

Armenia's election, peace in South Caucasus



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OPINION

On June 7, 2026, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan won re-election to a third term in Armenia's parliamentary elections. Pashinyan's Civil Contract party secured 64 of 105 seats in the legislature, giving him a mandate to push on with two major foreign policy shifts. Firstly, Pashinyan seeks to finalise a peace deal with Azerbaijan and to normalise ties with Turkey, a process combined with abandoning nationalist claims to the Karabakh territory after Azerbaijan regained full control of this region in 2023. Secondly, Pashinyan has vowed to seek further integration with the European Union, despite major economic pressure from Russia, with which Yerevan is formally in a customs union as well as a mutual-defence treaty organisation — the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), respectively.

Pashinyan's electoral success is remarkable. An erstwhile journalist, carried to power on the back of an anti-corruption protest movement in 2018, his re-election despite military defeat and the loss of control over Karabakh — a highly emotive issue in Armenia — is a near unprecedented feat. He was first re-elected in 2021, just seven months after Azerbaijani forces retook more than two-thirds of Armenian-held territory in and around the region. The second time was less than three years after Azerbaijani forces retook all of it, displacing 100,000–120,000 ethnic Armenians. Moreover, Pashinyan's victories have come despite him lacking the military credentials and historic role in leading operations in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988–94, or the Russia-linked wealth of his leading



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electoral rivals.

How did he do it?

Pashinyan's electoral success is all the more remarkable given his break with historical claims to Karabakh. In an April speech, he called future claims to the territory a "geopolitical trap" and vowed to put Armenia on the "course of creative and peaceful history" — alluding to the draft peace agreement initialled with Azerbaijan last year and talks with Turkey that saw Ankara lift decades-old trade restrictions this May. A key part of Pashinyan's success has been his pursuit of multilateral engagement. The draft peace agreement with Azerbaijan was belatedly supported by United States President Donald Trump's second

administration, which seized on the effort to rename the most controversial aspect — a trade corridor via southern Armenia linking Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan as well as Turkey by rail — the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), instead of the "Zangezur Corridor" previously insisted upon by Azerbaijan, a name many saw as carrying an inherent irredentist threat. Furthermore, Pashinyan argued that his electoral rivals had not benefited Armenia during their time in power before 2018, and that new opposition parties, whose leaders had deep ties to Moscow, would not do so in the future. After all, Moscow ignored Armenia's 2022 request for assistance under

the CSTO treaty when Azerbaijani forces were moving into de jure Armenian territory in the same region through which the TRIPP corridor will run. He also tied his campaign to Armenia's European aspirations, pledging to prepare the country for EU candidacy status if re-elected. Russia's ability to exert pressure also fell dramatically since it dedicated resources to its war against Ukraine — a remarkable turnaround given the Kremlin's lynchpin role in ending the 2020 Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Finally, the increased confidence in the power of Azerbaijan's regime, led by Ilham Aliyev, following its military victories, has reduced the need for Baku to seek further successes against Armenia, which has much less well-funded and equipped armed forces.

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The path to sustainable peace

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Finalising peace with Azerbaijan remains a formidable challenge given Azerbaijan's insistence that Armenia amend its constitution — to remove an indirect reference to Nagorno-Karabakh — as part of the process. While Pashinyan has said he plans to pursue such a vote, Civil Contract is short of the two-thirds majority in the legislature required to do so. The two parliamentary opposition parties — vehicles for the Russian-linked businessman Samvel Karapetyan and for former Armenian president Robert Kocharyan, who was also the first "president" of the ethnic Armenian state in Karabakh — are unlikely to entertain such proposals.

Further progress will depend on wider support that builds on the landmark visit by European leaders to Yerevan ahead of the election. Investigations by local and foreign journalists helped mitigate Russian influence campaigns, but since the election, Russia has further intensified economic pressure by expanding its trade controls. Delicate diplomacy and considerable help will be required to complete the journey.

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (front) speaks to the press as vote counting continued across the country in Yerevan, Armenia, on June 8, 2026.
● OZGE ELIF KIZIL/AA