Armenian Exports to EEU hit \$3,3 Billion but Expert Warns against 'Illusions'", *ArmenPress*, January 15, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1127998.html>

21 "Debt Estimated at 48,4% of GDP", *ArmenPress*, January 31, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1129239/>

The World Bank has approved in June 40 million dollars for an energy transition project. The project aims to support Armenia's Energy Sector Development Strategy to 2040 by focusing on the rehabilitation of power transmission substations, promoting energy sector modernization, and fostering regional energy cooperation among emerging and developing economies in Europe and Central Asia.

## 2. The Peace Agreement Process between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Speaking at the 6th Paris Peace Forum on 10 November 2023, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan conveyed that Armenia hoped to sign a Peace Treaty with Azerbaijan in the coming months, based on the three principles agreed upon at the negotiations held in Brussels on 14 May and 15 July 2023. Pashinyan explained these three principles as follows:

Armenia and Azerbaijan fully recognize each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, based on the understanding that Armenia's territory covers 29,800 square kilometers and Azerbaijan's 86,600 square kilometers.

Armenia and Azerbaijan reaffirm their unconditional commitment to the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration as the political basis for the border demarcation.

Future transport regulations to unblock transport and economic ties in the region will respect the principles of sovereignty, jurisdiction, reciprocity, and equality of all countries.<sup>22</sup>

During the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in Yerevan on 18 November, Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan said there was "a historic opportunity" to establish peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pashinyan, who met with the OSCE Secretary General on the same occasion, complained that "Although we agreed on the basic principles of the peace treaty, Armenia and Azerbaijan still speak different diplomatic languages".<sup>23</sup>

Armenia accepted the US Secretary of State's invitation for the parties to visit Washington DC on 20 November to discuss and expedite the peace agreement.

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22 "Armenia Seeks to Sign Peace Treaty with Azerbaijan in Coming Months Based on Three Brussels Principles: Pashinyan", *ArmenPress*, November 10, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1123921.html>

23 "Pashinyan: Armenia, Azerbaijan Speak 'Different Diplomatic Languages'", *MassisPost*, November 20, 2023, <https://massispost.com/2023/11/pashinyan-armenia-azerbaijan-speak-different-diplomatic-languages/>

However, Azerbaijan rejected the invitation on 17 November due to the remarks against Azerbaijan by a US Department of State official in the US Congress, and the peace talks were not held.<sup>24</sup> On 21 November, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan called for direct negotiations “in a mutually acceptable venue”, including on the border between the two countries. On 22 November, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia responded that it was ready to resume negotiations on the basis of three basic principles. Armenia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also announced that it had sent its 6th proposal on 21 November in response to the proposals sent by Azerbaijan in September.<sup>25</sup>

On 7 December, an important step towards peace was taken and a joint statement was released by the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. This statement, which is the first of its kind, begins with the introduction of “The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia share the view that there is a historical chance to achieve a long-awaited peace in the region. The two countries reconfirm their intention to normalize relations and to reach the peace treaty on the basis of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity,” and envisages mutual exchange of prisoners and military detainees as a sign of humanitarian values and goodwill. Accordingly, Azerbaijan pledged to exchange of 32 detained Armenian military servicemen for 2 Azerbaijani servicemen. As a sign of good faith, Armenia supported the bid of Azerbaijan to host the 29th Session of the UN’s Convention on Climate Change Conference (Conference of Parties - COP29) by withdrawing its own candidacy. In return, Azerbaijan supported the Armenian candidature for Eastern European Group COP Bureau membership.<sup>26</sup>

On 8 December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye released the following statement in support of this development:

“We welcome the decision announced with the joint statement by the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan and the Office of Prime Minister of Armenia regarding the adoption of some concrete confidence building measures between two countries. We also support the decision to continue talks for introducing additional steps to build confidence.

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24 Seda Sevencen and Emre Gürkan Abay, “Azerbaijan Refuses to Take Part in Peace Talks with Armenia in US”, *Anadolu Agency*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-refuses-to-take-part-in-peace-talks-with-armenia-in-us/3056045>

25 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Armenia Sends 6th Proposal to the Azerbaijani Side Regarding the Peace Treaty”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, November 21, 2023, <https://en.armradio.am/2023/11/21/armenia-sends6th-proposal-to-the-azerbaijani-side-regarding-the-peace-treaty/>

26 Heydar Isayev, “Armenia, Azerbaijan Issue Landmark Joint Statement”, *Eurasianet*, December 8, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-azerbaijan-issue-landmark-joint-statement>



We wish the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia be swiftly concluded, which will be one of the most significant achievements for establishing a lasting peace and stability in the South Caucasus.”<sup>27</sup>

On his visit to Baku on 14 December, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan stated his contentment with these security-building steps taken by the two countries and explained: “We wish that additional steps will be taken, and that these will pave the way for a lasting agreement between the two sides. Also, we think that these moves should also convey necessary messages to the third parties.”. The US Department of State’s spokesperson also praised Minister of Foreign Affairs Fidan’s statement in Baku on 15 December, stating that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had regularly discussed the normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations with Minister Fidan and said: “We welcome Turkey playing a productive role in resolving this conflict. We agree with what the foreign minister said, that peace is possible and we would support direct talks between the two parties to achieve that.”

On 26 December, the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia shook hands at the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) meeting in St. Petersburg, which was viewed as a gesture towards peace. This brief meeting was the first face-to-face meeting between the two leaders after the military operation of 19 September 2023.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty has given the impression of becoming a struggle between Russia and the West for power and influence in the region. In early December 2023, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned Armenia against relying on Western mediation,<sup>28</sup> while on 5 January 2024, the US Department of State’s spokesperson stated that Russia was strongly opposed to US initiatives, but would not undermine them. The US Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations visited Armenia on 8 January to discuss negotiations between the parties and held high-level contacts,<sup>29</sup> while the Azerbaijani side rejected the visit “because it did not see the US as a reliable mediator”. On this occasion, the Azerbaijani side once again offered to hold bilateral talks with Armenia without a mediator.

27 “No: 311, 8 December 2023, Press Release Regarding Adoption of Some Confidence Building Measures Between Azerbaijan and Armenia”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, December 8, 2023, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-311-azerbaycan-ile-ermenistan-arasinda-bazi-somut-guven-artirici-adimlarin-atilmasi-karari-hk.en.mfa>

28 “Russian Foreign Ministry: Armenia should not Trust ‘Western friends’”, *Xalqgazeti*, December 6, 2023, <https://xalqgazeti.az/en/maraqli/152130-russian-foreign-ministry-armenia-should>

29 “Security Council Secretary, U.S. Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan Normalization”, *ArmenPress*, January 8, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1127537.html>

After Azerbaijan taking back and liberating Karabakh from occupation, some amendments to the common border demarcation came to the agenda. These changes, which the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan conveyed to the President of the European Council in a telephone conversation on 7 October 2023 and further elaborated in a statement to the press on 10 January, are related to the “eight villages still under Armenian occupation”.<sup>30</sup> In the north, 4 villages in the Tovuz district are essentially on the border with Azerbaijan and their return is not an issue. 3 villages here are across the border. Likewise, there is a village with the same status in the south, and Armenia also has a village with the same status within the borders of Azerbaijan. These demands were met with concern and opposition in Armenia, as they were seen as Azerbaijan’s unilateral demands for new concessions and the allegation that they paved the way for a new Azerbaijani military operation was spread in the public. In this context, Pashinyan made two proposals: “a mutual arms control mechanism” and “the signing of a non-aggression pact if the signature of a peace treaty encounters delays”.<sup>31</sup> Azerbaijan rejected both of these proposals. As a result of Azerbaijan’s steadfast stance and the fact that its demands were based on realistic data, Pashinyan stated in a speech on 19 March that Armenia should make some limited territorial concessions in order to prevent a new war and visited the border region villages to see and explain the situation on the ground.<sup>32</sup>

At its eighth meeting on 19 April, the Armenia-Azerbaijan border demarcation commission agreed to return 4 villages in the Tovuz district to Azerbaijan.<sup>33</sup> Pashinyan praised this decision and said, “For the first time, we have resolved an issue at the negotiation table”. Pashinyan also expressed that Russian military bases in this region would be removed. The ARF in Armenia made a statement immediately and openly threatened and warned Pashinyan and everyone involved in this process.

This development was also praised and welcomed by the Western world. The spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, stated that Armenia was threatened with war and forced to make concessions. The statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye on this issue on 20 April is as follows:

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30 “President of the European Council Charles Michel Made a Phone Call to Ilham Aliyev”, *President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, October 7, 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61511>.

31 “Armenia PM Proposes non-Aggression Pact to Azerbaijan”, *Euractiv*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/news/armenia-pm-proposes-non-aggression-pact-to-azerbaijan/>

32 “Pashinyan: Armenia Ready to Cede 4 Border Villages to ‘Prevent War’ With Azerbaijan”, *Civilnet*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/768431/pashinyan-armenia-ready-to-cede-4-border-villages-to-prevent-war-with-azerbaijan/>

33 Ruslan Rehimov, “Armenia Agrees to Return 4 Occupied Villages to Azerbaijan”, *Anadolu Agency*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/armenia-agrees-to-return-4-occupied-villages-to-azerbaijan/3196895>

“We welcome the agreement reached on 19 April 2024 by the Azerbaijan-Armenia Border Delimitation Commission on the return of four villages, which have been under occupation for 30 years, to Azerbaijan and on the continuation of the delimitation works.

This positive development achieved through direct negotiations is an important step towards the signing of a final peace agreement.”<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the determination of the demarcation lines, the most important issue in the negotiations on the peace treaty continued to be the definition of the “Zangezur corridor”. On this issue, Iran strongly sided with Armenia and continued to act as an obstacle in the solution of the problem. Russia also continued to pay close attention to the issue. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov stated on 18 January that Armenia was not implementing Article 9 of the Moscow ceasefire agreement, which provides for direct road and rail transport from Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan, controlled by Russia, not Armenia.

Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan met in Munich on 17 February under the mediation of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and held first trilateral and then bilateral talks.<sup>35</sup> No official statement was made after the meeting and the only concrete agreement was the decision that the foreign ministers of the two countries would meet again in Germany in a short period of time. As a matter of fact, the foreign ministers of the two countries held trilateral and bilateral talks in Berlin on 28-29 February with the participation of the Germany’s Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>36</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia stated that “mutual agreement was expressed to continue negotiations on the unresolved issues”. The overall impression from the third parties’ point of view was that Germany attempted to assume the role among the parties that France had lost.

The US and the European Union (EU), unwilling to be left out of the peace treaty negotiations, invited Armenia to a meeting in Brussels on 5 April, ignoring Azerbaijan, which remained distant due to their pro-Armenian stance. Although the meeting, which was attended by the US Secretary of State, the

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34 “No: 67, 20 April 2024, Regarding the Agreement Reached by Azerbaijan-Armenia Border Delimitation Commission”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 20, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-67\\_-azerbaycan-ermenistan-sinir-delimitasyon-komisyonu-tarafindan-varilan-uzlasma-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-67_-azerbaycan-ermenistan-sinir-delimitasyon-komisyonu-tarafindan-varilan-uzlasma-hk.en.mfa)

35 “Tripartite Meeting between Nikol Pashinyan, Olaf Scholz and İlham Aliyev Takes Place in Munich”, *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, February 17, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/02/17/Nikol-Pashinyan-trilateral-meeting/>

36 “Berlin Hosts Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan for Peace Talks”, *EuroNews*, February 28, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/02/28/berlin-hosts-foreign-ministers-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan-for-peace-talks>

European Commission President, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Pashinyan, was only intended to strengthen Armenia’s resilience and was presented as a meeting where issues related to Azerbaijan would not be discussed, it caused the reaction of Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye is as follows:

“A historic opportunity for lasting peace and stability in the region has emerged as a result of Azerbaijan’s liberation of its occupied territories after the Second Karabakh War, and the restoration of its sovereignty over all its territories through the anti-terrorist operation in Karabakh on 19-20 September 2023.

At a time when the success of this historic opportunity is so close, it is even more important that third parties, especially actors from outside the region, adopt a fair and impartial approach to the process and carefully avoid any harm to it.

In this context, it is our responsibility to underline clearly that the trilateral meeting between Armenia, the EU and the USA on 5 April will undermine the neutral approach that should be the basis for the solution of the complex problems of the region.

This initiative, which excludes Azerbaijan, will pave the way for the South Caucasus to become an area of geopolitical confrontation, rather than serving peace.

We reiterate our call to third countries to take into account the parameters of the region and to approach the parties to the conflict from a position of equal distance.

We firmly believe that the South Caucasus will thrive and achieve the regional prosperity it deserves, on the basis of lasting peace and stability.

As ever, Türkiye will continue to assume its responsibilities in this regard and to encourage the use of this historic window of opportunity for lasting peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia.”<sup>37</sup>

On 12 April, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov accused the US and other Western countries of “trying to undermine agreements” aimed at

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37 “No: 55, 4 April 2024, Regarding the Trilateral Meeting Between Armenia, the USA and the EU to be Held in Brussels on 5 April 2024”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 4, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-55\\_-ermenistan—abd-ve-ab-arasinda-5-nisan-2024-tarihinde-bruksel-de-duzenlenecek-uclu-toplanti-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-55_-ermenistan—abd-ve-ab-arasinda-5-nisan-2024-tarihinde-bruksel-de-duzenlenecek-uclu-toplanti-hk.en.mfa)

stabilising the situation in the South Caucasus.<sup>38</sup> The opposition in Armenia accused Pashinyan of turning Armenia into an arena for “geopolitical rivalry” and Pashinyan responded by saying that Armenia had already been “flung around like a bag” in geopolitical conflicts through the OSCE Minsk Group process for thirty years.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in Almaty on 10-11 May, hosted by Kazakhstan, as a new step in the peace treaty negotiations. The parties appeared to be in a positive, optimistic, and constructive mood before the meeting. A joint press release was issued after the meeting. The ministers welcomed the progress in the delimitation of borders and the agreements reached in this regard. It was reported that the ministers and their delegations continued to discuss the provisions of the draft “Bilateral Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia” and agreed to continue negotiations on the open issues on the remaining open issues on which there are remaining differences.<sup>39</sup>

On 6 June, the President of Azerbaijan recalled that the stipulations in the constitution of Armenia continues to be an impediment to the conclusion of the peace agreement, an issue which Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan is known to have reflected on. However, on 7 June, the Armenian Foreign Ministry published the following statement<sup>40</sup> on the subject, fully retracting from earlier understanding and common sense.

“The Republic of Armenia does not have any territorial claims towards any of its neighbors, including Azerbaijan.

The constitution of the Republic of Armenia and the amendments to it are internal affairs of Armenia, and we consider the attempts by official Baku to intervene in the internal discussions in Armenia as a gross intervention into the internal affairs of the country.

At the same time, we believe that such rhetoric torpedoes the peace process and casts doubts on the sincerity of the leadership of Azerbaijan to achieve peace.

38 “West Accused Of ‘Trying To Undermine’ Agreements On South Caucasus Stability”, *Azattyun*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32902900.html>

39 Elena Teslalova, “Azerbaijan, Armenia End Talks in Kazakhstan with Pledge to Continue Discussing Controversial Issues”, *Anadolu Agency*, May 11, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-armenia-end-talks-in-kazakhstan-with-pledge-to-continue-discussing-controversial-issues/3216657>

40 “Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia regarding statements made by the President of Azerbaijan on June 6, 2024”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, June 7, 2024, [https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2024/06/07/mfa\\_statement/12686](https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2024/06/07/mfa_statement/12686)

The negotiated peace agreement clearly states that the Parties recognize each other's territorial integrity and do not have territorial claims against each other. There is also an agreed provision in the draft peace agreement that neither party may invoke its domestic legislation for not implementing its obligations under the peace agreement.

The signing of the agreement and the ratification through domestic procedures will lay down these principles finally in the agreement.

Accordingly, we believe that the clearest and most direct way to address all the concerns of the Parties is to sign the agreement, which will open the door to lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is ripe enough for signing, and the Armenian side expresses its willingness to work constructively and intensively to complete and sign it within the next month”.

The above statement unfortunately makes a mockery of intelligence in view of past experience regarding the implementation of the stipulations of the Constitution that cannot be regarded simply as domestic legislation. The statement as such dooms the signing of the agreement in a near future.

On the other hand, news items in the press on 19 June claimed that Pashinyan had ordered on 27 May the drafting of a new constitution. It was stated that Pashinyan gave the Council of Constitutional Reforms, established by a decree on 27 January 2022, until 30 December 2026 to draft and approve a new constitution. However, the next day, on 20 June, several members of the Council of Constitutional Reforms spoke to the press that they have not been informed of any drafting of a new constitution. Perplexing indeed.

### **3. Armenia's Foreign Relations**

Armenia's efforts to distance itself from Russia, the support it received from the West to loosen its strong ties with Russia, its attempts to develop relations with new powerful parties and seek alternatives to Russia, and its efforts to utilize this in its conflict with Azerbaijan have been the factors that have shaped Armenia's foreign relations during the period.

The duel of words and moderate level of confrontation with Russia continued throughout the period. On 22 November 2023, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated that they saw a “radical change” in Armenia's foreign policy orientation, despite Yerevan's efforts to “camouflage” it. The spokesperson also stated that Armenia not participating in the November Minsk meetings of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was not in



the interests of the Armenian people.<sup>41</sup> On the same day, Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan announced, similarly to what Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had done previously, that he would not attend the CSTO Minsk meeting in December. On the other hand, Simonyan was careful to emphasize that Armenia had not taken a decision to leave the organization. On 24 November, Pashinyan declared his full support for Georgia's territorial integrity.<sup>42</sup> On 12 December, the Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Ukraine's and Armenia's Ministers of Foreign Affairs discussed the development of bilateral relations. On 14 December, Russia's President Vladimir Putin stated that he did not expect Armenia to withdraw from Russian-led military, political and economic organizations and that leaving these organizations was "not in Armenia's interests".

On 21 December, Armenia revoked the broadcast rights of the Russian official media outlet *Sputnik* due to statements against the administration.<sup>43</sup>

Having boycotted the EAEU and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) meetings in Bishkek in October 2023 and the CSTO in Minsk in November, Pashinyan, this time at Putin's invitation, visited Russia on 25 December to attend the EAEU and CIS summits in St. Petersburg, where he held a bilateral meeting with Putin. In accordance with the alphabetical order, Armenia assumed the EAEU presidency for 2024.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, also on 25 December, the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Javier Colomina, made a statement on Georgian television, saying that Armenia had "decided very clearly to make a shift in its foreign policy and take some distance from Moscow". The Special Representative also explained "We support this. The Armenians are free to take their own decisions. In my opinion, Armenia has already started to get closer to us, to ask for more cooperation, more political dialogue with NATO. We encourage whatever is decided by our partners that we believe is good for the stability of the region."<sup>45</sup> In an interview on 28 December, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov expressed;

41 "Moscow Sees 'Camouflaged' Efforts by Yerevan to Change Foreign-Policy Vector", *Azattyun*, November 22, 2023, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32695587.html>

42 "Armenia Fully and Unequivocally Defends the Territorial Integrity of Georgia, Says Prime Minister", *ArmenPress*, November 24, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1124901.html>

43 "Armenian Authorities Suspend Russian Radio Broadcast", *Azattyun*, December 21, 2023, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32741860.html>.

44 "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Working Visit to St. Petersburg", *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, December 26, 2023, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2023/12/25/Nikol-Pashinyan-visit-to-Saint-Petersburg/>

45 "Armenia Has Decided Very Clearly to Make a Shift in Its Foreign Policy and Take Some Distance from Moscow, NATO Representative Says", *Alpha News*, December 25, 2023, <https://alphanews.am/en/armenia-has-decided-very-clearly-to-make-a-shift-in-its-foreign-policy-and-take-some-distance-from-moscow-nato-representative-says/>

“Recently, Yerevan has been developing cooperation with NATO and some of its member states. This year, Armenia took part in several dozen events with the alliance. It continues to update its armed forces in accordance with NATO standards; the republic’s military is undergoing training in a number of NATO member states. This cannot but cause us concern. I hope that Yerevan is aware that deepening interaction with the alliance leads to a loss of sovereignty in national defence and security.”<sup>46</sup>

Colomina was received by Pashinyan in Yerevan on 19 January 2024 and the issue of Armenia-NATO cooperation was discussed. EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Käär, who was simultaneously in Yerevan, also held talks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In an interview published in the Armenian press on 31 January, the Special Representative of the NATO Secretary General Colomina again praised Armenia for distancing itself from Russia and striving to establish closer ties with NATO, stating that “We are very encouraged by the decisions that Armenia has decided to take in their foreign and defense policy, the shift they have decided to implement”. Without elaborating, Colomina explained that the parties were working on an ambitious new “individually tailored partnership program” that will develop Armenia’s closer partnership with NATO.<sup>47</sup> Russia’s response was quick. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson harshly denounced these statements. In this context, the Russian spokesperson also referred to “NATO member Türkiye” and pointed out that Türkiye had provided military assistance to Azerbaijan in the 2020 Karabakh war, which affected the outcome, and that NATO did not object to Türkiye’s involvement. Colomina also commented on Türkiye’s policy in the South Caucasus, stating that;

“Well, for us Turkey is a very important ally, as you know, it is the only ally that has borders in the region and therefore is a key actor in the region. Turkey knows that we are supportive of the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. I think Turkey is willing to make progress in this direction. I do not know if they are actually waiting for some progress in the Azerbaijan-Armenian track first. That could be probably one of the considerations, but I think they are genuinely interested in advancing on that. As you know, I cannot really go into the foreign policy, the domestic politics of our allies, but I think, and we

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46 “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Interview with TASS News Agency, December 28, 2023”, *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 28, 2023, [https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/1923539/](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/1923539/)

47 “Principles agreed upon between Armenia and Azerbaijan until present should not be changed, says Javier Colomina”, *ArmenPress*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.armenpress.am/eng/news/1129201/>

have talked about this, it would be a very positive development whenever that happens.”

On 14 February, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan met with Colomina in Brussels, where he was in Brussels for the EU Association Council meeting. Mirzoyan wrote about the meeting on his social media account, “During my visit to Brussels, I had a fruitful exchange of ideas with Javier Colomina. I discussed the latest regional developments and attempts to destabilize the situation. I reiterated Armenia’s vision to overcome existing challenges. I also referred to our efforts to further strengthen the Armenia-NATO partnership”. At the 15 February cabinet meeting, the Armenian administration decided to appoint military attachés to NATO and OSCE missions.

On 17-19 March, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited three South Caucasus countries.<sup>48</sup> This was the first visit to the region by a top NATO official. The last leg of Stoltenberg’s regional visit was to Armenia on 19 March. The Secretary General met with Pashinyan and, afterwards, jointly answered questions from the press and congratulated Pashinyan for pursuing a “more independent” foreign policy and improving ties with NATO. Pashinyan stated; “Of course, we are interested in deepening our cooperation with NATO, and I hope that the Individually Tailored Partnership Program for Armenia will be accepted as soon as possible.” Stoltenberg also expressed the hope that a framework for closer NATO-Armenia cooperation will be prepared soon.

Russia responded to the NATO Secretary General’s visit to the South Caucasus. The Kremlin Spokesperson stated;

“NATO’s desire to strengthen its presence in the South Caucasus is well known to us, it can be seen with the naked eye. There is also the understanding that NATO’s attempts to expand [its] influence can hardly increase stability and predictability of the situation in the South Caucasus. Those contacts are the sovereign right of the [South] Caucasus states. We are watching carefully and mainly intend to orientate ourselves with our bilateral relations and cooperation tools that our parties have.”<sup>49</sup>

48 “Secretary General Starts South Caucasus Visit in Baku, Welcomes NATO’s Long-Standing Partnership with Azerbaijan”, *NATO*, March 17, 2024, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_223720.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_223720.htm)

49 Elena Teslova, “Russia Calls NATO Chief’s Visit to Caucasus ‘Attempt to Expand Alliance’s Presence in Region’”, *Anadolu Agency*, March 19, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/russia-calls-nato-chiefs-visit-to-caucasus-attempt-to-expand-alliances-presence-in-region/3168775>

On 26 December, following a telephone conversation between Pashinyan and the President of Iran Ebrahim Reisi on 20 December 2023, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived in Armenia on a working visit. On 27 December, in a joint press briefing with Mirzoyan, Iran's minister explained that during the high-level talks, they discussed what Iran's role could be in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks and that Iran does not want the involvement of extra-regional countries and believes that the most appropriate mediation would be the "3+3 Consultative Regional Platform/Consultative Mechanism". The Iranian minister praised and welcomed his country's historical and close ties with neighboring Armenia, noting that Iran was interested in opening a consulate in the border town of Kapan, while Armenia agreed to open a consulate in Tabriz, the capital of Iran's East Azerbaijan Province. Touching on the issue of transportation, the Iranian minister said that Iran supported the smooth functioning of regional transportation channels, especially the north-south transit route and the Crossroads of Peace project announced by Pashinyan. On the other hand, Iran has persistently opposed the "Zangezur corridor" demanded by Azerbaijan and encouraged Armenia to do the same. Conversely, it has given the green light to a parallel route through Iran. The Azerbaijani side, while welcoming the Iranian route, emphasized that this did not mean that a route through Armenia was renounced.<sup>50</sup>

Kamal Kharrazi, advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, met with Pashinyan in Yerevan on 29 January. During the meeting, the issue of transportation routes was mainly discussed, with the Iranian side reiterating its support for the Crossroads of Peace project, the South-North corridor, and its opposition to Azerbaijan's demand for the extraterritoriality of the "Zangezur corridor".<sup>51</sup>

In a statement on 6 February, the Iranian Ambassador to Yerevan expressed that Iran wants Armenia to become stronger in the region and that they are ready to provide "any assistance" for this purpose. Regarding the "Zangezur corridor" demanded by Azerbaijan, he repeated Iran's established stance that it would not tolerate any "geopolitical changes" in the South Caucasus.<sup>52</sup> On 14 February, the 18th meeting of the intergovernmental joint commission of the two countries was held and cooperation in the fields of economy, energy and infrastructure, especially transportation, was discussed. In a statement released by Iran after the meeting, it was indicated that an agreement on

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50 "Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Iran and Their Joint Press Conference", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, December 27, 2023, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2023/12/27/armenia\\_iran/12446](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2023/12/27/armenia_iran/12446)

51 "Top Aide to Iran's Khamenei Visits Armenia", *Azattyun*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32796805.html>

52 "Iran Ready to Help 'Strengthen' Armenia, Says Envoy", *Azattyun*, February 6, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32807979.html>

economic cooperation in 19 areas was signed and it was decided to increase the bilateral trade volume to 3 billion Dollars.

Pashinyan made the statement “Our relations with Iran are deep and Armenia remains committed to those relations. Our good relations with Iran are causing tensions in some places, while our good relations with other countries are causing tensions in Iran” in Munich on 19 February. With this explanation, he highlighted that Armenia’s close ties with Iran, which is under Western sanctions, have caused some discomfort in the West, while on the other hand, Iran has criticized Armenia’s rapprochement with the US and the EU, as it opposes the influence of extra-regional countries in the region. However, the fact that the West, which prioritizes supporting Armenia, does not perceive this as an issue and even has a tacit common interest with Iran regarding this matter allows Armenia to maintain a delicate balance.

On 6 March, the Armenia’s Minister of Defense visited Tehran and met with his Iranian counterpart and other military officials.<sup>53</sup> Once again, his interlocutors warned the Armenian minister that extra-regional powers could not bring peace and stability to the South Caucasus. Receiving the Armenian minister and his delegation, the Iranian President said that the basic principle of regional relations was respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and the prevention of foreign interference in regional affairs. The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who later met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Tehran on 10 March, called for further expansion of relations in all fields and said that closer cooperation between the two neighbors would benefit regional peace, stability and security. Iran’s ambassador to Yerevan said on 16 April that he was briefed by officials about the trilateral meeting Pashinyan attended in Brussels on 5 April and was assured that the meeting focused only on Armenia’s economic support and that the region had not become an area of competition between foreign powers.

Iran’s acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani, who assumed office after the tragic deaths of the Iranian President and Foreign Minister in a helicopter crash on 19 May 2024, reaffirmed the importance of implementing the statements of the Iranian Supreme Leader on achieving strategic objectives of Iran and Armenia to Armenia’s Foreign Minister in a phone call on 30 May.

During the period under review, Armenia-India relations have seen significant developments in military cooperation and the South-North transportation corridor. A brief history reveals that the two countries upgraded the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation they signed in 1995 with the Comprehensive

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53 “Armenian Defense Minister Visits Iran”, *Azatutyun*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32850808.html>

Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2019, which is a counterpart to the cooperation of Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Türkiye. India has started to compensate for the decline in Russia's military supplies to Armenia, with rocket launcher systems, anti-tank missiles, rockets, ammunition, air defense missiles, and weapon detection radars being shipped from India to Armenia since 2020. In addition, in cooperation with Iran, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INTSC) from the Iranian port of Shabahar to the Black Sea was put on the agenda, including Armenia and Georgia.

Pashinyan supported Armenia's military equipment supply agreements with France and India, stating that this was essential for the country's national security and defense. This development was interpreted in the press as "France-Armenia-India forming a Euro-Asian Strategic Alliance".<sup>54</sup>

In search of an alternative route, Armenia last year signed a 1.2 million Dollar deal with a company for a ferry service between the ports of Batumi and Novorissisk via the Black Sea, in view of the frequent closure of the mountainous section of the land route connecting Armenia to Russia via Georgia, especially in winter. The Minister of Economy announced on 10 January that the venture was unsuccessful, running for a few months but generating no interest in either exports or imports.

On 22 November 2023, Germany decided to provide 84.6 million Euros in grants and loans to Armenia. The US announced that US Agency for International Development (USAID) would provide 4.1 million Dollars for Karabakh refugees.<sup>55</sup>

On 26 November, Armenia and Saudi Arabia signed a protocol establishing diplomatic relations. On 17 April, the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs paid his first official visit to Riyadh and met with his Saudi counterpart.<sup>56</sup>

The head of the German Federal Intelligence Service visited Armenia and met with Pashinyan on 24 November.

The US Secretary of State spoke with Pashinyan by phone on 27 November and reaffirmed US support for sovereignty and territorial integrity. On 5 December, Armenia's National Security Chief Armen Grigoryan met with his

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54 "France-Armenia-India: Forging a Euro-Asia Strategic Alliance: The Geopolitics", *Aravot*, February 17, 2024, <https://en.aravot.am/2024/02/17/342269/>

55 "Germany to Provide €84,6 Million in Aid to Armenia", *ArmenPress*, November 22, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1124684/>

56 "Meeting of the Foreign Minister of Armenia with the Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Republic of Armenia*, April 17, 2024, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2024/04/17/arm\\_sa/12599](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2024/04/17/arm_sa/12599)



US counterpart Jake Sullivan in Washington DC. On 7 December, Louis Bono, the US envoy to the South Caucasus, visited Armenia and met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>57</sup>

On 29-30 November, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan visited Skopje to attend the 30th OSCE Ministerial Council and held talks with the US Secretary of State and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On 4 December, it was announced that France had begun the delivery of military equipment and weapons to Armenia. The shipment started with 50 armored personnel carriers and was reported to continue with three air defense radar systems and the Mistral short-range surface-to-air missile system.<sup>58</sup> The President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized France's arms sales to Armenia as a provocation. The President of Azerbaijan also harshly condemned France and India's arms sales to Armenia and accused these countries of encouraging increased tensions in the region.

On December 5, speaking at the New Regional Reality and Crossroads of Peace forum in Yerevan, the Indian Ambassador to Yerevan said that the centuries-old relations between Armenia, India and Iran are a solid basis for cooperation today, and Iran is a bridge that contributes to the development of our relations.

On 11 December, the EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy announced that the number of EU mission members stationed on Armenia's border with Azerbaijan had been increased from 138 to 209.<sup>59</sup> On 20 March, the Armenian Parliament approved the administration's proposal to grant diplomatic immunity to members of EU observation missions.

On 12 December, the Armenian Minister of Defense paid an official visit to the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC). The Armenian minister then moved on to Greece on 14 December for an official visit. The Armenian and Greek ministers signed a Military-Technical Cooperation Agreement on 15 December. Afterwards, on 19 December, representatives of the Greek and GCASC ministries of defense signed in

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57 "Meeting of Foreign Minister of Armenia with Louis Bono", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Republic of Armenia*, December 7, 2023, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2023/12/07/Mirzoyan\\_Bono/12400](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2023/12/07/Mirzoyan_Bono/12400)

58 "More French Arms Supplies to Armenia Revealed", *Azattyun*, December 4, 2023, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32713065.html>

59 "AB Ermenistan Misyonundaki Görevli Sayısını 209'a Çıkaracak", *TRT Haber*, 12 Aralık 2023, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ab-ermenistan-misyonundaki-gorevli-sayisini-209a-cikaracak-820032.html>

Yerevan the Armenia–Greece, Armenia–GCASC bilateral and Armenia, Greece, GCASC trilateral 2024 Military Cooperation protocols.

The Greek Minister of Defense paid a return visit to Armenia on 4 March. A military cooperation agreement was signed during the visit. The Greek minister argued that the trilateral defense cooperation between Armenia, Greece and the GCASC was successful and that it could be expanded to a quadrilateral or quintet format, perhaps with the participation of France and India.

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan attended the EU Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels on 12 December.

On 14 December, at a meeting of Landlocked Developing Countries in Yerevan, Pashinyan briefed on Armenia's project for peace interchanges on the south-north and east-west routes, reiterating Armenia's readiness to provide transport links with neighboring Azerbaijan and Türkiye, but reiterating that the rail and road routes through Armenia should be under Armenia's full control.<sup>60</sup>

On 14 December, Pashinyan announced that an agreement had been reached with the Russian company Rosatom to extend the life of the Metsamor nuclear power plant, which provides 31% of Armenia's electricity generation and is located about 15 km from the Turkish border, until 2036. The tender for the modernization of the plant is estimated at 65 million Dollars.

Undoubtedly to gain support from the Christian world, Catholicos Karekin II, head of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, announced on 13 January that he would visit the United Kingdom and the United States. Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia (located in Antelias/Lebanon) also organized a meeting with prominent figures on 19-20 January to discuss possible support for Armenia. On 30 January, Catholicos Karekin II met with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England.<sup>61</sup> The issues facing Armenia, including the preservation of the Armenian spiritual and cultural presence in Karabakh, were discussed. The head of the Caucasian Muslims Bureau, Allahshukur Pashazade, was quoted as saying: "Today, the Armenian Church led by the Armenian Catholicos preaches revanchism all over the world. They still do not agree that Karabakh is Azerbaijani land. Catholicos Karekin II is not worthy of my inviting him to Baku." Responding to the statement on 10 April, Etchmiadzin

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60 Siranush Ghazanchyan, "Crossroads of Peace Project to Expand Access to The Sea for Both Armenia and Azerbaijan – PM Pashinyan", *Public Radio of Armenia*, December 14, 2024, <https://en.armradio.am/2023/12/14/armenias-crossroads-of-peace-project-to-expand-access-to-thesea-for-both-armenia-and-azerbaijan-pm-pashinyan/>

61 "Armenian Church Catholicos meets with Archbishop of Canterbury in UK", *ArmenPress*, January 30, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1129157/>

rejected the accusation of vengefulness, but insisted on its views on Karabakh. On the other hand, the head of Iran's Islamic Culture and Communication Organization visited Etchmiadzin on 2 May and met with Catholicos Karekin II. Iran's Ambassador to Yerevan also attended the meeting.

Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan represented Armenia at the Davos Economic Forum in January 2024 and held bilateral meetings on this occasion.

On 18 January, by 336 votes to 1, the French Senate adopted a resolution expressing support for Armenia and calling for sanctions against Azerbaijan. Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan visited France and met with his French counterpart on 9 February. The French Minister expressed his country's unconditional, absolute, and continuous support for Armenia's sovereignty and resilience. On 22 February, Pashinyan and his wife attended a memorial ceremony for a Second World War heroic resistance fighter of Armenian origin and a dinner in their honor with French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife.<sup>62</sup> On the same day, the French Prime Minister noted on social media that the two countries have special relations and will always maintain them. On this occasion, the French Minister of Defense announced that he would soon visit Armenia, which would be a first. Likewise, it was reported in the French press on 22 February that France would send weapons to Armenia for defense purposes.<sup>63</sup>

Speaking on a French TV channel during this visit, Pashinyan claimed that after Azerbaijan's Karabakh offensive in September, "Russia's highest representatives" encouraged the Armenian people to take to the streets and overthrow him. Russia's reaction was voiced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson on 28 February, who said, "The Armenian prime minister's claims [that have been mentioned] have no basis", referring to Pashinyan's rise to power through street demonstrations. On 4 March, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov also dismissed the Armenian leaders' growing criticism of Russia as "blatant lies" and "ungreatful assessments" and warned that Russia would seriously "reconsider" its relations with Armenia if Yerevan continued to distance itself from Russia and move closer to the West.<sup>64</sup> Immediately after this warning, on 5 March, Lavrov had a telephone conversation with Mirzoyan. The Russian side did not make a statement, while a very brief statement from the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the two ministers discussed "bilateral and regional issues".

62 "A Grateful France Welcomes You, Missak and M  linee,' – Macron's Tribute At Manouchian Pantheonization", *ArmenPress*, February 22, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1130863/>

63 "France to Deliver Armaments to Armenia on February 22", *ArmenPress*, February 22, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1130884.html>

64 "Moscow Hits Back At Armenian Leaders", *Azatoryun*, February 28, 2024, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/32841177.html>

Armenian President Khachaturyan visited the Kurdish regional government of Iraq on 29 February and met with KDP Chairman Mesud Barzani. This visit followed their meeting in Davos on 18 January. In the media reports on the visit, it was reminded that Armenia opened a Consulate General in Erbil on 24 February 2021, and it was noted that there are approximately 7-8000 Armenians living in Iraq, about 3000 of them are in the Kurdish region, and the highest concentration is in the Zakho administrative unit with 850-900 Armenians.

Prime Minister Pashinyan visited Georgia on 26 January and signed a declaration on “Strategic Partnership” with his Georgian counterpart after the meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation.<sup>65</sup> Regarding the declaration, which both sides described as historic, the Georgian Prime Minister said, “De facto, we were already strategic partners and friends. It can be said that this reality was formalized today”, while Pashinyan stated “This achievement is the result of several years of joint work and reflects our commonalities and intentions”.

Armenia became a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 1 February 2024.<sup>66</sup>

On 2 February, Pashinyan traveled to Kazakhstan to chair the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council meeting and held bilateral high-level contacts.<sup>67</sup> The President of Kazakhstan visited Armenia on 15 April, indicating that peace talks with Azerbaijan could be held in his country.

President Khachaturyan visited Hungary on 6 February. The last visit at this level was in 2009. Khachaturyan stressed that he hoped that the stagnation in relations would be overcome.<sup>68</sup>

The fifth meeting of the EU-Armenia Association Council was held in Brussels on 13 February.<sup>69</sup> In a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, the parties confirmed their intention to further strengthen and deepen relations on the basis of shared values and agreed to prepare a new

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65 “Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan Visits Georgia Signs Strategic Partnership Declaration”, *Civil.ge*, January 26, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/579098>

66 Elena Teslova, “Armenia officially joins International Criminal Court”, *Anadolu Agency*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/armenia-officially-joins-international-criminal-court/3124506>

67 “Pashinyan in Kazakhstan to Chair Eurasian Intergovernmental Council Meeting”, *Hetq.am*, February 2, 2024, <https://hetq.am/en/article/163945>

68 “President Khachaturyan Considers his Visit to Hungary Historic”, *ArmenPress*, February 6, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1129710/>

69 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Fifth Meeting of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council to Take Place in Brussels”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, February 9, 2024, <https://en.armradio.am/2024/02/09/fifth-meetingof-the-eu-armenia-partnership-council-to-take-place-in-brussels/>

Association Agenda to establish more ambitious common priorities for multidimensional cooperation.

Pashinyan attended the Munich Security Conference and held bilateral meetings on this occasion. On 16 February, he met with Richard Moore, the head of the British Secret Service.<sup>70</sup> This was the second meeting between the two. Previously, Moore had visited Yerevan in July 2022 and after his meeting with Pashinyan, the administration submitted a bill to the Parliament to establish a “Foreign Intelligence Service of Armenia”. On 17 February, he held a bilateral meeting with the US Secretary of State. In his speech on 19 February, Pashinyan stated that Armenia was not Russia’s ally on Ukraine.<sup>71</sup>

On 5 March, Pashinyan paid a two-day visit to Egypt and met with the President of Egypt. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan also met with his Egyptian counterpart.<sup>72</sup>

South Cyprus’ Minister of Foreign Affairs paid a two-day visit to Armenia on 6-7 March. During his meeting with Pashinyan, Pashinyan said that he also attributed great importance to cooperation with Greece in the trilateral format.<sup>73</sup>

On 6 March, Armenia officially asked Russia to withdraw its border guards from the Yerevan airport and that Armenian officials would now take on this duty.<sup>74</sup> This was the first breach in the 1992 agreement with Russia, which stipulated that Russia would protect Armenia’s borders and included airport protection. Russia condemned this decision, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson saying that the Armenian government was taking a risk that would cause “irreparable damage” to bilateral relations and jeopardize the country’s security and economic development. The Russian spokesperson also opposed France’s military presence in the region, questioning its intentions and purpose. Armenia did not back down and gave a deadline of 1 August for the withdrawal of the Russian border guards at the airport. On 3 May, a spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the intention

70 “Nikol Pashinyan Meets with Richard Moore”, *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/02/16/Nikol-Pashinyan-Richard-Mur/>

71 “Armenia’s PM: ‘We are not Russia’s ally’ in war against Ukraine”, *Reuters*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/armenias-pm-we-are-not-russias-ally-war-against-ukraine-2024-02-11/>

72 “Nikol Pashinyan Meets with Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Documents Signed Between Armenia and Egypt”, *ArmenPress*, March 5, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1131789.html>

73 “Prime Minister Pashinyan Receives the Delegation Led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus”, *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/03/07/Nikol-Pashinyan-meeting-07-03/>

74 “Armenia Officially Asks Moscow To Remove Russian Border Troops From Yerevan Airport”, *Azatutyun*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-russian-border-guards-remove-yerevan-airport/32850687.html>

of ending Armenia's rhetoric regarding leaving CSTO, that Armenia could leave the organization if it wanted to.<sup>75</sup>

Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was in the Antalya Diplomatic Forum, told TRT World television on 6 March that Armenia envisages applying for EU membership. On 13 March, the European Parliament adopted a pro-Armenia, anti-Azerbaijan resolution with 504 votes in favor, 4 against, and 32 abstentions on the need for closer ties between Armenia and the EU and the signing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The resolution congratulated Armenia for freezing its membership in CSTO and opened a possible membership perspective for Armenia by stating that the EU should benefit from a pro-Western shift in Armenian foreign policy. In a statement the very next day, Pashinyan welcomed the EU parliament's decision, interpreting it as an endorsement of the administration's decision on a possible EU membership application.<sup>76</sup> The EU Commission's lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy told a Russian newspaper on 15 March that Armenia had a legitimate right to apply for EU membership.<sup>77</sup>

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan visited Argentina on 25-26 March.<sup>78</sup>

As a result of allegations that Armenia was under grave threat from Russia and Azerbaijan because of the EU and NATO initiatives, the EU and the US decided to hold a joint meeting with Armenia in Brussels on 5 April to reassure Armenia. It was announced that US Secretary of State Blinken, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell would attend the meeting to which Pashinyan was invited.<sup>79</sup> Russia and Azerbaijan responded to the meeting, which was officially stated to have the aim of unilaterally providing support and reassurance to Armenia. Russia characterized it as an attempt by the West to push the South Caucasus into a "geopolitical conflict" with Russia. Azerbaijan conveyed that the meeting was "directed against Azerbaijan", that it "aimed to create dividing lines and isolate Azerbaijan", and would negatively affect the peace process, as it would make Armenia even more intransigent

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75 "Armenia Free To Leave Russian-Led Bloc, Says Moscow", *Azattyun*, May 4, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32932373.html>

76 Shoghik Galstian, "Pashinian Buoyed by EU Parliament Resolution", *Azattyun*, March 14, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32861745.html>

77 Armen Mirzoyan, "Armenia Can Apply for EU Membership, Says European Commission Spokesperson", *Hetq.am*, March 15, 2024, <https://hetq.am/en/article/165004>

78 "Foreign Minister Mirzoyan is Paying an Official Visit to Argentina on March 25-26", *ArmenPress*, March 25, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1133168.html>

79 "Pashinyan to Meet Von der Leyen and Blinken in Brussels", *ArmenPress*, March 21, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1132886/>



with the encouragement it received from the West.<sup>80</sup> The US Department of State spokesperson felt the need to make the following statement to the press on 1 April: “The peace process is not the focus of this meeting; it’s a meeting between the US, the EU, and Armenia to discuss economic diversification, humanitarian assistance, support for refugees, and supporting Armenia’s political reforms in areas such as democracy and the rule of law”.<sup>81</sup>

“Together with our American friends, [we are] joining forces to demonstrate our strong commitment to Armenia’s sovereignty, democracy and resilience” the EU External Relations Chief Borrell told the press before the meeting.<sup>82</sup>

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its views on this issue with a statement released on 4 April.<sup>83</sup>

Following the trilateral meeting, the parties made a joint statement to the press. Blinken and von der Leyen announced that they had decided to provide Armenia with a total of approximately 356 million Dollars in aid to increase its “resilience” and “diversify” its economy. Of the promised aid, the EU will provide 270 million Euros over the next four years, while the US will provide 65 million Dollars in “development assistance”. The EU aid is presented as a “resilience and growth plan for Armenia” and will be channeled mainly into SMEs and basic infrastructure projects. Pashinyan told the press that “Today’s high-level dialogue signifies Armenia’s expanding partnership with the United States and the European Union”. Pashinyan also met with Samantha Power, the head of USAID, who was also present at the meeting. Power expressed her intention to fund a “transport sector strategy for regional integration”, in line with the Crossroads of Peace project.<sup>84</sup>

On 12 April, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, speaking at CIS Ministerial meeting in Minsk, accused the US and other Western countries once

80 “Ermenistan-AB-ABD Toplantısına Azerbaycan, Rusya ve Türkiye’den Tepki”, *Artı Gerçek*, 6 Nisan 2024, <https://artigercek.com/dunya/ermenistan-ab-abd-toplantısına-azerbaycan-rusya-ve-turkiyeden-tepki-300044h>.

81 “Peace Process Not the Focus of Upcoming Armenia-EU-U.S. Meeting - State Department Spokesperson”, *ArmenPress*, April 2, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1133790.html>

82 “Armenia: Press Remarks By High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell Before the Joint EUUS-Armenia High-Level Meeting in Support of Armenia’s Resilience”, *European Union External Action*, April 5, 2024, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/armenia-press-remarks-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-joint-eu-us-armenia-high-level\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/armenia-press-remarks-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-joint-eu-us-armenia-high-level_en)

83 “No: 55, 4 April 2024, Regarding the Trilateral Meeting Between Armenia, the USA and the EU to be Held in Brussels on 5 April 2024”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 4, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-55\\_-ermenistan-abd-ve-ab-arasinda-5-nisan-2024-tarihinde-bruksel-de-duzenlenecek-uclu-toplanti-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-55_-ermenistan-abd-ve-ab-arasinda-5-nisan-2024-tarihinde-bruksel-de-duzenlenecek-uclu-toplanti-hk.en.mfa)

84 “Nikol Pashinyan, Ursula Von Der Leyen, Antony Blinken and Josep Borrell Make Statements Prior to the Armenia-EU-US High-Level Meeting”, *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, April 5, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/04/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Announcement/>

again for their efforts to “infiltrate” the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs did not attend this meeting.<sup>85</sup>

The spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized Armenia for an Armenian delegation visiting the town of Bucha, a symbol of war crimes and Russian atrocities in Ukraine, in early June. The Speaker of the Armenian Parliament refuted the criticism, saying that no delegation from Armenia went to Ukraine, accusing the spokesperson with lying. Details of the visit emerged when the City Council posted images of Armenia’s Ambassador to Ukraine and the head of a Yerevan district head meeting with the Mayor of Bucha on 2 June. It was reported that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a Protest Note on 9 June regarding the visit. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said the visit was “an openly unfriendly step on the part of official Yerevan”. Not distraught, Armenia and Ukraine held political consultations in Kyiv on 17 June.

On 11 June, Russia criticised Armenia for refusing to financially contribute to CSTO.

Pashinyan declared in the Parliament on 12 June his intention to pull out of CSTO, accusing two members of the organization, calling Belarus by name, of having aided Azerbaijan in the war against his country. He declared “We will leave CSTO and we will decide the timing of our exit”. The Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs felt the necessity, shortly afterwards, to clarify that it was not the final decision. On 13 June, Armenia and Belarus recalled their ambassadors. Pashinyan said neither himself nor Armenian officials would visit Belarus while Aleksandr Lukashenko remains the President of Belarus. Pashinyan also qualified his declaration, saying Armenia’s attitude to CSTO might change if Belarus were to leave the organization or if the President of Belarus were to apologize to the Armenian people.

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs announced on 21 June that he would not attend the forthcoming CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers to be held in Almati.

On 17 April, information that was leaked from the EU to the press announced that the EU had decided to provide “non-lethal” military assistance to Armenia from the European Peace Facility (EPF) fund. According to the decision, 10 million Euros was allocated to Armenia for 30 months. The aim of the assistance was stated as contributing to the capability of the Armenian armed forces to enhance national security, stability, and resilience in the field of defense.<sup>86</sup>

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85 “US Trying to Spread Tentacles Into All CIS Regions, Commonwealth States See This — Lavrov”, *TASS*, April 12, 2024, <https://tass.com/politics/1774387>

86 Haghine Buniatian, “EU Set To Provide Non-Lethal Assistance To Armenia”, *Azattyun*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32909510.html>

The Armenian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and First Deputy Minister of Defense of Armenia, Lieutenant General Asryan attended the Conference of Commanders of European Armies held in Germany and also met with the Chief of the French Army Staff on 11 June. The two sides are reported to have discussed issues related to the further development of cooperation, particularly in the field of exchange of experience and training of personnel.

Armenian Minister of Defense went on a working visit to France and signed with his French counterpart a deal on 18 June for France to provide Armenia with French made CAESAR self propelled howitzers. The announcement did not say the cost, the number, or the delivery date of the howitzers. Russia and Azerbaijan accused France that the arms deal would risk war in the South Caucasus.

On 8 May, Pashinyan traveled to Moscow to attend the Eurasian Economic Cooperation summit, of which Armenia is the term chair. He later held a bilateral meeting with Russian President Putin. Pashinyan did not attend Putin's inauguration ceremony following his re-election. In response to a press member's question "You attended the Turkish President's inauguration, why didn't you attend Putin's?", Pashinyan said, "I received an invitation from President Erdoğan, but not from Putin."<sup>87</sup>

After the meeting, Putin's spokesperson announced that Russia would withdraw Russian troops and border guards from certain locations, including the 2000 troops leaving Karabakh, but that troops on the border with Iran and Türkiye would remain.

On 13 May, Pashinyan visited Denmark to attend the Copenhagen Democracy Summit organized by Anders Rasmussen, the former NATO Secretary General and former Danish Prime Minister, who has been criticized for his pro-Armenian and anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric. On this occasion, Pashinyan also held a meeting with Denmark's Prime Minister.<sup>88</sup>

The Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) paid an official visit to Armenia on 7 June, the first of its kind. After the meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, it was stated that the parties expressed hope that the discussions during the visit would contribute to expanding opportunities for cooperation between Armenia and the SCO.

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87 "Pashinyan: I Attended Erdogan's Inauguration Because I Received Invitation, But I Didn't Get One From Putin", *News.am*, May 7, 2024, <https://news.am/eng/news/821924.html>

88 "The Prime Minister Leaves for the Kingdom of Denmark on a Working Visit", *The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/05/13/Anons/>

The US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien visited Armenia on 11 June with an interagency government delegation. At his meeting with Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan, a detailed and multi-dimensional joint statement, charting the road map of close future relations of the parties, was released.<sup>89</sup> The parties outlined a vision for deepening ties in the coming year, to be formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding to upgrade the status of bilateral dialogue to a Strategic Partnership Commission. O'Brien also said they are working to expand economic opportunity-from Central Asia to the Mediterranean Sea. During the visit, a customs agreement was signed and pledges were made for closer defense and security ties.

Mirzoyan paid a working visit to Lithuania on 20 June and held a joint press meeting with his counterpart.

Pashinyan announced on 21 June Armenia's recognition of the State of Palestine, saying it was against "violence towards civilian populations". The same day, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed Armenia's decision to recognize the State of Palestine. The ministry spokesperson stated; "We are pleased that Armenia, following such countries as Spain, Ireland, Norway and Slovenia, has decided to recognize the State of Palestine. As we have noted before, the recognition of Palestine is the requirement of international law, justice and conscience". Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, and Egypt are also among states that welcomed Armenia's decision. Israel on the other hand, warned Armenia of "severe long time consequences".

#### 4. Relations with Türkiye

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan, in his speech on 30 November at the 30th OSCE Ministerial Council in Skopje, in which he mainly blamed Azerbaijan, mentioned Türkiye in a section, and said;

"In this regard the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border is also of crucial importance. As you might be aware, we have reached the agreement to open the land border for 3rd country citizens and Armenian and Turkish citizens holding diplomatic passports, which was reconfirmed by my counterpart, Minister Fidan at our bilateral meeting on 23 October; even concrete timing was indicated meaning upcoming

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89 "Joint Statement on U.S.-Armenia Strategic Dialogue Capstone", *Department of State of the United States of America*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-u-s-armenia-strategic-dialogue-capstone/>

weeks, and we hope that in the nearest future we will implement this first, but quite tangible step.”<sup>90</sup>

The news in the Armenian press that Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, Türkiye’s Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, said on 7 January that the works on the Turkish and Azerbaijani sides of the “Zangezur corridor” would be completed in 2028 created reactions and revived the issue on the agenda.<sup>91</sup>

The Chairman of Armenia’s State Revenue Committee stated on 12 January that the major renovation of the Margara border checkpoint, opposite Türkiye’s Alican border crossing, was completed and ready for crossing. He also added that “All infrastructures in terms of technical customs equipment, passport control, and for the border guards, are ready for duly implementation of the passenger service”.

At a press conference on 24 January, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan stated that Türkiye had still not taken any steps to implement interim normalization agreements reached with Armenia in 2022. Noting that one of those agreements calls for the opening of the Turkish-Armenia border for holders of Armenian or Turkish diplomatic passport as well as citizens of third countries. Another agreement envisaged air freight traffic between the two neighbouring nations. There have been no signs of its implementation, even though the Turkish government officially allowed cargo shipments by air to and from Armenia in January 2023. Mirzoyan said, “The Armenian side is ready for a quick opening of that border both in the political sense and in terms of infrastructure. The only missing component is the decision of the Turkish side. As we can see, either tangible steps in these directions have not been taken or there is no end result.” Speaking at a November summit of the leaders of Turkic states in Kazakhstan, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan again demanded that Armenia open an extraterritorial corridor to Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan exclave and reminded that this was a precondition.<sup>92</sup>

*Armenpress*, Armenia’s news agency, interviewed Javier Colomina, the Special Representative of NATO Secretary General, in Brussels on 31 January and asked him questions related to Türkiye as well. The questions and Colomina’s answers are below:

90 “Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan at the 30th OSCE Ministerial Council”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, November 30, 2024, [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2023/11/30/Mirzoyan\\_speech/12375](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2023/11/30/Mirzoyan_speech/12375)

91 Hoory Minoyan, “Turkey And Azerbaijan Announce Plans to Complete ‘Zangezur Corridor’”, *The Armenian Weekly*, January 10, 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/01/10/turkey-and-azerbaijan-announce-plans-to-complete-zangezur-corridor/>

92 Hoory Minoyan, “Armenian Foreign Minister Expresses Concerns Over Azerbaijani Reversal in Peace Talks”, *The Armenian Weekly*, January 24, 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/01/24/armenianforeign-minister-expresses-concerns-over-azerbaijani-reversal-in-peace-talks/>

***Question:** And what about Türkiye? As you know, Armenia is trying to normalize the relations with Türkiye as well. In your opinion, what is Türkiye's real position regarding the settlement of relations with Armenia, will it go for a real settlement of relations, or will the negotiations again be of a formal nature?*

**Answer:** Well, for us Türkiye is a very important ally, as you know, it is the only ally that has borders in the region and therefore is a key actor in the region. We have a very frank conversation with Türkiye on every topic and of course, we talk about the concourses as well. Türkiye knows that we are supportive of the normalization of relations between Armenia and Türkiye. I think Türkiye is willing to make progress in this direction. I do not know if they are actually waiting for some progress in the Azerbaijan-Armenian track first. That could be probably one of the considerations, but I think they are genuinely interested in advancing on that. As you know, I cannot really go into the foreign policy, the domestic politics of our allies, but I think, and we have talked about this, it would be a very positive development whenever that happens.

***Question:** You have mentioned the territorial integrity and sovereignty as important principles. However, NATO member Türkiye openly supported the large-scale war in the South Caucasus, unleashed by Azerbaijan. The reaction of the organization was not so strict and binding. Considering that Türkiye clearly supports Azerbaijan, do you think it is possible for Türkiye to directly intervene in the event of a new aggression by Azerbaijan against Armenia? And what will NATO's reaction be in that case? Considering that this time 'disputed territory' cannot be used as an excuse, because we are talking about an internationally recognized country and its borders.*

**Answer:** Well, it is very difficult to preempt conversations and as I said I can't really go into foreign policy decisions of my own allies. What I can tell you is that we are very attached to those two principles: sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have been very clear always that for us those are very important. The situation three years ago was different. As you said, there was a controversy in terms of how you looked at the particular enclave. In addition, even though there was recognition of the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Azerbaijan, there was a controversy, as I said. I think we are now facing a different situation and, in my opinion, and without preempting anything, the reaction I would assume would be different.



**Question:** *What is the role of Türkiye, taking into account its relations with Russia?*

**Answer:** Türkiye has a very specific regional and geographical situation and that is why their foreign policy, that I am not really allowed to talk about, is probably more complex than the one of other allies, but they are absolutely committed with our efforts on defense and deterrence. They are committed with our assessment on which are the two threats that we have, Russia and terrorism. They are contributing as much as any other ally in the efforts we are implementing.”<sup>93</sup>

The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Archbishop Sahak II Maşalyan, on 20 February 2024, travelled to Armenia to attend the meeting of the Supreme Spiritual Council, convened at the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin.<sup>94</sup>

On 20 February, on the occasion of the visit of the President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev, Turkish President Erdoğan advised Azerbaijan to avoid future border flareups with Armenia, wished that the historic opportunity for peace should not be missed, and said that the signing of a permanent peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia would be a new source of hope for peace and stability in our region and the world.<sup>95</sup>

Turkish President Erdoğan stated that some Western states did not realize that after the Karabakh war a completely new era began in the region, that those who manipulate Armenia for their own interests at the cost of the suffering of the peoples of the region had caused the greatest damage to Armenia, that they were pursuing unrealistic pipedreams, and that Armenia should realise and accept this reality. Furthermore, Erdoğan stated that it would be better for the Armenian people and leadership to seek security in peace and cooperation with their neighbours rather than thousands of kilometres away, that no matter how much military ammunition came from the West, it could not replace the stability that lasting peace would provide, that he invited Armenia to take the hand of peace extended by Azerbaijan and that Türkiye was ready to take the necessary steps in cooperation with Azerbaijan for the success of this process.

Opening on 1 March, the annual Antalya Diplomacy Forum was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Mirzoyan, accompanied by the

93 “Principles Agreed Upon Between Armenia and Azerbaijan Until Present Should Not Be Changed, Says Javier Colomina”, *ArmenPress*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.armenpress.am/eng/news/1129201/>

94 “Պոպի Հայոց Պատրիարքը ժամանեց Մայր Աթոռ Սուրբ Էջմիածին. Նա կմասնակցի Գերագույն հոգևոր խորհրդի ժողովին”, *News.am*, February 20, 2024, <https://news.am/arm/news/808376.html>

95 “Erdoğan Urges Azerbaijan Leader To Avoid Armenia Tensions”, *Ahram Online*, February 19, 2024, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/518016.aspx>

Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and Special Representative Ruben Rubinyan. On the occasion of the Forum, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye and Armenia also met.<sup>96</sup> The meeting was also attended by the special representatives for normalization of relations between the two countries. The Ministers discussed the normalization process of relations between the two countries and reaffirmed the mutual willingness to reach full normalization of relations. The ministers exchanged views on possible concrete steps in this direction.

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan presented Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" project at the Forum.

Speaking on a panel at the forum, Rubinyan said that the improvement of Türkiye-Armenia relations would have a positive impact on the process of developing relations in the South Caucasus and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Emphasising that the ultimate goal is full normalization, Türkiye's special representative Serdar Kılıç proposed that the next meeting of the two special envoys be held in Yerevan.

At a press conference on 12 March, Pashinyan gave a comprehensive answer to *Armenpress*' question on whether there is a tendency in the West to involve Türkiye in the Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement process. In his answer, Pashinyan stated that geopolitical actors must be neutral; otherwise, they cannot play a constructive role in the Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement process. He added;

"Regarding Turkey's role in the region and on the world stage, the reality is that we both observe and feel Turkey's presence. Armenia should have an agenda with Turkey and perceive it not through Azerbaijan but as a neighbouring country. We have to acknowledge that Turkey plays a significant international role. Communication with the Turkish leadership and the representatives of Turkey is natural because Armenia and Turkey are neighbours. It is neither unusual nor strange for the leaders of the two countries to have telephone conversations. I consider that we have a conversation and a dialogue with the President of Turkey, which is very complicated, not easy, but it is very important to have that conversation. Understanding the subtle layers of consciousness in the society, it was a great effort to go and participate in the inauguration ceremony of the President of Turkey."<sup>97</sup>

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96 "Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Türkiye", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia*, March 1, 2024, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2024/03/01/armenia\\_turkey/12524](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2024/03/01/armenia_turkey/12524)

97 "Pashinyan Refers To Turkey's Possible Involvement in Armenian-Azerbaijani Settlement", *ArmenPress*, March 12, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1132270.html>

On 15 March, at the press conference following the trilateral meeting of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye's Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Baku, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan's statement that "Türkiye expects general support for the opening of the Zangezur path" was highlighted in the Armenian press.<sup>98</sup>

At the Foreign Relations Committee of the Armenian Parliament on 15 March, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan stated that Armenia and Türkiye are exchanging protocols for the joint repair of the historical Ani bridge. Regarding the agreement on border crossings, he said "Unfortunately, this partial opening has not been implemented to this day, but I had the opportunity to confirm this agreement with the new minister."<sup>99</sup>

According to an Armenian press report, in early April, Armenia's High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Sinanyan met with the Editor-in-chief of the Istanbul-based *Jamanak* daily and discussed the current situation and the challenges facing the Armenian community, as well as the possibilities of participation in the Global Armenian Summit to be held in September.<sup>100</sup>

On 10 April, Pashinyan made a comprehensive speech during the parliamentary session, and in the context of the principles and initiatives to diversify foreign policy, he said the following about the relations with Türkiye;

"In our relations with Turkey, if we can say so, we are in the waiting mode and are waiting for the implementation of the officially recorded agreements. That is, opening of the Armenia-Turkey land border for citizens of third countries and holders of diplomatic passports. And in general, the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border will be an epoch-making event for our region, and we must continue our efforts in this direction as well."<sup>101</sup>

In April, the most prominent issue in Turkish-Armenian relations was once again the commemoration of the 109th anniversary of the claimed genocide. In a way, these events became an indicator, like litmus paper, of the attitudes of militant Armenians and third parties favouring them concerning Türkiye. A noteworthy development this year was that the Pashinyan administration,

98 "Turkey Continues To Demand Armenian 'Corridor' For Azerbaijan", *Azattyun*, March 15, 2024, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32863071.html>

99 "Armenia FM: Ultimate Goal not Materialized yet in Relations with Turkey", *News.am*, March 15, 2024, <https://news.am/eng/news/812470.html>

100 "Meeting with Ara Gochunyan", *Office Of The High Commissioner For Diaspora Affairs of Armenia*, April 11, 2024, <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/news/1245>

101 "Armenia Hopes for Positive Response from Azerbaijan to Peace Treaty Proposals -Pashinyan", *ArmenPress*, April 10, 2024, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1134436/>

which had taken radical steps towards independence and sovereignty, adopted a realistic and objective approach on this issue as well. Saying no to historical myths and the bigotry of the past, Pashinyan has given the green light to the idea of scientific and objective examination and research of the allegations on “genocide”, and this approach has left radical and militant groups, especially in the Diaspora, in a dilemma. Some countries and their leaders, who are under the influence of these groups or who use this excuse against Türkiye, have inevitably been in a difficult situation.

In his speech on this occasion, Pashinyan called on the people of Armenia to “overcome the trauma of the past” and asked for an end to the complaints about the “historical homeland”. Pashinyan’s efforts to translate the events into “Meds Yeghern” (Great Catastrophe) in Armenian instead of genocide did not go unnoticed.<sup>102</sup> It was pointed out that Pashinyan used the word “Meds Yeghern” 11 times and genocide 4 times in his 440-word speech. Catholicos of Etchmiadzin Karekin II, as the highest official of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, was not invited to the official ceremony this year as well.

Pashinyan departed from the established discourse and instead of blaming the Ottoman authorities during the First World War, he said that Ottoman Armenians were “victims of geopolitical intrigues and false promises”.<sup>103</sup> In his speech, Pashinyan stated;

“Never again. We should not say this to others, but to ourselves. And this is not an accusation against us at all, but a point of view where we, only we, are responsible and the director of our destiny and we are obliged to have enough mind, will, depth and knowledge to carry that responsibility in the domain of our sovereign decisions and perceptions.”

On the other hand, in the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, it was observed that the old discourse and line was maintained. The Apostolic Church was not surprising at all with the radical-militant statements of Catholicos Karekin II and Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia (located in Antelias/Lebanon).

Certain countries in the international arena did not refrain from repeating the rhetoric that has become a commonplace this year. The President of the United States Joe Biden repeated the same statement as last year. Likewise, French

102 Yavuz Aydın, “Paşinyan’ın 1915 Olaylarına İlişkin Sözleri Ermenistan’da Gündem Oldu”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 15 Nisan 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/pasinyanin-1915-olaylarina-iliskin-sozleriermenistanda-gundem-oldu/3192305>

103 Mayis Alizade, “Nikol Paşinyan “Soykırım” Konusuna Yaklaşımında da Devrim Yapıyor”, *Independent Türkçe*, 19 Mayıs 2024, <https://www.indyrturk.com/node/723596/t%C3%BCrki%C3%87yedensesler/nikol-pa%C5%9Finyan-soyk%C4%B1r%C4%B1m-konusuna-yakla%C5%9F%C4%B1mda-dadevrim-yap%C4%B1yor>

President Emmanuel Macron continued his provocative discourse. The Prime Minister of Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, the President of Greece and the Minister of Defence were among those who joined the chorus. A similar statement was made on behalf of Russia by the Russian Embassy in Yerevan. The Chilean Parliament also adopted a resolution to this effect.<sup>104</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye made the following two statements on 24 and 25 April:

“We reject the one-sided statements about the events of 1915 that have been made to satisfy certain radical circles.

These statements, which distort the historical facts, are also contrary to international law. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has clearly underlined that the events of 1915 are a legitimate subject of debate.

These biased and partial statements about history undermine the reconciliation efforts between the two communities, and encourage radical groups to commit hate crimes.

We call on all parties to support our proposal for a Joint Historical Commission and the normalisation process that has been initiated with Armenia.”<sup>105</sup>

No. 71: “The resolution adopted yesterday (24 April) by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile recognizing the events of 1915 as ‘genocide’ is null and void.

Parliaments have no authority to interpret or pass a judgement on history.

This resolution also contravenes the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which states that the crime of genocide can only be ruled by a competent court.”<sup>106</sup>

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104 “Şili Temsilciler Meclisi, 24 Nisan’ı Ermeni Soykırımı Kurbanlarının Anma Günü Olarak İlan Etti”, *Ermeni Haber Ajansı*, 25 Nisan 2024, <https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2024/04/25/%C5%9EiliErmeni-Soyk%C4%B1r%C4%B1m%C4%B1/273767>

105 “No: 68, April 24, 2024, Regarding the Statements by Authorities of Some Countries”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 24, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-68\\_-bazi-ulkelerin-yetkililerince-yapilan-beyanlar-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-68_-bazi-ulkelerin-yetkililerince-yapilan-beyanlar-hk.en.mfa)

106 “No: 71, April 25, 2024, Regarding the Resolution Adopted by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile on the Events of 1915”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 25, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-71\\_-sili-temsilciler-meclisinin-1915-olaylarina-iliskin-karari-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-71_-sili-temsilciler-meclisinin-1915-olaylarina-iliskin-karari-hk.en.mfa)

On this occasion, Turkish President Erdoğan emphasised that Türkiye has never discriminated against its Armenian citizens. President Erdoğan also sent the following message to Sahak II Maşalyan of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul:

“Reverend Sahak Maşalyan, Armenian Patriarch of Türkiye,

Distinguished Members of the Armenian Community,

My Dear Citizens,

I salute you wholeheartedly, with respect and affection.

I once again remember with respect the Ottoman citizens of Armenian descent who lost their lives due to unfavorable circumstances of the First World War and extend my condolences to their descendants.

I also wish Allah Almighty’s mercy to all members of the Ottoman society who passed away or martyred as a consequence of armed conflicts, rebellions, gang violence and terrorist acts.

The devastation caused by World War I in the Ottoman Empire has opened deep wounds in our minds.

The atmosphere of peace and serenity inherited from our ancestors can only be maintained through our joint efforts.

The security, prosperity and well-being of our Armenian citizens, who enriched Anatolian lands with their cultural works and human relations, continue to be under our assurance.

We did not and will not allow even a single Armenian citizen of ours to be discriminated, alienated or feel second-class in their homeland.

It is important to address history under the guidance of wisdom, conscience, and science, instead of favoring a radical discourse, marginalization, and hate speech.

Showing empathy without discrimination among the incidents engraved in our national memory will prevent the sown seeds of hatred from taking root.

We believe that the way to protect future generations from the spiral of violence and war encircling the world is to build a future together in the light of the lessons we have learned from our common pain.



With these thoughts, I once again salute the distinguished members of the Armenian community.”<sup>107</sup>

Armenian press reported on 28 May that Türkiye’s National Security Council included in its agenda the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Turkish President Erdoğan’s address to the participants of the Efes-2024 military exercise was also highlighted in the press;

“Armenia must get rid itself of the harmful influence of third countries and its diaspora. This will bring Armenia closer and closer to peace. The Armenian people must realize that their future is tied to the countries of the region, neighbors with whom they have co-existed for centuries. This will continue in the future. Armenia must also have the courage to do what is necessary”.

In a press release by a “Geghard Foundation” on 12 June, Türkiye was accused of promoting the concept of “Western Azerbaijan”. It purported that the Chairman of the National Commission for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports of Türkiye’s Parliament met with the representatives of the “West Azerbaijan” community.

Armenia’s special representative in negotiations for the normalisation of relations with Türkiye said in a conversation with journalists on 11 June, “We do not see steps on the Turkish side to open border with Armenia”, a narrative that Türkiye is not implementing agreement on border opening with Armenia pronounced also by Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan.

On 18 June, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with Turkish President Erdoğan. A readout of the conversation was issued by Pashinyan’s Office. Accordingly, the Prime Minister congratulated the President on the Eid al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) and the President congratulated the Prime Minister on the upcoming Vardavar Feast. President Erdoğan offered condolences to Prime Minister Pashinyan regarding recent floods in the northern regions of Armenia. The leaders underlined their will to fully normalize the relations between Armenia and Türkiye without any preconditions. In this regard, the leaders noted the importance of the continuation of meetings between the special representatives of both countries and reconfirmed the agreements reached so far. The leaders also noted with satisfaction the ongoing dialogue between high level officials of Armenia and Türkiye. They also discussed recent developments in the region and international agenda. There was no official readout from the President’s Office.

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107 “The Message President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent to Armenian Patriarch of Türkiye, Reverend Sahak Maşalyan”, *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye*, April 24, 2024, <https://tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/152136/the-message-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-sent-to-armenian-patriarch-of-turkiye-reverend-sahak-masalyan>

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