

CSI releases new report on persecution of Armenian church

As European leaders gather in Yerevan for first EU-Armenia Summit, human rights group publishes list of known political prisoners in Armenia

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND, May 4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "Not since the worst excesses of Soviet rule has the Armenian Apostolic Church faced state-sponsored persecution of such depth and intensity," concludes a [new report](#) released today by Christian Solidarity International (CSI).

The report includes a list of known political prisoners in Armenia, the first of its kind published by an international human rights group.

The report is authored by Peter Flew, an international lawyer and historian specializing in religious freedom across Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and the Caucasus, and is based on his recent fact-finding mission to Armenia. Combining legal analysis with historical background, the report details the effort by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to "subordinate the church to state control."

The political prisoners named in the report include clergymen, relatives of the clergy, podcasters, church workers, and others detained by the Armenian authorities in their campaign against the church. The report's list of political prisoners was compiled by CSI in consultation with the Armenian Center for Political Rights.

The report's release comes as European leaders are gathering in Yerevan for the 8th European Political Community Summit on May 4, followed by the first ever EU-Armenia Summit on May 5.

"European leaders attending well-staged political events in downtown Yerevan should know that



Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church. photo: csi

they are within walking distance of the prison where Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan is being held on manufactured charges,” said Dr. Joel Veldkamp, CSI’s director for public advocacy.

Since May 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan has been publicly campaigning to force the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Karekin II, to resign. As the report shows, Pashinyan’s government has arrested one-third of the archbishops in Armenia, imposed travel bans on the Catholicos and other senior church leaders, and attempted to foment a schism in the church.

On March 12, 2026, the [International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia](#), a watchdog group whose executive team includes Kenneth Roth, the former Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, issued a warning about democratic backsliding in Armenia, including “the apparent weaponization of the judiciary and security forces by the government against political opponents.”

The government’s campaign against the church began in May 2025, after the Catholicos spoke at a conference in Switzerland organized by the [World Council of Churches](#). There, the Catholicos publicly advocated for Armenian refugees from Nagorno Karabakh, a region which was ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan in 2023, to be allowed to return to their homes.

Pashinyan has made signing a peace treaty with Azerbaijan the centerpiece of his national agenda, and has called discussion of the refugees’ right of return “dangerous” for peace. In his address to the European Parliament in March, he accused church leaders of seeking to start a new war with Azerbaijan.

In his introduction to the report, CSI’s president, John Eibner, argues that the Pashinyan government’s campaign against the church must be understood as part of Turkey and Azerbaijan’s effort to “weaken the Armenian nation and diminish its ability to resist submission and integration into the emerging Turkish-led order in the region.”

“More than any other Armenian institution today, the Armenian Apostolic Church poses an obstacle to Turkey and Azerbaijan’s plans,” Eibner argues.

The report ends with a set of official recommendations from CSI to European and American policymakers. These include publicly affirming the right of the Armenian church to choose its own leaders without state interference, urging the Armenian government to release detained clergy and other political prisoners, engaging with independent human rights groups in Armenia, and supporting the Swiss parliament’s Peace Initiative for Nagorno Karabakh.

“Now is the moment for principled and coordinated action,” Flew concludes in the report. “Armenia’s security and prosperity will not be strengthened by subordinating the Armenian Apostolic Church. Instead, they depend on safeguarding the fundamental rights of all Armenians, as well as its national church.”

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