Image: CESS

VOLTEN BRIEF

Between a rock and a hard place: Security sector oversight in Armenia

Between a rock and a hard place: Security sector oversight in Armenia

By Jos Boonstra and Beatrijs Visser

Jos Boonstra is senior researcher at CESS
Beatrijs Visser was programme manager at CESS until September 2023

Introduction

After the 2018 Velvet revolution and the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia finds itself between a rock and a hard place. The rock is the lost war against Azerbaijan and the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has resulted in a refugee crisis and national trauma. The hard place is the pursuit of a democratic reform agenda in a polarised political environment, with only modest Western help. Politics in Armenia is a zero-sum game, with a majority government and a disgruntled opposition. Armenia can no longer rely on Russia as a patron and needs to improve relations with neighbours and secure support from the European Union (EU) and the United States (US). The war and the democratic reform agenda meet most visibly in the security sector, where reform is imperative but the old habits of not demanding transparency and avoiding accountability persist.

Key points:

1. Armenian politics is characterised by polarisation and uncertainty over the country's future direction.

2. Parliamentary scrutiny over Armenia's security sector falls short due to a shortage of political will, lack of capacities, and insufficient cooperation among oversight actors.

3. As the Armenian government seeks to implement a democratic reform agenda, little attention is devoted to developing oversight of the security sector.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

Armenia is amidst a process of security sector reform.[1] In 2020, the government adopted a police reform strategy that included an overhaul of the interior ministry. In 2022, Armenia set out to establish a new Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS). At the same time, reforms began regarding military leadership and civilian direction. These processes are being implemented by the Nikol Pashinyan-led government that came to power in 2018. Whereas Armenia moved from a presidential to a parliamentary system in 2018, the oversight role[2] of the Armenian National Assembly remains superficial, as the government firmly controls the legislature where it enjoys majority, while the opposition largely boycotts proceedings. Hence, parliamentary scrutiny of security sector reform is weak. At the same time, the oversight process lacks inclusiveness, as civil society is divided and other institutions, foremost the Audit Chamber and the Human Rights Defender (ombudsperson), lack traction with parliament.

The DIOS project

The *Developing Inclusive Oversight of Security* (DIOS) project in Armenia is being implemented from December 2021 until June 2024 by the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) from The Netherlands in cooperation with Peace Dialogue from Armenia. The project seeks to contribute to a more inclusive process of security sector oversight. It does so by organising a series of high-level policy labs and subsequent detailed expert labs. The project brings together MPs from the Committee on Defence and Security of the Armenian National Assembly, parliamentary staff, personnel from the Audit Chamber and the Human Rights Defender, and representatives of NGOs and think tanks.

This paper is based on the information gathered during a series of policy and expert labs during which Armenian (and a few international) participants shared their views on democratic control. Additionally, information was collected through desk research, an assessment mission, interviews, and questionnaires completed by Armenian think tank representatives. Respondents to the questionnaires and interviewees are hereby referred to as 'observers' and remain anonymous. The authors would like to thank all those who contributed to this study with their insights, and hope that their input will lead to strengthened oversight in Armenia as well as increased attention to international cooperation in support of democratic reform. The authors would also like to thank Edgar Khachatryan, Irna Hofman, and Merijn Hartog for reviewing a first draft of the paper. Whereas the paper was drafted before the September 2023 war of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh and the subsequent exodus of its population to Armenia, it does take into account some of the expected consequences of these developments.

---

1. The paper distinguishes between the process of Security Sector Reform that involves all security actors and is aimed at effective and efficient defence, police, and intelligence structures, and Security Sector Governance as a process that is aimed at democratic management of security actors.
2. The paper uses different terms to discuss 'oversight' of the government as an essential part of good governance: Democratic 'control' in general, security sector 'oversight' specifically, 'oversight' actors (parliament, audit and ombudsperson institutions, and civil society), and parliamentary 'scrutiny' and civil society 'monitoring'.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

This policy brief discusses democratic oversight of security in Armenia. It assesses the concepts of *capacity* in being able to exercise effective oversight; *cooperation* among different actors in holding the government to account; and the *culture* of oversight. The brief starts out with an exposé on the political and security situation in Armenia. In the main part, the concepts of capacity, cooperation, and culture are discussed. Regarding capacity, the paper assesses the legal framework and how it is applied. On cooperation, parliament's information position is discussed. The culture of oversight is approached through intelligence oversight and classification issues. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for the Armenian government, the legislature, civil society, and donors.

Reform and democratic control

For Armenians, national politics and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue have always gone hand in hand. The lost war of 2020 and the subsequent loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 weigh heavily on Armenian society. As one observer noted, trauma has resulted in polarisation and scapegoating as people blame the army, Russia, the diaspora, or Westerns partners, while it is Armenian politics that is unable to give clear direction and implement reform. Several observers opine that the majority government acts in a dominant and excluding manner, while the opposition is divided and disgruntled. At the same time, there is little space to constructively look ahead – the government is not preparing the population for a settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh, argued one observer.

In the same vein, national politics is affected by Armenia's relations with its neighbours – foremost Azerbaijan and Turkey – and by Russian influence versus relations with the EU and the US. The government seeks to roll back Russian influence in Armenia's security constellation. One observer noted that there is a feeling that Russia has abandoned Armenia in times of need, first during the 2020 war and recently by not securing Armenian access to Nagorno-Karabakh. After Russia's inactivity in upholding the ceasefire and deterring Azerbaijani troops, Armenian confidence in Moscow seems damaged beyond repair. Armenia's decision to join the International Criminal Court (ICC) – which implies that Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is wanted by the ICC, can no longer travel to Armenia – is a clear signal to Russia.

Declining Russian presence should be replaced with increased EU and US engagement. This will be a difficult, and potentially dangerous, process for Armenia. A weakened Russia could still stir trouble in Armenia, while Yerevan is uncertain of whether the EU and/ or the US would come through in an hour of need. Moreover, Armenia is still part of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. The EU and the US did step up in the recent negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh and will be instrumental in reaching a final peace settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 2021, Armenia and the EU concluded a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The challenge for Armenia will be to join the likes of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, all of which have EU membership aspirations, instead of being left in a group with Azerbaijan and Belarus that harbour no EU-membership ambitions.

Some background

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and continued Armenian-Azerbaijani tensions

With the Soviet Union's demise in the early 1990s, war started between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Fighting ceased in 1994, when Nagorno-Karabakh and seven other adjacent districts were controlled by Armenian forces. For over 25 years, regular incidents occurred and tensions remained high, as Armenia and Azerbaijan were unable to reach a settlement.

In September 2020, the protracted conflict erupted into a full-fledged war with many casualties. After six weeks, Russia brokered a ceasefire. Under the agreement, Azerbaijan gained control over a substantial part of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven adjacent regions. Since 2021 there have been several Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia, occupying territory. From December 2022 to September 2023, Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor resulting in a humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. On 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan attacked Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in an exodus of the population to Armenia.

Russian peacekeeping forces have been on the ground since 2020. At the end of 2022, the EU set up a border monitoring mission (EUMA). At the time of publishing, a settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan had not been reached.

Armenian politics

In 2015, two thirds of Armenians approved the transformation of the Armenian political system from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary republic in a referendum. The change came into effect three years later. Since 2018, following mass anti-government protests known as the Velvet Revolution, the country has been amid a significant transition. The Nikol Pashinyan government has a democratic reform and anti-corruption policy in place.

The most recent elections were held in June 2021; the turnout was slightly less than 50 per cent. The elections had initially been scheduled for December 2023, but were called earlier by Prime Minister Pashinyan due to a political crisis following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and an alleged attempted coup in February 2021.

The 107-seat parliament is divided as follows:
- Pashinyan's Civil Contract Alliance has 71 seats.
- The Armenia Alliance group occupies 29 seats.
- The I Have Honour Alliance has 7 seats.
- No other party or alliance reached the electoral threshold required to win a seat.

Security sector oversight in Armenia

- The *National Assembly of Armenia's Standing Committee* on Defence and Security is charged with overseeing police, emergencies, defence, and the national security services.
- The *Audit Chamber of Armenia* oversees government spending. The Ninth Department audits security institutions such as the Ministry of Defence.
- The *Human Rights Defender of Armenia* (ombudsperson) is elected by parliament and defends the human rights of individuals, including those of military servicemen.
- In *civil society*, several NGOs, think tanks, and academia are engaged in projects and monitoring of security policy-making and implementation. Some of them come together in the Platform for Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

Two electoral victories over the past five years gave confidence to the Pashinyan government. Notwithstanding some success in countering corruption, the broader democratisation agenda is still slacking. While there were hopes that the reform-minded government would put its cards on developing a parliamentary democracy, there is little that points in that direction. The change from a presidential to a parliamentary system was made in 2015 through a referendum under President Sargsyan, who might have sought to prolong his tenure by becoming prime minister due to the impossibility of re-election as president. The actual move to a parliamentary system came into effect in 2018, when Pashinyan came to power. Observers in this study see the parliamentary system in reality as a super-prime-minister system, in which the legislature plays no meaningful role. They argued that 'government is interested in people on positions, not institutions'; parliament is 'an appendix of the government'; and 'the judiciary is run by the old guard'. Several observers see political parties based on ideology as a means to turn away from the current polarisation whereby the opposition believes the government has given Nagorno-Karabakh away and the government sees the opposition as living in the past, close to Russia. There is, however, also an understanding that political parties need to be developed bottom-up, something that will take time.

Armenia's democracy scores in 2022

- Freedom House democracy score: 3.04/7 (up from 2.96 in 2021)
  (7 is fully democratic, 1 is fully autocratic)
- Transparency International Corruption Perception Index: 49/100 (up from 35 in 2018)
  (the higher the score, the less corrupt the country is perceived)
- Bertelsmann Transformation Index – political transformation: 6.75
  (defective democracy) (scale from 1 to 10)

The Pashinyan government closely controls the security sector, especially the armed forces and the intelligence agency. In 2021, the need for civilian control of the armed forces became evident when the military's top brass called for the government's resignation. One observer explained that reforms in the armed forces are aimed at military education, and the promotion and screening of procedures for senior and command officers. According to one observer, another reason for Pashinyan's focus on the security sector is the strong influence of Russia, especially in the intelligence services. Even though Russia's influence is waning, it still has the capacity to exert influence through the security sector with potential negative impacts on politics as well as on society. The top security officials in Armenia (the heads of the National Security Council and of the intelligence agency) are now close allies of the prime minister. A new Foreign Intelligence Service was recently established to do away with Russian-inspired practices. Beyond this, strategic vision is lacking; the process is managed from the top without much involvement of parliament or informing the public.

In the National Assembly there is capacity, experience, and expertise to exercise oversight of security sector reform. The standing Committee on Defence and Security, comprised mostly of seasoned MPs (11), and expert staff and advisors (5) meets regularly and keeps an agenda.

However, some observers indicated that there is little will to actively hold the government to account – government-aligned MPs seem to support the implementation of policy or new legislative proposals from the government without question, while the opposition mostly boycotts proceedings.

One complicating factor is that Armenia lacks a tradition of scrutinising defence and intelligence matters. Previously, national security and the defence of Nagorno-Karabakh were tightly controlled by the president and the security sector leadership. Security matters were regarded as essential and only few had access to information; broader society agreed on the overriding importance of security and individuals did not want to be seen as contesting this. This past view on security matters has partly led to a lack of debate and critical scrutiny of security policies by the parliament. The wish to democratically reform the security sector, combined with old habits and the current political polarisation, create a difficult environment to promote a culture of critical scrutiny by parliament and other oversight actors.

Case *capacity*: legislative scrutiny and the legal framework

One argument often brought forward by MPs and their staff in Armenia to explain the lack of parliamentary scrutiny are shortcomings in terms of capacities to exercise effective oversight. 'Capacity' mainly relates to parliamentarians' and staff's ability to do their job, but it also includes the legal framework of parliament, most notably the constitution and the rules of procedure. These regulate relations between the executive and legislative powers and ensure the capacities parliament can use to hold the government to account. Most observers argued that the Armenian Assembly has the capacity to exercise oversight over the security sector, but that it does not have the political will to use this capacity and often lacks an understanding of how to apply it. It appears that the Assembly indeed fails to understand its own role and tasks. For instance, while some MPs and staff mentioned they felt left out of the process of drafting the National Security Strategy, this is normally the sole task of the government. Instead, the Assembly should use its energy to critically review government drafts and then monitor the implementation of the adopted version.

In defence of the Armenian National Assembly, the legal foundation for its key oversight tasks is indeed troubled. While the constitution is broadly in line with European equivalents, it is problematic where the role of the legislature is concerned. On the one hand, it fails to include concepts such as the right of the legislature to summon representatives from the executive. Instead, the Assembly can only ask oral questions at set times and send in written questions to the government. On the other hand, the constitution is specific and seeks to regulate matters in detail. The constitution provides an exhaustive outline of how parliamentary tasks should be conducted, especially in terms of composition, elections, and law-making. This eliminates the flexibility of the legislature, which is a necessary component of a well-functioning democracy, even more so in the security field where quick action is sometimes needed.

In the Assembly itself, scrutiny is often curtailed by an abundance of procedures, deadlines, and protocols. One observer noted that in order for a parliamentary staffer to get information from the defence ministry, s/he first needs to go through parliament's entire bureaucracy

from the bottom to the top, after which the request reaches the defence ministry, where it goes through the ministry's own ranks from the top to the lower echelons that provide the requested information to equivalents in parliament. Amending the rules of procedure could simplify the process. However, this is easier said than done, as the constitution states that rules of procedure are a matter of constitutional legislation that needs a 60 per cent vote in support of amendment by the Assembly. Still, updating the rules could bring debate back in parliament. In the end, the rules of procedure should be created by parliament, for parliament.

Legal reforms alone will not stimulate the development of a more active and self-aware parliament. As one observer noted, parliament does have sound law-making initiating powers, but it does not use them. Well over 90 per cent of proposed laws are initiated by the executive and are mostly passed quickly by the majority, while the few legislature-proposed laws face stiff resistance. Boosting the capacity of the National Assembly by revising legislation, training MPs and parliamentary staff on procedures and mechanisms, developing political parties or lowering the threshold for parties to enter parliament are all important steps, but these will only have a practical impact when Armenia's government becomes transparent and parliament shows political will to hold the government to account.

Case *cooperation*: information and expertise

In order to exercise effective scrutiny, parliament needs up-to-date, reliable, and timely information. Besides receiving information from the government, parliament also needs to do its own research in-house or commission it externally through civil society. Whereas developing a strong knowledge position and applying it is a challenge for any parliament, in Armenia it has become even more challenging due to the country's polarised politics.

The Research and Training Centre (RTC) primarily provides parliament with legislative checks on draft legislation, but it can also produce analyses upon request by MPs. The RTC does not initiate research itself and does not have its own budget, thus limiting the possibility of involving external expertise. Its work is not committee-driven, but is rather instigated by political fractions, which makes the research department prone to political pressure. One observer highlighted the lack of trust in the Centre by opposition- and government-affiliated parties alike. Other observers consulted for this study were not even aware of the Centre's existence. Another observer argued that parliamentarians do not perceive the RTC as a serious source of information to carry out parliamentary scrutiny. In contrast, some interlocutors in the Assembly itself felt that parliament does take the RTC's opinions to heart. In any case, it is unlikely that the RTC is fully developed or used to its best ability.

Civil society analyses via NGOs and think tanks also have little traction. Since the 2018 change of leadership, civil society organisations loyal to the previous government – which had ruled the country since 1999 – have complained about being excluded by the current government of Nikol Pashinyan. At the same time, pro-government reform NGOs also have little impact. One observer noted that the government – of whom several members themselves derive from civil society – wants to avoid being seen with NGOs as this could spark attacks from the opposition of being corrupt or being aligned with Western philanthropic foundations.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

Civil society-parliament cooperation proceeds among similar lines. One observer noted that NGOs working with a donor-funded project that obliges cooperation with parliament can have the ear of MPs. Besides that, civil society views are either not offered or not taken on board by parliament. In the former case, a lack of capacity and funding often lies at the basis; in the latter case, NGOs are not regarded as independent by opposition- or government-affiliated MPs. Albeit to a lesser extent, the lack of incentive in taking external advice on board and using it also applies to independent agencies, foremost the Audit Chamber and the Human Rights Defender, whose reports are insufficiently used in holding the government to account.

Regarding the security sector and civil society, only a few NGOs are involved, mostly on human rights-related issues. As most defence- and intelligence-related security matters remain behind closed doors, NGO input is often superficial. The only exception is police reform on which NGOs have been actively involved by contributing to the government-initiated 2020 reform strategy and subsequent action plan. Unfortunately, in early 2023 NGOs withdrew from these efforts out of frustration given the persistent corruption and the police's and authorities' resistance to the planned reforms.

One positive exception is the establishment of a Platform for Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector that includes several ministries (Ministries of Defence, of Justice, and of Emergency Situations as well as the National Security Council), oversight actors (the parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence and Security, the Human Rights Defender Office, and the Supreme Judicial Council) and a group of democracy-promotion-driven NGOs. Occasional meetings bring these actors together to discuss cooperation on oversight, monitoring or projects. Unfortunately, the Platform has few funds to operate in a thorough manner. It does offer though a mechanism for cooperation and pooling expertise on security sector governance when there is a need or opportunity.

Case *culture*: secrecy and intelligence oversight

An issue that is not often assessed is the broader parliamentary culture through behaviour, norms, and values. Culture is always present, but difficult to point out. It cannot be changed top-down, but rather needs to be slowly developed bottom-up, ideally with impulses from outside perspectives. This means that NGOs and donors can play a substantial role in bringing about positive change in parliamentary culture.

One of the most pressing concerns for parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Armenia is the lack of transparency. The need for secrecy is used by the government to avoid disclosing information and being held to account. Parliament accepts this. Several observers argued that MPs on both sides of the aisle have little appetite for demanding disclosure and providing scrutiny of government policies. In theory, MPs can get hold of security-related information as, by law, the requester cannot be denied access. However, in practice, requested data is often not disclosed as it would threaten national security. The label 'confidential' is frequently misused by the government as a self-defence mechanism.

An excuse often given for 'overclassification' of information is that Armenia's neighbouring countries are hostile, and that transparency could lead to sabotage. However, according to an observer, Armenia's legislation is purposely built around keeping as much information secret as possible. The Law on State Secrets regulates the classification of information. It includes a list of topics considered as state secrets, all of which should typically be kept closed for 25-30 years. While it is vital for national security to keep some information strictly confidential, it does not make sense to keep most data secret for this long.

The issue of confidentiality hinders oversight of security in Armenia, particularly regarding the intelligence services. Intelligence is difficult to democratically manage anywhere; in Armenia, it is further complicated by Russia's influence. This influence is increasingly seen as problematic. Armenia was frustrated with Russia's lack of support during the 2020 war and its inaction to unblock the Lachin corridor in 2023. After the deception of Azerbaijan's September attack on Nagorno-Karabakh while Russian peacekeepers stood by idly, Armenia's trust in Russia as its security patron has evaporated. Getting rid of Moscow's influence on Armenia's security sector will be a challenge, as Russia is unlikely to pack up and leave. After all, Russian influence in Armenia's security sector has always sought to counter democratisation and ties with the EU and the US. Part of the government's reassessment of security is replacing the current National Security Service by the newly established Foreign Intelligence Service.

There seems to be little interest in parliament to develop a standing committee to deal with intelligence alongside the establishment of the new FIS. In civil society, the issue is not pushed; one observer argued that intelligence oversight should only be introduced after broader improvements of parliamentary scrutiny have been achieved. This shows how sensitive oversight of security is in Armenia. While this is understandable, it also exemplifies how parliament is not able to meet its oversight and representation duties. The biggest fear is that MPs might leak information to Russia or other parties. Clearly, members of a parliamentary committee dealing with intelligence should be fully screened and deemed reliable to retain confidential information. Also, scrutiny of intelligence need not be all-encompassing as there will always be matters too sensitive to share at a particular time, though the less secrets the better should be the rule in any democracy.

The establishment of the FIS offers an opportunity to get parliamentary scrutiny of intelligence finally installed in Armenia. It is also a chance to address and slowly change the broader culture of secrecy that limits active oversight of the security sector in general.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

Developing democratic control

This brief is about oversight of the security sector, but five out of the seven recommendations below are aimed at democratic control in general as procedures are similar to most policy fields. Only the last two recommendations relate to the security sector in general and oversight of intelligence specifically. The recommendations are aimed at the Armenian government, parliament, civil society, and international donors.

1. Prioritise inclusive oversight as an indispensable aspect of democratic governance.
A government that implements reform in a one-sided way and excludes the opposition will eventually alienate the population. An opposition that remains disgruntled and does not weigh in daily politics will not gain popular support. This is why a culture of democratic control is so important, as it not only assures good quality policy, but it also creates an atmosphere of common purpose – not in agreeing but in working together. Democracy-related reform programmes should focus more on oversight processes that are inclusive and less on people and products. Building a critical but positive democratic culture takes time and can only be sped up slightly through training and exchanges with partners in Armenia and abroad.

2. Counter zero-sum politics by starting to build genuine political parties.
Support to the development of political parties in Eastern Europe has gone out of fashion over the past decade. Notwithstanding this, there is still a need to develop political parties that form an essential basis of any democratic political system. Most Armenian observers that contributed to this paper indicated that Armenia is in dire need of political parties that do away with person-centred movements and alliances. Donors need to invest in young talent and understand that results will take time as this is a bottom-up process. Here lies a task for European NGOs and foundations that seek to establish a democracy that is social-democratic, liberal-democratic, Christian-democratic, and so on. 2024 will be the year to invest in proper (new) political parties as Nagorno-Karabakh's population in Armenia will want to express its voice.

3. Civil society needs to shed their political differences by coming together in providing expertise.
Just as politics is polarised between government and opposition, so are parts of civil society. At the same time, politicians exclude NGOs that have different opinions. Civil society organisations have a responsibility to abstain from maintaining political affiliation. Donors should be aware of divisions and seek inclusion of civil society. International donors should also be vigilant concerning support. Funding allocation should be scrutinized to prevent rendering support to NGOs advocating for an Armenian security sector under Russian influence or authoritarian control. Recently, all-around grassroot civil society involvement in accommodating refugees has been an encouraging sign of cooperation. Now, policy-oriented civil society organisations need to come together through good governance-inspired training, research, and awareness-raising projects. In cooperation with parliament, civil society could, for instance, lead in devising a blueprint for security sector reform (or aspects thereof), describing challenges and suggesting solutions that can be taken up by the Assembly.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

4. Parliamentary rules of procedure should be reviewed in a new parliamentary system.
Whereas legislation is not the main reason for the lack of parliamentary scrutiny, there are shortcomings in Armenia's legal setup. The constitution is detailed about the role of the legislature, but not on its role of exercising oversight. Without proposing to amend the constitution, it would make sense for the National Assembly to critically review its own rules of procedure. In doing so, it could look at models of other legislatures, preferably of European countries with a similar parliamentary system. The process of developing these could help spur parliamentary activity and create more self-awareness on oversight tasks. However, new rules of procedure will only work if MPs have the will and staff have the capacity to use them.

5. Develop analytical capacity in parliament in combination with civil society expertise.
The National Assembly has a Research and Training Centre that can deliver analyses. This body would ideally develop into a place where knowledge is generated, and outside expertise is attracted and used. The RTC should work closely with think tanks and NGOs, requesting analyses and organising research meetings. It could even go a step further, by welcoming short-term secondments by civil society researchers who would learn about the functioning of the legislature, while the Assembly would benefit from insights from young NGO actors. As the Centre also deals with training, it could be supported to develop training courses and exchanges for new MPs, parliamentary staff, and others.

6. Establish a parliamentary committee that oversees intelligence.
With the reform of intelligence in Armenia and the creation of a Foreign Intelligence Service, it would be a missed opportunity to not also establish parliamentary scrutiny of intelligence. Surely there are concerns about confidentiality, and government and opposition not seeing eye-to-eye, but a parliamentary committee dealing with intelligence (or at least a sub-committee of the current Committee on Defence and Security) would be in order in a democracy. This is especially true now that Armenia will increasingly look toward the EU and the US as security partners. When setting up the new intelligence agency and looking for best practices abroad, Armenia's Assembly could also investigate how other democracies exercise oversight of intelligence in a safe and effective manner.

7. Donors should support and coordinate support to inclusive security sector oversight.
Armenia is in need of increased attention and support by the EU and the US – firstly, in terms of security cooperation and, secondly, regarding increased economic ties and help with democratic reform. Brussels and Washington as donors, as well as foundations, international organisations, and NGOs, should support Armenia to reform its security sector, from the police and the intelligence services to the armed forces and border control. Whereas this falls short of security guarantees, Western engagement would also send a clear signal to Baku and Moscow of Western support. As part of this process, donors need to include support to scrutiny by parliament and monitoring by civil society as priorities to make headway with democratisation and development of Armenia's security sector.

End note

As part of a broader democratic reform effort, Armenia needs to devote attention to democratic control of the security sector. Currently, the capacity available to exercise democratic control is ignored or misused, while there is ample space to improve legislative and human capacity. Whereas there is cooperation among oversight actors, this is based on procedures that do not yield impact, or proceeds along political lines that result in exclusion, foremost of civil society actors. Limited capacity and lack of cooperation have led to a passive and complacent culture of oversight, whereby parliament follows the government's line, and the opposition excludes itself.

To help remedy this situation, Armenia and its donor partners should lift democratic control in general and security sector oversight specifically to a higher level of priority. However difficult, given Armenia's uncertain future and polarised politics, a democratic reform programme and healthy security sector cannot do without parliamentary scrutiny and broader public involvement. After the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia will need to look toward the future and develop new and deepened partnerships with the EU and the US: democratically-managed security policy needs to be part of this development.

CESS Centre for European Security Studies

CESS

The Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) is an independent institute for research and training, based in Groningen, the Netherlands. CESS seeks to advance security, development, democracy and human rights by helping governments and civil society face their respective challenges. CESS is an international, multidisciplinary and inclusive institute. Its work is part of the European quest for stability and prosperity, both within and outside Europe. CESS encourages informed debate, empowers individuals, fosters mutual understanding on matters of governance, and promotes democratic structures and processes.

Peace Dialogue

Peace Dialogue is a non-religious and non-political NGO, established in Armenia in 2009, with a vision to build peaceful and democratic societies where justice and the rule of law prevail. Our mission is to foster the protection of human rights, promote multi-layered dialogue, and build democracy and democratic institutions in conflict-affected and post-conflict societies, both locally and internationally. We strongly believe that peace, justice, and democracy are interrelated, and sustainable peace can only be achieved through the establishment of democratic institutions that uphold human rights and the rule of law. Through our work, we have built a network of civil society actors, human rights defenders, and peacebuilders who share our vision of a more peaceful and democratic world.