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Armenian PM Calls on Citizens To Discuss EU Membership

By AFP

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People take part in a protest in central Yerevan, demanding the resignation of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on March 13, 2024. **Alexander Patrin / TASS**

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Thursday called for broad public dialogue on the prospect of applying for EU membership, as the ex-Soviet country's ties with Russia fray.

Moscow's war in Ukraine has reinvigorated the EU's drive to enlarge, with Brussels putting EU aspirants Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on a formal membership path after years of reluctance.

Armenia has grown angry with Moscow over what it considered inaction during Azerbaijan's sweeping offensive to retake the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region last year.

Pashinyan said the possibility of joining the European Union "must become a widely discussed topic in society."

His comments came after the European Parliament this week passed a resolution "on closer ties between the EU and Armenia."

Pashinyan said his cabinet "has the political will to continue working towards a maximum deepening of Armenia's ties with the EU."

Armenian officials have increasingly publicly spoken about joining the EU while Yerevan distances itself from Moscow.

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Last week, Armenia said it no longer needed Russian border guards at Yerevan airport — where they have been deployed since 1992.

Armenia has repeatedly floated intentions of leaving the Russian-led CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation) security bloc.

Moscow on Wednesday warned against the move, saying it would wreck ties between the two countries and undermine Armenia's security arrangements.

"Continuing Yerevan's current course could ultimately cause irreparable damage to our allied relations," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

She said it would "completely destroy effective mechanisms for ensuring" Armenian security.

Armenia boycotted a CSTO summit at the end of 2023 over what Pashinyan said was the bloc's failure to fulfill its security obligations.

In a sign of its ambition for new security guarantees, Yerevan has been forging partnerships with Western countries — mainly France and the United States.

Moscow had for decades been the main moderator of the conflict over Karabakh but has been bogged down by its two-year Ukraine offensive.

In February, Armenia formally joined the International Criminal Court (ICC), despite Moscow warning the small Caucasus country against the move.

It is now obliged to arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin if he sets foot on Armenian territory under an ICC arrest warrant issued for the Russian leader in March 2023.

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