

# EaP Think Bridge

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## Sad anniversary of the Eastern Partnership



Several official events in May show the accomplishments of the past and policy flaws, and offer an outline of the new horizons for the Eastern Partnership

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EaP Think Bridge is a platform uniting expert communities in the countries of Eastern Partnership region to fill the gap in distributing analytical products for stakeholders

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**Contacts:**  
[info@prismua.org](mailto:info@prismua.org)  
[www.prismua.org/eap-think-bridge](http://www.prismua.org/eap-think-bridge)

## 10 years together

**May was the month of conclusions and careful forecasts for the Eastern Partnership. The decade of the policy was celebrated in the EU in a full sway and with fanfare, but without serious decisions on a political agenda, without a summit, without a general declaration and without a clear vision for new horizons.**

What this means for the region and what kind of misty contours are outlined for the cooperation in European institutions and partner countries, Hennady Maksak analyzed.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Partnership is far from being calm. In Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan again called on supporters to take the streets, forgetting, probably, that he is now the leader of the state, not the opposition and the methods for the belated justice reform will have to be divergent from revolutionary.

The old tensions over the border escalated in Georgia and Azerbaijan. After a short conflict, the common demarcation commission resumed its work in the disputed area.

Belarus again felt the political and economic pressure of Russia in May, but it seems that Minsk took into account past mistakes and changed tactics when discussing integration issues.

The political crisis in Moldova reached its apogee: the newly elected parliament has not yet been able to agree on the coalition. Democrats and socialists took the last chance to come to an agreement, otherwise extraordinary elections cannot be avoided.

Ukraine, meanwhile, is preparing for dramatic changes. The newly elected president dissolved parliament and called on the Cabinet of Ministers to resign.

As events develop in the Eastern Partnership, we are following in our analysts' reviews from each of the countries of the region.

**Olga Chizhova**

Editor-in-Chief of the EaP Think Bridge Digest



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# Armenia: Crisis within the government

Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Center (Yerevan, Armenia)

**Armenian domestic agenda in May was overwhelmed by the judiciary reform developments. EU promises of support dominated in the economy. Meanwhile, foreign policy focused on the peace process with Nagorno Karabakh.**



**Pashinyan called on his supporters to block the entrances to the courts buildings throughout the country.**

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Crisis over judicial reform escalates

District court judge took a controversial decision on May 18 to release former President Robert Kocharian from pre-trial detention. The grounds for such a decision were that the prosecutors failed to legally demonstrate the need for the former president's custody pending his trial on charges of attempting to "overthrow the constitutional order" during fatal clashes in a post-election confrontation in February-March 2008. That decision angered many and sparked a sharp rebuke by Pashinyan, who criticized many judges for their lack of independence and alleging links to Armenia's "corrupt" former leaders. The same presiding judge, Davit Grigorian, then suspended the Kocharian trial on May 20, arguing that a "suspicion

of discrepancy" between the charges and the constitution requires him to submit the case for legal review by the Constitutional Court.

Reflecting the heightened tension, Gagik Harutiunian, the chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a body officially empowered to nominate new judges, monitor courts and enforce the independence of the judiciary, resigned on May 24, citing concerns over "ongoing developments relating to the judicial authority". Later that day, Harutiunyan's brother Arzuman resigned his post as the number two official in charge of the country's National Security Service (NSS), the successor to the Armenian KGB.

*More on the judiciary reform and its importance for the Armenian government after the revolution - in our analytical article "Armenia's revolution continues"*

### Armenian President meets IMF chief

On May 16 Armenian President Armen Sarkissian met with the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde, on the sidelines of an international economic forum in Kazakhstan. During the meeting the Armenian president advocated IMF assistance in transforming the country into a “financial hub” by leveraging the country’s “mature banking and financial systems”. The IMF has been providing crucial support to Armenia and extended a fresh \$250 million loan to Armenia in support of Armenian government’s macroeconomic policies and “ambitious” reform agenda. The latest loan, as a “precautionary standby arrangement,” would be disbursed in several installments over three years and is further aimed at strengthening “resilience against external shocks”, coming in the wake of an earlier IMF loan package that ran from 2014-2017.

### EU pledges financial support for large infrastructure projects

The head of the EU Delegation in Yerevan, Piotr Switalski,

**Pashinyan criticized many judges for their lack of independence and alleging links to Armenia’s “corrupt” former leaders**

stated on May 10 that in principle the European Union is prepared to finance “very costly” infrastructure projects proposed by the Armenian government, which will focus on the construction of highways as the continuation of the North-South corridor and the construction of a highway to the Iranian border. Ambassador Switalski also praised the government’s reform programme, noting that “during these 12 months Armenia has changed”, with “undeniable

gains and successes”, especially in the fight against corruption. The promise of EU support follows a similar announcement on May 9 by the World Bank, which will extend a new \$15 million loan to finance the reconstruction and repairs of some 61 kilometers of roads. This is to be matched by the Armenian government’s contribution of a further \$3.8 million in “additional financing” for the approved Lifeline Road Improvement Project (LRIP) that has already modernized about 433 kilometers of Armenian roads since 2009. Counting this new loan, since 1992 the World

Bank has provided nearly \$2.4 billion in funding, comprised largely of low-interest loans, affirming the World Bank’s role as the leading foreign creditor for Armenia.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### Nagorno Karabakh peace process continues

In an announcement by Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan of May 27, a new round of talks will be held between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers. The announcement comes immediately following the visit to Yerevan by the three co-chairmen of the OSCE’s Minsk Group, the official mediators of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict, who met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The “upcoming meeting” between Foreign Ministers Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov will follow an earlier round of talks in Moscow on April 15 that was hosted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and concluded with a joint statement reiterating their intention to strengthen the ceasefire regime around Karabakh and along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and reconfirming others to take confidence-building measures.

This next ministerial meeting also comes after a brief conversation on May 13 in Brussels between Prime Minister Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, in the leaders’ fifth face-to-face contact since September 2018. In interview comments to Russian media on May 27, the Azerbaijani foreign minister said that while Azerbaijan

provided the Armenian leadership time to “familiarize itself with details of the negotiation process” last year, “that transitional phase ended” and “negotiations resumed” with a “dialogue” based on “the existing format and under a particular agenda, which gives rise to certain optimism”. He further added that mutual confidence-building measures must be matched by “real steps in the negotiation process” and “elimination of severe consequences”, with a “withdrawal of occupation forces from Azerbaijan’s territories”.

### China and Armenia forge visa-free travel agreement

Following the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Yerevan, an agreement was signed on May 26 for visa-free travel that will allow Armenian and Chinese citizens to visit for up to 90 days. The agreement, aimed at boosting tourism and business ties, as well as other exchanges, comes after an official state visit of Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan to Beijing on May 14-15, where he met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. The outlook for such deepening of relations is already promising, as China stands as Armenia’s second largest trading partner, with bilateral trade increasing by over 29%, to \$771 million, last year.



# Azerbaijan: Tensions with Georgia over the borderline

Sevinc Aliyeva, The Baku Academy of International Law and Human Rights (Baku, Azerbaijan)

In May, Azerbaijani Minister of Agriculture paid an official visit to France and met with his French counterpart to discuss agricultural issues. Foreign policy agenda of the country was dominated by a border dispute with Georgia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has introduced its new strategy and recommendations for the country for the next five years.



Georgian protesters at the disputed part of Azerbaijan - Georgia border

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Agriculture in the spotlight

After the introduction of the e-agriculture system, Azerbaijan's domestic focus is again on agriculture. The government is trying to achieve cooperation with dominant agricultural economies of the world and learn their best practices.

In late May, Azerbaijani Minister of Agriculture [Inam Karimov](#) visited France and met with [Didier Guillaume](#), French Minister of Agriculture and Food. Ministers exchanged their

views about food safety, development of agriculture, and the general environment in their respective countries. In his speech, Karimov called on French entrepreneurs to take business opportunities in Azerbaijan and invited Guillaume to participate in Caspian Agro exhibition which will be held in May 2020. This exhibition is designed to enhance sustainable agriculture, implementation of cutting-edge technologies and strengthening cooperation between local and foreign farmers.

### Recommendations from the EBRD

The Board of Directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has approved a new strategy for Azerbaijan for the next five years. The 2019-2024 strategy discusses current vulnerabilities in the economic system of the country and puts forward three strategic priorities: endorsing economic diversification by stimulating competitiveness and good governance, enhancing resilience by developing financial markets, and reinforcing green economy transition and regional connectivity.

The EBRD is one of the biggest investors for Azerbaijan with a €3.3 billion investment to date. According to the EBRD, the main challenges for the implementation of the new strategy are but not limited to the difficult business environment, export complexity, weak labour market and vulnerable employment, underdeveloped financial system, unaccountable governance system and low renewable energy usage. *"We see a huge potential in the renewables sector and aim to make a real impact in this area. Continued efforts by the authorities to reform the energy market and improve the business climate will be of great help in unlocking our own funds and mobilising financing from other sources,"* [said Ivana Duarte, Head of the EBRD's office in Baku.](#)

Moreover, a recent Regional Economic Prospects report published by the EBRD mentions that Azerbaijan's economy

[is expected to grow 3.5% and 3.3% in 2019 and 2020, respectively.](#)

### Alat Free Trade Zone

One of the notable changes in the economic strategy of Azerbaijan has emerged after the foundation and launch of Alat Free Trade Zone which is regulated [in accordance with the Law on Alat Free Trade Zone](#) dated 18 May 2018. Many laws and decrees on the economic activities, [as well as agriculture](#), trade, competition policy, and intellectual property rights, have been amended by the confirmation of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan since early 2019. These laws have explicitly exempted the Alat Free Trade Zone from their scope of application. Targeting the market comprised of more than 130 million of people, the new free trade zone is aimed at the stimulation of national production via the promotion of "Made in Azerbaijan" brand and the reinforcement of the role of Azerbaijan in international logistics and main trade routes from Asia to Europe. The Alat Free Trade Zone includes the New Baku Port with the total area of 1000 hectare consisting of the 400-hectare area of the Baku International Sea Trade Port. Therefore, such a massive economic zone is predicted to make a cumulative impact to [Gross Domestic Product by \\$57 billion.](#)

## FOREIGN POLICY

### Border issue with Georgia

In May, Azerbaijan and Georgia experienced a border dispute around Keshikchidag historical monument. After Georgian President Zurabishvili visited the site and talked about the importance of continuing the demarcation process, Azerbaijani side closed access to the complex for a few days and increased the number of guards, which caused public outrage in Georgia. Some activists even gathered around the monument [and started a protest "in defence of David Gareji"](#).

Keshikchidag is a historical site which is situated in the mountainous part of South Georgia along the border with Azerbaijan and has been included in the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This ancient complex, which is called "David Gareji" in Georgia and "Keshishdag" or "Keshikchidag" in Azerbaijan, is located in the non-demarcated zone of the border between Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to the European organization Europa Nostra, [the whole site consists of 21 temples and 5,000 cells.](#)

Historically, there has been some tension about the borders; however, border authorities have reached an agreement to some extent. Both countries have different historical facts about the complex, thus more than a third of the border between the two countries has remained undivid-

ed. Problems have evolved especially around Udabno and Chichkhrituri monasteries which are situated in the mountainous part of Georgia and are accessible via a path that crosses Azerbaijan border. The Azerbaijani side has tolerated visits by tourists to Udabno; however, it has been a problem for Georgian scholars to enter the area for research purposes. The latter monastery, on the other hand, is reachable by Georgians only under special circumstances.

Azerbaijani side blamed Georgian media for exaggerating the issue. *"Creating such conflicts is in the interests of neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan. Only a third party is interested in this,"* [said Rizvan Huseynov, Chairman of the Center of Caucasian History.](#) According to him, the issue does not need to be overemphasized. "I am calling on everyone to avoid emotional speeches about Keshikchidag," stated David Zalkailani, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia in [his interview with journalists.](#)

The bilateral commission of the two countries met in Baku and decided to inspect the disputed zone together. After the discussion between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Georgia, David Gareja was fully reopened; however, border concerns remain and need to be resolved. *"Azerbaijan ... is ready to finalize this process in the near future",* [said Leyla Abdullayeva, a ministry spokesperson.](#)



# Belarus: The planned elections and an unplanned crisis

Yuri Tsarik, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies (Minsk, Belarus)

May saw a slight decrease in foreign policy activity and intensification of domestic politics in Belarus. This is the result of preparations for the upcoming elections and the reform of the Constitution, as well as the crisis around the Ministry of Interior Affairs.



President Lukashenko goes on introducing the planned Constitutional changes

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Traffic cop: Kidnaping or suicide?

On May 16, social media followed by mass media reported on the kidnapping of Yevgeniy Potapovich, a traffic policeman in Mogilev Oblast, who was found dead later. Initially, the investigators suggested that he was kidnapped and murdered. Later, the law enforcers accepted the suicide version as the main one. Before this, the police (*militsiya* in Belarus – *transl.*) conducted measures of “special influence” towards the Roma community in Mog-

ilev Oblast. These included mass arrests and “intense” interrogations, according to those involved.

Two aspects make this a remarkable incident. Firstly, the fact that social media (especially Telegram) covered it more effectively than the media (the largest Telegram channel in Belarus hit 100,000 subscribers in May). Secondly, the Minister of Interior notably refused to apologize to the Roma community outraged by the harsh police actions. The leadership of the Presidential Administra-



tion and Mogilev Oblast did it on behalf of the authorities instead. Such a “special position” of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, which is opposed to the position of the Presidential Administration, is an unusual phenomenon for Belarus. Although such “division of roles” is probably pre-agreed, the May crisis, coupled with other scandals, somewhat weakened the apparatus positions of the Interior Minister.

## Constitutional reform and elections

The discussion around the upcoming constitutional reform and election campaigns in Belarus is rather atypical. In April, Aleksander Lukashenko said about the need to redistribute mandates from president to other “branches of power”, including the Council of Ministers, the National Bank and the National Assembly. In May, however, a slightly different agenda for the constitutional reform was declared by both the chairman of the Council of the Republic of Belarus and the head of the Central Election Commission of Belarus, aimed at activating local gov-

ernment, introducing direct elections of village councils, and possibly city councils later. Importantly, these two agendas do not contradict one another. They reflect the way the authorities view the transition of power aimed at changing the very institutional basis of government in Belarus. In terms of social policy, these proposals imply the removal of a range of the state’s obligations at the local level and a transfer of responsibility for the implementation to citizens and civil society.

According to President Lukashenko, he expects the respective proposals primarily from the Constitutional Court for the discussion of the constitutional reform, while not commenting on proposals from the Central Election Commission. The board of the Central Election Commission did not attend the meeting on election campaigns with President Lukashenko in May. And Lidia Yermoshina, the chair of the Central Election Commission of Belarus, said that she was considering leaving her post after these campaigns.

## FOREIGN POLICY AND ECONOMY

### Under Russia’s pressure

Internationally, a pause came in the turbulent relations between Belarus and Russia. After the election schedules were changed and Russia’s notorious ambassador Mikhail Babich was forced to go back to Russia (some think that this happened after Belarus got compromising materials against Babich as a result of interrogating Andrey Vtyurin, Deputy State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus, who had been arrested earlier), Moscow launched some changes on the Belarusian vector. Ambassador Dmitry Mezentsev was sent to Minsk with a “diplomatic” message: “there is no need to focus on what has not been done”. This means that Belarus was offered to accept that a number of the issues in its interest cannot be solved, so it should be happy with what it has.

At the same time, the Rosselkhoznadzor, Russia’s agriculture produce regulator, has done yet another series of confiscations and introduced additional restrictions on Belarusian goods. The Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development is delaying its next tranche of \$200 million under the lending program for Belarus. In addition to this, Russia’s Ministry of Finance has “hung in the air” the issuing a \$600-million loan to Belarus.

Meanwhile, Russian sources are conducting a massive operation on social media. The goal is to create an impression that Belarus and Russia are allegedly actively working on serious changes in the regulatory framework of cooperation, that would lead to “deeper integration”,

and, in fact, to subordination of Belarus to Moscow’s will. In reality, the joint Belarus-Russia working group is not discussing any fateful or geopolitically significant issues. It primarily talks about economic aspects of integration.

Moreover, the Belarusian side has switched to the new tactics in discussing integration issues, taking into account the lessons of the past. Minsk leaves energy cooperation in the bilateral format (given the fact that the single Eurasian Economic Union oil and gas market will not be established until 2025, and there is no special progress in that direction anyway). Instead, Belarus links the com-

compensation for losses caused by Russia’s oil tax maneuver to the setting of a “fair price” for Russian gas. This means that Belarus will not demand any compensation if Russia cuts the price of natural gas. At the same time, the Belarusian leadership brings the debate on access to Russian market to the EAEU forum where Belarus opposes Russia jointly with Kazakhstan, as well as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to

a smaller extent -- they are also interested in unimpeded access to the Russian market and minimization of consequences caused by Russia’s counter-sanctions.

President Lukashenko followed that line at the EAEU summit in Nur-Sultan in May. So did Foreign Affairs Minister Vladimir Makei in his meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, and Prime Minister Syarhey Rumas in discussions with Russia’s PM Dmitry Medvedev. In addition, even President Lukashenko’s speech, usually sharp, was conspicuously restrained and non-confrontational. This indicates that the Belarusian side has a strat-

**Russia sends a new diplomatic message: there is no need to focus on what has not been done**

egy for the foreseeable future at least.

Overall, the contamination of the Druzhba pipeline with chlororganic compounds benefits Belarus. The harsh reaction of European companies to the incident (they refused to pay for the contaminated oil) leaves Minsk hopeful that it will not be alone in its claims to Moscow.

At the same time, Belarus obviously needs to compensate for the loss to its economy caused by this incident. It forced Belarusian oil processing plants to decrease output. In April, the oil processing output in Vitebsk Oblast [shrank](#) 29.9%, followed by 15.8% in Gomel Oblast. As a result, Belarus' foreign trade indicators deteriorated sharply. Its trade deficit was \$882.5mn in April 2019. Its exports fell 2% compared to 2018, while imports grew 10.6%. Overall, trade deficit after four months of 2019 was \$1.919bn compared to \$1.538bn in 2018.

Meanwhile, disturbing trends come from Ukraine. Belarusian leadership is concerned about oligarch Ihor Kolomoiskyi using his influence over the administration of newly elected president Volodymyr Zelenskyi to squeeze Belarusian exporters of oil products out of the Ukrainian market. Against this background positive news for Minsk came from Lithuania. Gitanas Nauseda won the presidential election in Lithuania. He [holds](#) a constructive position on cooperation with Belarus. This will hardly deliver a quick change of the situation around the Belarusian nuclear power plant (scheduled to be launched this year). But this may well signal that disagreements on this will no longer block initiatives, such as the signing of the Belarus-EU agreement on simplified visa regime and readmission.

# Georgia: Political perspective through a prism of elections in one district

Lasha Tughushi, Liberal Academy Tbilisi (Georgia)

**Mtatsminda district elections proved to be a rehearsal for the upcoming parliamentary elections and demonstrated what political battles are to come. “Project of the century” is under threat due to competition. A joint commission on border demarcation between Georgia and Azerbaijan resumed its work.**



Candidates at parliamentary by-elections Lado Kakhadze and Shalva Shavgulidze

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Elections rehearsed

*European Georgia* and *Free Democrats* agreed to join forces for the up-coming MP by-elections. Shalva Shavgulidze, one of *Free Democrats* leaders, entered the race on behalf of both parties and was able to take part in the second round of parliamentary by-elections in Mtatsminda district that took place on May 19. Apart from this

candidate, there is also a *Georgian Dream* candidate in the second round – Lado Kakhadze, a doctor who had previously acted as the head of Tbilisi sakrebulo (city council).

Shavgulidze was at some point a member of parliamentary bloc *Georgian Dream*. In 2012 this political power took over *National Movement* of Mikhail Saakashvili. Shavgulidze was a key figure who handled a high-profile



Girgvliani murder case. Sandro Girgvliani was a young banker brutally murdered by those close to Saakashvili. It was Shavgulidze who led this case to victory in Strasbourg Court and this subsequently meant a political defeat for Saakashvili's regime.

*European Georgia* is Misha's former team, and Mtatsminda is the center of the country. This situation is crit-

ical for the former prime minister and billionaire, *Georgian Dream* leader Bidzina Ivanishvili. His rivalry with Shavgulidze may lead to his defeat and this may become a very sensitive issue and a major challenge for his political team. Many political experts believe that these by-elections are a dress rehearsal of its own kind with looming parliamentary elections next year.

## ECONOMY

### Port competition

Emotions run high around Anaklia deep water port, the first one of its kind in the country. The construction of the port was named as the country's strategic priority, a guarantee of its independence. On May 2 there appeared information regarding the construction of a new deep water harbor in the port of Poti. Anaklia Development Consortium and its management perceived this news as a step towards destroying their perspectives and what is more, making it impossible to invest in the "project of the century" as this project had been dubbed by Georgian authorities.

**Georgia and Azerbaijan resumed negotiations on their border issues eight years after the previous attempt**

The minister of economy and sustainable development Natia Turnava fired the head of Technical and Construction Supervision Agency who had signed the document on permitting construction in Poti. The minister ordered a special statement issued saying that she was not aware of the construction permit.

The truth is that Anaklia port, first of all, is a potential threat to Russian interests in the region due to its economic and security potential. The port is supposed to be built within only 5 km from the occupation line. Its capacity is to serve over 100 ml tons of freight, which means a serious geo-economical East-West potential.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### Negotiations on the border with Azerbaijan

Georgia and Azerbaijan resumed negotiations on their border issues eight years after the previous attempt. The issue of border delimitation and demarcation resurfaced after Azerbaijani border officers had denied access to the Georgian monastery of Udabno for several days. The controversy is the following: David-Gareji is a monastery complex of about 2,5 km located on top of a rock in a desert, with a significant part of the complex situated on one of the unmarked parts of a 450-km border line between Georgia and Azerbaijan. After MFA-level negotiations the road was opened again.

The presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan discussed

the matter and decided that the border issue needs to be solved – it was already during Zurabishvili's official visit to Azerbaijan in February that Salome Zurabishvili and Ilham Aliyev reached an agreement. The delimitation and demarcation process has to be completed.

This uncertainty is a repeated cause for some tension, especially among fervent Christians. The societies of both countries closely follow the work of the intergovernmental commission which will allow Georgia and Azerbaijan to find a solution suitable for the kind of strategic partnership and friendly relations between the two countries.

# Moldova: A new round of political games

Natalia Stercul, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (Chisinau)

The intriguing results of parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova will most likely lead to a coalition between the Democratic party and the party of Socialists. The tactical goals of democrats will be achieved, and Moldovan politics will go back to square one. Now the citizens of Moldova, being tired of the political crisis in the country and seeing no way out in the near future, mostly think about price increase and inflation. Will the EU policy regarding the Republic of Moldova change under such conditions, with it somewhat acquiring a different shade after forming the new European Parliament? It remains to be seen.



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Will tactical goals be achieved in the political game?

Many politicians and experts predicted with 90% probability the possible early parliamentary elections under

the given uncompromising circumstances in the country's domestic policy and the inability of political forces to come to an agreement. The president himself many times expressed his point of view on the issue and not without regret. As he stated, in case the MPs cannot reach a mu-

tually acceptable agreement by June 10 he will have to initiate the process of dissolving the parliament.

ACUM and PRSM could not reach an agreement and nobody hopes that this is going to happen in the future. However, early elections can still be avoided if the Democratic Party and the Party of Socialists form a coalition. Following a period of long silence, the democrats made the first step and invited the socialists to the negotiating table. The latter in fact agreed at lightning [speed](#), despite having previously dubbed such a step as impossible.

It seems like the chosen tactics is likely to be successful, especially taking into account the fact that on May 28-29 Igor Dodon and Vladimir Putin met on the sidelines of Eurasian Summit in Kazakhstan and this meeting had its impact. It is worth reminding that earlier Moscow acted in favor of early parliamentary elections as it

was acting against the coalition of the Democratic Party and the Party of Socialists due to the notorious Russian laundromat (a huge Russian money laundering scheme where Moldova was a key transit point). However, it is most likely that the situation was reviewed. Moreover, given the conditions of a complicated political crisis and considering the fact that it is prior to taking an important decision – to dissolve the Parliament or form a coalition with the democrats, Dmitry Kozak, a special representative for the President

of the Russian Federation, arrived in Moldova. This visit has a purely political nature and is only made insidious using economic undertones. It again proves that Moscow can influence domestic political situation within the country. Under such conditions it is highly unlikely that early parliamentary elections will take place.

**Following a period of long silence, the democrats made the first step and invited the socialists to the negotiating table**

## ECONOMY

### Inflation and price increase

The citizens of the Republic of Moldova faced price increase for essential goods including agricultural produce. Against this backdrop higher prices for diesel fuel hardly come as a surprise. Such price increase can scarcely be called unreasonable as the National Bank of Moldova reviewed its 2019 inflation forecast and now the rate makes up 5,1% against 4,9% as stated in February. The annual inflation rate is expected to grow during the entire year of 2019, therefore, the rate of price increase is going to go up as well.

Moreover, according to May World Bank report, tax measures adopted prior to elections and higher prices for agricultural goods as well as possible increase for regulated tariffs will lead to higher level of inflation in Moldova. Economic recession continues to get worse, while it is more and more difficult to regulate price formation. Taking into account such factors as lower foreign funding, structural disadvantages of the country's economic development and political uncertainty, the existing risks and challenges in this sphere are not only obvious, but also more and more tangible.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### European parliament elections, their results and aftermath for Moldova

The elections to the European Parliament draw close attention of the entire global community, which is first and foremost explained by the fact that they are one of the most large-scale and democratic elections in the world. Their results determine not only policy efficiency within the EU, the lives of member states but also EU foreign

policy both on bilateral and multilateral levels. The new European Parliament will be drastically different from the previous one as much depends on seat allocation between the representatives of pro-European parties and populists. As for the Republic of Moldova, the results of these elections play a special role as it will impact future EU policy regarding the Republic of Moldova and other member states of the Eastern Partnership.



# Ukraine before “a perfect storm”

Sergiy Gerasymchuk, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Kyiv, Ukraine)

There was no peace and quiet following recent presidential elections in Ukraine. Political summer promises to be boiling hot. Volodymyr Zelensky and his team wish to follow up their spring success with early elections and government change. This scenario is far from being impeccable from a legal standpoint, however, current Ukrainian politics is dominated by political expediency. Financiers and international partners are bracing themselves for what is to come. It is yet unclear if the ship named “Ukraine” can survive its “perfect storm” and whether the ship’s new captain can avoid “shipwreck”.



Ukraine’s sixth president Volodymyr Zelenskyi inaugurated.

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Zelensky vs Parliament: constitutional crisis and early elections

The major development of Ukraine’s political arena in May was undoubtedly the inauguration of Volodymyr Zelensky and his first steps as the president of Ukraine. In his inauguration speech on May 20, the newly elected

president stated that the parliament must be dissolved and [called on the Cabinet of Ministers to step down](#). The decision on dissolving the Verkhovna Rada (questionable from a legal standpoint) was taken by the sixth president of Ukraine and [was reflected in the corresponding decree](#). Therefore, a new race for early parliamentary elections started. The elections are set for July 21.

During the meetings the new president held with the

heads of parliamentary groups and factions a decision was made to hold an extra parliamentary session. Volodymyr Zelensky demanded to adopt some legislative changes concerning parliamentary elections, namely lowering the parliament's threshold from 5 to 3% and rejecting the electoral system majority component (when a half of MPs was elected in 225 constituencies). However, Ukrainian MPs did not support [any initiatives proposed by the president](#). On the other hand, Volodymyr Zelensky, despite his campaign promises, did not introduce a draft law on open list election system to the parliament. There wasn't any mention of the impeachment law promised by him as well.

The president's decision to dissolve the Verkhovna Rada and set up a date for snap election got a mixed response from Ukrainian MPs. As a result, 62 MPs [appealed to the Constitutional](#)

**Newly elected president stated that the parliament must be dissolved and called on the Cabinet of Ministers to step down**

[Court of Ukraine against the presidential decree #303/2019.](#)

Together with this appeal to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, two claims were received by the Supreme Court of Ukraine demanding that the presidential decree #303/2019 signed on May 21 be ruled null and void. However, it is likely that these court rulings will be ready only after the elections.

Another controversial decree #304/2019 signed by Volodymyr Zelensky was the one appointing Andriy Bogdan the Head of the Presidential Administration, the move that resulted in protests among legislators. The legitimacy of such appointment was questioned by Deputy Minister of Justice Serhii Petukhov, who stated that Mr. Bogdan was cooperating with the administration of Viktor Ya-

nukovich, the president who fled the country, [therefore making him subject to the lustration law.](#)

## ECONOMY

### Financial circles awaiting new political reality

Up until recently Ukraine's political battles made little impact on its economic processes, however, it seems that the situation started to change in May. According to the World Bank 2018 report, Ukraine's economy grew by 3,3%, while investors' trust is limited due to erratic reform process and electoral uncertainty. The World Bank 2019 forecast is for the country's economy growth to make up 2,7%. Further reforms could improve these indicators up to 3,4% in 2020 and 3,8% in 2021. Difficulties related to further reform implementation (including health care reform, pension reform, government administration reform and social aid reform) [will result in 2% loss.](#)

The answers to the issues regarding the plans of new authorities are sought by the IMF mission that arrived in Kyiv on May 21, in order to evaluate [the implementation of the current stand-by program](#). Already in early May the IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde [declared support for](#)

[Ukraine in the future.](#) However, it is obvious that the heat of political battles in the country somewhat decreased the optimism among international financiers. Now, according to the IMF spokesman Gerry Rice, next IMF tranches will most probably reach Ukrainian accounts only following the elections and forming a new government.

Aside from political risks and a high chance for slower reforms, Ukraine's financial partners express their concerns regarding the fate of Privatbank (that used to belong to a Ukrainian tycoon Igor Kolomoisky). As of now, the National Bank made an appeal regarding the verdict ruled by Kyiv District Administrative Court that challenges the decision of the National Bank [leading to the nationalization of Privatbank in 2016.](#)

Another confrontation between Ukraine and the Russian Federation adds fuel to the fire. Moscow protracts negotiations on gas transit. In its turn Ukraine is trying to claim damage worth \$11-14 bn related to accelerated technical depreciation and losses [due to the possibility of losing its gas transit starting 2020.](#)

## FOREIGN POLICY

### Zelensky and global leaders: welcome to the club?

[Mr. Zelensky's inauguration was attended by US delegation led by US Secretary of Energy Rick Perry \(he stated that US will continue supporting the people of Ukraine\).](#) European leaders such as the presidents of Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Georgia attended the official events on the occasion of the inauguration. As for the EU officials, the vice president of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič was

present. The president of Ukraine also had a telephone conversation with the Chancellor of Germany. They discussed further political dialogue between the two countries and the issue of restoring peace [in Donbas region.](#)

Vladimir Putin was not invited for the occasion. However, he was reminded of Ukraine in a different way. One of the most important May developments not only for Ukraine, but also for the entire civilized world was when the United Nations Tribunal ordered Russia [to release Ukrainian sailors and ships captured in the Kerch Strait in November 2018.](#)



# The sad anniversary of Eastern Partnership

Hennadiy Maksak, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Kyiv, Ukraine)

Several important events took place in May in Brussels and other capitals of the EU and partner states, aimed at summarizing and celebrating 10 years of the Eastern Partnership. In fact, the list of public and non-public reflections on these got close to a hundred by 2019. Is it worth then looking at them so closely?



Some events are worth the attention, particularly, several prepared by European institutions deserve a closer look. They show the accomplishments of the past and policy flaws, offering an outline of the new horizon for the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

In earlier practices, the aspects to celebrate and the important developments linked to the EaP region were normally brought up at EaP Summits, the top mechanism for political meetings and consultations. The EaP Summits are biannual events, gathering heads of states and governments. Nothing would seem to fit the celebration of the 10th anniversary better. Yet, an alternative was offered this time, especially as there was no desire

to hold a summit this year.

On May 13, the Council of the European Union met at the level of EU and EaP foreign ministers. On May 14, the European Commission held a high-level conference. While the ministerial meeting provided the official nonpublic element of talks and conclusion drawing, the conference focused on creating an atmosphere of celebration and the most inclusive approach for the participants. Below is how this happened.

## No declarations

The approach to the celebration of EaP's 10th anniversary was serious, with the respective preparations on



the political agenda and cultural arrangements. There were only happy emotions to share at the concert of the Brussels Jazz Orchestra with musicians from the six partner-states. Creating Together, as the concert was named, was indeed much easier than agreeing on the political agenda.

In the political dimension, EU and EaP foreign ministers held a meeting chaired by Federica Mogherini, while European Council President Donald Tusk held a working dinner with the heads of states and governments on May 13.

Earlier experience shows that ministerial meetings are rarely a model for seeking compromise and common points. They can rather be compared to a fan of opinions, from the most cautious to the most optimistic ones. The anniversary inspired hope of a possible political breakthrough that could potentially lead to a joint declaration filled with real sense. In reality, the meeting ended ahead of the schedule and one partner-state blocked the final document.

It was probably better that the declaration was never released. It came out too refined and devoid of accents. In his comment for the media, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin called the declaration an “empty amphora”, referring to a form with no filling. Breaking lances over the issues of territorial integrity, the prospect of EU membership and the reference to Russia as aggressor has by now become a notorious tradition.

## **Differentiation: a goal or a side effect?**

In her final remarks, Chair Mogherini pointed out that EaP proved effective and dynamic, and it applied special approach to all partner-states based on differentiation and conditionality over the years since its launch. The impression in such circumstances is that these are the results of the EU's inability to correctly assess the interests and needs of its partners, rather than a determined search for individual approaches.

The same feeling prevailed at the high-level conference where Jean-Claude Juncker, Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn spoke in a festive atmosphere about our common accomplishments while pointing out different speeds and needs. But the issue of multi-speed policy was not duly reflected in most speeches, including the ones of presidents and prime ministers of EaP countries.

One accomplishment noted by the EU bodies in this context was drafting and signing differentiated bilater-

al agreements with different sets of commitments and ambitions. The signed Association Agreements and Free Trade Agreements with the EU, as well as visa-free travel regimes, were listed as success stories.

When summarizing the conference, Commissioner Hahn called on the states to seek deeper cooperation with the EU through more determined implementation of the Association Agreement and the continuation of the launched reforms. The prospect of membership or dynamic application of the format of three associated EaP countries were not accented, even though it seemed perfectly logical and natural to imply that both of these proposals can seriously boost internal reforms in partner-states, as parts of the EaP policy. And there are a lot of incentives here.

**Commissioner Hahn called on the states to seek deeper cooperation with the EU through more determined implementation of the Association Agreement and the continuation of the launched reforms**

While the greatest share of financial support within the EaP framework focuses on reinforcing cooperation with institutions in partner-states, the implementation of rule of law reforms and the establishment of effective and fair judiciaries are far from perfect. Things are gloomy in anti-corruption efforts, even

in the Association Club states.

Ironically, most accomplishments in the EaP policy have more to do with societies of EaP partners, while governments tend to burden or hamper processes. Even official promotional materials of the European Commission speak about accomplishments in business, mobility and efficiency more often, or as often as they speak about the steps which government bodies take to sign new agreements and implement them.

## **Ukraine's prospect**

Despite the fact that Ukraine was represented by a large delegation chaired by the President, the outcome of its work is hardly optimistic. Firstly, this was the last, somewhat ceremonial visit of Petro Poroshenko where he had an opportunity to meet with the EU partners who supported him during his tenure. Some, such as Donald Tusk, received official awards from Ukraine. Secondly, even the positive results in the implementation of European integration objectives by Poroshenko's team did not meet a due response from the audience as a result of uncertainty over policy succession with Ukraine's new President Volodymyr Zelenskyi.

While this did not surprise Kyiv, the draft final declaration did not mention the membership prospect for Ukraine. Therefore, the Ukrainian delegation was not too upset when the participants failed to approve it.

Foreign Minister Klimkin was forced to explain to

his Belarusian colleague Volodymyr Zelenskyi's statements calling on Ukraine's neighbors to see how presidents are changed.

Ukraine's delegation was mostly focused on the talks on possible additional sanctions against Russia for its decision to issue Russian passports to the residents of the occupied parts of the Donbas under a streamlined procedure.

Overall, 10 years of EaP have delivered quite a few

### **EaP ministerial meeting ended ahead of the schedule and one partner-state blocked the final declaration**

results for Ukraine. Kyiv's next horizon for EaP should follow two tracks: intensified implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU, and recognition of the need to assume the role

of the leader amongst EaP states, even if it is in the curtailed format of association. In this, Ukraine needs to seek the support of Warsaw and Stockholm as the EaP format continues its institutional development.

# Armenia's revolution continues

Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Center (Yerevan, Armenia)

On May 19 Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan urged supporters to block the entrance of all court buildings. This was the reaction to District Court's decision to free the ex-president Kocharian. "Revolutionary" methods of dealing with the situation only demonstrated that the government made a serious mistake not reforming the judiciary sooner.



After several thousand activists turned up to heed that call on May 20, Pashinyan suspended the action and held a televised national address to announce a new mandatory "vetting process" of all judges, with new requirements for greater transparency that include declarations of wealth and assets and other international "best practices" in legal reform. Weighing the issue, on May 23 the European Union expressed readiness to help the Armenian authorities reform the domestic judiciary by providing the appropriate "technical and financial assistance."

As a direct form of criticism for Pashinyan on May 27, a group of 163 of the total 229 judges in Armenia after the extraordinary meeting of the "General Assembly of Judges"

in Yerevan issued a statement that expressed cautious support for the Armenian government's sweeping plan to reform the judicial system. However, the judges demanded that they must be consulted on the implementation of the ambitious reforms. The statement also noted that the judges welcome reforms "to strengthen confidence in the judicial authority which would be taken in strict compliance with the law." According to Yervand Khundkarian, the chairman of Armenia's Court of Cassation, the judges further called on the government to adhere to the existing laws and commitments to relevant international treaties and conventions, while also condemning any attempts to interfere with "the normal work of courts".



## Way to reforms

Although hailed as Armenia's "Velvet Revolution," coming to power of the new Armenian government led by Nikol Pashinyan in April 2018 actually began with a forced resignation. Armenia's third president, Serzh Sargsyan, ended his two-terms in power with a fatal, failed attempt to remain in charge of the country by becoming the prime minister, as the head of a new parliamentary form of government. That resignation of an incumbent leader triggered an unexpected series of events that not only ended over a decade of power wielded by an entrenched ruling Republican Party, but also ushered in a new period in Armenian political history.

And the surprisingly quick and smooth successful demonstration of the potency of popular support and "people power" brought a movement led by Nikol Pashinyan to power as the new Armenian prime minister. Once installed as premier, however, Pashinyan faced the resistance of the reluctant parliament still dominated by a waning but warring majority Republican Party. As a second obstacle, Pashinyan was able to leverage overwhelming popular support from the streets against the institutional resistance of the parliament and by December 2018, garnered his own overwhelming majority of seats in a new parliament with an extraordinary election that was also unusually free and fair.

Driven by the momentum of those achievements, Prime Minister Pashinyan embarked on a new course of governing the country based on the mandate of both popular personal support and political control of 88 of the 132 seats in the new parliament. With his "My Step" political bloc easily dominating the new parliament, the only potential challenge was posed by two much smaller parties: the "Prosperous Armenia," which retained 26 seats, and the "Bright Armenia" party, with 18 seats. And as neither the former ruling Republican Party nor the more marginal parties once aligned in support of the old government were able to win seats, the Armenian parliament genuinely reflected the country's profoundly new political reality.

Despite such political power and prowess, however, the early months of the Pashinyan Administration were marked by a set of missteps and mistakes, stemming from the combination of inexperience and lack of coherent or clear strategy. Nevertheless, the government pushed ahead with an ambitious reform programme capped by an anti-corruption drive that most clearly and convincingly demonstrated the serious political will of the new leadership. And even with a mixed record of consen-

sus and compromise, exacerbated by an early incapacity to better define and defend new policies and legislative initiatives, the premier was able to sustain an impressive degree of popular support.

## Assessing the first year

Looking back, a more objective assessment of the first year of the Pashinyan government reveals three significant observations. First, the mistakes of the government were far less serious than they seemed at the time. Mistakes in public policy and political missteps are common for any government. Rather, the real test for the Armenian government is whether the same mistakes are repeated and to what degree the government learns from its mistakes. From that perspective, the Pashinyan Administration has done fairly well, and has demonstrated the ability to both correct mistakes and contain any resulting damage. This has also been matched by the recognition of the challenge of managing a steep "learning curve", which was further evident in its "humility in office" that replaced the previous government's "arrogance of power". And as inexperience is best offset by enthusiasm and willingness

to seek outside counsel and expertise, the Pashinyan Administration remains open to constructive criticism.

The second factor in assessing the first year in office is not as promising, however. More specifically, the political calculus for the victory of the Pashinyan government in 2018 is no longer applied to 2019. Popular support in the streets is never a source for an institutional mandate to govern. Although this maxim was accepted and determined Pashinyan previous priority of forcing an early election for a new parliament, the temptation to turn back to the street and threaten to call out his supporters

undermines both the credibility and competence of the government as an institution.

Moreover, despite the potent threat of protest by mobilizing supporters, such a move is a serious blow to forging consensus and compromise as essential pillars for democratic governance. In this context, the prime minister needs to do much more to foster the development of a stronger and more assertive parliament, as both a separate institution and a source for broader public policy. To date, the parliament has yet to fulfill its role as originator of legislative and policy initiatives, as well as a critical oversight body capable of enforcing "checks and balances" within the process of government.

And the prime minister needs to delegate more authority and decision-making power to the parliament. Other-

**It is, after all, the judiciary that not only holds institutional power as a branch of government in its own right, but is also essential as the legal and constitutional foundation for reform and the rule of law**

wise, Armenia's infamous "pyramid" of political power will stifle deeper democratization and institutional development. At the same time, the pyramid model is inherently unsustainable, as the premier will not be able to maintain the same degree of control or micro-management over the political process for long.

But it is the third observation in the assessment of the Armenian government that is most troubling. More specifically, the "Velvet Revolution" is under threat, and vulnerable to the limitations inherent in the specific trajectory of political change. This vulnerability stems from the reality that the so-called Velvet Revolution was indeed revolutionary, but not quite a revolution by method or model. Starting with the forced resignation of a dismissed individual and moving to replace the institution of the discredited parliament, political change in Armenia was both incomplete and inconclusive. This is most evident in the government's belated, and somewhat diluted, call for an "economic revolution", announced much later than politically practical or prudent.

But it was the failure to tackle and take on the challenge of a tainted judiciary sooner that is now seen as a serious mistake. It is, after all, the judiciary that not only holds institutional power as a branch of government in its own right, but is also essential as the legal and constitutional foundation for reforms and the rule of law. Thus, the benign neglect of legal and judicial reform during the early period of the Pashinyan Administration led to a serious loss of momentum that also deprived the government of the critical legal basis for combating corruption and other crucial reforms.

The obvious lack of an independent or even reform-minded judiciary should have been a much higher priority for the government, especially given the belated launch of an effort of "transitional justice" that was never clearly articulated and poorly planned. The concept of transitional justice was also weakened by the government's premature shift away from a priority focus on economic crimes of corruption to the overtly political transgressions of the previous government, as evident in the charges against former President Robert Kocharian and other former officials for their culpability in the post-election fatalities in March 2008.

Thus, the failure to deal with the judiciary sooner offered an opportunity for all government opponents to regroup around a "citadel of resistance," with an assault driven by efforts to galvanize remnants of support not for the ousted former president, Sargsyan, but for the more dangerous president that preceded him, Kocharian.

## The revolution continues

In recent weeks, the battle between the reformist gov-

**The obvious lack of an independent or even reform-minded judiciary should have been a much higher priority for the government**

ernment and the resistant judiciary erupted, with an escalation sparked by the case of former President Robert Kocharian. The escalation started on May 18 with a controversial decision by a Yerevan district court judge to release the former president from pre-trial detention. Although that decision was soundly criticized by the government, from the legal perspective alone, it was fairly straightforward and sound as a matter of the

rule of law and criminal procedure.

The backlash to his release was largely an emotional and political reaction, as legally the decision was determined more by the failure of the prosecutors to meet the higher burden of proof in convincing the court of the danger of flight risk or obstruction of justice to justify the former president's custody pending his trial. But the reaction was also more than simply an emotional response and was also due to the longstanding abuse of pre-trial detention, most often as an unnecessary and legally unwarranted form of coercion of defendants beyond legal norms. Sadly, the government's response was also somewhat disappointing, as the same abuse of pre-trial detentions was long used as a method to repress and intimidate the opposition in the past.

This move was further misunderstood by many, who incorrectly misinterpreted the release as undermining or weakening the criminal charges against Kocharian for attempting to "overthrow the constitutional order" during the fatal clashes in the post-election violence in February-March 2008. Although the release could raise concerns over a possible attempt to obstruct justice, or witness tampering by Kocharian, the prosecutors could have sought monitored "house arrest" or pursued other methods to deter such a scenario, just as the surrendering of Kocharian's passport eased fear of his flight risk.

But largely reflecting the emotional outrage over the March 2008 fatalities and the deep dislike for Kocharian, the release was sharply rebuked by Prime Minister Pashinyan, who criticized many judges for their lack of independence and alleging links to Armenia's "corrupt" former leaders. Although the release of the former president from pre-trial custody was not as egregious as it seemed, the situation quickly escalated only days later when the same presiding judge, Davit Grigorian, suspended the Kocharian trial, arguing that a "suspicion of discrepancy" between the charges and the constitution required him to submit the case for legal review by the Constitutional Court. This move offered a freed Kocharian a month before the higher court would be obligated to issue its ruling, allowing him the freedom to coordinate a desperate countermove.

Ironically similar to the ambition of former President Serzh Sargsyan as a trigger for Pashinyan's popular

movement, the symbolic role of former President Robert Kocharyan now serves as the figure-head and rallying point for open opponents and self-declared enemies of the current Armenian government. Another point of ironic similarity is rooted in the fact that both Sargsyan and Kocharyan now are significantly weaker and much more discredited than they either seem or realize. In a broader context, efforts to oppose the Pashinyan government are signs of desperation and symptoms of weakness, not strength or confidence.

The weakness of the Kocharyan threat is also evident in his lack of any political vehicle or instrument to challenge the government. And with a notable lack of any serious popular support, his need for a political platform is a major obstacle as it denies him any realistic pathway to power. Moreover, his credibility is meager, and even his supporters have rallied around him not in unified loyalty but out of a limited shared opposition to the government. This means that without a political vehicle or party, he will be unable to overcome the divisions and differences of a diverse and dysfunctional base of support.

The situation also demonstrates the relative waning of the power and influence of the former president as well, revealing him as very much more a former president than a current contender. His loss of support from the Prosperous Armenia party was an especially daunting setback, which would have been his natural political base of support given his help in crafting the party and helping to create its leader, “businessman” Gagik Tsarukyan, a chosen oligarch who enjoyed special favor and a lucrative share of the corruption network of the Kocharyan government. But for Tsarukyan such personal loyalty and political allegiance to Kocharyan was abruptly over in the wake of a public clash with then-President Serzh Sargsyan in early 2015, who humiliated the oligarch. The lack of any defense or support from Kocharyan only fed an added degree of betrayal in Tsarukyan’s eyes, thereby moving him closer to cautious support for Pashinyan in 2018. It is this background that explains the failure of Kocharyan to leverage a political platform or party. The sole excep-

**Armenian Prime Minister was seriously under-estimated at several key turning points over the past several years.**

tion is the marginal, and now largely discredited nationalist party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-D), whose past allegiance to Kocharyan and Sargsyan seriously tainted their standing.

## **The Russia factor**

Beyond the lack of a political vehicle, Kocharyan is also weakened by any real hope of Russian backing. Although for Moscow, the Pashinyan government is neither a preferred partner nor a trusted supplicant, Russia’s calculation is driven more by the logic of exercising its power through a reliance on the structural leverage of Armenian dependence than any emotional ties to its former patron. For this reason, despite the public image of Kocharyan being popular in Moscow, Russian policy only takes calculated risks and not blind gambles. Any such moves to back Kocharyan over an established Armenian government with widespread support and electoral legitimacy would present an unpredictable gamble for Moscow, and the one most likely to fail and trigger a serious backlash.

## **Conclusion**

Looking back over one year, the outlook for the next stage of the “Velvet Revolution” remains difficult to predict. But one important “lesson learned” for looking ahead is the fact that the Armenian Prime Minister was seriously under-estimated at several key turning points over the past several years. And as evident from 2018 onwards, he was able to easily surpass expectations and seriously overcome obstacles each time, confounding critics and even surprising supporters alike. Therefore, it seems more likely that Armenia’s coming phase of revolution will only continue, and its momentum will withstand the challenge from an “old guard.” And while it may not be as smooth as last year, the lack of any viable alternative and the absence of any credible threat will ensure that Prime Minister Pashinyan will have more opportunities to surpass expectations and only excel at surprising observers for some time to come.



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