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Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

The honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia

Information note following the visit in Armenia from 6 to 8 November 2023

Co-rapporteurs: Mr Kimmo Kiljunen, (Finland, SOC) and Ms Boriana Åberg (Sweden, EPP/CD)

1. Introduction

1. In January 2022, the Assembly adopted a report on the functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia.² In February 2023, the co-rapporteurs visited Armenia and an information note on the situation on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in the Lachin corridor was produced.³

2. On 6-8 November 2023, we carried out a fact-finding visit in Yerevan, Yeraskh and Artashat. During the visit in Yerevan, we met the Prime Minister Mr Nikol Pashinyan, the Minister of Justice Mr Grigor Minasyan, the Minister of Internal Affairs Mr Vahe Ghazaryan, the representatives of the three factions represented in the National Assembly (Civil Contract for the majority, *Hayastan* and *Pativ Unem* for the opposition), The President of the Constitutional Court Mr Arman Dilanyan, the President of the Court of Cassation Ms Lilit Tadevosyan, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council Mr Karen Andreasyan, the Chairperson of the Corruption Prevention Commission Ms Haykuhi Harutyunyan, The Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission Mr Vahagn Hovakimyan, the Chairman of the Commission on Television and Radio Mr Tigran Hakobyan. We also met representatives from civil society. In Yeraskh, we met the Governor of the Ararat region Mr Sedrak Tevonyan. We also met recently displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh relocated to Artashat and Yerevan. The programme of the visit is attached to this note in the Appendix.

3. We would like to warmly thank the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia for the organisation of the visit and its hospitality, as well as Mr Patrik Svensson, Ambassador of Sweden to Armenia, and the staff of the Council of Europe Office for the support they provided.

4. During this visit, we had the opportunity to carefully assess the numerous developments that have occurred since January 2022 regarding the functioning of democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect for human rights. In this timeframe, the Council of Europe monitoring bodies have issued several documents of importance regarding the honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia: the European Commission for democracy through law (Venice Commission) has released five advisory opinions;⁴ the Group of States

¹ Document declassified by the Monitoring Committee on 25 January 2024.

² [Doc. 15432](#).

³ [AS/Mon \(2023\) 05 REV](#).

⁴ [CDL-AD\(2022\)002](#); [CDL-AD\(2022\)044](#); [CDL-AD\(2022\)048](#); [CDL-AD\(2023\)030](#); [CDL-AD\(2023\)045](#).

against Corruption (GRECO) has adopted a second interim compliance report on its fourth evaluation round;⁵ the European Commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI) released its sixth monitoring cycle report on Armenia; the Commissioner for Human Rights made a visit to Armenia and Azerbaijan and issued her “observations on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region”⁶. Four groups of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights that are pending implementation are still under enhanced supervision.

5. Moreover, the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026⁷ was officially launched on 16 February 2023. Under this Action Plan, the Council of Europe and the Armenian authorities have agreed to carry forward jointly, through co-operation programmes, reforms aiming to enhance the effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) system and the protection of human rights in the biomedical field as well as the freedom of the media; to combat violence against women and improve children's rights; to combat discrimination and promote the rights of minorities; to ensure respect for social rights; to enhance the independence and efficiency of justice; to fight corruption and cybercrime; to improve the healthcare conditions in prisons and enhance the role of probation in the judicial system; and to promote good governance and local government reforms.

6. Armenia is engaged in a fast-paced democratisation process since the “Velvet Revolution” of 2018, while trying to find a settlement to its 30 year long conflict with Azerbaijan. The focus of this note does not allow us to enter into a detailed assessment of all the above-mentioned developments, therefore we have focused on these elements that we consider most relevant in the reporting period.

2. Political context

7. In 2022 and 2023, the consequences of the conflict with Azerbaijan, the conditions for a lasting peace that would allow a normalization of relations with Azerbaijan and Türkiye and the situation of Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh were the main focus of the public debate in Armenia. Nevertheless, domestic issues also gathered much attention. The government of Mr Nikol Pashinyan maintains its will to reform Armenia following the “Velvet Revolution”, in the sense of democracy, respect for rule of law and human rights. The situation of the judiciary, and its perceived corruption and politicisation, are the subject of very intense political debates.

8. The last parliamentary elections were snap elections called in June 2021 following protests over the 9 November 2020 ceasefire agreement. The elections gave a large majority to the incumbent Prime Minister's party: almost 54% of the votes cast went to his Civil Contract party (71 seats). The *Hayastan* Alliance came second with 21% of the vote (29 seats), followed by the *Pativ Unem* Alliance which won 7 seats (5%). As a result, the political legitimacy of Mr Pashinyan was strengthened and his party, Civil Contract, has a two-third majority in the National Assembly.

9. After the elections, Mr Pashinyan announced a major reform of the armed forces, the purchase of modern weapons from the Russian Federation, closer ties with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), of which Armenia is a member, and the deployment of Russian border guards on parts of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. In January 2022, we reported that in Armenia “there was a general political consensus that the Russian Federation is the first and only guarantor of the security that Armenia needs and that the country should strengthen its ties with the Federation.”⁸ One of the most important Russian armed forces' bases outside of the Federation is located in Gyumri, in the west of the country. And the ceasefire agreement with Azerbaijan gave the Russian Federation a critical role for the protection of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh by providing that: “peacemaking forces of the Russian Federation (...) shall be deployed along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin Corridor.”

10. The military aggression of Ukraine by the Russian Federation that started in February 2022 had major consequences on the relations with the Russian Federation. In March 2022, Armenia did not vote against the United Nations General Assembly's resolution condemning the Russian invasion. The Russian troops stationed in the country and the Russian border guards did not deter hostile military actions by Azerbaijan. In September 2022, a full-scale Azerbaijani offensive occurred along the border, involving artillery, heavy weapons and drones and resulting in 204 Armenian servicemen being killed or missing and 80 Azerbaijani

⁵ [GrecoRC4\(2023\)6](#).

⁶ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, “[Observations on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region](#)”

⁷ Council of Europe [Action Plan](#) for Armenia (2023-2026).

⁸ [Doc. 15432](#) par. 59.

fatalities. As a result of those clashes, the Azerbaijani army occupied a number of important strategic positions and heights on the territory of Armenia, including those overlooking the main road linking the capital Yerevan to the Iranian border.⁹

11. After this outbreak of violence, the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia met in Prague on 6 October 2022 at the invitation of the President of the French Republic and the President of the European Council. An EU civilian mission was dispatched on Armenian territory to monitor the border with Azerbaijan.

12. On 12 December 2022, a group of people from Azerbaijan started to occupy the “Lachin corridor”, the only road linking Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh, contrary to the provisions of the ceasefire agreement. On 21 December 2022, the European Court of Human Rights issued interim measures indicating that Azerbaijani authorities should “take all measures that are within their jurisdiction to ensure safe passage through the “Lachin Corridor” of seriously ill persons in need of medical treatment in Armenia and others who are stranded on the road without shelter or means of subsistence.” On 18 February 2023, we visited the checkpoint on the Armenian side of the Lachin road and issued a statement¹⁰ calling “for the immediate cessation of the unlawful and illegitimate obstruction of the Lachin corridor.” On 22 February 2023, in provisional measures, the International Court of Justice ordered: “The Republic of Azerbaijan shall (...) take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin corridor in both directions.”¹¹ On 23 April 2023, Azerbaijani forces established a checkpoint on the Lachin corridor near the border with Armenia. The forced isolation of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh worsened.

13. On 14 May 2023, after one of several meetings organised in Brussels between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan, the concluding remarks mentioned both leaders’ “unequivocal commitment to the 1991 Almaty Declaration and the respective territorial integrity of Armenia (29,800 km²) and Azerbaijan (86,600 km²).” This statement was a major milestone in the path towards a peace treaty as it implicitly recognised Azerbaijan’s sovereignty over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The rest of the statement called for the normalisation of relations between both countries based on mutual recognition of sovereignty, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity, and the strict adherence to the principle of non-use of force and threat of use of force. Mr Pashinyan has been severely criticised by opposition parties in Armenia for his approach to these negotiations, and street protests and disobedience movements have been a common feature in 2023.

14. On 19 September 2023, despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under the control of de facto authorities. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan declared that the Armenian army would not get involved in the fighting. The following day, the de facto authorities agreed to disarm, and a ceasefire took effect. On 24 September 2023, Azerbaijan permitted civilians to use the Lachin corridor for one-way travel to Armenia.¹² By the 6 October 2023, the number of persons displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh reached 100 670¹³, almost the entire population of the territory.

15. The fate of the population from Nagorno-Karabakh provoked extremely strong reactions in Armenia itself, as in 2020. On 19 September 2023, on the first day of the attack, protesters gathered in Yerevan for a rally outside government buildings, calling on Mr Nikol Pashinyan to resign. The editor-in-chief of Russian state media *RT* wrote that: “The Armenian authorities personally handed over Armenia’s sacred place” and nicknamed Mr Pashinyan as “Judas”.¹⁴ Mr Pashinyan declared on television that “there are already calls, coming from different places, to stage a coup in Armenia.” The protesters clashed with the police in an attempt to storm the government house. Protesters also surrounded the Russian Embassy criticising Russia’s refusal to intervene in the conflict. On 20 September, thousands rallied in Yerevan, calling for a military intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh. The police started detaining protesters, stating that the rally was illegal.¹⁵ By 25 September, more than 140 persons had been arrested by the police.

16. On 16 and 17 October 2023, Mr Pashinyan addressed the European Parliament and met with Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić. In his address, the Prime Minister said: “(...) events taking place in the

⁹ [AS/Mon \(2023\) 05 REV](#).

¹⁰ [Statement](#) by the co-rapporteurs (24.02.2023).

¹¹ International [Court](#) of Justice (17.11.2023).

¹² [The Guardian](#) (24.09.2023).

¹³ Official figures from the International Organisation for Migration, [Armenia situation update](#)

¹⁴ https://twitter.com/M_Simonyan/status/1704076507021218174?s=20

¹⁵ [News.am](#) (20.09.2023).

Republic of Armenia and in different places of the world raise the following question: is democracy able to provide security, peace, unity, prosperity and happiness? (...) democracy in Armenia has continued and continues to receive strong blows, which operate with an almost exactly repeated formula: external aggression, then the inaction of Armenia's allies in the field of security, then attempts to use the war or humanitarian situation or the external security threat to subvert Armenia's democracy and sovereignty, which is expressed by inciting internal instability with hybrid technologies directed by external forces. (...) when hundred thousand of Armenians fled from Nagorno Karabakh to the Republic of Armenia, our allies in the security sector not only did not help us, but also made public calls for a change of power in Armenia, to overthrow the democratic government.¹⁶

17. On 24 October 2023, the Prime Minister declared: “the external security systems in which we are involved are not effective for the state interests and security of the Republic of Armenia. (...) the illegal blocking of the Lachin Corridor, the September 19 Azerbaijani attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, raise serious questions in Nagorno-Karabakh as well about the goals and motives of the peacekeeping troops of the Russian Federation. (...) We are also looking at the ratification of the Rome Statute as another measure which will enable the Republic of Armenia to use the capabilities of the International Criminal Court in ensuring external security. We made the decision to ratify the Rome Statute in December 2022, when it became clear to all of us that the CSTO and the instruments of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership are not enough to ensure Armenia's external security, and that decision is not directed against the CSTO or the Russian Federation in any way.” Indeed, on 3 November 2023, the National Assembly of Armenia ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Kremlin spokesperson, Mr Dmitry Peskov, described the Armenian decision to join the ICC as “inappropriate ... from the point of view of our bilateral relations.”¹⁷

18. On 7 December 2023, a joint statement was released by the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan which read: “The Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan share the view that there is a historical chance to achieve a long-awaited peace in the region. Two countries reconfirm their intention to normalise relations and to reach the peace treaty on the basis of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹⁸ Confidence-building measures have been agreed upon, including an exchange of prisoners. In conformity with the agreement, 32 Armenian prisoners of war were released by Azerbaijan on 13 December and Yerevan handed over 2 Azerbaijani soldiers to Baku. There are still 23 Armenian prisoners confirmed by Azerbaijan, among them representatives of military and political leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh.

19. On 12 December 2023, the European Commission's High Representative Josep Borell announced that as a first step in the increasing cooperation between the European Union and Armenia, the Foreign Affairs Council agreed to strengthen the EU mission in Armenia, recognising that a historic chance to achieve peace in the region existed.

3. Functioning of democratic institutions

20. In January 2022, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 2427 \(2022\)](#) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia in which it acknowledged that “Armenia has made marked progress in its democratic development since 2018.”¹⁹

21. In his speech before the European Parliament in October 2023, Mr Pashinyan declared that: “democracy, for the Republic of Armenia, is a strategic choice and not something dictated by circumstances.” and continued stating that: “For the first time in the history of the Republic of Armenia, the elections became a way to overcome the internal crisis and not the other way around. This is the key difference between Armenia after and before the people's, nonviolent, “Velvet Revolution” of 2018. If, before the revolution, elections usually became the cause of internal crises due to the lack of public confidence in their results, after the revolution, elections prevent or overcome the crisis, because citizens have not only a theoretical but also a practical opportunity to make decisions and implement those decisions.”

22. Electoral reform and confidence in elections is therefore fundamental in the reform process in Armenia, and the results are indeed very positive. Nevertheless, we believe that the democratic resilience of the institutions requires a democratic culture that still needs improvement.

¹⁶ [Website](#) of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia (16-17.10.2023).

¹⁷ [The Guardian](#) (03.10.2023).

¹⁸ [Website](#) of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia (07.12.2023).

¹⁹ [Doc. 15432](#).

3.1. Electoral reform and confidence in elections

23. Before the snap elections in June 2021, two packages of amendments to the electoral code were adopted in a consensual manner, after extensive consultations. Both were reviewed by the Venice commission and ODIHR²⁰ which “noted with satisfaction that consultations among the political stakeholders and non-governmental organisations were broad and took place within an adequate timeframe in order to ensure that amendments of such fundamental texts receive the widest possible support amongst different political forces, civil society and expert community.” “The changes have been discussed and prepared for a long time following an inclusive and transparent political process.” In the explanatory memorandum of January 2022, we considered that overall, the reform of the electoral framework had been real and far-reaching, although improvements were still possible.

24. Another reform occurred since, to implement the recommendations that had been issued by ODIHR, the Venice commission and PACE. The reforming process can be considered exemplary: “the elaboration of the draft amendments was preceded by extensive ten-month long public consultations with different stakeholders including civil society, and (...) this process was supported by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Various interlocutors met by the rapporteurs confirmed this open and inclusive process involving representatives of relevant state bodies, of non-governmental organisations and international experts. The rapporteurs were informed that many of the recommendations proposed by electoral stakeholders during the consultative exercise facilitated by IFES in late 2022 have been incorporated into the draft. The Ministry of Justice has made available on “e-draft” the draft amendments for the citizens to comment on them, and the draft legislation has been subject to public debate.²¹”

25. Together with the Venice Commission and ODIHR, we welcome these broad consultations and public discussions and the fact that the draft amendments were proposed long before the next scheduled elections, which are due in 2026. The way electoral law was reformed in 2021 and 2023 satisfies all the procedural conditions regarding transparency and consultations.

26. As far as the substance of the reform is concerned, the proposed amendments deal with some issues that had been previously identified. In response to a recommendation from the Venice Commission, provisions have been drafted on the holding of elections during emergency situations, including epidemics and martial law. It appears however that the draft regulation might create a significant risk of a declaration of a state of emergency or martial law being exploited for political gain, and the Venice Commission and ODIHR have proposed several amendments to prevent this outcome.

27. Several new provisions aim to enhance the transparency of the electoral process. The ODIHR and Venice Commission assessed that they would increase the understanding of the electoral process for voters as well as increase voter confidence in the credibility of the process, in particular the work of the Central Electoral Commission.

28. Another set of measures deal with the electoral roll and voter registration. According to the electoral code, the initial list of voters shall be published for each electoral precinct, as well as signed lists of voters having participated in the vote. Our interlocutors explained that this measure was introduced to prevent election fraud and ballot stuffing, bearing in mind the high number of Armenians living abroad still registered in local lists of voters. This publication allows greater transparency, but the Venice Commission expressed concerns regarding the possibilities of voter harassment on the basis of those lists. As a consequence, the Venice Commission and ODIHR recommended reconsidering the relevant provisions in the light of best practice on personal data protection.

29. We have discussed this recommendation with numerous stakeholders in Armenia, and all considered that the publication of the list had a very positive effect on confidence in the election results and almost unanimously called for its continuation. We share the view of the Venice Commission that other mechanisms can be implemented to prevent voting on behalf of others and to allow sufficient scrutiny of the electoral roll while safeguarding the personal data of voters, but we understand that in the Armenian context, these measures have to be implemented in a way that will not give rise to any suspicion of fraudulent intent. Armenia has proven its capacity to undertake electoral reforms in an inclusive, transparent and consensual way and the same method should allow the progressive replacement of the publication of the electoral roll.

30. The draft amendments also propose new regulations for recounting voting results in polling stations. Unfortunately, previous recommendations from ODIHR and the Venice Commission to grant voters standing to challenge results have not been incorporated in the current draft. The current regulation does not provide

²⁰ [CDL-AD\(2021\)025](#).

²¹ [CDL-AD\(2023\)030](#).

an effective remedy according to international standards and OSCE commitments and should therefore be amended.

31. We will pay great interest to the follow-up given to these recommendations when the text will be debated in Armenian parliament. At this stage, the proposed amendments already constitute a welcome improvement in key areas and the topics that require further improvements should not prove overly complicated to resolve.

3.2 Mutual tolerance and institutional restraint: strengthening democratic culture

32. As regards institutional balance and enabling a democratic culture to take root in the political sphere, the Parliamentary Assembly “called on the majority and the opposition to engage with each other in a constructive and respectful manner over clearly identified and divergent policy directions. It noted that functional mechanisms were in place to protect the opposition’s rights, enabling it to play its role and propose alternatives.” The Assembly also “called on the parliamentary majority to fully perform its role in terms of oversight and review of government action, given that it holds the large majority of seats.”²²

33. This recommendation follows the findings of the Election Observation Mission which concluded that the elections “were characterised by intense polarisation and marred by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric among key contestants. (...) the negative tone and the personality driven nature of the campaign hindered a policy-focused debate.” ODIHR electoral observers reported “increasingly high levels of intolerant, inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric in the period leading up to election day”. During the electoral campaign, the Human Rights Defender issued a statement calling on all the political forces to exclude the use of insults and swearwords.²³ The final report on the June 2021 elections listed among priority recommendations “Public officials, political parties, their candidates and supporters should refrain from using inflammatory rhetoric. Clearly defined non-criminal dissuasive measures should be introduced, while protecting freedom of speech.”²⁴

34. In its 2023 report on Armenia, ECRI wrote that “Hate speech incidents, including calls for violence, occur occasionally in the political and public spheres in Armenia. However, they do not usually have a racist or xenophobic motivation. According to several independent observers met during the visit, such incidents are mainly related to political figures, NGO representatives or journalists. (...) the limited public awareness of what constitutes hate speech, including incitation to hatred and discrimination, has led to some confusion about what can be seen as acceptable debate in politics and in the media, including online, as well as to insufficient action to prevent and sanction hate speech, including criminal hate speech.”²⁵

35. Mutual tolerance and acknowledgement of the legitimacy of political opponents is a necessary element of democratic societies that is often lacking in Armenia’s political debate. Respect for political opposition is not only a matter during electoral campaigns. In the exercise of power, restraint from the majority in the exercise of constitutional powers is also welcome.

36. Within the National Assembly of Armenia, the June 2021 elections have left the Civil Contract party with a two-thirds majority in Parliament which allows it to impose its choice in nominations to the most important positions in the State against the wishes of the minority. The misuse of such supermajorities to completely side-line the opposition has been observed in other countries and the Assembly recalled that: “This situation means that the ruling parties have a great responsibility to observe and safeguard the principles governing the smooth operation of democratic institutions, including the rights of the opposition (...).”²⁶

37. According to article 104 of the Constitution of Armenia, one of the three Deputy Chairpersons of the National Assembly shall be elected from among the parliamentarians included in the opposition factions. According to article 106 “The positions of chairpersons of standing committees shall be distributed among factions in proportion to the number of parliamentarians included in the faction.” In accordance with these provisions, one deputy Chairperson of the National Assembly and three standing committees’ chairpersons should be chosen among opposition members. These provisions are in line with the Venice Commission’s recommendations: “The Venice Commission endorses the principle of proportional representation in the positions of responsibility as an important instrument for ensuring opposition rights. In most important committees (for example, responsible for the budget or for the oversight of the security services) it is recommended to reserve certain seats for the opposition even going beyond its actual representation in Parliament or give the opposition the chairmanship positions. The principle of proportionate representation is also recommended for the composition of delegations of the national parliaments to the international parliamentary associations and other similar bodies.”

²² [Resolution 2427 \(2022\)](#).

²³ [Human Rights Defender](#) of the Republic of Armenia (31.05.2021).

²⁴ ODIHR Election observation mission [final report](#), early parliamentary elections 20 June 2021.

²⁵ [ECRI](#), Fifth report on Armenia, adopted on 29 March 2023.

²⁶ [Doc. 15619](#) para. 48.

38. The *Hayastan* faction proposed the candidacy of Mr Artur Ghazinyan for Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security, which was rejected by the vote of the majority. Sixteen times, *Hayastan* proposed the same candidate, and sixteen times the majority rejected it. This repetitive pattern illustrates the lack of cooperation between opposition and majority in the National Assembly.

39. In our 2022 report on the functioning of democratic institutions, we were concerned “whether the majority that emerged from the 2021 elections and the new opposition will be able to play their roles in a constructive and non-confrontational way given that the election campaign was marred by inflammatory statements.”²⁷ Therefore, we were disappointed to learn that the Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly and the three chairpersons of standing committees from the opposition had left these positions. The Deputy Chairman for the opposition, Mr Ishkhan Sagatelyan, and the Chairman of the Commission on economic affairs Mr Vahe Hakobyan, were removed from their positions on 2 July 2022 on the ground of repeated absences.²⁸ These absences corresponded to a moment when both factions of the opposition, *Hayastan* and *Pativ Unem*, were boycotting the sessions of the National Assembly and participating in rallies and protests in Yerevan. It is useful to recall that in the guidelines on the relationship between the parliamentary majority and the opposition in a democracy, the Venice Commission considered that: “(...) an organised and prolonged mass boycott of the work of Parliament by the opposition (...) cannot entirely be ruled out as a legitimate form of political behaviour, but it is permissible only in rare and very extreme circumstances where the legitimacy of Parliament is in doubt due to the actions of the majority. Disagreements about current politics, even major ones, cannot justify boycott.”²⁹

40. After hearing members of opposition factions as well as representatives of the majority, we call on the sense of national interest and statesmanship of all the parties involved to find a swift solution so as to ensure that the opposition can fully play its part in parliament.

3.3 *Appointments procedure in the National Assembly*

41. The proper functioning of the system of checks and balances also needs the full participation of the parliamentary opposition, in particular regarding appointments to independent collegial bodies. The Venice Commission is very clear in this regard: “Appointments to certain top positions outside the Government or to independent collegial bodies and agencies need to be depoliticised. Therefore, the procedure of selection, nomination and appointment should be, to the maximum extent possible, based on a cross-party consensus. At least, mechanisms should be in place which would reduce the dominance of the parliamentary majority within such collective bodies or limit the relevance of the affiliation of the office holders with the governing party or a coalition.”³⁰

42. Furthermore: “The qualified majority required for an appointment (3/4, 2/3, 3/5 etc.) would depend on the political context of each particular country. However, *a qualified majority rule will not have any use in a system where the Government party or a block already has the necessary number of votes to appoint candidates single-handedly*. In that case, the requirement of a qualified majority may be even detrimental to the opposition in the long run, if it is not supplemented with an efficient anti-deadlock mechanism: without such a mechanism the replacement of an official at the end of his or her term (and probably in the next electoral cycle) may be problematic, and the qualified majority rule will therefore help to cement the influence of the current governing majority.”³¹

43. Opposition factions as well as civil society organisations have brought our attention to some nominations to important positions in independent bodies. Candidates proposed by opposition parties have been rejected while the candidates from the majority were elected to the TV and Radio Commission. Mr Arthur Razmik Davtyan,³² who had been parliamentarian in the ruling coalition since 2019, was elected by the National Assembly as a Judge of the Court of Cassation. Later the Supreme Judicial Council proposed the candidacy of Mr. Davtyan as chairman of the anti-corruption chamber of the Court of Cassation to the President of the Republic, who appointed him to this position on 3 March 2023. Mr Vahagn Hovakimyan,³³ who at the time was a member of parliament in the ruling coalition, was elected as Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission on 7 October 2022. Mr Karen Andreasyan³⁴, then Minister of Justice, was elected by the National Assembly as a member of the Supreme Judicial Council, and was then elected as its chairman.

²⁷ [Doc. 15432](#) para. 83.

²⁸ [JAMnews](#) (02.07.2022).

²⁹ [CDL-AD\(2019\)015](#) para. 60.

³⁰ [CDL-AD\(2019\)015](#) para. 139.

³¹ *Idem*, emphasis added.

³² We met Mr Davtyan on 7 November 2023 among other members of the Cassation Court.

³³ We met Mr Hovakimyan on 7 November 2023 at the Central Electoral Commission.

³⁴ We met Mr Andreasyan on 7 November 2023 at the Supreme Judicial Council.

44. Each of these nominations may be perfectly founded taking into consideration the professional qualifications and the background of each of these candidates. However, the fact that these people have been perceived by the general public as related to the ruling coalition has adverse effects on the perception of their political independence, and ultimately on the confidence in the institutions they now serve. The legitimacy of checks and balances and independent supervisory bodies is paramount and relies to a significant degree on the perception of their political independence. We encourage the political majority in Armenia to engage in open and transparent discussions with the opposition in the National Assembly on the nominations, even if the required majority is already secured, so as to guarantee the independence of appointed persons and to install good practices within the Armenian political system.

45. In this context, we are concerned by the alleged politicization of the debates on the elections to the Corruption Prevention Committee which took place on 6 and 7 December 2023. According to the ex-Chair, Ms Haykuhi Harutyunyan,³⁵ “the nature of the 2023 selection process and debate in the National Assembly have undermined both respect for diversity and the possibility that political opposition parties can exert any influence. As a result, the risk of the politicisation of the CPC has been increased.” As no candidates have yet been elected, it is still possible for opposition and majority to reach a consensual decision.

4. Rule of law

4.1 Independence of the judiciary

46. There is little trust in the judiciary in Armenia. Widespread corruption, low professionalism and politicisation are among the most repeated criticisms. After the “Velvet Revolution” of 2018, the government envisaged a comprehensive vetting of all judges, and later proposed redefining the incompatibility requirements with retroactive effect. As a result of ongoing dialogue with the Council of Europe, the Armenian authorities abandoned these radical plans and, instead, developed a set of less radical measures which would aim *inter alia* to improve the disciplinary mechanisms for judges, which were seen as inefficient and over-protective of judges.

47. It is clear from our dialogue with authorities, members of parliament and civil society organisations that independence of the judiciary is still a major political issue. Several measures have been taken over the past few years to promote the independence of judges and thus strengthen the confidence of the Armenian population in the judiciary, including a raise in their remuneration by 30 % in 2018, the establishment of new “anti-corruption” courts, and the screening of judges, prosecutors and investigators by the Corruption Prevention Committee. Some encouraging trends have been noted and a change of behavior among judges is occurring.

48. In our January 2022 report, we concluded: “In the judicial field many reforms have already been carried out or initiated. They will take some time to yield results of some magnitude, but the foundations for a more independent judiciary are being laid. The measures taken to enhance the transparency and independence of the recruitment and promotion processes of judges were considered satisfactory by both GRECO and the Venice Commission. The question of the disciplinary procedure is still under debate because it is perceived by the Armenian authorities as a fundamental lever to guarantee more virtuous behavior of the judges in place. That of the quality of justice as well.”³⁶

49. On 21 July 2022, the Government of Armenia approved the strategy of judicial and legal reforms for 2022 – 2026 and the resulting action plan. On 25 August 2022, the Minister of Justice of Armenia requested an opinion of the Venice Commission on a draft constitutional law on making supplements and amendments to the judicial code. The Venice Commission welcomed the openness of the Armenian authorities to a genuine dialogue with the Council of Europe, and their continued effort to improve the system of judicial governance in line with the European standards, within the boundaries set by the national constitution, and in view of the overall legal and political context of the country.³⁷

50. Two elements of the current disciplinary mechanism were in particular discussed between the Council of Europe and the Armenian authorities: the power of the Minister of Justice to initiate disciplinary cases against judges, and the absence of a proper system of appellate review of the decisions of the Supreme Judicial Council in disciplinary matters.

³⁵ We met Ms Harutyunyan while she was still Chairing the CPC on 7 November 2023.

³⁶ [Doc. 15432](#).

³⁷ [CDL-AD\(2022\)044](#).

51. Regarding the review of the Supreme Judicial Council, the National Assembly amended the Judicial Code to set forth a mechanism of appealing based on the recommendations of the Venice Commission on 25 October 2023.

52. Regarding disciplinary proceedings, according to the judicial code, proceedings against a judge may be initiated by three bodies: the Ethics and Disciplinary Commission of the General Assembly of Judges (“the EDC”), the Minister of Justice, and the Commission for prevention of corruption, but in this last case only on corruption charges. The body deciding on the disciplinary liability of judges is the Supreme Judicial Council (“the SJC”), which is composed of five judges elected for the period of five years by the General Assembly of Judges and five prominent lawyers elected for the same period by Parliament.

53. The authorities initiating disciplinary proceedings have broad investigatory powers: they may request and study the relevant court files, request written explanations from the judge concerned, request information from the persons bringing complaints against judges as well as from the other natural and legal persons, state bodies or officials. Based on this inquiry, the body which has instituted the proceedings may either discontinue them or submit the case to the SJC for determination on the merits. The SJC will then decide if a disciplinary measure is required.

54. The Minister of Justice is accused by the opposition of using disciplinary proceedings to intimidate judges, to silence them or influence their decisions. The Government, for its part, agrees with the idea that the power to initiate disciplinary proceedings should eventually be removed from the Minister of Justice, but strong corporatism within the magistracy survives and impedes any kind of disciplinary sanctions against judges. According to statistical data from the Ministry of Justice, the EDC and the Ministry of Justice receive almost the same number of applications (around 600 a year), but the Minister of Justice is initiating twice as many proceedings as the EDC (33 or 34 a year against 17), and transmits four times as many cases to the SJC at the end of the procedure: the Minister is on average sending 20 cases to the SJC, while the EDC is sending 4 or 5. According to the Minister of Justice, these figures show that the EDC is too lenient due to corporatism.

55. On the other hand, we heard concerns about the politically motivated use of disciplinary proceedings. As the SJC is currently chaired by the former Minister of Justice, some consider that the government is exerting control on its decisions. Some decisions to initiate proceedings against judges based on the judgments of the ECtHR have been perceived as arbitrary, and the Corruption Prevention Commission suggested initiating such proceedings in a more transparent way, by applying objective criteria.³⁸

56. In the opinion of December 2022, the Venice Commission considered that: “even though the involvement of the Minister is currently seen as a tool helping to combat judicial corporatism...in a longer perspective it would be preferable to withdraw the power from the Minister, as soon as other mechanisms – namely the EDC – prove their efficiency.”

57. As a consequence, the Ministry of Justice developed a “concept paper concerning the reform of the Ethics and Disciplinary Commission of the General Assembly of Judges” and submitted it to the opinion of the Venice Commission on 26 September 2023. The Venice Commission prepared a joint opinion with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) and adopted it on 15-16 December 2023.³⁹

58. Currently, the EDC is composed of six judicial members and two lay members, all elected by the General Assembly of judges. The reform proposes modifying this composition. The General Assembly of Judges would retain the power to elect the lay members, but the candidates should be nominated by the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, the Minister of Justice and by civil society organisations (nominating two members). The candidates would be subjected to equal eligibility requirements, and the selection would be carried out through a competition. The EDC would therefore be composed of eleven members, six judicial members and five lay members.

59. The Venice Commission and DGI positively evaluated the increased presence of lay members in the EDC to limit the risks of corporatism and welcomed the reform in that regard. However, they warned that the reform should ensure that the nomination procedure is not politicised and that the nominating bodies are not viewed as tools for exercising improper influence on the judiciary. The Venice Commission also expressed the view that the SJC should remain free from political influence, and proposed “Among the guarantees of political neutrality of the SJC, the authorities could consider, if necessary by way of constitutional amendment, the restrictions for the politicians (including recent politicians) to become the SJC members. The Judicial Code

³⁸ <http://cpcarmenia.am/hy/news/item/2023/07/04/1/>

³⁹ CDL-AD(2023)045.

forbids the SJC members to engage, among other things, in political activities (Art 83, para.1), however this restriction is not sufficient, and it does not address the problem of politicians who, without a cooling-off period, may take up a position in the SJC.⁴⁰ This recommendation is in line with our remarks on the nomination procedure in paragraph 43 of this information note, and we fully endorse it.

60. Overall, the Venice Commission and DGI gave a very positive assessment of the concept paper, and one should once again commend the Armenian authorities for their genuine commitment to reforming the judiciary in line with the European standards and relying on the expertise of the Venice Commission. Reforming the EDC to fight the risk of corporatism will allow to gradually remove the power of the Ministry of Justice to initiate disciplinary proceedings, therefore bringing a welcome solution to the concerns that remain regarding the independence of the judiciary in Armenia. We will closely follow the debates around the draft reform once it is presented to the National Assembly.

4.2 Fight against corruption

61. Fighting corruption is a priority for the Armenian authorities, and several important steps have been taken in the past years. Many institutional reforms have occurred in the last couple of years. Two specialised anti-corruption bodies have been created: the Corruption Prevention Commission and the Anti-Corruption Committee, and specialised anti-corruption courts have started to operate.

62. The Law on the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC) was adopted in 2017, and the members of the CPC were elected in 2019. The CPC is an autonomous, collegial body, composed of five members and is responsible for the prevention of corruption and the implementation of anti-corruption education functions. The CPC maintains the public register of assets, income and interest declarations, conducts verification of the credibility of the submitted data and imposes administrative sanctions for the failure to declare property. Recently, the powers of the CPC to review declarations have been expanded to proper verification of the declarations up to receiving information constituting banking secrecy. The CPC makes integrity checks on judges, prosecutors and investigators before their appointments or mobility. The methodology of those checks has gradually been improved with the technical assistance from the Council of Europe.

63. The law on the Anti-Corruption Committee was adopted in March 2021. It has exclusive competence for conducting pre-trial criminal proceedings and carrying out criminal intelligence operations in cases of alleged corruption. The creation of this committee is a welcome reform as the investigative functions of cases of corruption were dispersed among multiple agencies. The committee is now fully operational, and according to official statistics, the number of cases of corruption crimes recorded increased by 79.5 % between the 2022 and 2023,⁴¹ The number of cases sent to court also significantly increased over the last year. This is not the result of a real increase in corruption cases, but of an increase of the efficiency of the fight against corruption. This is made possible by improvements in the law enforcement agencies, an increase in the public confidence in those agencies and by a change in mentality in the population that now reports cases of corruption much more often.

64. These very promising developments still need to be confirmed in the long term, but they show a real determination in the fight against corruption, as cases involving high-level officials demonstrate. Public confidence in these newly created bodies is critical to the success of the anti-corruption strategy. In this regard, the politicisation of nominations to the CPC is a worrying signal.⁴²

65. In spite of these efforts, Armenia lost some ranks in the 2022 index of corruption perception prepared by Transparency International. The Prime Minister has invited the Head of Transparency international, the President of the Corruption Prevention Commission and the President of the Supreme judicial council to a government meeting to discuss this setback and expressed his wish that “Armenia continued to be in the domain of impressive progress”.

66. According to GRECO evaluations, Armenia had implemented satisfactorily or dealt with in a satisfactory manner all nineteen recommendations contained in the Third Round Evaluation Report. The Fourth Round of evaluation, “Prevention of corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors”, is pending, a second interim report was released in March 2023. With respect to members of parliament, progress is underway. Public consultation in the law-making process has been made mandatory for draft laws initiated by the Government. A draft code of ethics for MPs and draft amendments to the National Assembly’s Rules of

⁴⁰ [CDL-AD\(2023\)045](#) para 32.

⁴¹ [Anti-Corruption Committee](#) of the Republic of Armenia (23.10.2023).

⁴² See para. 40 above.

Procedure intended to establish a mechanism to monitor members' compliance with ethical norms have been developed, but not yet presented to GRECO for scrutiny. The supervision of the side activities of MPs is yet to yield tangible results.⁴³

67. A new anti-corruption action plan has been adopted for the period 2023-2026.

5. Human rights

5.1. Situation of the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh

68. Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh led to the massive displacement of the local Armenian population to Armenia. In a few days, more than 100 000 people arrived in Armenia in dire need of humanitarian assistance. This represents 3 % of the total population of Armenia. The Armenian authorities have dealt with the emergency: most refugees have found a hard shelter; pupils have been registered in Armenian schools and emergency relief has been distributed for the displaced persons.

69. During our visit in the country, we met refugees in Yerevan and Artashat. We were struck by their courage and their dignity. The families we met fled at very short notice, leaving behind almost everything they owned, because they were fearing for their lives. For some, it was the third time they had to flee because of this conflict. Most of them arrived in Armenia in a state of exhaustion, hunger and mental and physical distress worsened by the consequences of the lack of food, medicine and basic goods that they had suffered during the nine preceding months. The details of the circumstances in which these people left their homes can be found in the "Observations on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region" issued by the Commissioner of Human Rights.⁴⁴

70. On returning from Armenia, we stated that: "to ensure the sustainability of this assistance and help to all those who want to settle permanently in Armenia, the country urgently needs the solidarity of all Europeans."

⁴⁵ We welcome the decision from the Council of Europe to prepare a comprehensive response package to the influx of refugees⁴⁶ and reiterate our call to all Council of Europe members to provide long-term assistance to Armenia in order to face the socio-economic challenges posed by this massive influx of refugees.

71. The Government of Armenia has granted Karabakh Armenians the status of refugees which allows them to work and benefit from social security and medical care, education and freedom of movement. However, they do not have Armenian citizenship and therefore cannot own land, be employed in governmental agencies or participate in political life. Two months after arriving in Armenia, some 5 350 refugees have found a job in Armenia. According to Karabakh's exiled leadership, some 6,000 Karabakh Armenians have left for other countries, mainly for the Russian Federation. Mr Pashinyan has stated that: "our policy on our sisters and brothers forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh is as follows: if they are objectively unable or unwilling to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, we will do everything to have them stay in Armenia."

5.2. Situation of the media

72. Since joining the Council of Europe in 2001, there have been systemic and recurring challenges to media freedom in Armenia. The 2018 "Velvet Revolution" ushered in a period of reforms which brought Armenia closer to Council of Europe freedom of expression standards. In particular, independent online media outlets have demonstrated their ability to fulfil the essential democratic role played by the media.

73. In 2022, we considered that the diversity of the media landscape had generally flourished since 2018 but noted that Armenian media remained highly polarised. Positive changes are also reflected in improved international rankings by organisations such as Reporters without Borders and Freedom House. These reports, too, acknowledge the diversity – although not full independence – of the media, as well as the relatively free operation of online independent and investigative media. At the same time, concerns relate to continued legal actions and violence against journalists; political influence and business controls in the print and audio-visual media; and the polarisation of the media caused by the editorial representation of their owners' interests.

⁴³ See developments under section 4.1 of this note, on independence of the judiciary.

⁴⁴ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, "[Observations on the Human Rights Situation of People affected by the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Karabakh region](#)"

⁴⁵ [Statement](#) by the co-rapporteurs (15.11.2023).

⁴⁶ [Visit](#) by the Special Representative on Migration and Refugees (SRSG) Leyla Kayacik from 11 to 13 October 2023.

74. The sources of information used by Armenian audiences are now overwhelmingly internet-based media and social media. Television is the second leading source of information, although its consumption has steadily declined since 2015. Local television and Russian television channels are used by a considerable number of Armenians and stakeholders suggested that in particular international news is provided through Russian TV channels. The influence of print media has dramatically decreased.

75. Most media outlets are affiliated with and directly controlled by larger political or business interests, creating systemic and persistent limits to press freedom and thus, democratic media performance. The advertising market is underdeveloped, which leads to the media getting sponsorship and support from politicians and other influential public figures. The same applies to public media, which, in many cases, refrains from government criticism. These factors limit the financial independence of the media. Revealing the true owners of media outlets in Armenia is one of the main challenges in the sector.

76. The Law on Audio-visual Media, which replaced the outdated Law on Radio and Television, was adopted in 2020 and aimed to reflect the significant changes in the nature of content production and dissemination in the digitally transformed media environment. Its provisions have raised concerns, and the law needs to be revised to ensure alignment with Council of Europe standards. The Council of Europe DGI released a technical paper in March 2022 on Armenia's media sector needs assessment⁴⁷ which recommended that national authorities carry out a major legal reform process. Under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026, the Council of Europe and the Armenian authorities have agreed to carry forward jointly, through co-operation programmes, reforms aiming to enhance the freedom of the media. We will carefully follow the developments on this issue.

5.3. Rights of journalists

77. Journalists' access to information is regulated under the 2003 Law on Freedom of Information, which defines general rules for requesting public information by all categories of professionals (journalists, lawyers, civil society activists), as well as by the general public. However, despite the precisely defined procedures and rules for filing and processing information, effective enforcement mechanisms are lacking, which hinders the meaningful enjoyment of the right to freedom of information.

78. In July 2021, "grave insult" was criminalised. This decision has received widespread criticism from international and domestic observers, including the Human Rights Defender of Armenia. In [Resolution 2427 \(2022\)](#), the Assembly reiterated its position that defamation should not be criminalised. The authorities have heard this call and in the new criminal code entered into force in 2022, the provision criminalising grave insult was removed. We welcome this decision and recall the invitation to "develop tools other than preventive punishment to combat disinformation and hate speech."⁴⁸

79. In May 2022, Armenia ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (also known as the Tromsø Convention). The Convention aims at fully guaranteeing freedom of information, and domestic legislation and practice will need to be brought into line with its provisions. The first report from the authorities was transmitted in January 2023. Overall, the area of freedom of information needs further development in Armenia.

80. Safety of journalists remains a concern. Physical violence and attacks against journalists have decreased in recent years, however a rise of cases was reported in 2022, perpetrated by both public officials and private individuals. Most happened during various opposition protests. In many cases, threats of violence and attacks against journalists are not properly investigated. Attacks from previous years have not been followed up, nor adequately publicised by the law enforcement bodies, and no one has been convicted for attacking journalists in 2020 or 2021. This impunity emboldens the perpetrators of these crimes and at the same time, has a chilling effect on society, including journalists.

5.4. Right to peaceful assembly

81. A series of street protests against government policy regarding the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh has raised concerns regarding the respect for the right to protest and the response of law enforcement to the protests. In particular, the series of demonstrations which took place on 19 September and the following days have caused concern. In a statement from 9 October 2023, the *Hayastan* faction reported that "more than 700

⁴⁷ Council of Europe, Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Overview of the national legislative framework covering media freedom, freedom of expression, public service media and its compliance with Council of Europe standards, [DCFE-ARM-NAR-TP-1/2022](#).

⁴⁸ [Resolution 2427 \(2022\)](#) para 24.3.

people were taken to police stations during various acts of disobedience. In extreme cases, disproportionate force was used against them. (...)”

82. The Armenian Helsinki Committee, a non-governmental group, documented the opposition protests. According to their report, on 19 and 20 September, clashes took place between the participants of an assembly held in front of the Government residence and police officers. “The police officers formed a chain and blocked the entrances of the Government building, and some of the participants tried to break the chain by pushing them, some protesters threw plastic bottles and other objects in the direction of the police. Several times, depending on the efforts of the police representative negotiating or the calls to calm in loudspeaker from participants in the gathering, the tension has eased.” “On the evening of September 19, at 20h50, during another clash between police and protesters, the police used stun grenades without warning. At least one of them exploded in a large crowd. As a result, some participants of the meeting received physical injuries. According to the Ministry of Health, 16 police officers were injured in the clashes and 18 civilians.”

83. Systematically, the Human Rights Defender sent “rapid response groups” to visit the police departments where people had been detained. Private interviews were conducted with the detained persons, the grounds for detention as well as the protection of their rights in the Police Departments were assessed. From September 19 to 26, the representatives of the Defender held private conversations with more than 350 persons deprived of their liberty.

84. In a statement released on 26 September,⁴⁹ the Human Rights Defender emphasised that: “the fundamental right to freedom of assembly refers to peaceful assemblies. Guaranteeing the peaceful nature of assemblies is the responsibility of the State. At the same time, it is crucial that the participants of the assemblies, in turn, ensure the peaceful course of the assembly, exercise restraint and comply with the requirements set by law.” The Office of the Human Rights Defender recorded that, in a number of cases, the physical force used by police officers when detaining people was disproportionate and not justified by the need to take the person into custody. The Human Rights Defender recalled that the use of disproportionate force by police officers is inadmissible and unacceptable under any circumstances but also recorded cases of physical injuries inflicted on police officers by the participants of the gathering, which is deplorable. The Defender also ascertained that calls for violence and hate speeches were made by protesters.

85. We discussed these issues during our meeting in Yerevan with the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr Vahe Ghazarian. He explained that a new police service was being designed, specialised in management of street protests. This service will be trained and fitted with the necessary equipment. Regarding the events in Yerevan, he stated that the police did its best to restore public order and safety, that police refrained from using force and tried to negotiate to ensure the peaceful nature of demonstrations. Nevertheless, the police had been forced to apprehend those undertaking acts of civil disobedience, where people blocked the traffic, giving rise to tensions and risks of clashes between protesters and ordinary citizens. He added that 27 investigations had been opened against police officers in 2023.

86. We also reported to the Minister cases of two lawyers who were beaten by policemen inside police stations when working to defend their clients. The Minister clearly condemned such events and told us that both cases were being investigated, full information including video and audio recording had been provided to help identify the perpetrators. After this event, a meeting was held between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and representatives of the Bar Association to put in place a memorandum of understanding. A task team of barristers and policemen will be available 24 hours a day to prevent escalation and aggravation in case of tensions.

87. The Minister of Internal Affairs also explained that Armenia was applying the lessons learned from the Lithuanian experience regarding practices in police stations. We would also suggest considering the “GODIAC” project, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, which involved the police forces of twelve European States and initiated a change of strategy in order to reduce conflicts and escalations during law-enforcement operations. Another round of exchange of experience would be beneficial for many member States of the Council of Europe.

⁴⁹ [Human Rights Defender](#) of the Republic of Armenia (26.09.2023).

Programme of the visit

Fact-finding visit 6-8 November 2023

Delegation: **Mr Kimmo Kiljunen** (Finland, SOC), co-rapporteur
Ms Boriana Åberg (Sweden, EPP/CD), co-rapporteur
 Secretariat: **Mr Matthieu Monin**, Secretary of the Monitoring Committee

Monday, 6 November 2023

09.30 Meeting with NGOs at the Council of Europe office
 13.00 Lunch
 14.15 Meetings at the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia with:
 14.30 **“With Honor” Faction**
 15.20 **“Armenia” Faction**
 16.10 **“Civil Contract” Faction**
 17.20 Meeting with **Mr Arman Dilanyan**, President of the Constitutional Court
 20.00 Official Dinner on behalf of **Mr Ruben Rubinyan**, Vice President of the National Assembly, Chair of the Armenian Delegation to PACE

Tuesday, 7 November 2023

09.00 Meeting with **Mr Vahe Ghazaryan**, Minister of Internal Affairs
 10.30 Meeting with **Mr Grigor Minasyan**, Minister of Justice
 11.30 Meeting with **Ms Lilit Tadevosyan**, President of the Court of Cassation
 12.30 Meeting with **Ms Haykuhi Harutyunyan**, Chairperson of the Corruption Prevention Commission
 13.35 Lunch
 15.00 Meeting with **Mr Karen Andreasyan**, President of Supreme Judicial Council
 16.15 Meeting with **Mr Vahagn Hovakimyan**, Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission
 17.30 Meeting with **Mr Nikol Pashinyan**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia
 19.15 Working Dinner with members of the international community

Wednesday, 8 November 2023

09.00 Meeting with **Mr Tigran Hakobyan**, Chairman of the Commission on Television and Radio of the Republic of Armenia
 11.30 Meeting with **Mr Sedrak Tevonyan**, Ararat Region Governor
 (Place of the meeting: village of Yeraskh)
 13.00 Lunch
 14.30 Meeting with **refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh**
 15.30 Departure for **Khor Virap monastery**