

ATHENA

FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH

MSc Course

"The EU and the Post-Soviet Space"

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This “foreign policy speech” was originally written for the ATHENA Jean Monnet Chair MSc Course “The EU and the Post-Soviet Space” taught by Dr. Olga Burlyuk. It is published as part of our mission to showcase peer-leading papers written by students during their studies. This work can be used for background reading and research, but should not be cited as an expert source or used in place of scholarly articles/books.

Context

On 19th September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive into Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), which put the entirety of the region back under Azerbaijan's control. By the end of September, more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians living in the region had fled the region for fear of military reprisals and ethnic cleansing. The military offensive occurred despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers on the border of the region, meant to prevent any further hostilities from happening. This event is another painful note in the history of a long and complex conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The inspiration for this speech is a close friend of mine who is Armenian. He has previously told me that he sees the failure of Russian peacekeepers to act in response to Azerbaijan's offensive as a betrayal of Armenia by Russia. In response, he hoped that the Armenian government would begin pursuing closer ties with the EU to limit Russian influence. While this ended up happening only to a very limited extent, I chose to write my speech as an imagination of what it would look like if Armenia went down this path.

This speech is delivered by Nikol Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia, on 21st September 2023 - the day celebrated in Armenia as Independence Day, and a day after Azerbaijan took control of Nagorno-Karabakh this year. The speech is given to the Armenian National Assembly and is also televised throughout the country. The purpose is to boldly announce Armenia's intention to pursue closer ties with the EU in response to Azerbaijan's offensive.

Speech

Honorable President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, Dear fellow members of parliament, and the great people of Armenia,

I am speaking before you today on the 32nd anniversary of the restoration of an independent state for our Armenian nation.

Yet, 32 years later, many of us fellow Armenians cannot bring themselves to celebrate today. **And how could we be celebrating?** How can we feel any joy at this time, knowing that our fellow countrymen from Artsakh are having to flee their homes, their properties looted, their way of life rooted out. The truth is, under this situation, no one calling themselves Armenian has anything to celebrate today.

The situation in Artsakh has been of paramount importance for my government, as well as all previous Armenian governments. We pursued what we assumed to be a stabilization agreement in 2021, with peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation stationed in Artsakh in order to stabilize the status quo.

I will not make it a secret that Armenia does not possess the same levels of military capacity or resource endowment as some of our neighbors do. Quite the contrary: we are well aware of our geopolitical reality. It is with this understanding that we pursued the stabilization deal in 2021 which put Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh. We undertook the deal offered to us by the Russian Federation in good faith and full trust. Following the events of the last week, we are forced to unequivocally declare; **Russia has broken our trust!** The death of some 200 Armenian citizens in the past 2 days, and a further 100,000 to be forced to flee their homes from this illegal invasion – these facts lie squarely with the Russian Federation and its leadership.

In consideration of the recent developments, it has become more than clear to my government that the only way to break the recurring cycle of pain imposed on our country is only by a radical reorienting of our foreign policy. This government cannot be blamed for not seeking solutions with the Russian federation in good faith. The truth is, good faith can only get you so far – **especially if your opponent has no regard for good faith to start with, and particularly when your own so-called partners don't either.**

In this aspect, the European Union represents a clear alternative for our country.

I am announcing today that my government will be seeking to upgrade the existing Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the EU to an accession agreement. We declare our sovereign decision to pursue, in a realistic timeframe, candidate status for membership in the European Union. In parallel, I am

announcing that my government will begin the process of withdrawing from the Eurasian Economic Union. In order to ensure the future security of the people of Artsakh and Armenia at large, I am also announcing that my government will be asking the European Union to upgrade the competences of the EUM Armenia military mission. My government has already contacted the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU for this purpose.

We firmly understand the implications of the decisions announced today. However, my government believes that time has come for the Armenian people to be no longer held as hostages of these unfavorable conditions. It was 7 years ago that millions of Armenians at home and around the world stood together in our Velvet Revolution to rise above our conditions and to be able to choose the direction we want for our country. It is today that we finally have the chance to live up to those ideals that we fought for in our Revolution.

I proudly declare: Armenia's future is in Europe, for Armenia is Europe.

Thank you, and Long Live Armenia!