

# BACK TO SQUARE ONE

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Having obtained the majority of the votes in the June 20 parliamentary elections, Nikol Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party will return to power. They will form a majority government despite failing to fulfill the promises of the 2018 election and despite suffering a horrendous defeat in last fall's war against Azerbaijan/Turkey.

Of the 2.5 million registered voters a considerable number resides abroad without possibility to vote electronically. The participation rate was 49.26% with 20,000 more people voting compared to the 2018 elections. The opposition maintains that electoral fraud was committed and Robert Kocharyan, head of Armenia Alliance, announced on Tuesday that the party will challenge the election results at the Constitutional Court. The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued by the [International Election Observation Mission](#) on June 21 has a more overall positive evaluation "The 20 June 2021 early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia were competitive and generally well-managed... However, they were characterized by intense polarization and marred by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric among key contestants."

Robert Kocharyan, Serge Sargsyan, and Nikol Pashinyan each bear a certain share of responsibility for the devastating war and losses in Artsakh. Amazingly two of the culprits and candidates supported by the third have been voted to return to power. Any hope to set up a fact-finding commission to investigate the war failures are thus diminished if not non-existent.

The Pashinyan campaign successfully portrayed the fight as between "white" Pashinyan and "black" Kocharyan. Meanwhile, Kocharyan and Armenia Alliance ran unsophisticated campaigns. While Pashinyan celebrates his victory, he should not interpret it as a reflection of his popularity. A significant number voted for him, because he was perceived as less of an evil than Kocharyan or Sargsyan. Many voters' preference was based on the artificially created perception that the only choice was between bad and worse.

Additionally, most people living in small towns and border villages who are impoverished, post-2018 felt that they were being heard and no longer ignored by the ruling class Pashinyan was approachable and involved in person with villages and communities. Voters in those areas identified with Pashinyan especially due to his populist approach and speaking the "language" of the people. By contrast, they did not relate to the elegant men and women in shiny shoes, starchy collars, and complex sentences who were campaigning. Being aloof, they did not visit homes and did not share the voters' worries. They kept themselves inaccessible in expensive cars and houses.

Ironically, it was Pashinyan who resurrected the political corpse of Kocharyan when he failed to hold the latter accountable for blatant corruption as an oligarch ruler, for the 1999 Parliamentary massacre and the March 1, 2008 tragedy. Starting from the pre-election period, Kocharyan, through his media resources and connections also created the perception that the voters face two options only: either Civil Contract Party or Armenia Alliance. As a result, the vast majority of voters,

who rejected the old, failed power, gave their vote to Pashinyan whose party fell short of presenting a proper agenda. Armenia Alliance, similarly, void of a political agenda, was able to enter parliament with 21% as voters believed Kocharyan was Pashinyan's number one competitor.

The 20-plus parties that participated in the elections were not able to deliver their message to the electorate as they were overshadowed by the exaggerated "Black" and "White" options campaign. Lack of funds, a shortage of qualified campaign staff, not utilizing PR (Public Relations) technological tools, and the absence of young professionals who should have influenced political change further exacerbated their challenges. The small parties could not overcome their secondary minor differences and form competitive coalitions. Furthermore, they faced a blockade by oligarch controlled mass media.

Problems to address as the newly to be formed majority government enters the stage:

1. Before entering the election race, it was clear that the aspirations of 2018 uprising -- which many call a revolution -- did not materialize in the last two and a half years. The former leaders were rejected, Pashinyan's government was to accomplish reforms but did not or could not. Now with the same leaders who were against reforms serving as minority opposition, hopes to accomplish reforms are meagre. Also, with no viable opposition the government's promises may remain just that, promises.
2. Should Pashinyan falter on the Nov. 9 ceasefire agreement through refusal to open transport lines between Turkey and Azerbaijan through Meghri, Russia will shift its pressure to Kocharyan to enforce the full implementation of the 'Lavrov Plan'. This may present itself in the form of political instability and provocative media. Hence, the outcome of the elections will serve Russian interests over that of Armenia's. Meanwhile the return of POWs, demarcation issues and de-mining need to be immediately addressed.
3. Lack of ideology and vision permeates the Armenian political landscape preventing unity that could pull the nation out of calamity. Crises have the tendency to reveal the political and ideological problems facing a society and thus present an opportunity to find the key to a long-term solution.

Remedies the new government should apply to pull the country out of the morass:

1. To reawaken the spirit of the 2018 popular uprising, Pashinyan will have to carry on internal reforms primarily in the justice system, revise the constitution, and continue to expose and prevent corruption. The second key target will be economic development. The government should implement policies that establish a smart knowledge-based economy. It's only such an approach that can place Armenia on the global economic map and provide a competitive edge.
2. The new government should come up with a robust plan and formula for "foreign policy" that gives Armenia the ability to preserve its margin of manoeuvring and create diplomatic

relationships that serve the best interests of Armenia. In other words, Armenia should become a regional and maybe even a global point of intersection for countries and a major actor (mediator) that can establish Armenia as a point of reference. Of course, this comes hand-in-hand with economic competitiveness and internal political stability. Second, revamp the armed and security forces. Through prioritizing investments in science and technology create a military system that will discourage enemy forces from making hostile moves. Armenia should create a broad based highly mobile militia army trained in lethal techniques like some other countries, such as Switzerland, and Sweden.

3. A national doctrine is the backbone of a thriving political entity, that is a country with a viable state. The government should immediately start working towards developing a long-term vision for the nation with the principles to implement it. After all, states have a major role in redefining these concepts along with society at large. Armenians are not an exception to this.

To turn the tide the elected majority government of Armenia should make a 180 degree turn in the approach and stance it has taken since 2018. First, it should introduce major internal reforms. Second, embark on building diplomatic relationships with countries that align with Armenia's interests and reorganize its security and defence assets. Lastly, establish a national doctrine that will provide a strategy with a long-term vision including the revitalization of science, technology, education, culture, economy, and political renaissance that will serve Armenia and its best interests.

## Comments



**Charles Paskerian** – 2021-07-10 17:57:04

I think this editorial is well written. Tavit [see comment] makes some good points, but part of the problem should not be ignored. Putin is how he is, and at the moment he is in control of Russia, our most important Ally, after France. As the Leader of Armenia, it was Pashinyan's duty to do all he could to further the Armenian Agenda with Russia. He should have diplomatically played up to Putin. Two years ago, Putin was ready to help Armenia more,, but then Pashinyan, acted as if he was an equal with Putin, which he is not,, and became belligerent toward Russia, trying to get the West on his side. A futile program, which further antagonized Russia. Coupled this, with his persecution of Kocharyan, ( Yes, Kocharyan had been corrupt,) but a very close friend of Putin, created a greater problem for the future of Armenia with Russia. Now we need a Tigran the Great to resolve this mess. We have weak Leadership on all sides that is not cooperating with each other to save Armenia.... Also, as the present Leader?? Pashinyan needs to Listen to others, learn Tact, Fiscal responsibility, and Business Acumen to succeed. God Bless Armenia.



**Tavit** – 2021-06-24 19:26:04

These are great proposals. However, the problem is that Russia (Armenia's only "ally") betrayed Armenians in every possible way. The result was not a stronger Russia or stronger Armenia. Russia's actions weakened BOTH countries. The result was major pan-Turkic penetration into the Caucasus by Turkey and NATO. That's why the Western countries have been relatively quiet about the war's results except for side issues such as POWs. How does Armenia deal with a clueless Russian leadership (that is, Putin) that brought this about, all because Putin threw a totally unnecessary temper tantrum over Pashinyan? The fact is that Putin is incompetent, and Russia is a loser. It is losing all over the world and under pressure from the east, west, and south. Armenia perhaps can't do much about this at this time, but the fact that Russia is a pathetic loser of a country must be kept in mind, something that I think that the editorial hints at.