PEACE AS BLACKMAIL

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Category: Opinions

Armenia's Constitutional Question and the Threat of War

By Hovsep Hayreni, Belgium. 28 May 2026

On the eve of the general elections on June 7, Armenia's domestic political life is being shaken by a extraordinary act of blackmail. Prime Minister Pashinyan says, "If the Civil Contract Party does not secure a constitutional majority, there will be war in September, and it will bring very grave consequences. Take note: I am not saying if it fails to win the elections; I am saying if it fails to obtain a constitutional majority!"

This point must not be passed over lightly. Pashinyan is not saying, "If we lose the elections, there will be war." He is saying, "If we fail to obtain a constitutional majority, there will be war." This is not a minor difference.

A constitutional majority, meaning at least 65 out of 107 parliamentary seats, is needed to amend Armenia's constitution. So the question becomes unavoidable: if a new constitution is truly a natural reform arising from Armenia's own domestic needs, why is the failure to secure the required majority presented as a possible cause of war?

This is where the real problem begins.

For anyone who has closely followed the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, one fact is no longer hidden: the force coercing the Armenian government toward constitutional change is the Azerbaijani government. This is not a new development. Azerbaijan has long linked the signing of a peace agreement to Armenia amending its constitution. This demand was raised alongside the insistence to dissolve the Minsk Group, and it has been repeated at every opportunity since.

Yet the draft peace agreement initialed in Washington contained no explicit clause requiring Armenia to amend its constitution. Despite this, Aliyev continued to keep constitutional change on the agenda as a separate condition. He stated that Pashinyan had given assurances on this matter and emphasized that the peace agreement would not be signed unless constitutional changes were made. In this way, Armenia's internal legal order has been turned into a bargaining chip within the so-called peace process.

Pashinyan and his government try to present this as their own political choice. They argue that they have been considering constitutional reform since 2018 and that they are not acting under anyone's pressure. But in the present context, this explanation is hardly convincing. The constitutional debate is clearly moving in the direction demanded by Azerbaijan.

One essential point must be stated plainly: Armenia's Constitution contains no article, not even an indirect phrase, laying claim to Azerbaijani territory. The only point Azerbaijan relies on is the historical reference in the preamble of the Constitution.

The Azerbaijani government interprets the Declaration of Independence's historical references to Artsakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh, as a "territorial claim against Azerbaijan" and demands that this reference be removed. Pashinyan, although he had previously said that this pressure was groundless and that his government saw no such problem, changed his position in the face of Aliyev's insistence and began to say, exactly as Aliyev wanted, that the new constitution should contain no reference to the Declaration of Independence. His justification is that the Declaration was built on a "logic of conflict."

This justification is deeply flawed: it not only does injustice to that historical document, but also fails to direct even the slightest criticism, in this respect, at the other side, which continues its agitation filled with war hysteria.

The present Republic of Armenia was founded in 1991. The Declaration of Independence is the historical document of that founding. A state's birth certificate cannot simply be discarded under today's political pressure as if it were an unnecessary burden. Can there be independence without struggle? Which state has ever been founded without conflict, tension, or historical rupture? Founding documents must be understood within the historical reality in which they were written. To condemn them later in a way that suits the pressure of a hostile state weakens both historical memory and political will.

To portray the Declaration of Independence as a document shaped by a "logic of conflict" is, in effect, to present Armenia's own founding memory as the problem. While the other side continues to impose new conditions, issues threats, and speaks in the language of pressure, the impression is created that the real obstacle is Armenia's historical document. A strange illusion is produced, as if there were mutual goodwill and a shared effort to overcome hostility, and as if the main barrier to peace were Armenia's founding text.

But the issue does not end there. If references to founding declarations are to be treated as a problem, then the same standard cannot apply only to Armenia. Azerbaijan's Constitution also refers to its own founding documents. Those documents contain historical claims over a significant part of present-day Armenia. Moreover, this is not merely a matter of old documents left in the past. The current Azerbaijani government and the nationalist circles around it still use the term "Western Azerbaijan" when referring to Armenian territories.

This is a clear asymmetry. Armenia is expected to step back from its own founding memory and abandon the reference to its Declaration of Independence, while Azerbaijan's expansionist language and historical claims are not subjected to the same pressure. The Armenian government has now given up even on defending the right of return of the people of Artsakh, while the Azerbaijani side continues to make insinuations and claims regarding Armenian territories, especially Syunik.

For this reason, constitutional change cannot be viewed as a merely technical reform. This debate is not simply about reorganizing state institutions or modernizing the constitutional system. It is directly

connected to Armenia's sovereignty, its founding memory, and the kind of state it will remain in the future.

If a country's constitution is changed not through the free will of its own people, but under pressure from a neighboring state, under the threat of war, or under the blackmail of a peace agreement being withheld, then this is no longer ordinary constitutional reform. It becomes external interference in the internal legal order of the state. More importantly, accepting such interference opens the door to similar demands in the future. Today, the target is the reference to the Declaration of Independence. Tomorrow, the same logic of pressure may be applied to borders, roads, security arrangements, the army, foreign policy, and relations with the diaspora.

Submitting to such an imposition would move Armenia further away from being an independent republic that makes decisions according to its own historical and political will. It would turn Armenia into a fragile structure forced into one concession after another in the name of peace, with its sovereignty diminished and its actions made dependent on the approval of neighboring states. This is precisely where the danger of vassalization begins. A state may still formally appear independent, with its flag, parliament, and government intact, yet in its most fundamental decisions it may become unable to act without first calculating the threats and consent of others.

Pashinyan's idea of a "Fourth Republic" must also be discussed in this context. Of course, Armenia can have a constitutional debate. Of course, every state may feel the need to renew its institutions. It is also known that Pashinyan has had such ideas for years. But today, the issue has emerged in a completely different context. After the defeat of 2020, the loss of Artsakh, the attacks of 2022, the displacement of the Armenians of Artsakh in 2023, and Azerbaijan's continuing pressure, the idea of a "Fourth Republic" is no longer merely a matter of domestic reform. It carries the danger of becoming a political project shaped to satisfy external demands.

The real danger is that Armenia may weaken the foundations of its sovereignty in the name of peace. Peace is, of course, precious. To care deeply about peace is human. But to make one's own people tremble with the fear of war in the name of peace, and then try to turn that fear into votes, is plain and simple blackmail.

The equation Pashinyan has built ahead of the elections is very simple: either me, or war. On one side, he places himself and his party as the "party of peace." On the other, he gathers all opponents under the label of the "party of war." This language does not only target political rivals; it also places psychological pressure on voters. The memory of war is still painfully fresh among the people. The loss of Artsakh, border attacks, displacement, blockade, and the feeling of defeat are wounds that have not yet healed.

Pashinyan speaks directly to those wounds. His statement that "there will be war in September" is not a random reference to a month. In recent years, September has taken on a heavy meaning in Armenian memory. On September 27, 2020, the Artsakh war began. On September 13 and 14, 2022,

large-scale attacks were carried out on Armenia's southeastern borders. On September 19 and 20, 2023, the final blow was dealt to Artsakh, and its Armenian population was driven from its homeland. For Armenians, September is no longer merely a month on the calendar. It has become a dark symbol of recent history.

Given this symbolism, it is not surprising for a politician to speak about the danger of another September. The dangers are real. Azerbaijan's aggressive policy is clear. Its strategic alignment with Turkey is also a serious security concern for Armenia. But the problem is this: if a leader who, since last August, has been reassuring his people by saying that "peace has been achieved" suddenly begins, as soon as the election campaign starts, to say that peace is once again in danger, then there is serious manipulation at work.

The claim that peace has already been secured is as exaggerated as the claim that a change of power would inevitably bring war. What these two opposite narratives have in common is that both present Pashinyan as indispensable. In one version, the message is: "I brought peace." In the other, it is: "Without me, war will come." The result is the same. The public is denied a real political debate and is instead handed an electoral dilemma built on fear.

At times, a strange impression emerges: as if Aliyev no longer needs to issue threats of war himself. The Prime Minister of Armenia reproduces that language of threat inside Armenia. Those whom Aliyev calls "revanchists" are now being warned from within Armenia itself: do not question the peace process, or war will come.

Of course, this criticism does not mean whitewashing Armenia's former authorities. Previous governments created the heavy consequences of dependence on Russia. Nor do the former politicians and oligarchic circles now standing against Pashinyan offer society a strong, reliable, and independent alternative. There are understandable reasons why many people remain distant from them. But this reality does not mean that Pashinyan's own course should be beyond criticism.

Armenia cannot be forced to choose between two bad options: either a return to old dependence on Russia, or a version of peace that increasingly vassalizes the country under Azerbaijani and Turkish pressure. The real need lies outside this false choice. Armenia needs a more dignified, more independent, and more principled politics.

Armenia is a defeated and fragile state. Ignoring this would be irresponsible. It is also clear that what has been lost cannot be recovered in the short term. But precisely for this reason, Armenia needs more careful, more principled, and stronger diplomacy. A leadership that hesitates to defend legitimate rights, turns its own founding memory into a bargaining chip under pressure, and imagines that peace can be preserved only through concessions may not prevent war at all. On the contrary, it may create even more favorable conditions for future attacks.

A dignified peace cannot be built by erasing a people's memory. It cannot be built by abandoning sovereignty, dismantling founding documents under external pressure, or disciplining voters

through the fear of war. Peace has meaning only when it rests on mutual responsibility, international guarantees, resistance to the poisoning of relations between peoples, and respect for the sovereign rights of states.

The Armenian people, as well as the diaspora, must not remain indifferent to this debate. The issue is not merely a constitutional amendment. The real question is what kind of republic Armenia will continue to be: a republic that protects its historical memory, sovereignty, and security, or a fragile statelet whose will is shaped from outside.

This is the true meaning of today's constitutional debate. Peace must not be confused with capitulation, reconciliation with tutelage, or diplomacy with blackmail. Armenia does not need war; of course, it needs peace. But that peace must not be a silence purchased through fear. It must be a dignified and secure future.

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Hovsep Hayreni is an Armenian researcher and writer from Turkey, living in Belgium. His writings focus on the Armenian Genocide, the memory of Western Armenia, the Upper Euphrates region, Dersim, Kurdish-Armenian historical reckoning, Artsakh, and Armenia's current political issues.

Hayreni's articles have appeared in Agos, Tarih ve Toplumlar, HyeTert, and Yakındoğu Yazıları. His recent writings in Tarih ve Toplumlar, in particular, address the historical memory of 1915 together with the loss of Artsakh, pressure from the Turkey-Azerbaijan axis, Armenia's sovereignty issues, and the danger of the language of "peace" turning into a language of submission.

His two main books are *Yukarı Fırat Ermenileri 1915 ve Dersim* (*The Armenians of the Upper Euphrates: 1915 and Dersim*) and *1915 Bağlamında Kürt-Ermeni Tarih Muhasebesi ve Güncel Tartışmalar* (*Kurdish-Armenian Historical Reckoning in the Context of 1915 and Contemporary Debates*). In these works, local memory, testimonies, the specific place of Dersim, and the need for honest reckoning in Kurdish-Armenian relations occupy a central place.

Comments



Nurnisa Erismis – 2026-06-09 00:47:44
Dear Hovsep, I think your observation about the Prosperous Armenia Party is particularly important. The fact that Prosperous Armenia remained just below the electoral threshold should not be seen merely as the exclusion of one party from parliament. Its absence directly affects the distribution of seats and may therefore have a decisive impact on the constitutional amendment process. If a party falls below the threshold by only a very small margin, the political consequence of that result cannot be treated as a minor technical detail. The seats that would otherwise have gone to that party are redistributed among the other parties, and this may determine whether the ruling party obtains the required three-fifths majority to submit constitutional amendments to a referendum. For this reason, Prosperous Armenia's request for a recount is significant. The issue is not only electoral mathematics, but also the legitimacy of a constitutional process that may have serious consequences for Armenia's future. When a difference of a few votes, or a fraction of a percentage point, can open the way to constitutional change, the matter must be handled with maximum transparency and caution.



Hovsep Hayreni – 2026-06-08 19:13:03
Սիրելի Վահէ, Շնորհակալ եմ քու ցուցաբերած քաղաքաւարի մօտեցումին համար։ Բոլորս կրնանք սխալուիլ, բնական է։ Իսկ ընտրութեան արդիւնքները այնպէս եղան որ Բարգավաճ Հայաստան Կուսակցութիւնը քանի մը տասնեակ քվեների պակասութեամբ դուրս մնաց Ազգային Ժողովէն և իր 5 աթոռները բաժնուեցին միւսներին՝ որով Քաղաքացիական Պայմանագիրը բարձրացաւ 64-ի։ Այսպիսով այն կստանայ 3/5 մեծամասնութիւն, որը թոյլ կուտայ հանրաքվէի տանել սահմանադրական փոփոխութիւնը, սակայն բոլորովին նոր սահմանադրութիւն կազմելու համար ըստ իրաւագէտերին 2/3 մեծամասնութիւն պէտք է և անոր համար 6 ձայն պակաս կը մնայ։ Ասկէ զատ ԲՀԿ-ն շատ քիչ տարբերութեամբ դուրս մնալու հանգամանքին դէմ իր կասկածները յայտնելով հաշուարկները ստուգելու պահանչք ներկայացուցած է։ Կարելի է դրութիւնը փոխուի և 3/5 մեծամասնութիւնն ալ չստացուի։



Vahe H Apelian – 2026-06-08 07:38:59

Hovsep I offer my apologies to you. I had never reasoned that based on the snap popular parliamentary election results we had since Armenia switched to parliamentary form of governance, that the government may fall short of constitutional mandate to propose amending the constitution by referendum. But apparently it does. I understand the results of the June 7, 2026 election will end up with a National Assembly consisting of: "Civil Contract" Party: 61 seats "Strong Armenia" Alliance: 28 seats "Armenia" Alliance: 11 seats "Prosperous Armenia" Party: 5 seats These numbers then do not give Civil Contract mandate to propose Constitutional amendment. Something that the Civil Contract could have done before the election and apparently may not after the election. A learning experience.of governance in Armenia for me. Thanks



Vahe H Apelian – 2026-06-05 15:06:12

Sireli Hovsep, First and foremost, thank you for your response to my comment and for the manner of your response for my critical comment regarding your post. I do not recall Pashinyan ask for constitutional mandate for election but he asked for landslide. But any party or alliance that makes the government in Armenia, may propose Constitutional change by referendum. Let us go over the figures. During the December 2018 snap general election, driven by the euphoria of the Velvet Revolution, Nikol Pashinyan's My Step Alliance won the snap general election by landslide, having gotten 70% of the votes, while the two opposition parties had a total of 15% of the votes. The resultant was a 132 seat National Assembly with 88 seats, or 2/3 or 69% of the seats for Nikol Pashinyan's alliance; and 44 seats, or 1/3 or 33% of the seats to the opposition that had only 15% of the general election votes. During the June 2021, election, Nikol Pashinyan led Civil Contract party, won 54% of the votes but ended up with 71 seats of 107 seat National Assembly, or 2/3 or 69% of the seats, when it had only 54% of the general election votes. The Opposition had 26.33% of the votes, but ended up with 36 seats, or 1/3 or 33% of the National Assembly seats. In both these elections, the government ended up with 2/3 (69%) of the seats and the opposition 1/3 (33%) of the seats, as stipulated by law. There is a mathematical logic there. I do not need to get into it. Behind these numbers, that take into account the percentage of the votes in the general election, there is a legal mandate, to achieve an "effective opposition" and a "stable government", which will translate into 2/3 of the seats or 69% of National Assembly for the government and 1/3, or 33% of the national assembly to the opposition. But in different numbers of the National Assembly seats, 132 seat in the June 2021 election, 107 seats in the June 2026. Whatever the outcome of the June 7, 2026 election, there will be at least 3 political entities, as party or alliance, that will have 1/3 of the National Assembly seats, and the governing entity will have 2/3 of the seats. The number of the seats of the National Assembly may change. But any party or alliance that makes the government in Armenia, may propose Constitutional change by referendum. Serov Vahe, who lives in America, is not a citizen of Armenia, cannot vote, prefers Civil Contract, but accepts and supports any party, the citizens of Armenia bring about in the orderly democratic election in Armenia.



Hovsep Hayreni – 2026-06-05 03:45:02

Dear Vahe, Constitutional amendments are ultimately decided by referendum. However, before a proposal can be submitted to a referendum, it must first be considered by the National Assembly. A decision to submit a constitutional amendment to a referendum requires the affirmative vote of at least three-fifths of the total number of deputies. Without such a decision, the amendment cannot proceed to a referendum. This information is based on the constitutional procedure itself and on the public debate that followed Prime Minister Pashinyan's statement during the election campaign that "if we do not obtain a constitutional majority, there will be war again in the fall." Therefore, this is not my personal interpretation. As for the Hrchagakir, I am well aware of what the term means. In Turkish I used the word "bildirge" (declaration), which appears to have been rendered somewhat differently in English. I have also read the text of the Declaration of Independence and know very well what it contains. Political realities may have changed, but the Declaration remains a historical and founding document. Its primary purpose was the proclamation of Armenia's independence, and the state whose independence was declared was the Republic of Armenia within the borders of Soviet Armenia. The aspiration for unification with Nagorno-Karabakh may no longer correspond to today's political realities, but at the time it was regarded as a legitimate cause for which people struggled and made sacrifices. To abandon that Declaration today would mean denying the legitimacy of everything that was considered just and rightful in that historical moment. Prime Minister Pashinyan is effectively doing exactly this when he argues that "the Karabakh movement was the greatest mistake." Yet, at the same time, he remains largely silent in the face of Aliyev's claims regarding "Western Azerbaijan." He is unable even to state clearly that Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected. That is the real issue. If, tomorrow, parts of Armenia's internationally recognized territory were also to be lost, the same logic could once again be invoked to justify a new "reality" and to concede that the other side was right. This is precisely why many Armenians are concerned about the direction of the current debate. Best regards, Hovsep Hayreni Please note that this response was translated into English from my Turkish original. I have reviewed the translation and it accurately reflects my intended meaning.



Vahe H Apelian – 2026-06-03 14:27:35
ARMENIA DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. Hrchagakir is falsely reported as Declaration of Independence. Hrchagakir simply means an important declaration, a manifesto. Check any Armenian dictionary. There is nothing mentioned in Hrchagakir as from whom, or from what Armenia is declaring independence and why it is declaring independence. There is no British Monarch or crown like mentioned there abusing its power, from whom or from which the Americans declared Independence. Or, there is no Spanish Colonialism like doing Mexicans wrong, from which Mexicans declared of Independence. The Armenian Declaration is a call to unite with Artsakh and remedy historical wrongs. Armenia cannot live up to what it declares, lest it resorts to another catastrophic losing war. I recommend Armenia remove the Declaration-Hrchakagir – from its Constitution or annul it.



Vahe H Apelian – 2026-06-03 14:18:05
Something amiss with this report. Hovsep Haireni claims that “A constitutional majority, meaning at least 65 out of 107 parliamentary seats, is needed to amend Armenia’s constitution”. I have read Armenian Constitution more than once. I do not recall such a provision, that the National Assembly can amend the constitution. Armenians voted for a constitution in 1995. Subsequently amended it twice, in 2005 and in 2015., always by referendum. I will have to point out that the present National Assembly make up, per 2021 June election is as follows: Civil Contract 71 seats, Armenia Alliance 29 seats, I Have Honor Alliance 7 seats. Not only 65 but Civil Contract has 71 seats. Given such a lapse on a fundamental premise, it remains to the readers to make their minds about the arguments Hovsep Haireni makes. .



Nurnisa Erismis – 2026-06-01 04:44:25
Welcome to Keghart, dear Hovsep Hayreni. Your article is a timely and necessary warning: peace must never become another name for fear, blackmail, or submission. Armenia needs a dignified peace, one that protects memory, sovereignty, and political will. I hope this will be the first of many contributions