

## EDITORIAL / BAŞYAZI

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# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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**Abstract:** *This article covers the domestic and international developments of Armenia, the background to why the peace agreement envisaged and outlined in the cease-fire agreement of November 2020 could not be realized in the two and half years that elapsed, how the current efforts proceed and relations between Türkiye and Armenia in the light of the normalization of relations process in the period of December 2022-June 2023.*

*Russia's war against Ukraine failing in its aim of a quick victory, the prolongation of the war and its transformation into a war of attrition with the active and substantial support of the West has revealed the military deficiency of Russia. The West, seeking other means of pressing and further jeopardizing Russia, has seen the opportunity in approaching Armenia, an ally and traditionally under very tight reins of Russia, to broker the peace agreement with Azerbaijan and eventually drive Russia away and to establish its own domain. Russia too has recognized this development as a threat in the region, seen as vital for its connectivity with the South and the East and considered to be its soft belly. Armenia's ambivalence and potential for shift of allegiances have become a serious concern for Russia.*

*The region becoming a new flash point in the West-Russia adversity has not caused discomfort in Armenia. To the contrary, Armenia appears to*

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*have seen an advantage in dealing with parties with varying interests and calculations in the region to minimize its losses in the 2020 war and possibly make new gains. This expectation has led to the procrastination of the formulation and signing of the peace agreement. Karabakh and the issue of the delimitation of the borders have come to the fore as major obstacles.*

*A similar duality is witnessed in domestic politics. On the one hand advocating peaceful and liberal principles, the Armenian administration has found a passable excuse for restraint in those principles due to the activities and actions of the very small but vociferous opposition guided and directed by the radical Dashnaksutyun-ARF with a dark terrorism record and their sponsors and financiers in the Diaspora. The attitude and sermons of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin very much in line with the radical opposition has been another factor in restraining the administration.*

*Relations with Türkiye have moved within the framework of the normalization process, albeit experiencing sharp ups and downs. Armenia's humanitarian assistance following the earthquake disaster of 6 February in Türkiye, the opening of the border crossing for Armenian vehicles to this end, the visit of the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Ankara and to the disaster area have raised the hope for good-neighborly and compassionate relations. However, immediately after, the inauguration of a monument in the capital city of Yerevan consecrating radical Armenian nationalist terrorism has once again confirmed that there is no change in the anti-Turk or Türkiye sentiments and policies. It cannot be denied that these sentiments and policies enjoy the support, even encouragement of the third parties where Armenian diaspora is entrenched and also on grounds of religious solidarity. Prime Minister Pashinyan's attendance to President Erdoğan's new term reception after his election win provided another glimmer of hope for the progress of relations.*

**Keywords:** Pashinyan, Mirzoyan, Lavrov, Blinken, Michelle, Sholz, Bono, Vardanyan, Lachin Corridor, Zangezur Corridor, Nemesis Monument

**Öz:** *Bu incelemede Aralık 2022-Haziran 2023 tarihleri arasında Ermenistan'daki iç gelişmeler, dış dinamikler, 2020 yılında cereyan eden savaşı sonlandıran Kasım 2020 ateş-kes anlaşmasının üzerinden geçen yaklaşık iki buçuk yıla rağmen hala öngörülen barış anlaşmasının imzalanamamış olmasının nedenleri ve bu yönde süregelen girişimler ile Türkiye-Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkiler ve başlatılan normalleşme sürecindeki gelişmeler ele alınmaktadır.*

*Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya karşı giriştiği savaşta öngördüğü hedeflere ulaşamaması, savaşın uzaması, Batı'nın aktif biçimde Ukrayna'yı*

*desteklemesiyle savaşın uzun vadeli bir yıpratma savaşına dönüşmesi, dolayısıyla Rusya'nın askeri zaafiyetinin de ortaya çıkması, Batı'nın Rusya'ya daha da zora sokmak ve zaafiyetini pekiştirmek amacıyla Rusya'nın geleneksel olarak mutlak güdümünde olduğu bilinen Ermenistan üzerinden Güney Kafkaslarda yeni bir cephe açabilmek üzere Ermenistan-Azerbaycan barış sürecinde başat rol üstlenme girişimleri dönem içinde bölgeye damgasını vurmuştur. Batı'nın bu şekilde Rusya'ya bölgeden uzaklaştırma ve nüfuz alanı oluşturma olasılığı karşısında, Güney ve Doğu ulaşımını sağlayan hayati çıkarlarının bulunduğu ve yumuşak karnı olarak tanımlanan bu bölgeye yönelik gelişmeler Rusya tarafından kuşkusuz tehdit olarak algılanmıştır. Bu süreçte Ermenistan'ın ikili tutumu ve bağlılıklarını değiştirme potansiyeli Rusya için ciddi bir endişe kaynağı olmuştur.*

*Bölgenin Rusya-Batı rekabetinde yeni bir odak noktası haline gelmesinden rahatsızlık duymak bir yana, bu gelişmeyi avantaja dönüştürmek peşinde koşan Ermenistan, bölgede farklı hesapları ve çıkarları bulunan tarafları kullanarak savaş sonrası kayıplarını en aza indirmek, hatta yeni kazanımlar sağlamak amacıyla nihai barış anlaşması imzalanması sürecini sürüncemede bırakacak bir yaklaşımı benimsemiştir. Karabağ konusu ve sınırların tespiti başlıca uyumsuzluk unsuru olarak ön plana çıkmıştır.*

*İç politikada da benzer bir ikili yaklaşım sürdürülmüştür. Yönetim bir yandan barışçı ve liberal ilkeleri savunurken, diğer taraftan radikal ve terör geçmişi tescilli Taşnaksutyun-EDF güdümündeki, sayıca çok az ancak militan bir muhalefetin ve bunların Diasporadaki yönlendirici ve finansörlerinin etkinliklerini kendilerini engelleyen bahane olarak kullanılabilmiştir. Eçmiadzin Katolikosluğunun da muhalefet çizgisindeki eylem ve söylemi de kuşkusuz yönetimin hareket serbestisini kısıtlayan bir unsur olmuştur.*

*Türkiye ile ilişkiler normalleşme süreci içinde ilerlemeye devam etmiş, ancak keskin iniş ve çıkışlar göstermiştir. Türkiye'deki 6 Şubat deprem felaketi Ermenistan'ın insani yardım girişimi, Türkiye'nin bu amaçla Alişan karayolu sınır kapısını açması, Ermenistan Dışişleri Bakanının ziyareti ile ileri ve dostça bir düzeye ulaşırken, Erivan'da radikal Ermeni milliyetçisi terörizmi kutsayan bir anıtın açılması gerçekte Türk ve Türkiye karşıtı hissiyat ve yaklaşımda hiçbir değişikliğin olmadığını bir kez daha göz önüne sermiştir. Ermenistan'ın bu genel hissiyat ve yaklaşımında Ermeni diasporasının radikal faaliyetlerine hoşgörü gösterilen ülkelerden ve dinsel dayanışmadan da destek, hatta teşvik gördüğü yadsınmamaktadır. Başbakan Paşinyan'ın Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın davetine icabetle seçim sonrası kutlama törenine katılması ilişkilerin geleceği için yeni bir ümit ışığı yaratmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Paşinyan, Mirzoyan, Lavrov, Blinken, Michelle, Scholz, Bono, Vardanyan, Laçın Koridoru, Zangezur Koridoru, Nemesis Anıtı

## 1. Domestic Developments in Armenia

The inability to leave behind the wounds and despair caused by the 2020 (Second) Karabakh War, which ended with Azerbaijan's decisive victory, and inertness to quickly take steps towards a new beginning led to the perpetuation of a general weariness and pessimism. The conditions of the peace agreement were the main item on the internal political agenda and all criticism from the opposition concentrated on this issue.

Armenia's Ministry of Interior, abrogated under former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan to bring the police force under his direct control, was re-established on 9 January and Vahe Ghazaryan, a friend of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan from childhood, was appointed as the minister.<sup>1</sup> In addition to law enforcement, the Ministry's scope of authority includes rescue and migration operations.

Despite the continuation of the boycott of parliamentary sessions by 35 opposition MPs since April 2022, the ruling party, which has a parliamentary majority, has refrained from exercising its legal authority to depose them.

On 19 January, a fire broke out in a military barracks, killing fifteen soldiers and injuring seven others, three of them gravely.<sup>2</sup> This was the largest non-war military loss in Armenia's history. The military authorities and the leadership were heavily criticized.

The third meeting of Armenia's program launched in 2020 to utilize diaspora experts in state institutions and administration was held on 6 February. Prime Minister Pashinyan delivered the keynote speech at the meeting, where the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs reported on the progress made and stated that 50 experts are currently working in 24 different institutions.<sup>3</sup> On March 10th, the first pan-Armenian citizens' assembly session was held in Yerevan under the title "Convention of the Future Armenian". Approximately two hundred participants took part in the meeting and discussed the issues of "historical responsibility", "Armenia-Diaspora unity", "population growth"<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Siranush Ghazanchyan, "Vahe Ghazaryan appointed Armenia's Minister of Interior," *Public Radio of Armenia*, January 9, 2023,

<https://en.armradio.am/2023/01/09/vahe-ghazaryan-appointed-armenias-minister-of-interior/>

2 "Armenian soldiers die in fire blamed on heater lit with petrol," *BBC News*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64329367>

3 "We must make efforts to ensure efficiency and development. PM Pashinyan receives participants of 'iGorts' program," *Armenpress*, February 6, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1103473.html>

4 Mane Babajanyan, "The Convention of the Future Armenian held in Yerevan," *The Armenian Weekly*, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/03/15/the-convention-of-the-future-armenian-held-in-yerevan/>

The Armenian Government barred another Armenian militant (the Central Executive chairperson of the Dashnaktsutyun-Armenian Revolutionary Federation/ARF party's youth branch in France) from entering the country and declared him *persona non grata* in January. This was the fourth ARF militant banned from entering the country.<sup>5</sup> The Armenian ARF party opened the International ARF Youth Conference in Yerevan on 6 February. The conference was attended by 33 organizations from 14 countries. These countries were listed to be Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Canada, the United States, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Australia, and three from South America.

A month later, on 6 March, the ARF celebrated its 132nd anniversary, and the program organized by the ARF Western United States Central Committee, in which radical, irredentist Armenian views were expressed, was also broadcast on Armenian television channels. Likewise, in March, Armenia's High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs under the Prime Minister held meetings with Armenian Diaspora representatives in the Eastern region of the United States. In press releases following his meetings, the High Commissioner "discussed the need for cooperation among Armenian-American elected officials in order to effectively advocate for the Armenian cause" and stated that he "discussed the need for unity and cooperation within the Diaspora in order to effectively utilize the Diaspora's resources in support of Armenia and Artsakh [the so-called Armenian state in Karabakh]"<sup>6</sup>. The visit and contacts of the High Commissioner were criticized by the ARF.

The opposition parties, spearheaded again by the ARF started street protests on 23 May against the Prime Minister upon his statements to sign a peace agreement with Azerbaijan that will also recognize Karabagh within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. On 24 May the ARF Bureau announcement read: "We will not tolerate coercive agreements that violate the interests of the Armenian nation."<sup>7</sup> The supreme assembly of ARF-Armenia convened on 9 June to examine the activities of ARF-Armenia and to guide the strategy and tactics to the current challenges. The party leader said at a news conference on 13 June that to prevent Pashinyan's program, his party would try to initiate a popular movement starting with demonstrations in summer. He admitted that the opposition's 2022 bid for regime change did not attract

5 "Armenian government continues anti-ARF policies toward ARF Youth," *The Armenian Weekly*, January 29, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/01/29/armenian-government-continues-anti-arf-policies-toward-arf-youth/>

6 "Zareh Sinanyan fiddled his violin during visit to eastern US cities while Armenia, Artsakh burned," *The Armenian Weekly*, March 11, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/03/11/zareh-sinanyan-fiddled-his-violin-during-visit-to-eastern-us-cities-while-armenia-artsakh-burned/>

7 "ARF Bureau: 'We will not tolerate coercive agreements that violate the interests of the Armenian nation'," *Armenian Weekly*, May 24, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/05/24/arf-bureau-we-will-not-tolerate-coercive-agreements-that-violate-the-interests-of-the-armenian-nation/>

sufficient popular support. He expressed confidence that the opposition would pull larger crowds this time.

In an interview with a newspaper on 14 February, Catholicos Karekin II, the spiritual leader of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, one of the four centers of the Armenian Apostolic Church, explained that his relations with Armenia's administration were distant and merely ceremonial and that he does not deny that there are disagreements between them. Karekin II has repeatedly accused Pashinyan and his government of making concessions to Türkiye and Azerbaijan, called for his resignation, and argued that "the Nagorno-Karabakh people's right to self-determination is non-negotiable". Pashinyan and members of his government, in turn, boycotted attending Christmas and Easter services led by the Catholicos and excluded the Catholicos from official and national day invitations. The Catholicos once again made these views and opinions public on 20 April. He emphasized that his previous call for Pashinyan's resignation was not limited by time and that the situation in the country unfortunately continues to be dangerous and worrying.<sup>8</sup> On 22 May, there was a renewed exchange of barbs as Pashinyan accused the Armenian Apostolic Church of meddling in politics, prompting a scathing retort from Karekin II.<sup>9</sup> On 23 May Karekin II and the Catholicos of Cilicia Aram I (the spiritual leader of the Armenian Catholicosate located in Antelias/Lebanon) issued separate statements criticizing and condemning Pashinyan that he had agreed to recognize Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. Both, Karekin II and Aram I said that Pashinyan's acknowledgement was "unacceptable". On 12 June, the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Church chaired by Karekin II once again denounced Pashinyan's policies, warned against "humiliating" peace deal, and demanded to resolutely defend the non-negotiable rights of the "Artsakh" people to self-determination.<sup>10</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan held a meeting with President Vahagn Khachaturyan on 29 May where the President expressed his support to the Prime Minister and his government regarding their policies aimed at establishing peace in the region.<sup>11</sup> He added:

"Last week was an important event in our political life, starting with the meeting in Brussels, after which you clearly expressed the view of

8 "Catholicos on demanding Armenia PM Pashinyan's resignation: Our fatherly exhortation not limited by time," *News.am*, April 20, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/755831.html>

9 "Tensions Between Pashinyan and Karekin II Escalate," *Asbarez*, May 22, 2023, <https://asbarez.com/tensions-between-pashinyan-and-karekin-ii-escalate/>

10 "Armenian Church Again Warns Against 'Humiliating' Peace Deal," *Azatutyun*, June 12, 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32455807.html>

11 "Prime Minister Pashinyan meets with President Khachaturyan, refers to Azerbaijan's behavior after Brussels talks," *Armenpress*, May 29, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1112089.html>

the government of the Republic of Armenia, according to which we accept the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and expect the same from Azerbaijan... I want to assure you once again that I support and will support all the programs that you implement, which are aimed at establishing peace in the region, to the best of my ability”.

In its annual report on the state of freedom in the world, published in March, the US organization Freedom House left Armenia’s “partly free” status unchanged, but downgraded its overall rating.

The results of the October 2022 census in Armenia were announced in early May. The permanent population was given as 2,928,914. Permanent population refers to the population with permanent residence in Armenia, i.e. the population that is currently present or temporarily absent in the census. The current population, meanwhile, was recorded as 2,638,917. This number includes permanent residents and temporary residents. The previous censuses conducted in 2001 and 2011 gave the permanent and current population as 3,213,011-3,002,598 and 3,018,854-2,871,771 respectively. In 2022, 25,000 Armenians applied for citizenship, a record number since 1991, while approximately 40,000 ethnic Armenians had received citizenship between 2018 and 2021.<sup>12</sup>

According to foreign trade statistics released in January, Armenia’s exports increased by 75,2% last year. Russia ranked first with 2.07 billion dollars. The United Arab Emirates came second with 479 million dollars and China third with 329 million dollars. The biggest leap in exports was with the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC), which increased 211 times to 4.76 million dollars. Greece also increased 14 times to 324 million dollars. Other countries include Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Georgia, Iran, the UK, and Korea. The most important item in exports was minerals with 929 million dollars. Other items were precious and semi-precious stones with 885 million and motor vehicles and parts with 615 million dollars.<sup>13</sup>

Another piece of related data on the economy is that the largest tax revenue in the budget comes from the Zangezur copper enterprises, amounting to 360 million dollars. This accounts for 7,5% of Armenia’s budget revenues. The Russian Gazprom company ranked second in tax revenues with around 110 million dollars and the tobacco company ranked third with 90 million dollars.

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12 “Armenia’s permanent population is 2,928,914, according to new census,” *Armenpress*, May 2, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1110018.html>

13 “Armenia’s foreign trade turnover in January 2023 increased by 93.8% to nearly \$1.3 billion,” *Arka News Agency*, March 6, 2023, [http://arka.am/en/news/business/armenia\\_s\\_foreign\\_trade\\_turnover\\_in\\_january\\_2023\\_increased\\_by\\_93\\_8\\_to\\_nearly\\_1\\_3\\_billion](http://arka.am/en/news/business/armenia_s_foreign_trade_turnover_in_january_2023_increased_by_93_8_to_nearly_1_3_billion)

On 22 February, it was decided to re-open the Amulsar gold mine operated by a Canadian company, which was closed in 2018 following protests by environmentalists.<sup>14</sup>

Tens of thousands of Russian citizens transmitted their accounts to Armenian banks due to the war in Ukraine, and according to Central Bank data, money transfers from Russia totaled 3.5 billion dollars in 2022, up from 865 million dollars a year earlier, with transfers from the US coming in second with 670 million dollars.<sup>15</sup>

In January, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development announced that it had provided 117 million euros to Armenia's private sector for use in SMEs and telecommunications. The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed on 13 June the first review under the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) with Armenia, enabling access to SDR 18.4 million (about 24.5 million dollars), bringing total access to SDR 36.8 million.<sup>16</sup>

The Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan said in the parliament during budget discussions on 30 May that the volume of FDI's made in Armenia in 2022 stood at nearly 1 billion dollars. He informed through social media on 7 June that construction of a steel plant by American investment of around 70 million dollars, covering an area of 16,500 square meters, started in the village of Yeraksh at the Azerbaidjan border with 200 work force already employed.<sup>17</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan announced on 8 June that he has formed a working group to realize his government's ambitious plan to build a new nuclear power station.<sup>18</sup> The group is to specifically explore the possibility of replacing the aged Metsamor nuclear plant by small modular reactors designed by US companies. One such company is the NuScale Power Corp which plans to build Armenia's first such plant by 2030. The background to this development rests on the memorandum of understanding on "strategic nuclear cooperation" signed in May 2022 during Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan's visit to the US.

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14 Arshaluis Mgdesyanyan, "Armenia restarts controversial gold mine," *Eurasianet*, February 27, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-restarts-controversial-gold-mine>

15 "Russia-Ukraine war: 2022 witnesses a fourfold growth in money transfers from Russia to Armenia," *Ampop Media*, April 27, 2023, <https://ampop.am/en/transfers-from-russia-to-armenia-increased-4-times/>

16 "First review under the stand-by arrangement and request for modifications of Performance criteria and monetary policy Consultation clause—press release; staff Report," *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*, June 2023, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/journals/002/2023/205/002.2023.issue-205-en.xml>

17 "First time ever, Armenia's foreign direct investments stand at \$1 billion," *Armenpress*, May 30, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1112116.html>

18 "PM Pashinyan activates task force in charge of construction of new nuclear power reactor," *Armenpress*, June 6, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1112610.html>

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

Two and a half years after the 2020 Moscow cease-fire (armistice) agreement that ended the war between the two countries, the failure to reach the stage of signing a peace agreement has increased uncertainty and tension in the region. This situation was all the more exacerbated with the war in Ukraine as it offered possibilities for third party alignments and foreign interventions with the ultimate motive of creating a new front against Russia.

Azerbaijan prioritized the signing of a peace treaty to secure its gains from the war. However, Armenia, in anticipation of the changing political landscape and international support, chose to stall the process to reverse its loss of Karabakh as well as to make changes in its favor in the delimitation and demarcation of the disputed borders. The status of the Armenian minority in Karabakh, access from Armenia to Karabakh, the Lachin Corridor vs. the Zangezur Corridor were the main issues of the period.

Armenia's objection to Azerbaijan's demand for access to its cross-border territory of Nakhchivan through Armenia via the Zangezur Corridor became a controversial issue based on irrational claims. In response, Azerbaijan reacted in a step-by-step manner through the Lachin Corridor, which serves a similar function. On 12 December, environmentalist Azerbaijani civil society representatives blocked the road in opposition to the mining activities in the area.<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister Pashinyan pinned blame on Russia for the development, stating that it was the responsibility of the Russian Peacekeeping Force to keep the road open. He went further and called for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force in Karabakh if Russia was unable to do so. The Spokesperson of the Russian Presidency noted that the United Nations (UN) cannot send an additional peacekeeping force to Karabakh without Azerbaijan's approval.<sup>20</sup>

Armenia brought the issue to the UN Security Council. Here, the US, France, and Russia demanded the immediate opening of the road. However, the Security Council members could not agree on a joint resolution and the draft prepared by France was not approved.<sup>21</sup> Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not refrain from praising the French diplomatic initiatives, which were

19 "Protests of Azerbaijani eco-activists continue on Khankandi-Lachin road?", *Report.az*, February 9, 2023, <https://report.az/en/karabakh/protests-of-azerbaijani-eco-activists-continue-on-khankandi-lachin-road/>

20 "UN mission on Lachin corridor only possible with consent of Azerbaijan, Armenia, says Russia," *Anadolu Agency*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/un-mission-on-lachin-corridor-only-possible-with-consent-of-azerbaijan-armenia-says-russia/2812026>

21 "Despite 'Glimmer of Hope' in Armenia, Azerbaijan Conflict, Escalating Tensions Threaten to Derail Fragile Progress, Senior Official Tells Security Council," *United Nations*, December 20, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15154.doc.htm>

opposed by Russia. Prime Minister Pashinyan also criticized Russia and its former Soviet allies for not supporting it within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). On 17 January, Armenia called for a special meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to discuss the humanitarian situation arising from the closure of the Karabakh road, where Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan accused Azerbaijan with intentions of ethnic cleansing.<sup>22</sup>

On 1 January, Russia's Ministry of Defense announced that the CSTO "Indestructible Brotherhood-2023" annual military exercise would be held in Armenia. At a press conference on 10 January, Pashinyan announced that it would not be appropriate to hold this exercise in Armenia this year. During the meeting, Pashinyan was asked about the possibility of Armenia's exit from the organization in light of his criticism of the organization. Pashinyan gave the following incomprehensible answer to this question: "Can we say that Armenia will leave the CSTO? Maybe the CSTO will leave Armenia? Does this whole situation in the region suggest that the CSTO intends to leave Armenia?"<sup>23</sup> At the same meeting, Pashinyan made another vague statement:

"Recently Azerbaijan, in its contacts with Western partners, justifies its aggressive actions on the fear that Armenia and Russia are preparing joint aggressive actions against Azerbaijan and that they [the Azerbaijanis] are taking preventative measures. [...] We call our Russian colleagues' attention to the fact that when they stay silent it means that Russia's military presence in Armenia does not only guarantee the security of the republic, but the opposite: It creates a security threat for Armenia."<sup>24</sup>

In a statement released by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 10 March, Armenia took another step in this direction and announced that Armenia has renounced the quota of Deputy Secretary General assigned to it within the CSTO.

Prime Minister Pashinyan said at a press conference on 22 May that Armenia would decide on whether to withdraw from the CSTO if Yerevan determines that it is a non-functional structure.<sup>25</sup> Russian Presidential Spokesperson told

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22 "Ararat Mirzoyan met with the US co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Louis Bono," *Radar.am*, February 18, 2023, <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2553468329/>

23 Joshua Kuchera, "Armenia refuses to host CSTO exercises," *Eurasianet*, January 10, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-refuses-to-host-csto-exercises>

24 Kuchera, "Armenia refuses to host CSTO exercises."

25 "Armenia to leave CSTO if Yerevan deems it 'non-functional organization'— prime minister," *TASS*, May 22, 2023, <https://tass.com/world/1621147>

the media on the same day that the CSTO enjoys authority among the member countries and Russia will continue the dialogue with Armenia on the CSTO. Armenia appeared to boycott a regular meeting of the CSTO defense ministers on 25 May in Belarus as the Armenian Minister failed to attend with no explanation.

Secretary of the Armenian Security Council Armen Grigoryan initiated another anti-Russian rhetoric, publicly claiming that Russia was pressuring Armenia to join the “union state” with Belarus and to open an extraterritorial corridor to Azerbaijan for access to Nakhchivan.<sup>26</sup> The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted harshly to the statement and demanded proof of these allegations.<sup>27</sup> Pashinyan intervened here as well, saying that they had not received any official proposal in this direction, that Grigoryan had probably received some signals through his unofficial contacts, and that facts could not always be proven. At a press conference on 20 January, the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia denied these allegations and statements, mockingly describing them as nonsense.

A striking observation on the situation in Karabakh came from Ukraine. An official from the Presidential Office argued that the so-called Armenian administration in Karabakh is a puppet of Russia, that the issue is being turned into a crisis through misinformation. For example, the Armenian population in Karabakh is reiterated on every occasion to be 120,000, whereas this number is unlikely to be more than 40,000. In other words, the population is overstated by three times in the most lenient calculation. Moreover, the ultimate position designed for the former Russian oligarch Ruben Vardanyan, who was brought to power in Karabakh, is the Prime Ministry of Armenia.<sup>28</sup>

Armen Sarkissian, the former President of Armenia who resigned from his post and left the country, wrote an article in the *Time* magazine published in the US on 12 January, in which he argued that Karabakh is Armenian territory.<sup>29</sup> What draws attention here is not the content of the article, but the fact that A. Sarkissian, with well-known connections, was reminded to the public as an alternative name at a time when Pashinyan was under pressure to resign and Vardanyan’s name was mentioned.

26 “Armenia ‘Forced To Join Russia-Belarus Union’,” *Azattyun*, December 27, 2022, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32195524.html>

27 “Kremlin slams ‘provocative’ Armenian claims about ‘being forced to’ join Russia-Belarus union state,” *Anadolu Agency*, December 27, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/kremlin-slams-provocative-armenian-claims-about-being-forced-to-join-russia-belarus-union-state/2774043>

28 Joshua Kuchera, “Ukrainian officials support Azerbaijan in blockade of Karabakh,” *Eurasianet*, January 25, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/ukrainian-officials-support-azerbaijan-in-blockade-of-karabakh>

29 Armen Sarkissian, “The Humanitarian Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh Is a Textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing,” *Time*, January 12, 2023, <https://time.com/6246850/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-lachin-corridor/>

The contradiction between the Armenian leadership's rhetoric and actions regarding the situation in Karabakh was once again displayed on 14 January when the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs officially met with the newly appointed "foreign minister" of "Artsakh" and congratulated him on his new post.

On 23 January, the European Union (EU) decided, at the request of the Armenian government, to send a new 100-member observer mission, including 30 police officers, to replace the 40-member civilian observer mission that began duty on 20 October and ended on 19 December.<sup>30</sup> The mission's term of duty was predicted to last for two years and to begin on 20 February. It was announced that the delegation would be headed by a German Federal Police official. Germany would also provide 15 police and civilian personnel. Germany's active interest in the region was formalized by the German government's official statement on this issue.

Azerbaijan and Russia expressed their discontent with this EU initiative. Russia characterized the initiative as a move to undermine Russia's peace efforts and the EU's aspiration to establish influence in the region. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov suggested the deployment of a CSTO delegation as an alternative. Although Armenia did not officially respond negatively to this proposal, it chose to remain distant. In this context, Pashinyan claimed that unlike the EU, the CSTO does not recognize the current borders of Armenia, a member of the CSTO.

In a statement on 16 February, Pashinyan informed that they had presented Azerbaijan with some new proposals for a peace agreement, but did not elaborate on their content and the extent to which they were compatible with the principles proposed by Azerbaijan in March 2022. In this context, Armenian Security Council Secretary Grigoryan's proposal that the Karabakh issue must be addressed in the peace agreement and that Karabakh Armenians must start direct negotiations with Azerbaijan within the framework of an "international mechanism" was sternly rejected by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which stated that Armenia still cannot accept Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson emphasized that Armenians living in Karabakh are citizens of Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Azerbaijani officials met with representatives of Karabakh Armenians twice in late February and early March at the headquarters of the Russian Peacekeeping Force in Karabakh.<sup>31</sup> However, the parties mutually

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30 Arshaluis Mgdesyian, "EU approves new monitoring mission for Armenia, over Russian and Azerbaijani objections," *Eurasianet*, January 25, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/eu-approves-new-monitoring-mission-for-armenia-over-russian-and-azerbaijani-objections>

31 Burç Eruygur, "Azerbaijan invites representatives of Karabakh Armenians for 2nd round of talks," *Anadolu Agency*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-invites-representatives-of-karabakh-armenians-for-2nd-round-of-talks/2844376>

rejected the content of the talks. On the morning of 5 March, a clash broke out in the region, killing three Karabakh Armenian policemen and two Azerbaijani soldiers. Azerbaijan's call to the Karabakh Armenians to hold a new meeting in Baku received a negative response from the Armenian representatives on 28 March. The reasons cited were the venue, agenda, and timing of the meeting.

On 16 March, Pashinyan announced that they had received new proposals from Azerbaijan on the peace agreement, thus beginning the fourth round of negotiations on a draft agreement text. In an interview with an Egyptian news agency on 24 March, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia stated the following about Armenia's demands for a peace agreement:

“Clarification of parameters for the delimitation of the state border, distancing of forces from the state border and the creation of a demilitarized zone along the borderline, establishment of a mechanism of guarantees, which will ensure the implementation of obligations, establishment of an international mechanism to address the issue of rights and security of the Armenians in Karabakh”.<sup>32</sup>

An interview given in Baku by Toivo Klaar, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, who visited the region in March, caused serious discomfort in Armenia. Klaar stated the following in his interview:

“Transparency is absolutely legitimate. I think the idea that there should be transparency about what is being transported on the Lachin road is absolutely legitimate. Because we do not want the Lachin road to be used for any shipment of goods that would exacerbate tensions or be used for any military or sort of illicit purposes... I think the view in Armenia is true that these [i.e. Lachin and Zangezur] are two separate issues. One is the Lachin road, which is covered in one point of the November 2020 Statement, and then there is the connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan which is covered in another point of the 2020 Statement. So, from that point of view, these are treated in different areas of that statement. But in the end, it is a question of discussion, of negotiation.”<sup>33</sup>

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32 “FM briefs Egypt media on details of Armenia proposals forwarded to Azerbaijan,” *News.am*, March 23, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/751288.html>

33 “Toivo Klaar: We can have peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan -INTERVIEW,” *APA*, March 8, 2023, <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/toivo-klaar-we-can-have-peace-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan-interview-398159>

Azerbaijan's position on this issue is clear and has been reiterated at the highest level:

“If Armenia does not want to recognize free passage across the border from the Azerbaijani mainland to Nakhchivan, then checkpoints should be established at both ends of the Zangezur Corridor and on the border between the Lachin district [of Azerbaijan] and Armenia”.

In its decision announced on 22 February, the UN International Court of Justice, in line with Armenia's application, demanded that Azerbaijan ensure unimpeded traffic flow on the only road connecting Armenia and Karabakh. Azerbaijan's initiative to establish a checkpoint at the entrance to open the road was opposed by Armenia as well as Russia.

Ruben Vardanyan, who was appointed as the head executive of the so-called Armenian administration in Karabakh in November, was dismissed from his post on 23 February, in less than four months in this position. Vardanyan announced that he would not return to Russia and would personally continue his struggle in Karabakh.<sup>34</sup>

On 22 March, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan stated that he welcomed his Russian counterpart Lavrov's call for a trilateral meeting, which was originally proposed for 23 December but could not be realized due to Armenia's refrain, adding that this meeting could take place soon.<sup>35</sup> On the same date, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a telephone conversation with the Armenian and Azerbaijani Ministers of Foreign Affairs and, as it was later revealed, invited his counterparts to the United States for a trilateral meeting.<sup>36</sup> The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson stated on 12 April that Azerbaijan and Armenia had agreed to come to Moscow for peace treaty talks and that the exact date of the meeting would be announced afterwards.

On 11 April, a new and small-scale clash broke out between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces with mutual casualties.<sup>37</sup> On 23 April, Azerbaijan

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34 “Vardanyan was not fired at Aliyev's request”: opinion from Yerevan,” *Jam-News*, February 23, 2023, <https://jam-news.net/dismissal-of-ruben-wardanyan/>

35 “Mirzoyan-Lavrov meeting in Moscow,” *Jam News*, March 21, 2023, <https://jam-news.net/meeting-of-lavrov-and-mirzoya-in-moscow/>

36 “Secretary Blinken's Call with Azerbaijani President Aliyev,” *US Department of State*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-azerbaijani-president-aliyev-11/> ; “Secretary Blinken's Call with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan,” *US Department of State*, March 20, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-armenian-prime-minister-pashinyan-12/>

37 “Azerbaycan-Ermenistan sınırlarında çatışma: 3 Azeri asker şehit,” *NTV*, 11 Nisan 2023, [https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/azerbaycan-ermenistan-sinirinda-catisma-3-azeri-asker-sehit,Gz\\_oG6jTI0uP2HeEQz34AQ](https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/azerbaycan-ermenistan-sinirinda-catisma-3-azeri-asker-sehit,Gz_oG6jTI0uP2HeEQz34AQ)

unilaterally set up a checkpoint at the entrance to the Lachin Road.<sup>38</sup> In response, the Prime Minister of Armenia once again called for the immediate deployment of an international monitoring mission in the region. The US, the EU, France, and Russia condemned Azerbaijan's unilateral action.

In his address to the Parliament on 18 April, Prime Minister Pashinyan expressed more explicitly his view on Karabakh, which he had been indirectly conveying for some time, and officially declared that Armenia unconditionally recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and is ready to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan with this understanding. Pashinyan stated that Azerbaijan must likewise recognize Armenia's territorial integrity of 29,800 square kilometers within the Soviet Union-era borders<sup>39</sup> (Armenia claims that 75 square kilometers of its territory remained on the Azerbaijani side after the 1990s and that 150 square kilometers were occupied in 2021 and 2022, while Azerbaijan claims that many villages on the border and across the border are under Armenian occupation). In response to the criticism and reactions from the opposition that Karabakh is being surrendered, Pashinyan claimed that the former administration had already adopted this understanding by approving the Madrid Principles, which led to further criticism and accusations. In a statement to the press on 20 April, Catholicos Karekin II stated "I can't imagine that Artsakh [the so-called Armenian state in Karabakh] can be part of Azerbaijan". Stating that the issue is a source of great concern for the people of Armenia, the Catholicos did not refrain from provocation, stating that the freedom and independence of the "people of Artsakh" must be protected at all costs.

On 30 April, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan announced that the parties would meet in Washington for trilateral talks with the US Secretary of State Blinken. The talks, which were announced to last four days, started on 1 May. On the first day, Blinken met separately with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts, followed by a trilateral meeting. In the upcoming days, the Armenian and Azerbaijani Ministers held bilateral talks, followed by trilateral talks once again. Blinken emphasized that the talks were positive and that he was hopeful regarding the outcome. The US Department of State Spokesperson echoed this optimism. Following the end of the meeting, Blinken also announced in a written press release that significant progress had been made in the talks.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, in an

38 "Azerbaijan sets up checkpoints on the Lachin corridor," *Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.eiu.com/n/azerbaijan-sets-up-checkpoints-on-the-lachin-corridor/>

39 "Armenia ready to recognize Azerbaijan's 86,600 km2 territorial integrity which includes Nagorno Karabakh – Pashinyan," *Armenpress*, May 22, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1111461.html>

40 "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at the Bilateral Peace Negotiation Closing Session with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov," *US Department of State*, May 4, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-bilateral-peace-negotiation-closing-session-with-armenian-foreign-minister-ararat-mirzoyan-and-azerbaijani-foreign-minister-jeyhun-bayramov/>

interview on 5 May, while in Czechia, Pashinyan expressed that the main disagreements with Azerbaijan were not only concerning Karabakh, but also over borders and security guarantees, and therefore the progress made in Washington was “minimal”.<sup>41</sup>

The talks in Washington have preceded the trilateral meeting that was envisaged to be held in Moscow, which has provoked a reaction from Russia. The Spokesperson of the Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the US and France were not aiming for honest mediation and that their real intentions were political and aimed at undermining Russia’s efforts. On 2 May, the Russian Presidential spokesperson reiterated this viewpoint, stating that an agreement between the two countries is only possible with the implementation of the 2020 cease-fire agreement brokered by Russia.<sup>42</sup>

While Moscow was expected to be the next meeting venue, it was announced on 8 May that the European (Union) Council President Charles Michel had invited the leaders of the two countries to Brussels on 14 May. On 10 May, the Armenia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan would also meet in Moscow on 19 May, hosted by Russia. This was confirmed by the Spokesperson of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 17 May. At the press conference, the Spokesperson stated that the ministers would hold bilateral and trilateral talks. A statement from the US Department of State conveyed that US Secretary of State Blinken met with Michel on 11 May and they discussed support for the parties at the 14 May meeting.

On 12 May, Armenia’s Security Council Secretary Grigoryan, known as the shadow negotiator, traveled to Brussels to establish contacts with his Azerbaijani counterpart Hikmet Hajiyev to make preparations and preliminary work for the Brussels tripartite summit.

The 14 May Brussels trilateral summit produced concrete decisions on the subject. The parties confirmed unequivocally that they recognize each other’s territorial integrity of 29,800 and 86,600 square kilometers within the borders of the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration. The territory of Azerbaijan as such includes Karabakh, and thus, for the first time, Armenia recognized Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory without specifically mentioning it by name. However,

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41 “Azerbaijani MFA comments on Pashinyan’s claims voiced in Czechia,” *APA.az*, May 4, 2023, <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/azerbaijani-mfa-comments-on-pashinyans-claims-voiced-in-czechia-402526>

42 “Peskov comments on Armenian-Azerbaijani talks in the US,” *Mediamax*, May 2, 2023, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/51161/>

the other part of the problem, which is the rights and privileges of the Armenian people there, is not addressed.<sup>43</sup>

The President of the European Council made the following statement at the end of the meetings:

“It was a pleasure to host President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan today for a fifth meeting in Brussels. Our exchanges were frank, open and result-oriented. They focused on progress on the path towards Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization. The leaders shared a common willingness for a South Caucasus at peace. I commend their respective efforts. Together, we reviewed all issues on our agenda.

Following the recent positive talks held in the United States on the peace treaty, the momentum should be maintained to take decisive steps towards the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

On border issues, we reviewed progress and the next steps regarding the delimitation of the border. In this context, the leaders agreed on the resumption of the bilateral meetings on border issues. The leaders confirmed their unequivocal commitment to the 1991 Almaty Declaration and the respective territorial integrity of Armenia (29,800 km<sup>2</sup>) and Azerbaijan (86,600 km<sup>2</sup>). The ultimate delimitation of the border will be agreed through negotiations.

On connectivity, the sides made clear progress in their discussions aimed at unblocking transport and economic links in the region. Positions on this topic have now come very close to each other in particular on the reopening of the railway connections to and via Nakhchivan. Their respective teams have been tasked to finalize an in principle agreement on the modalities for the opening of the railway connections and the necessary construction works together with a concrete timetable. They also agreed to draw upon the support of the World Customs Organization in supporting this work.

On humanitarian issues, there has been an understanding that further detainees would be released in the coming weeks. I also stressed the need to safeguard the mutual understanding that soldiers who have

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43 “Press remarks by President Charles Michel following the trilateral meeting with President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia,” *European (Union) Council*, May 14, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/14/press-remarks-by-president-charles-michel-following-the-trilateral-meeting-with-president-aliyev-of-azerbaijan-and-prime-minister-pashinyan-of-armenia/>

simply got lost and crossed to the other side would continue to be released through a speedy procedure. We also discussed the importance of stepping up work on addressing the fate of missing persons and on demining.

We continued our exchanges on the issue of the rights and security of Armenians living in the former Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. I encouraged Azerbaijan to engage in developing a positive agenda with the aim of guaranteeing the rights and security of this population, in close cooperation with the international community. I also raised the need for a transparent and constructive dialogue between Baku and this population.

I believe that it is important to refrain from hostile rhetoric, engage in good faith and show leadership to reach mutually-acceptable solutions.

The EU has no hidden agenda. Our sole aim is to help Armenia and Azerbaijan reach a comprehensive and fair peace. We are ready to contribute to their joint efforts. We have agreed to hold the Brussels meetings as often as necessary. Leaders will meet again in Brussels in July. And as was already announced publicly, we will also meet again in the very near future together with President Macron of France and Chancellor Scholz of Germany on the margins of the 2nd European Political Community Summit in Chişinău. I also intend to invite the leaders for another such meeting in the margins of the third EPC summit in Granada in October.”

The President of the European Council also outlined a roadmap for the continuation of the talks. Accordingly, the next meeting of the two leaders would be a trilateral meeting on 1 June in Chisinau on the occasion of the second meeting of the European Political Community, followed by a quintet meeting to include the leaders of France and Germany. Their following meeting is envisaged to take place at the meeting of the European Political Community in Granada in October. Armenia has accepted these proposals, while Azerbaijan has stated that it has not made a decision concerning the quintet format.

Russia has followed these developments with concern and has repeatedly expressed its grievance and discontent on various occasions. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, in a speech on a Russian TV channel on 17 May, accused the US and its Western allies of putting pressure on Armenia in order to “expel Russia from Armenia” and claimed that Russia had information that they were telling Armenia “come to us, drive the Russians out of your territory, and the border guards too, remove the Russian military base, the

Americans will help ensure the security of Armenia” and that the Western policy was clearly provocative.<sup>44</sup>

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in Moscow on 19 May at the invitation of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov. Minister Lavrov first met with both ministers separately, then in a trilateral meeting, followed by a bilateral meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers. Lavrov made the following statement to the press after the trilateral meeting<sup>45</sup>:

“Work on the peace treaty is undoubtedly fundamental. But our partners confirmed today that without solving the issues of delimitation, unblocking transport and economic links and an overall improvement of the security situation in both Karabakh and on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border it’s very hard to make progress on concrete aspects of the peace treaty. We discussed all this together. Regarding the peace treaty, I think that on a number of articles which we discussed today we managed to bring the two sides’ understandings closer to a common vision. We hope that a positive result will be achieved as a result. The parties are very, very close to a final agreement.”

Lavrov announced that a Russian-Armenian-Azerbaijani task force would meet next week, after a long break, to discuss practical solutions for transport links. Lavrov also announced that a separate Armenian-Azerbaijani working group on border delimitation and demarcation would soon begin its work with Russia’s support.

A final development announced from Moscow following the Ministers of Foreign Affairs’ trilateral meeting was that, at the invitation of President of Russia Vladimir Putin, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to hold a trilateral summit in Moscow on 25 May.

At a news conference in Yerevan on 22 May, Prime Minister Pashinyan confirmed in clear words that he has agreed Azerbaijan’s sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh through a peace treaty currently discussed between the two countries.<sup>46</sup> As to be expected, the opposition was scathingly against it. Karabakh Armenians more so, claiming that it grossly violates the provisions

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44 “Sergey Lavrov: US ‘advises’ Armenia to drive away Russian military base, border guards,” *News.am*, May 17, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/760347.html>

45 “Sergey Lavrov on what was achieved at the trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia,” *Turan.az*, May 19, 2023, [https://www.turan.az/cache/2023/politics\\_news/free/news-2023-5-free-politics\\_news-en-4705.htm](https://www.turan.az/cache/2023/politics_news/free/news-2023-5-free-politics_news-en-4705.htm)

46 “Armenia hopes talks with Azerbaijan will swiftly lead to peace treaty,” *Armenpress*, May 22, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1111443/>

of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of Armenia. The common understanding was that such a deal would be devoid of legal basis. The radical ARF leader said the party would do everything to scuttle planned “surrender” of not only Karabakh but also Armenia.

With the Russian President as host, the trilateral summit was held in Moscow on 25 May. President Putin said outstanding differences between Baku and Yerevan are “purely technical” and “surmountable”. He said the Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani vice-premiers should iron them out. Putin also held bilateral meetings with the two leaders.<sup>47</sup>

On 26 May, the US Special Envoy Louis Bono for Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations again visited Armenia, following his talks in Azerbaijan.<sup>48</sup> The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that they reviewed the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process with Armenian Minister Mirzoyan.

With the Karabakh Armenian representatives having responded negatively to the invitation for talks by Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani President Aliyev warned on 28 May the illegal administration in Karabakh that he could offer any kind of amnesty only when the “parliament” is dissolved, the “president” surrendered, and all “ministers”, “deputies” and others left their posts.<sup>49</sup> The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted, alleging that Aliyev not only threatened the Karabakh Armenians with “ethnic cleansing” but was also preparing the ground for another aggressive action.<sup>50</sup> The Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the criticism, stressing that Baku intends to take all necessary steps to reintegrate local Armenian residents. The US Department of State spokesman welcomed on 30 May Aliyev’s remarks on consideration of amnesty. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed dismay at the US praise of Aliyev’s remarks. The Karabakh illegal authorities likewise expressed deep disappointment and bewilderment.

The European (Union) Council President hosted another Aliyev-Pashinyan meeting in Chisinau on 1 June, attended also by the President of France and Chancellor of Germany in the margins of the second meeting of the European Political Community. The European Council President said after the meeting

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47 “Putin Hosts Fresh Talks Between Pashinian, Aliyev,” *Azatutyun*, May 26, 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32428164.html>

48 “US Envoy Again Visits Armenia, Azerbaijan,” *Mirror Spectator*, June 1, 2023, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2023/06/01/us-envoy-again-visits-armenia-azerbaijan/>

49 “Azerbaijani president gives ultimatum to Karabakh authorities,” *Eurasianet*, May 30, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijani-president-gives-ultimatum-to-karabakh-authorities>

50 “EU Urges Dialogue Between Azerbaijan, Karabakh Armenians,” *Azatutyun*, May 30, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32435480.html>

that it had been a good preparation for the next meeting to take place in Brussels on 21 July.<sup>51</sup>

The trilateral meeting of ministers of foreign affairs planned to be held in Washington on 12 June was postponed on short notice.<sup>52</sup> According to the spokesperson of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was postponed at the request of the Azerbaijani side. Neither the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor the press elaborated on this issue. US Department of State Spokesperson said it was purely due to scheduling issues and that they hope to reschedule talks “as soon as we can”.

The Russian President met with the Armenian President on 9 June in Sochi for the second time in two weeks to discuss bilateral issues and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson again slammed the EU for opening three more EU monitoring “hubs” in Armenia in written comments released on 16 June.<sup>54</sup> She claimed that the main purpose of the EU mission was to drive Moscow out of the region. The EU mission countered that it always planned to operate from six hubs with maximum 103 international staff.

### 3. Armenia’s Foreign Relations

The development that marked the period was Armenia’s steps to politically distance itself from Russia and establish closer ties with the West, particularly the United States. It proceeded through taking advantage of Russia’s weakness revealed by the war in Ukraine and its isolation from the West, and encouraged by the West’s attempts to further squeeze Russia in the South Caucasus. It is not surprising for those who are familiar with Armenia’s history to observe that throughout history, Armenia has maintained the tradition of closely assessing the changing balances, abandoning the power to which it has hitherto paid allegiance, and establishing ties in favor of the stronger and rising power.

51 “EU Hosts Another Aliyev-Pashinyan Meeting,” *Mirror Spectator*, June 8, 2023, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2023/06/08/eu-hosts-another-aliyev-pashinyan-meeting/>

52 “Azerbaijan postpones planned talks with Armenia in Washington D.C.,” *Armenpress*, June 8, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1112814/>

53 “Putin, Pashinian Meet Again,” *Azatoryun*, June 9, 2023, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/32452518.html>

54 “Russia Again Slams EU Monitoring Mission In Armenia,” *Azatoryun*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.azatoryun.am/a/32460878.html>

Armenia's open opposition to Russia and its allies in the CSTO is based on the allegation that Russia and its allies are disregarding its security and that they have left Armenia alone against Azerbaijan. Prime Minister Pashinyan repeated this claim once again on 3 January. He went even further and declared that Russia could pose a security threat to Armenia. On 10 January, he also accused Russia of wanting to include Armenia in the Russia-Belarus alliance.

Armenia's failure to find the support it expected from the Russian Peacekeeping Force was brought to the agenda with calls for the deployment of an international force. This policy took a concrete form by the invitation of an EU observer mission, not surprisingly drawing the ire of Russia. In an interview with a Russian press agency on 2 February, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov summarized that Azerbaijan had retrieved its territories that had been under Armenian occupation for years, that Russia had taken action for the deployment of CSTO forces on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border following the conflict that broke out in September 2022, that Armenia first demanded that the organization unconditionally condemn Azerbaijan's aggression, but that the members of the organization opposed this, and therefore the organization could not deploy troops. The possibility of Armenia's exit from the CSTO by giving up its highest quota in the Organization, the post of Deputy Secretary General, was widely voiced during the period. Armenia's Security Council Secretary Grigoryan accused Russia of not even delivering paid-for weapons and cautioned that the security conjuncture in the world was changing. The last statement on the issue was made by Armenia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakan Safaryan on 17 May, who stated that the possibility of Armenia's exit from the CSTO was not on the agenda at the moment.<sup>55</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan attended the regular meeting of CSTO ministers of foreign affairs held in Minsk on 20 June, confirming continuing interest of Armenia in the organization.

France continued its biased stance, once again becoming the major supporter of Armenia during this period. On 12 January, the Speaker of the French Parliament paid a two-day official visit together with a delegation. Emphasizing the France-Armenia friendship and solidarity on every occasion, the Speaker of the Parliament, in response to a journalist's question, stated however that France does not recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh as per international law.

On 12 January, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili paid a working visit to Armenia. The Armenia-Georgia Commission for Economic

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55 "Armenia to leave CSTO if Yerevan deems it 'non-functional organization'— prime minister," *TASS*, May 22, 2023, <https://tass.com/world/1621147>

Cooperation Meeting was chaired by the two Prime Ministers. During his visit, the Georgian Prime Minister reiterated his readiness to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan to ensure peace and stability in the region. Afterwards, at the Davos Economic Forum on 19 January, Garibashvili stated that Georgia is indeed a neutral and impartial mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The President of Azerbaijan Aliyev, who also attended the same meeting, stated that a trilateral meeting of the three regional countries would contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Prime Minister Pashinyan, on the other hand, did not attend Davos despite being invited. When Aliyev accused Pashinyan of running away from peace talks, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan responded afterwards that Armenia was closely following the calls of the international community and was ready to engage in more substantial negotiations.<sup>56</sup> This approach was another indication that Armenia's goal was not to sit at the peace table for a solution with the countries of the region that know the problems and the issue from the inside, but to rely on big powers to put pressure in its favor.

Armenian President Khachaturian visited Estonia on 16 March.<sup>57</sup> The motive was to keep the ties warm with the Baltic states who have been making efforts to assume a role in the Armenian cause. On 23 May, he went to Qatar to attend the Qatar Economic Forum.

Relations with Iran maintained their closeness and mutual solidarity during this period. On 18 January, Yerevan and Tehran were declared sister cities.<sup>58</sup> As part of "regular political consultations", Iran's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs held talks with his counterpart, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other officials in Yerevan on 22 March. He reiterated Iran's opposition to the deployment of foreign forces in the region. On 10 April, the Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia met with the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran in Tehran.

On 18 January, political consultations between the Armenian and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) Ministers of Foreign Affairs were held in Yerevan. On this occasion, the parties emphasized the importance of the trilateral cooperation between Armenia-GCASC-Greece. At the end of March, the Ministries of Defense of Armenia and Greece signed

56 For more information: Murad Abiyev, "Georgian Gambit" By Azerbaijan In Davos," *Caliber.az*, January 23, 2023, [https://caliber.az/en/post/139036/?fbclid=IwAR2VzJhYOplddjF0Lkhf5Xj0R2fZmLz\\_XLHDV6dHvPAg9Sbnco0uPkoCJ4](https://caliber.az/en/post/139036/?fbclid=IwAR2VzJhYOplddjF0Lkhf5Xj0R2fZmLz_XLHDV6dHvPAg9Sbnco0uPkoCJ4)

57 "Vahagn Khachaturyan and the Prime Minister of Estonia discussed issues of security and regional importance," *Radar Armenia*, January 16, 2023, <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2547727481/>

58 "Tehran, Yerevan Become Sister Cities," *Azattyun*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.azattyun.am/a/32229418.html>

a military cooperation program for 2023. 15 of the 21 activities in the program are envisaged to be carried out in Greece and six in Armenia.

On 23 January, during a two-day visit to Brussels, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan met with NATO Secretary General and addressed the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European (Union) Parliament. Mirzoyan also met with the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, and on 25 January, the EU announced that it had decided to send a 100-member border observer mission to Armenia, despite the objections of Russia and Azerbaijan. On 26 January, the first high-level EU-Armenia Political and Security Dialogue was held in Yerevan. It was stated that this meeting, which symbolizes the desire and intention to enhance cooperation between Armenia and the EU, would be held annually.

Ruben Rubinyan, Deputy Speaker of the Armenian Parliament, representative of the normalization process with Türkiye and head of the Armenian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, met with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on 26 January and asked her to put pressure on Azerbaijan to open the Lachin Road. On 16 February in Yerevan, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe presented the Council's "Action Plan" for Armenia, which was admitted to membership in 2000 together with Georgia and Azerbaijan.<sup>59</sup>

As part of his visits to the region, the President of Egypt paid an official visit to Armenia on 29 January and signed several agreements and documents of understanding with the Armenian President, who described the visit as a historic event. On 7-9 March, Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan traveled to Cairo to attend the Council of the Arab League's 159th Ministerial Meeting and delivered a speech at the meeting. Mirzoyan stated that Azerbaijan was providing misleading information on relations with Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh on international platforms, especially in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement, where Armenia was not represented, and that they expected that these initiatives, which also conjured the sensitive issue of Islamic solidarity, would not draw friendly Arab countries into the sphere of religious differences and would be rejected.<sup>60</sup>

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59 "New Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia launched in Yerevan," *Council of Europe*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/new-council-of-europe-action-plan-for-armenia-launched-in-yerevan>

60 "Sisi Arrives in Armenia in First Ever Visit by an Egyptian President," *Egyptian Streets*, January 29, 2023, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2023/01/29/sisi-arrives-in-armenia-in-first-ever-visit-by-an-egyptian-president/>

On 2-3 February, Prime Minister Pashinyan held a bilateral meeting with his Russian counterpart in Kazakhstan, where he attended the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council meeting in Almaty.<sup>61</sup>

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan paid a working visit to Germany on 6-7 February and held a joint press conference following his meeting with the German Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Prime Minister Pashinyan traveled to Germany on 16 February to attend the Munich Security Conference. He took part in the session of the conference titled “Moving mountains? Building security in the South Caucasus”, moderated by the OSCE Secretary General, attended by the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Georgia. Contrary to expectations, a bilateral Pashinyan-Aliyev meeting did not take place in Munich. Nonetheless, the parties held a trilateral meeting on 18 February with the attendance of the US Secretary of State. Following the trilateral meeting, the parties did not announce any concrete agreement on any issue. The European (Union) Council President also met separately with both leaders on the margins of the conference. Another interesting figure Pashinyan met with in Munich was Bob Menendez, Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, who is recognized in the US Senate with his extremely Armenian biased stance.<sup>62</sup>

On 22 February, Luxembourg’s Minister of Foreign Affairs paid an official visit to Armenia and expressed support for Armenia. On 9 March, in response to a question in Parliament regarding his meeting with the President of Azerbaijan in Davos, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs said that he expressed concern about the closure of the Lachin Corridor and asked Azerbaijan to withdraw to the borders before the conflict of 12 September 2022.

Armenia abstained in the UN General Assembly vote on the Russia-Ukraine war on 24 February.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan traveled to Syria on 23 February meet his Syrian counterpart and the President of Syria to express condolences following the earthquakes on 6 February.

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61 “Nikol Pashinyan and Mikhail Mishustin meet in Almaty,” *Prime Ministry of Armenia*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2023/02/02/Nikol-Pashinyan-Mikhail-Mishustin/>

62 “Pashinyan and Menendez discussed the developments taking place in the South Caucasus,” *Radar.am*, February 18, 2023, <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2553432870/>

Prime Minister Pashinyan returned to Germany on 2-3 March for a working visit, meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Berlin. In a joint press conference, Chancellor Scholz called for respecting the right to self-determination of the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh, a rhetoric that is no longer voiced even by the Armenian leadership.<sup>63</sup> Scholz's more "royalist than the king" rhetoric led to speculations as to whether Germany was trying to replace France in Armenia. Germany's active involvement in the EU observer mission, assuming the chairmanship of the mission, and now having a say on the ground added another dimension to the speculations.

Armenia's Chief of General Staff and a high-level delegation met with their Indian counterparts in New Delhi on 6 March and discussed developing military ties between the two countries. In the political and economic sphere, Armenia is seeking to promote a North-South Transportation Project from Mumbai in India to Bandar Abbas in Iran and through Armenia.<sup>64</sup>

Louis Bono, the newly appointed US Envoy to the South Caucasus, arrived in Yerevan on 7 March as part of his visit to the region and held his first meetings.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan traveled to Moscow on 20 March at the invitation of his Russian counterpart. The message conveyed at the joint press conference held after the head-to-head and delegation talks was that the talks were comprehensive and that the relations were progressing well and continued along traditional lines. However, Mirzoyan's criticism of the Lachin Corridor and his insistence on sending an international mission to Karabakh indicated that the differences could not be resolved. A development that further strained relations emerged in the last week of March. Immediately after the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrant for the President of Russia Putin, the Armenian Constitutional Court's attempt to initiate a parliamentary process for Armenia to become a party to the ICC provoked an intense response from Russia. On 27 March, Russia officially warned Armenia that such a step would have extremely negative consequences for the Russia-Armenia relations. Thereafter, there was no further development on the issue in Armenia.

In April, Armenia continued to test Russia's composure. In an announcement made by the US Department of Defense, Armenia, along with non-NATO

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63 "Olaf Scholz Backs Karabakh's Right to Self-Determination," *Hetq*, March 3, 2023, <https://hetq.am/en/article/153738>

64 "Armenia to elaborate new Europe-India-Iran transport corridor," *Mehr News Agency*, May 8, 2023, <https://en.mehrnws.com/news/200471/Armenia-to-elaborate-new-Europe-India-Iran-transport-corridor>

members Georgia, Moldova, and Kosovo, was included among the 26 countries that will would in the US-led NATO military maneuvers to “deter threats to peace in Europe and defend the continent against aggression”.<sup>65</sup> On 6 April, the US Deputy Department of Defense Spokesperson announced at a briefing that Armenia would also participate in the exercise, which would start on 22 April and take place on the soil of 10 European countries, with 9,000 troops from the US and 17,000 from other countries. After remaining silent for a while, Armenian military officials announced on 7 April that Armenia would not participate in the US-led exercise. During this period of uncertainty, on 5-7 April, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the US European Command, accompanied by a delegation, held talks in Armenia on military training opportunities and joint exercises. On 12 April, a spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Armenia had been officially asked to clarify its participation in NATO’s “anti-Russian” military maneuvers.<sup>66</sup>

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan paid a working visit to Romania on 3-4 April. In the North-South corridor project, which Armenia has been promoting, Romania is the designated connection point with Georgia in the Black Sea.<sup>67</sup>

A delegation headed by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Global Markets of the US Department of Commerce visited Yerevan for the Economic and Energy working group meetings as part of the Armenia-US Strategic Dialogue. It was reported in the press that the US delegation pressed Armenia to comply with the sanctions against Russia.<sup>68</sup>

On 14 April, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan held a bilateral meeting with his Russian counterpart in Samarkand, where he was attending a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>69</sup>

Armenia, Iran, and India held their first meeting as a trilateral group in Yerevan on 21 April. The meeting focused on communication and economic

65 “Armenia to participate in US-led Defender 23 military exercises,” *News.am*, April 6, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/753546.html>

66 “Moscow requests clarification on Armenia’s participation in NATO drills,” *Mediamax*, April 13, 2023, <https://mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/50944/>

67 “Ararat Mirzoyan will be in Romania on a working visit,” *Radar Armenia*, 3 Nisan 2023, <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2560923819>

68 “Ambassador Kvien’s Remarks at American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia General Meeting,” *US Embassy in Armenia*, May 3, 2023, <https://am.usembassy.gov/american-chamber-of-commerce-2/>

69 “Rusya Dışişleri Bakanı Lavrov, Ermeni mevkidaşı Mirzoyan ile Semerkant’ta görüştü,” *Son Dakika*, 14 Nisan 2023, <https://www.sondakika.com/haber/haber-rusya-disisleri-bakani-lavrov-ermeni-mevkidasi-15767263/>

issues. Sources in India compared this initiative to the trilateral grouping of Pakistan, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan.<sup>70</sup>

Following his visit to Azerbaijan, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Armenia on 27 April and restated France's strong support for Armenia.<sup>71</sup>

Prime Minister Pashinyan travelled to Czechia on 4 May for a two-day official visit. On the same day, the sixth meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation of the two countries was held in Prague. Pashinyan gave an interview to a Czech TV channel, where he said "We are not Russia's ally in the war with Ukraine and our feeling from that war is anxiety because it directly influences all our relationships". The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed on 2 June that those remarks were noted.

On 9 May, Pashinyan travelled to Moscow to attend the Victory Day celebrations and held a meeting with Russian President Putin.<sup>72</sup> In a TV address on 15 May, the Russian President's Spokesperson described the two countries' ties as an "advanced partnership" and a "special relationship that has deep historical roots" and emphasized that the relationship has a bright future. On 25 May, Pashinyan travelled to Moscow to take part in the 30th session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and again held a meeting with President Putin. On 7 June, Pashinyan went yet again to Russia ostensibly to attend the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council held in Sochi, where he had another meeting with Putin. Neither the Russian Presidency nor the Armenian government's press office reported any details of their conversation.

Pashinyan travelled to Iceland to attend the European (Union) Council summit on 16-17 May. In his speech there, he reaffirmed the Brussels agreement.

Slovenia's National Assembly President paid an official visit to Armenia on 30 May.

After Iran, Russia too decided to open a consulate in Syunik (Zangazur) province's Kapan city, which is situated in the Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran border triangle. A statement issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that the decision was taken during the 25 May meeting between the

70 "İran, Hindistan ve Ermenistan Arasında 3'lü İstişare," *Tesnim Haber Ajansı*, 21 Nisan 2023, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/tr/news/2023/04/21/2883376/iran-hindistan-ve-ermenistan-aras%C4%B1nda-3-l%C3%BC-isti%C5%9Fare>

71 "French FM visits Armenia in difficult period of time – Mirzoyan," *Armenpress*, April 28, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1109835.html>

72 "PM Pashinyan attends Victory Day Parade in Moscow," *Armenpress*, May 9, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1110514.html>

leaders of the two countries. This development was confirmed also by the Armenian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs on 19 June.<sup>73</sup> It was indicated that there are around a thousand Russian citizens in the region and that almost all of them are soldiers on border guard duty.

#### 4. Relations with Türkiye

The normalization process that started between the two countries has not yet produced concrete results at the pace and on the issues that Armenia prioritized. The process continued to progress in a step-by-step manner and in concordance and alignment with the regional progress. The new year began with a concrete step in the normalization process, with the announcement that Türkiye and Armenia would allow direct air transportation of cargo. The next step would be Türkiye's opening of land border crossings to third country citizens. In a statement made on 10 January, Prime Minister Pashinyan described the permission for freight shipment as a commendable step and said that this was of great importance not only in terms of the Armenia-Türkiye relations but also in the context of recent developments in the international supply chain, that Armenia attaches importance to regional transportation and that it is ready to provide a railway connection from Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan.<sup>74</sup>

The hope that Armenia's humanitarian response to the earthquake disaster of 6 February in Türkiye during the period would lead to the establishment of a mutual understanding of good neighborliness was soon replaced by pessimism due to the following negative rhetoric and vengeful acts coming from the Armenian side.

On 20 January, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan stated that he had received an invitation to the Antalya Diplomatic Forum, scheduled for March, and that he would gladly attend this year, as he did last year. He added that no date had yet been set for the next meeting of special envoys, but the visit to Antalya was very important for the continuation of this process and for achieving substantial results. Unfortunately, the Antalya Forum was postponed due to the earthquake disaster in February.

Following the earthquake disaster, Prime Minister Pashinyan announced Armenia's readiness to help, and following a telephone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, announced his decision to send a

73 "Russia wants to open consulate-general in Kapan," *Armenpress*, June 19, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1113578/>

74 Ani Mejlumyan, "Armenia begins work to restore railroad ties with Azerbaijan," *Eurasianet*, January 19, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-begins-work-to-restore-railroad-ties-with-azerbaijan>

27-member rescue team and relief supplies. Türkiye opened the closed border crossing to allow the aid vehicles to pass through.<sup>75</sup> Armenia's decision to provide humanitarian aid to Türkiye was criticized by the domestic opposition and radical factions in the Diaspora, who stated that Armenia's goodwill gestures would not change Türkiye's policy towards Armenia. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan arrived in Ankara on 15 February to express condolences, accompanied by a Deputy Minister and the special envoy for the normalization process, met with his Turkish counterpart, held a joint press conference and then went to Adıyaman to observe the work of the Armenian rescue team on site. Mirzoyan had the following to say about his meeting with Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.<sup>76</sup>

“Certainly, our meeting today is determined by the disaster that has claimed many lives, however, being in Türkiye at this difficult moment, I would like to once again reiterate the readiness and willingness of the Republic of Armenia to build peace in the region and, particularly, to fully normalise relations with Türkiye, establish diplomatic relations and fully open the border between Armenia and Türkiye. I would like to inform, as Minister Çavuşoğlu noted a little while ago, that today we have discussed some details on this process, and we have an agreement to jointly repair the Ani bridge, as well as take care of the relevant infrastructure ahead of the full opening of the border.”

Turkish Minister Çavuşoğlu's statement published in the Armenian media is as follows:

“The process of normalizing relations continues in South Caucasus. We believe that the cooperation that happened during these days will contribute to this process. The normalization processes of Armenia with Turkey and Azerbaijan, I believe, will contribute to establishing stability and welfare in our region. With sincere steps our three countries can bring lasting stability to the Caucasian region.”

Çavuşoğlu also emphasized the importance of repairing the Ani Bridge located on the historic Silk Road on the border between the two countries.

Prime Minister Pashinyan, in his address to the Council of Ministers on 16 February, stated that “Foreign Minister Mirzoyan's visit to Turkey is very

75 “İnsani yardım için Türkiye-Ermenistan kara sınırı 35 yıl sonra açıldı,” *Sözcü*, 11 Şubat 2023, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2023/gundem/son-dakika-insani-yardim-icin-turkiye-ermenistan-kara-siniri-35-yil-sonra-acildi-7588680/>

76 “Mirzoyan Ankara'da: 'Bu Acı Bize Yabancı Değil',” *VOA Türkçe*, 15 Şubat 2023, <https://www.voaturkce.com/a/mirzoyan-ankarada-bu-aci-bize-yabanci-degil/6963797.html> ; “Press Statement of the Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan following the meeting with Foreign Minister of Türkiye Mevlüt Cavusoglu,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia*, February 15, 2023, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2023/02/15/fms\\_armenia\\_turkiye/11865](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/2023/02/15/fms_armenia_turkiye/11865)

important and meaningful” and gave the floor to the Minister to provide information. Mirzoyan said the following:<sup>77</sup>

“I have to state that the Turkish side, on the level of the central, local authorities and the population appreciated the service of our rescuers and the provision of humanitarian aid. [...] I also spoke to our rescuers, they told me how the population treated them. I think this was an important humanitarian step. Certainly we discussed some issues concerning the bilateral relations, concrete agreements were reached, as my Turkish counterpart said in his statement for the press, I can also state that there is a decision to speed up this process of dialogue and the processes taking place with the goal of ultimately opening the borders. It was announced that we will carry out joint work in direction of restoring the Ani Bridge. Essentially, we will try to complete by the beginning of the tourism season the process of opening the land border for citizens of third countries and diplomatic passport holders of our two countries.”

Prime Minister Pashinyan re-emphasized that Armenia’s action had a humanitarian purpose first and foremost and expressed that he found the criticism of providing aid to Türkiye unacceptable.

While Turkey and Armenia were taking steps towards normalizing their relations, statements from the West that would undermine this process continued during the period. The European (Union) Parliament included a radical Armenian narrative in a report published on 15 March. The response of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to this rhetoric is as follows:<sup>78</sup>

“The European Parliament’s regular report, titled “EU-Armenia Relations”, dated 15 March 2023 once again includes unfounded allegations regarding Türkiye and 1915 events.

These remarks which disregard historical facts and international legal norms are null and void.

We call on the European Parliament to act in conformity with political ethics and international law, instead of reiterating such one-sided and baseless claims.”

77 “PM Pashinyan describes Foreign Minister’s Turkey visit as ‘very important and meaningful,’” *Armenpress*, February 16, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1104282.html>

78 “QA-5, 17 March 2023, Statement of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Tanju Bilgiç, in Response to a Question Regarding the European Parliament Report on ‘EU-Armenia Relations’,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye*, March 17, 2023, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc\\_-5\\_-avrupa-parlamentosu-nun-ab-ermenistan-iliskileri-baslikli-raporu-hk-sc.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-5_-avrupa-parlamentosu-nun-ab-ermenistan-iliskileri-baslikli-raporu-hk-sc.en.mfa)

Türkiye-Armenia football national teams played the first leg of the 2024 European Cup Group D match in Yerevan on 25 March. In accordance with a UEFA decision, Turkish spectators were not allowed to attend the match. Indeed, the events that took place in the stadium showed how even a sporting event can be radicalized. Türkiye won the match 2-1.<sup>79</sup> The burning of the Azerbaijani flag at the opening ceremony of the European Weightlifting Championships in Yerevan on 17 April, in public view inside the indoor sports hall was another indicator how sporting events are politicized and radicalized.

During his visit to Türkiye, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov said in Ankara on 7 April: “We welcome the normalization of relations between Armenia and Türkiye that started with our support. We welcome the efforts to unblock transport links and communications”.<sup>80</sup>

On 17 April, the government of Armenia announced the results of the 2022 action plan, which also included the steps taken within the scope of the normalization process with Türkiye. On this occasion, Prime Minister Pashinyan stated the following:<sup>81</sup>

“There is a big opportunity to establish normal relations between our countries. And this opportunity increased when we decided to respond, with the logic based on humane, good-neighborly values to the devastating earthquake that hit Turkey in the beginning of this year. And the government and public of Turkey perceived and accepted our actions as such. And the dozens of Armenian flags flying in front of the Turkish foreign ministry during Foreign Minister Mirzoyan’s Ankara visit weren’t simply a protocol attribute [...]. The flags of Armenia and Turkey were hoisted on the ruins of our relations and the devastating earthquake. [...]”

24 April, which has become a symbolic date in the Armenian claims and rhetoric, was highlighted and reiterated also this year with the supporting statement of US President Joe Biden, with no need for further comments.

The statement made by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this issue is as follows:<sup>82</sup>

79 “Euro 2024 elemeleri: Türkiye ilk maçta, Ermenistan deplasmanında 1-2 kazandı,” *BBC Türkçe*, 26 Mart 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/cd12191w61ko>

80 “Çavuşoğlu ve Lavrov’dan Ankara’da ortak basın toplantısı: “Suriye ile normalleşme sürecinin şeffaf bir şekilde devam etmesini bekliyoruz,” *T24*, 7 Nisan 2023, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/rusya-disisleri-bakani-lavrov-ankara-da-cavusoglu-ile-heyetlerarasi-gorusme-gerceklesti.1102966> ; “Russia hopes no one will impede settlement in South Caucasus — Lavrov,” *TASS*, April 7, 2023, <https://tass.com/politics/1601183>

81 “Armenian Prime Minister speaks about ‘big opportunity’ to normalize relations with Turkey,” *Armenpress*, April 18, 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1108950.html>

82 “No: 111, 24 April 2023, Press Release Regarding the Statements Made by the Government Officials of Some Countries on April 24, 2023,” *Ministry Of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye*, April 24, 2023, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-111\\_-24-nisan-2023-tarihinde-bazi-ulkelerin-hukumet-yetkililerince-yapilan-beyanlar-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-111_-24-nisan-2023-tarihinde-bazi-ulkelerin-hukumet-yetkililerince-yapilan-beyanlar-hk.en.mfa)

“The unfortunate statements that are incompatible with historical facts and international law regarding the events of 1915 are futile efforts aimed at rewriting history for political motives.

It should not be forgotten that 1915 events cannot be defined according to politicians’ personal agendas and their domestic political considerations. Such an approach can only lead to distortion of history. Those who insist on this biased approach will go down in history as worthless opportunist politicians.

We reject these statements, which we consider null and void, and condemn in the strongest terms those who persist in this mistake. Türkiye does not need to be lectured about its own history by anyone.

We urge these circles who seek to derive animosity from history for shallow political considerations to support our Joint History Commission proposal, and the regional peace and cooperation efforts led by our country instead of repeating such grave mistakes.”

Turkish President Erdoğan also sent the following message to the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul:<sup>83</sup>

“The Patriarch of the Armenians of Turkey, Mr. Sahak Mashalyan, Distinguished Members of the Armenian Community,

Dear Citizens,

I greet you with my most heartfelt feelings and affection.

I respectfully commemorate the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives in the difficult conditions of the First World War and offer my condolences to their descendants.

On this occasion, I would also like to ask God’s mercy on the Ottoman citizens who died due to the conflicts, rebellions, gang activities and acts of terrorism during the First World War.

With the earthquakes of February 6th, which were described as the disaster of the century, we have once again seen that we, 85 million of us, are people who find peace under the shadow of the same flag, who share the same homeland soil, whose past and future are one, and who are partners in destiny.

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83 “Erdoğan’dan Patrik Maşalyan’a taziye mesajı,” *Agos*, 24 Nisan 2023, <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/28503/erdogan-dan-patrik-masalyan-a-taziye-mesaji>

No matter how tragic, we should not let the events of the past determine our present and future.

We believe that relieving the pain by sharing instead of comparing is the best way for our future.

With this understanding, we are trying to strengthen our internal peace, reinforce our unity and solidarity, and expand the rights and freedoms of all our citizens with the steps we have taken in the last 20 years.

We strive to establish an inclusive and embracing climate in Turkey where no one is marginalized, no one is excluded because of their identity, no matter what faith or ethnic identity they belong to.

In the coming period, we will continue to work with the goal of friendship and peace by seeing our differences as a source of substance/wealth, despite those who try to politicize history.

We will continue to protect the rights and freedoms of our Armenian citizens who make irreplaceable contributions to the cultural, artistic, political, economic, educational, social and humanitarian life of our country.

I sincerely believe that the esteemed members of the Armenian community will give us the necessary support in these endeavors.

With these thoughts in mind, I once again respectfully commemorate the Ottoman citizens who passed away during the disintegration of the Empire.”

The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Mashalyan’s response message is below:

“We would like to thank Mr. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his meaningful and important condolences. Looking back and being stuck in the past is not a useful approach.

The past should be the source from which we draw our nourishment, but we need to reconsider the past for the present and the future. In fact, on the occasion of April 24th, our President was the only state leader to share our pain. In all these messages, we sense an effort to build a bridge, to create a reconciliation between peoples. This is of course very valuable for us and for this geography. Because our effort to build the future is possible by making sense of the past and reflecting it to the present. We cannot change the past. We only have today, and we can build the future with today. So much so that the behavior we should

have in all of this is to build bridges of peace between Armenians and Turks, between Armenia and Turkey in a Christian way, and we have a duty to change this memory, this geography into a memory of peace for the peoples and to turn this fertile geography into God's table. For this, like the patriarchs before us, like our pioneers, we pray from the heart. We ask for God's help to break the ice, to build bridges, to improve relations and to build a better future.

When we look to the future, what we see are options. When the events of April 24th and the 'Great Catastrophe', which our people call 'Meds Yeghern', are analyzed well, considering the First World War, before the war started, people were told that they had enough reasons to fight. So much so that the states were ready to fight. They thought it would have favorable consequences. After four years of war, they realized that it was nothing of the sort. Even the worst peace before the war was much better than the war itself. Because nearly 20 million people disappeared, most of them young people. Soldiers and civilians lost their lives. And of course, today, April 24th, the ember burns where it falls. So, we remember the hundreds of thousands of people we lost. We pray for them, and we will have a service in our church afterwards. We will ask for their prayers. Because in 2015, with a vision, our church felt it necessary to end the mourning and to look at the 1915 Events from a different perspective. Because now, 100 years later, we see that despite that 'Great Catastrophe', our people have survived, they have maintained their existence, they have maintained their language, they have a homeland, they have a large diaspora, they have a population of nearly 12 million. So much so that this 'Great Catastrophe' could not defeat our people. It could not destroy us, we survived. The reason for this is really our faith, our church, our creative abilities inherited from our ancestors. Through all of these, we have successfully lived through 100 years and created new lives for ourselves all over the world. We have rebuilt, we have prospered again. Because God was with us. God took us by the hand and lifted us up. And of course, the prayers of the 100s of thousands of martyrs who died when we looked with the eyes of faith were also instrumental."

The repeated statement of the US President, targeting only Türkiye and the Turks, did not meet the insatiable expectations of the radical elements of the Armenian Diaspora, who are in the habit of demanding something more after each gain, this time questioning and criticizing why it did not include the Armenians in "Artsakh" who were "subjected to genocide by Azerbaijan".

24 April was also commemorated in Armenia, where government officials, including the President, Prime Minister, and President of the

National Assembly of Armenia, laid wreaths at the genocide memorial. Church officials did not attend this ceremony and visited the monument afterwards.

Below is the statement made by Prime Minister Pashinyan on this occasion:<sup>84</sup>

“Dear people,

Dear compatriots,

On April 24, we commemorate the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide carried out by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, and tens of thousands of citizens will carry out a procession of respect, remembrance and meditation to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial.

The April 24 march is perhaps the most impactful occurrence that has predetermined and is predetermining our reality, an exceptional day to think about our history, past and future. What do young parents think when walking to the Tsitsernakaberd memorial, often holding the hands of young children, or what do elderly people with more life experience think?

They are probably thinking about two questions. Why did the Meds Yeghern happen and what should be done to prevent its recurrence? Hundreds and thousands of works have been written about the causes of the Armenian Genocide, many reasons and motives have been revealed. As for the methodology to exclude the recurrence of such a crime, it largely depends on our understanding of the concepts of “state” and “region”.

The state, only a developed and sovereign state is able to ensure the existence and security of our people, and everyone has something to do for the establishment of the state - with education, work, civil responsibility and respect for law.

Our strategic choice for the region is as follows: Do we have the will and ability to normalize and develop our regional relations, regardless of, or even more so, when the existing security threats around us worsen due to regional or extra-regional reasons?

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84 “Ermenistan’da 24 Nisan anması,” *Agos*, 24 Nisan 2023, <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/28500/ermenistan-da-24-nisan-anmasi>

Realizing all the difficulties and complications, our government has decided to go the way of finding a positive answer to that question, because only that way can guarantee security and well-being.

Dear people,

Dear compatriots,

Today we bow to the memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide and ponder about the past, present and future. And this is the best moment to think about the past, present and future.”

Below is the statement issued by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with reference to the day:

“The international recognition of the Genocide is aimed at preventing the repetition of a similar crime against humanity in any other corner of the world, including the threats of new ethnic cleansing: it is the indifference, tolerance and impunity that make this mass crime possible.

Unfortunately, today as a century ago, the danger of genocidal policy is palpable in different corners of the world. Even today, Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh are facing the danger of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The continuous aggressive policy of Azerbaijan towards the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, the anti-Armenian rhetoric, the actions aimed at depriving Armenians of their homeland, erasing the Armenian trace are nothing, but a manifestation of genocidal intentions.”

On 25 April, a fountain named after “Nemesis”, known as the goddess of revenge in Greek mythology, was inaugurated in Yerevan, blessing an Armenian terrorist organization carrying that name, targeting Turks and Türkiye. While steps were being taken to normalize relations, Türkiye reacted without delay to this development that disregards and undermines the normalization process. The following is the statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 26 April:<sup>85</sup>

“We strongly condemn the unveiling of the “Nemesis Monument” in Yerevan, dedicated to the perpetrators of assassinations against the Ottoman political and military leaders in the early 1920s, as well as the Azerbaijani officials of the time and even some Ottoman citizens of Armenian origin.

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85 “No: 113, 26 Nisan 2023, Ermenistan’ın Başkenti Erivan’da Açılan “Nemesis Anıtı” Hk.,” Türkiye Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 26 Nisan 2023, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-113\\_-ermenistan-in-baskenti-erivan-da-acilan-nemesis-aniti-hk.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-113_-ermenistan-in-baskenti-erivan-da-acilan-nemesis-aniti-hk.tr.mfa)

The unveiling of this shameful monument is a glorification of a bloody terrorist movement that led to the heinous terrorist attacks in which 31 of our diplomats and their family members were murdered.

The way in which this event has been presented in the Armenian media also reveals a distorted and unacceptable interpretation of history still kept in some minds.

Such provocative steps, which are incompatible with the spirit of the normalization process between Türkiye and Armenia, will in no way contribute to the efforts for establishment of lasting and sustainable peace and stability in the region. On the contrary, they will negatively affect the normalization process.”

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Çavuşoğlu stated that this shameful monument also harmed the normalization process initiated in 2022. He underlined that Türkiye was sincere in its decision to normalize its relations with Armenia, but that it was unacceptable to allow a monument sanctifying terrorism. He announced the closure of Turkish airspace to Armenian aircraft in response to Armenia’s provocations, warning that further steps could be taken.<sup>86</sup> Prime Minister Pashinyan stated that the erection of the monument was wrong, but shifted the blame on the local authorities, while National Security Secretary Grigoryan stated that it was an internal matter, that no one had the right to interfere in internal affairs and that normalization with Türkiye should be without preconditions.

On 4 May, the Spokesperson of the US Department of State issued a statement saying that they were “disappointed” that Türkiye had closed its airspace to Armenian aircraft and that air links were an important security enhancing measure not only for the two countries but also for the stability of the region.<sup>87</sup>

The President of the National Assembly of Armenia, Alen Simonyan, arrived in Ankara on 3 May to attend the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and held bilateral and delegation meetings with Mustafa Şentop, the Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. In this meeting, Simonyan also mentioned the Nemesis monument and claimed that it was not an act of the Government, that no one representing the Armenian government was present at the inauguration and expressed

86 “Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: ‘(Teröristler için Nemesis anıtının yapılması) Ermenistan uçaklarına hava sahamızı kapattık’,” *Habertürk*, 3 Mayıs 2023, <https://www.haberturk.com/ankara-haberleri/31028599-disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-teroristler-icin-nemesis-anitinin-yapilmasi-ermenistan>

87 “ABD’den Türkiye’nin hava sahasını Ermenistan uçaklarına kapatmasına ilişkin açıklama,” *Habertürk*, May 3 Mayıs 2023, <https://www.haberturk.com/abdden-turkiyenin-hava-sahasini-ermenistan-ucaklarina-kapatmasina-iliskin-aciklama-3588627>

regret at Türkiye's reaction. Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Şentop emphasized that Türkiye wants normalization to take place and that steps that would harm this process should be prevented.<sup>88</sup>

According to polls conducted by the International Republican Institute, an American company, the results of which were released in early May, France, Iran, and the United States are the countries that the Armenian people consider the friendliest. Russia ranked fourth. The countries perceived as the biggest political threats were Azerbaijan and Türkiye.<sup>89</sup>

In an interview with a Polish magazine in early May, President of Armenia Khachaturyan, in response to the question whether Armenia still wants a strategic military alliance with Russia in light of recent developments, said "Yes! We want to continue cooperating with Russia, and we very much care about it. We want Russia to defend us against Turkey and Azerbaijan".<sup>90</sup>

In an interview with a Czech magazine on 15 May, Prime Minister Pashinyan stated that the main goal of Armenia's foreign policy is to establish normal relations with all its neighbors and that Armenia currently has good relations with Georgia and Iran, but almost no relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which should not be the case.<sup>91</sup>

On the eve of Turkish elections in May, Pashinyan said in a press interview "Hopefully we will be able to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations after the presidential election in Türkiye. I also hope we can carry on with normalizing our relations with Türkiye in a natural way. This is high on our agenda<sup>92</sup>". Pashinyan congratulated Erdogan on winning the Turkish presidential election on 28 May. He said on social media "We congratulate President Erdogan on reelection. I am looking forward to continuing our joint work until full normalization of relations between our two countries".

88 "Ermenistan'dan Türkiye'ye: Nemesis Anıtı, dış politika ifadesi değil," *Cumhuriyet*, 5 Mayıs 2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/dunya/ermenistandan-turkiyeye-nemesis-aniti-dis-politika-ifadesi-degil-2078001>

89 "IRI Armenia Poll Shows Concerns over National Security, Sharp Divisions on Russia, Improving Relations with Turkey," *International Republican Institute (IRI)*, May 1, 2023, <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-armenia-poll-shows-concerns-over-national-security-sharp-divisions-on-russia-improving-relations-with-turkey/>

90 Karol Wasilewski, "President of Armenia: We want Moscow to defend us against Turkey and Azerbaijan," *TVP Weekly*, May 3, 2023, <https://weekly.tvp.pl/69581248/president-of-armenia-we-want-moscow-to-defend-us-against-turkey-and-azerbaijan>

91 "Armenia now has almost no relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, which should not remain like that: Pashinyan," *News.am*, May 15, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/760101.html>

92 "Normalizing relations with Turkey high on Armenia's agenda," *Interfax*, May 29, 2023, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/90917/>

Upon the invitation of Turkish President Erdoğan, Prime Minister Pashinyan arrived in Ankara on 3 June for Erdoğan's inauguration reception.<sup>93</sup> He was accompanied by the Special Representative of Armenia for the normalization process between the two countries. His participation in the event once again culminated with the hysterical cries of radical elements, both inside Armenia and abroad. Even a former Minister of Foreign Affairs joined the chorus, alleging that it has caused surprise and anger in wide circles in Armenia and the Diaspora. On the other hand, President Erdoğan praised Prime Minister Pashinyan for attending his inauguration ceremony and told reporters on his way back from his visit to Azerbaijan on 14 June that "Pashinyan's acceptance of our invitation was an important step. He attended our ceremony, overcoming many obstacles emanating from his country's opposition. We held a brief meeting, and I thanked him for accepting the invitation."<sup>94</sup>

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan called his new Turkish counterpart Minister Hakan Fidan to congratulate him on 7 June. It was reported that they also discussed efforts to normalize bilateral relations.

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93 Yavuz Aydın, "Ermenistan Başbakanı Paşinyan, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın yemin törenine katılacak," *Anadolu Ajansı*, 2 Haziran 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ermenistan-basbakani-pasinyan-cumhurbaskani-erdoganin-yemin-torenine-katilacak/2912916>

94 "Sweden must do its part on terrorism for NATO bid, says Erdoğan," *Yeni Şafak*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/sweden-must-do-its-part-on-terrorism-for-nato-bid-says-erdogan-3665162>

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