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Putin Congratulates Armenia's Opposition Leader-Turned Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

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Nikol Pashinyan **Artyom Geodakyan / TASS**

Russia's newly-inaugurated President Vladimir Putin was among the first foreign leaders to congratulate Armenian protest leader Nikol Pashinyan on becoming prime minister on Tuesday.

Armenia's parliament voted for opposition leader Pashinyan to take the post of Prime Minister, weeks after the politician spearheaded a popular revolt against Armenia's longtime leader Serzh Sargsyan. Armenia has relied heavily on Moscow after the Soviet Union's collapse and houses a Russian military base near its second-largest city of Gyumri.

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“I expect that your work as the head of government will contribute to further strengthening the friendly, allied relations between our countries,” the Kremlin cited Putin as saying in a congratulatory message to Pashinyan Tuesday.

Throughout Armenia's wave of protests, Moscow has remained publicly neutral, and Pashinyan has consistently said he viewed Moscow as a vital ally.

In the lead-up to his election on Tuesday, Pashinyan said that he was committed to staying in an economic bloc and regional collective security organization led by Russia, which is wary of an uncontrolled change of power that would pull the country out of Russia’s orbit.

Pashinyan told the state-run TASS news agency that he hoped to meet Putin on May 14 during a Eurasian Economic Union summit in Sochi.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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