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From
“Historical Armenia”
to
“Real Armenia”

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and Their Geopolitical Stakes



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1. Introduction

The parliamentary elections of 7 June 2026 represent a turning point for Armenia, as they are the first regularly scheduled elections held since 2017. After a decade marked by political crises and snap elections — in 2018, against the backdrop of the Velvet Revolution, and in 2021, in the aftermath of the trauma caused by the Nagorno-Karabakh war — this regular electoral exercise tests both the country's democratic resilience and the maturity of its political institutions.

However, the stakes of the vote go beyond the usual competition to form a parliamentary majority. The elections take on the character of a plebiscite on Armenia's strategic orientation: whether to continue moving closer to the Euro-Atlantic community and pursuing a European trajectory, or to gradually return under Moscow's geopolitical influence. In a fluid regional context marked by competition among Russia, the European Union, the United States, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Iran, the outcome of the vote will indicate the direction in which Yerevan intends to redefine its security, sovereignty, and external partnerships.

At the same time, the election has an existential dimension linked to the peace process with Azerbaijan. The electorate is faced with a difficult choice between the logic of a "Historical Armenia," anchored in territorial claims and collective traumas, and the project of a "Real Armenia," oriented toward normalization, regional connectivity, and geopolitical pragmatism. This equation is further strained by Azerbaijan's demand for constitutional amendments in Armenia, specifically the removal of references

associated with unification with Nagorno-Karabakh, turning the ratification of the peace agreement into a pivotal point in the country's future national trajectory.

2. Political Context and National Trauma

2.1. The Legacy of the Loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and Collective Trauma

The definitive loss of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) in September 2023 represents the central political and identity-related trauma shaping Armenia's current parliamentary election. The enclave, controlled by ethnic Armenians after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was recaptured by Azerbaijan through a rapid military offensive, carried out despite the 2020 ceasefire and against the backdrop of the passivity of Russian peacekeeping forces. The exodus of more than 100,000 Armenians from the region produced a major humanitarian crisis and profoundly reshaped the perceptions of the electorate, which now oscillate between apathy, distrust in institutions, and nationalist radicalization.

Faced with this loss during his own tenure, Nikol Pashinyan sought to decouple the agenda of the Armenian state from the Karabakh issue by promoting the doctrine of "Real Armenia," focused on state survival, regional normalization, and connectivity. This repositioning, also driven by Armenia's military vulnerability, nevertheless generated an open conflict with the Armenian Apostolic Church, a central institution of national identity, which has

imposed limit on the number of partners. If negotiations fail, the law provides for a second round to be held on the 28th day between the two leading forces, with the ballot explicitly indicating the proposed candidate for the office of prime minister. To ensure executive stability, the winning camp receives a seat bonus that guarantees it 54% of the total seats in Parliament.

The amendments introduced to the Electoral Code in 2021¹¹ lowered the threshold for entering Parliament to 4% for political parties, with the stated aim of encouraging political pluralism. For electoral blocs, the threshold varies depending on the number of constituent parties: 8% for alliances composed of up to three parties, and 10% for those comprising four or more political entities. Unlike referendums, parliamentary elections are not conditional upon reaching a minimum voter turnout threshold.

Eligibility for legislative or executive office is subject to strict criteria: candidates must be at least 25 years old, hold exclusively Armenian citizenship, have at least four years of permanent residency, and demonstrate knowledge of the Armenian language. Electoral lists, which must include at least 80 candidates, are also subject to mandatory quotas: at least one-third of candidates must be women, while non-party individuals included as “invited” candidates may not exceed 30% of the total list.

4. Main Actors and Political Platforms

Nineteen parties and political formations have entered the electoral race for the new legislature in Yerevan, but public opinion polls¹² indicate that the future parliament will most likely be composed of the following political actors.¹³

Civil Contract Party

The main actor remains the Civil Contract Party, led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. In power since the 2018 Velvet Revolution and holding a solid majority in the current National Assembly, the party enters the election with an ideological platform that differs significantly from that of 2021. Pan-Armenian rhetoric and the emphasis on the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh have been abandoned in favor of the doctrine of “Real Armenia,” which confines the national project to the internationally recognized borders established by the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration. Terms such as “Artsakh” and “self-determination” have disappeared from the core of the program, replaced by priorities such as regional normalization, connectivity, and the consolidation of the state within its current borders.

In foreign policy, Civil Contract supports maintaining the suspension of Armenia’s participation in the CSTO, reducing dependence on Russia, developing a domestic model of “comprehensive defense,” and deepening relations with the EU. Domestically, the party proposes adopting a new Constitution, digitizing public services, achieving annual GDP growth of 6%, creating 25,000 jobs per year, and providing housing support for 10,000 families displaced from Karabakh. Its agenda remains controversial, however, due to its open conflict with the Armenian Apostolic Church and its stated to reform it.



Fig. 2. Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia – official portrait. Source: Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, official portrait photograph, Official Website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, accessed June 3, 2026, [https://www.primeminister.am/en/official-photos/#photos\[pp_gal_1\]/0/](https://www.primeminister.am/en/official-photos/#photos[pp_gal_1]/0/).

Strong Armenia Alliance

The main emerging pole of the opposition is the Strong Armenia Alliance (Mer Dzevov), established in 2025 and associated with billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, the founder of Tashir Group and a businessman with significant economic ties in Russia, including links to networks close to the Kremlin¹⁴. Although Karapetyan cannot run due to his multiple citizenships, the alliance is represented electorally by his nephew, Narek Karapetyan. The alliance is positioning itself as a platform similar to Georgian Dream: sharply critical of Pashinyan, open to restoring relations with the CSTO and Moscow, but without fully returning to the discourse of the old political elite. Unlike the traditional opposition, Strong Armenia adopts a pragmatic position regarding the impossibility of quickly recovering Artsakh and supports the regional TRIPP project. Its program focuses on accelerated industrialization, the creation of 300,000 jobs, the construction of 20,000 affordable housing units, and the rejection of government projects such as universal health insurance and the academic campus near Yerevan.

Armenia Alliance

The Armenia Alliance, led by former President Robert Kocharyan, represents the core of the conservative opposition and the old political elite. With 27 seats in the current parliament, the bloc positions itself as the main defender of the nationalist and pro-Russian line. Kocharyan attacks the government over the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and rejects the doctrine of “Real Armenia,” advocating instead for the restoration of the strategic axis with Moscow. The “Together We Can” program combines security-related pledges, such as the development of a domestic high-tech military industry, with broad social measures, including a 50% increase in pensions, the indexation of the minimum wage, zero-interest agricultural loans, and the mobilization of the diaspora through national development funds.



Fig. 3. Robert Kocharyan speaking at the Vanadzor rally, May 29, 2026. (Photo from his official X account). Source: Robert Kocharyan (@RobertKocharyan), Key points from the Vanadzor rally, May 29, 2026, photograph, X (formerly Twitter), <https://x.com/RobertKocharyan/status/2060450917942743522/photo/1>

Prosperous Armenia Party

The Prosperous Armenia Party, led by magnate Gagik Tsarukyan, enters the campaign as a potential political kingmaker. Although he publicly rejects a coalition with either Pashinyan or Kocharyan, Tsarukyan leaves open the possibility of cooperation with Strong Armenia. The party's platform proposes a multi-vector foreign policy, maintaining strategic relations with Russia and Iran while pursuing dialogue with the EU and the United States, and rejecting unilateral concessions to Azerbaijan. Economically, the party promotes tax incentives, subsidized loans, the cancellation of citizens' micro-debts, and the transition to a professional army.

Other Parties

Emerging formations also hover around the electoral threshold, including New Power, led by former mayor Hayk Marutyan, which targets the urban pro-European electorate disappointed with the current government, and Wings of Unity, launched by former Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan. The latter has a technocratic profile focused on military modernization, partnerships with the United States and France, and support for the "Trump Route" project.

5. The Geopolitical Stakes: Russia and the European Union

5.1. Relationship with the Russian Federation: Between Structural Dependence and Hybrid Pressure

Relations between Yerevan and Moscow deteriorated sharply after Azerbaijan's 2023 offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh, carried out despite the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces. Perceiving Russia's and the CSTO's inaction as a violation of their security commitments, the Pashinyan government froze Armenia's participation in the alliance¹⁵ and accelerated its diplomatic diversification toward the West.

In this context, Russia treats the 7 June 2026 election as a major geopolitical test. The narrative promoted by Moscow presents Pashinyan's re-election and the continuation of Armenia's rapprochement with the EU as a potential "Ukrainian path"¹⁶ for the country, associated with the loss of security and economic stability. Russian pressure combines economic, political, and hybrid instruments: restrictions on certain Armenian products¹⁷, warnings over the possible loss of preferential prices for gas, oil, and diamonds¹⁸, as well as disinformation¹⁹ and influence²⁰ campaigns attributed to Russian services²¹ and aimed at instilling fear among the population.

However, Moscow's coercive capacity is limited by its own dependencies. Armenia remains formally a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, whose treaties currently do not provide a simple legal mechanism for excluding or suspending a member state²². Moreover, following the imposition of Western sanctions after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Armenia became an important

channel for Russian-Armenian trade and for re-exports to Russia²³, making a complete rupture costly for the Kremlin as well.

Armenia's vulnerability is therefore combined with a form of asymmetric counter-pressure. As a result, Pashinyan is seeking to exploit Russia's entanglement in Ukraine to advance a gradual decoupling, avoiding an abrupt break while relying on regional connectivity, closer relations with the EU and the United States, and normalization with Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

5.2. The European Union: A Strategic Alternative and Security Corridor

As a counterweight to Moscow's pressure, the European Union has become the main pillar of Armenia's geopolitical diversification strategy. Under the Pashinyan administration, rapprochement with Brussels has become structural: in 2024, the visa liberalization dialogue was launched²⁴, and in 2025, the Law on European Integration was adopted²⁵. Although Armenia remains within the framework of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU and still needs to advance domestic reforms, the European orientation has been legislatively established as a strategic objective.

Aware of the intensification of Moscow's hybrid pressure, Brussels has strengthened its support for Yerevan, including by deploying expert teams to help counter disinformation and protect the integrity of the electoral process²⁶. In addition, Yerevan's hosting, in May 2026, of the European Political Community summit and the first EU–Armenia summit²⁷ carried significant symbolic and political weight, providing Pashinyan with important political capital ahead of the elections and sending the electorate the message that the European option can deliver

concrete benefits in terms of development, security, and connectivity.

For the EU, the 7 June election carries significant regional stakes. Against the backdrop of Azerbaijan's authoritarian drift and Georgia's democratic backsliding, Armenia could become Europe's main democratic partner in the South Caucasus. At the same time, a stable Armenia connected to the West could strengthen trade and energy routes toward the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, reducing dependence on routes controlled or influenced by Russia and Iran.



Fig. 4. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during the inaugural Armenia-EU Summit with European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Source: Nikol Pashinyan at the Inaugural Armenia-EU Summit, May 5, 2026, photograph, Press Service of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, [https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2026/05/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Armenia-EU-Summit/#photos\[pp_gal_1\]/7/](https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2026/05/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Armenia-EU-Summit/#photos[pp_gal_1]/7/)

5.3. Role of Major Actors

The United States plays a catalytic role in supporting the current government in Yerevan through a visible diplomatic offensive ahead of the 7 June election, marked by the visits of Vice President JD Vance²⁸ and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the signing of a bilateral strategic partnership²⁹, and the public message of support

by President Donald Trump to Prime Minister Pashinyan³⁰. In this context, Marco Rubio suggested that Russia is displeased with the increasingly close rapprochement between the United States and Armenia, and that Moscow would prefer the current Armenian prime minister to lose the election.³¹

The central element of the rapprochement between Armenia and the United States is the TRIPP project, supported by Washington, which aims to connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan through Armenian territory. In synergy with the “Crossroads of Peace” initiative, this corridor could bring Armenia transit revenues, investment, and enhanced strategic relevance, while reducing the region’s dependence on routes controlled or influenced by Russia and Iran. Connectivity could thus become Armenia’s major asset, with the Middle Corridor emerging as a pillar of its transformation from a geopolitically isolated state into a strategic hub between Europe, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia.

France represents Armenia’s main diplomatic and security anchor within the EU, with Paris’s support reinforced by the influence of the Armenian diaspora and by the provision of humanitarian assistance and defensive military equipment.³²

Azerbaijan and Türkiye view the continuity of the Pashinyan government as favorable to maintaining the peace process and regional normalization, although concerns persist within Armenian society regarding territorial concessions, economic dependence, and strategic vulnerability.³³

According to discussions with independent experts from Armenia, Iran has limited capacity to influence political developments in Yerevan, given the constraints it faces as a result of its confrontation with the United States and Israel. However, Tehran views

TRIPP with caution, as well as Washington’s intention to establish a stronger presence in the Caucasus.³⁴

In parallel, Armenia is cautiously diversifying its relations with India and China. With India, it is developing several military cooperation projects, including arms imports³⁵, while its relationship with China remains more limited geopolitically, as Armenia was the last South Caucasus state to sign a strategic partnership agreement with Beijing³⁶. Economically, China is interested in the potential connection of Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” initiative to the Belt and Road Initiative, although the volume of bilateral trade remains volatile and has not yet translated into significant Chinese investment.³⁷



Fig. 5. Nikol Pashinyan and Donald Trump sign Armenia-US Memorandums of Understanding. Source: Nikol Pashinyan and Donald Trump sign Armenia-US Memorandums of Understanding, August 9, 2025, photograph, Press Service of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, [https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2025/08/09/Nikol-Pashinyan-US-meeting-Trump/#photos\[pp_gal_1\]/37/](https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2025/08/09/Nikol-Pashinyan-US-meeting-Trump/#photos[pp_gal_1]/37/).

6. Post-Electoral Scenarios and Conclusions

Scenario A: Clear Victory and Consolidation of the “Real Armenia” Doctrine

A clear victory for the Civil Contract party, accompanied either by a constitutional majority or by the formation of a sufficiently solid pro-Western majority, would validate the strategic direction promoted by Nikol Pashinyan and the doctrine of “Real Armenia.” Such an outcome would provide the government in Yerevan with the political mandate needed to accelerate the peace process with Azerbaijan, initiate a constitutional referendum, and operationalize major regional connectivity projects, particularly the U.S.-backed TRIPP railway initiative.

Armenia’s integration into the Middle Corridor framework, progress in the visa liberalization dialogue with the EU, and the deepening of the strategic partnership with Washington could accelerate economic diversification and gradually reduce the country’s traditional dependence on Russia. However, even under this favorable scenario, internal risks would remain high. The nationalist opposition, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and segments of society marked by the trauma of the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh could challenge the legitimacy of the concessions associated with peace. In parallel, Russia would likely seek to amplify polarization through economic pressure, information operations, and indirect support for forces opposed to the government.

Scenario B (Most Likely): Victory Without a Constitutional Majority

A likely scenario is one in which the Civil Contract party secures a parliamentary majority sufficient to remain in government, but not a constitutional majority. In this case, Pashinyan could continue rapprochement with the EU and the United States, as well as the regional connectivity agenda, but would have limited room for maneuver on the key issue of constitutional amendment, demanded by Azerbaijan as a condition for the ratification of the peace agreement.

Such an outcome would ensure governmental stability, but not a political mandate strong enough for reforms carrying major identity-related implications. The constitutional referendum could be postponed, while the peace process could enter a phase of controlled stagnation. Russia could exploit this deadlock through economic pressure and disinformation campaigns, keeping Armenia in a zone of strategic vulnerability.

Scenario C: Political Deadlock and Reorientation toward Moscow

A weak result for Civil Contract, combined with the possible consolidation of the opposition, could generate political deadlock and diplomatic recalibration toward Moscow, following a trajectory similar to developments in Georgia. In this scenario, rapprochement with the EU and the strategic partnership with the United States would slow down, while Armenia’s participation in Russia-dominated architectures could be politically reactivated.

The major strategic consequence would be the blocking or freezing of the peace process with Azerbaijan, especially if the new majority refused the constitutional amendments

requested by Baku. Although such a development could temporarily reduce Russian pressure and preserve certain energy advantages, it would risk once again isolating Armenia from Western political, economic, and security flows. Moreover, stagnation in border delimitation and in the peace agreement could increase the risk of renewed asymmetric escalation with Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

The parliamentary elections of 7 June 2026 go beyond the logic of a simple change in government. They represent a test of Armenia's democratic resilience, institutional maturity, and ability to redefine its security in a hostile regional environment. Ultimately, the vote functions as a referendum on the country's strategic direction: a return to the logic of a "Historical Armenia," dominated by trauma and territorial claims, or the consolidation of a "Real Armenia" — sovereign, connected, and capable of transforming its geographical vulnerability into a strategic advantage.

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