

National Democratic Alliance
April 2024 Briefing
Recent Developments in Armenia-Azerbaijan Confrontation

In March 2024, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan declared his intention to surrender four villages of Armenia to Azerbaijan, citing Azeri demands and threats of war if the demands are not met. He subsequently met with residents of two of those villages.

The Armenian society's response was swift. Leaders of two opposition parties, Jirayr Sefilian of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Armenia's largest pro-Western political party, and Vardan Ghukasyan of Public Voice, respectively, issued statements calling on the public to put up a united resistance against Prime Minister Pashinyan's actions.

The regime is becoming increasingly desperate to counter broad-based dissent and dissatisfaction with its domestic and security policies.

Detainment and Harassment of Opposition and Civil Society Activists

The regime's statements regarding border villages have been happening on the backdrop of continued harassment of opposition activists and supporters. Below is a list of specific events taken places recently:

1. Armenian Government Directly Targets NDA Leadership

Concerned about public outrage against their policy of continued concessions to Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Pashinyan and his governing Civil Contract party are ratcheting up Soviet-style political persecutions against opponents. In the early hours of Friday, March 29, 2024, the Armenian police and National Security Service raided the offices and personal residences of the NDA leadership. They seized the phones and computers of NDA leaders with an apparent intent to disrupt the normal functioning of the organization and intimidate NDA members and sympathizers. Such tactics, however, are unlikely to deter NDA's activities and prevent the party's continued rise in popularity.

2. Trumped up Legal Charges Against NDA Activists

Following a peaceful protest rally in downtown Yerevan, a policeman approached a group of activists shouting and demanding that the car carrying loudspeakers pull over and for everyone in it to get out. The protestors complied, however, their request for an explanation resulted in the special forces attacking them from behind. Ten activists were detained and subsequently beaten in police custody. The episode is shown in [this video](#) (starting at about 1:10 mins). They were then ordered to appear in the administrative court, where legal proceedings against these activists continue.

3. Unlawful Eviction of Sos Avetisyan's Family

The police forcefully removed Sos Avetisyan, a prominent NDA member, from his apartment in downtown Yerevan, which he purchased and has occupied along with his family since 2010.

In 2023, police identified a criminal group that forges documents and addresses to present a claim in courts against lawful owners of apartments. Despite this, the prosecutor's office effectively helped the criminals speed up the eviction process to force Mr. Avetisyan from his apartment. The law requires the prosecutor's office to set a public hearing before an order of eviction is given, however, the prosecutor ordered the eviction before inviting Mr. Avetisyan and other residents of the building to a public hearing.

4. *Repressions against Varuzhan Avetisian and other NDA Activists*

The regime continues repressions against a NDA Governing Council Member, retired Colonel Varuzhan Avetisian, and other NDA activists jailed in Nubarashen Prison. According to Article 96, Part 6 of the Armenian Penal Code, after serving no less than one third of their sentence in strict conditions in prison, convicts should be moved to mild conditions in prison. Mr. Avetisian and the NDA activists met the stated requirement for a change from strict to mild conditions several months ago. They submitted a petition to the Armenian government asking to be moved per the Armenian penal code, but were denied by the Armenian government.

5. *Restrictions on Travel imposed on US Citizen Garo Yeghukian*

A dual US and Armenian citizen and senior NDA leader, Garo Yeghukian, recently put in a request with the Armenian government to lift travel restrictions on him so he could return to the United States to have heart surgery. Mr. Yeghukian has been subject to an eight-year ongoing trial, from politically motivated charges dating back to the pro-Russian regime of Serzh Sargsyan. The Armenian government has used the ongoing trial as a means of imposing travel restrictions on him. In 2017 Mr. Yeghukian appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which in 2020 ruled that Mr. Yeghukian's right to "a fair trial within reasonable time" has been violated and ordered the Armenian government to pay restitution to Mr. Yeghukian. The Armenian government has paid the restitution, however ignored the intent of ECHR ruling by persecuting Mr. Yeghukian for another 4 years.

6. *Arrest of Opposition Bloggers*

On March 22, 2024, the special forces brutally arrested two opposition bloggers and charged them with "hooliganism using information technologies." The open and brutal way in which this was done by Pashinyan's police is undoubtedly meant to send a signal to the population that dissent will not be tolerated.

7. *Arrest of Civil Society Volunteers*

On March 24, 2024, approximately 30 members of the "Combat Brotherhood," a civil society organization that was training civilians in Armenia's border areas, and six members of the NDA were unlawfully detained by police in Verin Voskepar, one of the villages planned for surrender by Pashinyan.

Ambassador Papian's Visit to Belgium and Germany

Despite the worsening external and internal developments, NDA continued its high-level outreach in the United States and Europe. From March 7-13, 2024, Ambassador Ara Papian, a member of NDA's Governing Council, visited Belgium and Germany at the invitation of the Diaspora organization "Armenian Renaissance." The following is a brief list of public and private meetings held with Ambassador Papian:

- Public lecture at the Open University of Brussels (Université Libre de Bruxelles).
- Meeting with Christian Petry, a member of the Bundestag from the ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD), SPD's speaker in the European Parliament, and rapporteur on the Armenian issues.
- Meeting with Markus Meckel, the last foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of Germany, long-time former deputy of the Bundestag, the key author of the Lustration Law in Germany.
- Meeting with Sofie van Bergen, the Armenia Desk Officer in the EU's European External Action Service (EEAS).