

Armenia election: Pashinyan victorious once again

Karol Wasilewski, Miłosz Bartosiewicz

According to the preliminary results of Armenia's parliamentary elections held on 7 June, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party emerged victorious. With voter turnout approaching 60%, the party secured 50% of the vote, giving it an absolute, though not constitutional, majority in parliament. The pro-Russian Strong Armenia party, led by Russian-Armenian oligarch Samvel Karapetyan (23%) and the Armenia Alliance headed by former president Robert Kocharyan (10%) also secured parliamentary representation. The fate of Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia, however, remains uncertain, as the party is hovering around the electoral threshold and its final result will be determined only after a recount of the votes (currently 4%). The campaign was characterised by a high degree of polarisation. Both the government and the opposition accused each other of electoral misconduct. While the ruling camp alleged vote-buying, the opposition pointed to the misuse of state resources, growing authoritarian tendencies, and repression directed against its supporters.

Pashinyan's victory will ensure the continuation of Armenia's rapprochement with Western states and the normalisation of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, while also enabling the government to press ahead with efforts to marginalise the opposition. A particular challenge for the prime minister will be managing relations with Russia, which openly supported the opposition during the election campaign, while also meeting the economic expectations of Armenian society.

Commentary

- **The election result ensures the continuation of Pashinyan's 'Real Armenia' project.** In his post-election speech, the prime minister signalled a more far-reaching campaign against the pro-Russian opposition, stating that dismantling the country's 'criminal-oligarchic system' would be a priority for his party over the next five years. He also accused his political opponents of vote-buying and argued that opposition party leaders should face criminal charges. Pashinyan further indicated his intention to continue the normalisation of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, although he did not explain how he intends to secure constitutional amendments that remain Baku's principal condition for concluding the peace process. At the same time, the prime minister reaffirmed his commitment to deepening relations with Western partners, while stressing that Armenia seeks to remain a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and to strengthen ties with both Russia and the organisation's other member states.

- **The opposition's strong performance points to a further intensification of political polarisation in Armenia and increased public pressure on Pashinyan to deliver tangible results.** In the short term, the prime minister's opponents may challenge the election outcome. This is already reflected in statements by Karapetyan, who described the electoral process as 'shameful' owing to the detention and arrest of his supporters (including on allegations of vote-buying), while also accusing the authorities of interfering in the vote-counting process. Over the longer term, the opposition is likely to focus on what it portrays as the undemocratic nature of Pashinyan's rule and to argue that the 'Real Armenia' policy is antagonising Russia without generating tangible economic benefits for society. Consequently, it will seek to cast doubt on the merits of the prime minister's chosen foreign-policy course.
- **Pashinyan's failure to secure a constitutional majority poses a challenge for Armenia's Western partners, which are keen to preserve the country's current foreign policy trajectory.** It also complicates the normalisation of relations with Azerbaijan and may require Baku to adopt a more flexible approach to the process. Pashinyan is aware of these constraints, which helps to explain why, in his post-election remarks, he indicated that he was counting on support in the form of the reopening of the border with Turkey. The situation is also likely to require greater engagement from both the United States and the European Union, which provided clear backing for Armenia's prime minister in the run-up to the election (see '[Armenia ahead of the election: between Russia and the West](#)'). The absence of tangible successes in Pashinyan's foreign and security policy – much like the limited economic benefits achieved thus far – is likely to be exploited by Russian propaganda to argue that Armenia's pro-Western reorientation has been detrimental to the country's interests and that its Western partners are ultimately unreliable.
- **Russia is likely to continue exerting pressure on Pashinyan's government in an effort to slow Armenia's reorientation towards the West, employing a combination of economic, political, and informational instruments.** The strengthened presence of the pro-Russian opposition in parliament provides Moscow with an additional channel through which it can influence developments in Yerevan. An indication of this approach may be found in the reaction of Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, who highlighted the growing polarisation of Armenian society and accused the Armenian authorities of carrying out 'brutal repression' against the opposition and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Moreover, Russia is likely to increase pressure on Armenia through the institutions of the EAEU and by leveraging its relations with Azerbaijan. Excessively aggressive actions by the Kremlin, however, could prove counterproductive, particularly if the pro-Moscow opposition proves unable to make effective use of its position in parliament.