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Armenia Submits Bill Recognizing Independent Nagorno-Karabakh

By The Moscow Times

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Ethnic Armenian soldiers stand in a trench at their position near Nagorno-Karabakh's town of Martuni.

The Armenian government has approved a draft bill recognizing the Nagorno-Karabakh region's independence and sent it to the country's parliament, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Thursday.

The bill was submitted by Armenian opposition lawmakers Zarui Postanjan and Grant Bagratyan.

Similar initiatives have been presented to the Armenian government in the past, but the Cabinet has repeatedly rejected them, citing concerns that it could interfere with negotiations over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, RIA Novosti reported. The regional conflict is mediated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group — co-chaired by Russia, France and the United States.

Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan said that the government's decision "has been conditioned by discussions between Armenia and Karabakh, taking external and internal factors into account."

In early April, tensions in Azerbaijan's breakaway region, populated mostly by ethnic Armenians, escalated as both sides accused each other of offensive warfare. Baku and Yerevan have been engaged in a dispute over the region for more than 20 years, since 1988 when Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed its independence from Azerbaijan. The move led to a war, which ended in 1994 following a cease-fire.

Novruz Mamedov, deputy head of the Azerbaijani presidential administration, had earlier called the Armenian lawmakers' proposal to recognize the region's independence "a provocation," Azeri news outlets reported.

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