ARF-DASHNAKTSUTYUN
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

BRIEFING NOTE

Pashinyan's Assault on the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun)

26 October 2025 Revised & Updated

Analysis and Context for Policymakers and the Public

Fact Sheet

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Overview

Since mid-2025, Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan's government** has intensified a sweeping crackdown on Armenia's **opposition**, the **Armenian Apostolic Church**, and **independent voices** challenging his plans for further concessions to **Azerbaijan** and **Turkey**.

Within this campaign, Pashinyan and his ruling **Civil Contract Party** have escalated **political, legal, rhetorical, and physical attacks** against the **135-year-old Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun)** — Armenia's oldest political party and a principal opposition force (With 18 of 107 total and 36 opposition MPs in the National Assembly). The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun is a **full member of the Socialist International** and an **observer member of the Party of European Socialists (PES)**.

Government actions have included **labeling the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun a "terrorist organization," arresting its members,** and **signaling possible legal restrictions or even a ban.** These measures appear designed to **appease Azerbaijan amid ongoing negotiations** and **neutralize a key domestic counterweight** to Pashinyan's unilateral foreign policy agenda.

On **October 2, 2025**, ARF-Dashnaktsutyun representatives warned that the government is preparing to obstruct or disqualify the party ahead of the **2026 parliamentary elections.**

"They're going to try to obstruct us — it's already underway," said ARF-Dashnaktsutyun MP **Kristine Vardanyan**, pointing to remarks by both Pashinyan and Civil Contract MP **Narek**

Babayan advocating legislative changes to ensure "democracy and transparency" in political parties.

In an effort to **appear democratic while concealing his true intentions**, Pashinyan has publicly called for transparency regarding opposition funding. However, his own Civil Contract Party's donor list was **only exposed through independent investigative reporting**, revealing questionable contributions from individuals with **no verifiable income.**

Additionally, Pashinyan has sought to **restrict the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's internal conventions**, labeling them "conspiratorial" and implying possible links to terrorism.

MP **Vardanyan** recalled that similar pretexts were used in the early 1990s, when the **Ter-Petrosyan government suspended** the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's operations under analogous allegations.

On **October 22**, Pashinyan intensified his attacks in the National Assembly, claiming:

"The speeches and policies of a significant segment of our opposition, or the most active segment, are developed outside Armenia. They have no connection with domestic political life. They are connected with foreign political agendas and serve as internal brakes on foreign policy. [...] In the opposition segment, we only have foreign emissaries who carry out foreign instructions."

Key Events and Statements

1. Calls to Ban the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun

Civil Contract members and supporters, both inside and outside parliament, have **repeated Soviet-era narratives** portraying the ARF as obsolete or have **openly demanded its banning.**

- **May 2023:** Then Civil Contract MP **Hakob Aslanyan** called for the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's dissolution, claiming it is a "nation-destructive organization." He alleged, without evidence, that the party was involved in espionage and avoided calling its gatherings "congresses" to evade legal oversight. He predicted the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun would soon "disappear from Armenia's political scene."
- **July 10, 2025:** Civil Contract MP **Hasmik Hakobyan** called for the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's closure and inclusion on a "terrorist organizations" list, citing **unsubstantiated claims** of weapons and "terror plots."
    - Despite admitting no coordination with Pashinyan, Hakobyan asserted that a "terrorist act" had been foiled and dismissed the **presumption of innocence.**

- These accusations coincided with the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's leadership of organized resistance to further **territorial and diplomatic concessions** to Azerbaijan and Turkey.

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2. Pashinyan's Position

- **July 16, 2025:** Pashinyan declared that any potential ARF-Dashnaktsutyun closure is "a legal matter, not a political one," signaling his government's readiness to act once "legal grounds emerge." This language suggests preparation of a **legal pretext** for a **political ban.**
- **October 1, 2025:** During a government Q&A session in the parliament, Civil Contract MP **Narek Babayan** proposed amending the law to ensure all political parties are as "democratic" as the ruling party.

Pashinyan welcomed the suggestion, stating: "The idea you're expressing — I like it, since we're a democratic country — means we must find mechanisms ensuring that any political party operating here also complies with the principles of democracy and transparency**. This might even raise the question of whether a party should be allowed or not allowed to participate in elections**."

Pashinyan repeatedly demands opposition parties disclose their donors, yet **his own party's donor list was exposed only by independent media**, not by the government. Reports by *Infocom* and *CivilNet* revealed **suspicious donations from individuals with no declared income**; some unaware donations were made in their name.

Pashinyan mocked and derided the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun, saying, "What's the point of closing the ARF? You're shutting down the Dashnaktsutyun every single day. There's no need to close the ARF, because it's already closing itself daily — give it a bit more time, and it will close forever. It's such a predictable thing."

He further attacked the party's internal operations: "If that law[1] allows you to gather somewhere in secret and hold a party meeting, that's bad. What does a secret meeting even mean? Conspiratorial — I don't want to say terrorist. What does it mean to hold a congress in Tsaghkadzor or elsewhere so that no one can see what's happening, and then announce that someone was elected by someone else? And where are the ballots?"

Responding mockingly to opposition criticism, he continued: "Go out into the streets and squares — carry out your revolution. Why are you sitting on soft chairs? Where is your revolution? Where are your masses? [...] If everything is as terrible as you say, why are you sitting here? Where are the crowds on Baghramyan Avenue? Where are the barbecues?"

And concluded with further accusations: "I want to see the Dashnaktsutyun's donor list. You

[1] Presumably, the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Political Parties.

don't have donors, because you're not engaged in political activity — you're engaged in conspiratorial activity. You're being brought suitcases of money from the budgets of other countries… Maybe you're even getting salaries, and not only from Armenia."

Criminal Prosecutions and Political Persecution

3. Mass Arrests of ARF Members

- **July 10, 2025:** On the day Prime Minister Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and their high-ranking delegations, were meeting in Dubai, the National Security Service (NSS) raided the homes of five ARF members, including staff and youth leaders; along with two other individuals, all seven were arrested "on suspicion of plotting terrorist attacks."
- No weapons or any illegal items were found; however, Strikeball gear (a sport involving simulated combat) and ARF T-shirts were presented as "evidence."
- Initially, detainees were **denied legal counsel**, and rights violations were reported.
- After the expiration of the time allowed by law, 72 hours, **five of the seven** (four of them ARF members) **were released without charge**. Although Armenia's Investigative Committee implicitly claimed to have foiled "terrorist attacks," only one of the arrested young men, ARF member, 18-year-old Andranik Chamichyan, was formally charged with "preparation of terrorism." A Yerevan court allowed the law-enforcement agency to hold Chamichyan and another suspect in pre-trial detention. The latter, with no connection to any of the others arrested, was charged with illegal arms possession, rather than terrorism, after investigators reportedly found a hand grenade in his apartment.
- The timing — during sensitive talks with **Baku and Ankara** — indicates a **politically calculated effort** to weaken organized opposition.

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4. The "Galstanyan Coup" Case

- **June 25, 2025:** Archbishop **Bagrat Galstanyan** and 14 others, including ARF members, were arrested for an alleged coup plot — all **deny the charges.**
- **July 8, 2025:** ARF-affiliated MP **Artur Sargsyan** was stripped of parliamentary immunity, accused of being involved in the "coup plot." In the parliament, Sargsyan's closing remarks were followed by a brawl instigated by ruling MPs.[2]

[2] "Everything is already predetermined … and I have decided that instead of spending my precious time [left before the arrest] here, I will go to church with my four minor children and wife, light a candle there, and then go to the Investigative Committee," Sargsyan said before walking off the parliament floor.

- The crackdown on Galstanyan's "Srbazan (Sacred) Movement", supported by the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun, is part of the broader effort to **neutralize all resistance to Pashinyan's foreign policy direction**, especially his posture toward Azerbaijan.

5. Targeting of ARF-Member and ARF-Aligned Lawmakers

The ruling majority has used its control of the National Assembly to **remove opposition MPs from leadership positions**, citing procedural grounds or exploiting boycotts.

- **June–July 2022:** Civil Contract removed **Ishkhan Saghatelyan**, ARF-Dashnaktsutyun Supreme Body of Armenia Chair and opposition Deputy Speaker, from his post. Since the majority refused to elect the opposition "Hayastan/Armenia" faction's candidate (Ishkhan Saghatelyan) to one of the three posts of Deputy Speaker, by law reserved for the opposition, the post remains vacant. At the same time, the majority also removed other opposition figures from committee leadership (e.g., opposition "Hayastan/ Armenia" faction members Vahe Hakobyan, as Chair of the Economic Affairs Committee, and Armen Gevorgyan, as Chair of the NA Standing Committee on Regional and Eurasian Affairs).
- **Summer 2022:** Several opposition MPs, including ARF-Dashnaktsutyun members **Tadevos Avetisyan** and **Artur Khachatryan,** were pressured to resign from committee vice-chair positions — denounced by the opposition as a **purge of opposition leadership in the National Assembly.**
- **July 7, 2025:** Former Defense Minister **Seyran Ohanyan** and former Environment Minister **Artsvik Minasyan** (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun) were indicted in **politically motivated corruption cases.**[3] Pashinyan had publicly vowed in May to imprison Ohanyan, revealing a **personal vendetta.**

According to some eyewitness accounts, the brawl broke out there after Vahe Ghalumyan, a Civil Contract member MP, physically assaulted Sargsyan during his walkout. Other deputies joined in the fight, jostling and swearing at each other.
Artur Hovannisyan, a senior lawmaker from the Civil Contract party, threatened to "break the neck" of another opposition colleague and threw a glass bottle at him. The bottle hit Civil Contract's Karen Hambardzumyan in the head, however.
Despite the intervention of uniformed security guards, the ugly scene continued in the parliament lobby, with Hakob Arshakian, a Civil Contract member and parliament vice-speaker, chasing oppositionists there. Arshakyan shoved in the process a pregnant woman who tried to rein him in.

[3] The Office of the Prosecutor-General formally requested the stripping of their parliamentary immunity, accusing Ohanyan of illegally privatizing land and building a summer house in a natural reserve when he served as Armenian defense minister from 2008 to 2016. It stated that Artsvik Minasyan facilitated the alleged land seizure in his then capacity as Minister of Environment. Both Ohanyan and Minasyan rejected the accusations as politically motivated. Other opposition lawmakers linked them to Pashinyan's threats voiced during the Armenian government's question-and-answer session in the parliament on May 7. At that session, Pashinyan lost his temper and pledged to "go after" Ohanyan and other Hayastan lawmakers in response to their claims that he is turning a blind eye to media reports about corruption among members of his entourage. "You must be the first to go [to prison] and you will go," Pashinyan shouted at the retired general.

- Also, occasionally, **there are physical confrontations (brawls/scuffles/ assaults) that occur on the floor of Armenia's National Assembly** (or immediately inside the parliamentary chamber) in which members of the ruling Civil Contract majority (or parliamentary security acting in support of the majority) engage in physical confrontations with opposition parliamentarians. These escalate in part due to hard rhetoric, but also physical interference (e.g., blocking exits), which is symptomatic of increased polarization.
- In addition, during opposition street demonstrations or civil disobedience actions, riot police have physically and verbally assaulted opposition lawmakers. One such assault was in May 2024, against ARF member **Ashot Simonyan**, who was blocking the riot police from illegally storming (without any warrant) the party's headquarters. While one officer was fired, no criminal charges have been brought against him or any other officers involved in the assault.

These actions reflect a **pattern of shrinking democratic space**, erosion of checks and balances, and the suppression of dissent.

Defamation Lawsuits Filed by the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun

On **September 22, 2025**, the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun filed multiple **defamation and insult lawsuits** against pro-government figures — **Civil Contract MP Lusine Badalyan, Minister of Economy Gevorg Papoyan,** and **Republic Party leader Aram Sargsyan.**

According to ARF-Dashnaktsutyun attorney **Hovhannes Khudoyan**, the lawsuits followed a campaign blaming the ARF for Armenia's **2020 defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh** and portraying the party as **violent and treasonous.**

In August–September interviews, these officials made inflammatory accusations:

- **Lusine Badalyan (Sept. 10, 2025):** Claimed the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun organized the November 2020 attacks on government buildings, the "attempted assassination" of then National Assembly Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan, and sought to "behead" ruling figures.
- **Gevorg Papoyan (Aug. 21, 2025):** Alleged the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun and Republican Party supporters were "smashing buildings and stealing jewelry" on November 10, 2020.
- **Aram Sargsyan (Aug. 27, 2025):** Asserted that "the Dashnaks," as part of Artsakh's (Nagorno-Karabakh) National Assembly leadership, mishandled 2023 talks with Ilham Aliyev and "caused the loss" of Artsakh.

These lawsuits mark a **strategic shift** by the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun toward **legal counteraction** against state-aligned disinformation and defamation.

Historical Context

- **1994 December:** The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's activities were suspended by President **Levon Ter-Petrosyan** under allegations of terrorism, narcotics, and non-Armenian citizens in its leadership, but the Supreme Court confirmed the suspension, citing only a violation of the Law on Political Parties, namely non-Armenian citizens[4] in the party's leadership. For the other accusations by the President, individuals were tried by the courts, which found that a small group of party members conspired and acted against the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun.
- The 1994–1998 suspension was a legal process unrelated to violent extremism.
- Pashinyan's camp now resurrects that precedent, but with a harsher, terrorism-linked narrative, likely to justify quashing the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun's political influence as an influential political force both in Armenia and the Diaspora.

Legal and Political Dimensions

- The crackdown mirrors **Soviet-style tactics**: using law and propaganda to stifle dissent under the guise of "national security."
- Authorities are **constructing a legal case** for banning the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun while running a **smear campaign** to erode its legitimacy.
- The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun denounces this as a **campaign of political persecution** designed to dismantle one of Armenia's **most historic and organized political movements.**

Conclusion

The combination of **arrests, raids, legal threats, defamation, and disinformation** targeting the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun — with **over 40 members detained in recent years** — reveals a **coordinated state effort** to delegitimize and potentially outlaw the party.

While Pashinyan portrays the process as "legal," the **political objectives are clear:**

- **To appease Azerbaijan** amid ongoing negotiations, and
- **To weaken domestic opposition** before the 2026 parliamentary elections.

This convergence of **coercion, intimidation, and propaganda** underscores an **accelerating slide toward authoritarianism** in Armenia.

The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun remains one of the few organized forces opposing the government's policies on **Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), the Armenian Genocide,** and

[4] At the time, Armenian laws did not allow dual citizenship.

normalization with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Notably, **Davit Ishkhanyan** — ARF-Dashnaktsutyun Bureau member and former Speaker of the Artsakh Republic's Parliament — is among **23 Armenian political prisoners** held in Azerbaijan, with **16 currently facing show trials** in the Baku Military Court.

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Relevant Fact Sheets on: Pashinyan Targets the Armenian Church (5 November 2025), Pashinyan's Steps Toward Authoritarian Governance in Armenia (14 July 2025), Right of Return (3 November 2025), About Armenian Hostages Held in Azerbaijan (August 2025).

For more info, see: Armenia's Authoritarian Turn: Nikol Pashinyan and the Persecution of Samvel Karapetyan and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, authored by Robert Amsterdam, founder and managing partner of Amsterdam & Partners LLP.