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Ter-Petrosian Endorsed By Raffi Hovannisian And His Zharangutyun (Heritage) Party



Raffi Hovannisian

Levon Ter-Petrosian

YEREVAN -- Opposition leader Raffi Hovannisian and his Zharangutyun (Heritage) party endorsed Levon Ter-Petrosian on Tuesday, boosting the former president's chances of winning the Armenian presidential election.

The decision was announced after a meeting of Zharangutyun's nine-member governing board which began late Monday and ended after midnight. In a written statement, the party said Ter-Petrosian's return to power would enable Armenia to undergo "systemic changes" and have a "legitimate president."

Zharangutyun representatives indicated that the decision was not made unanimously but did not specify whether Hovannisian voted for it. The U.S.-born popular politician, who had served as independent Armenia's first foreign minister during Ter-Petrosian's rule, declined to attend a news conference held by them the next morning.

"Of all the candidates [Ter-Petrosian] has attracted greatest public interest," said Vartan Khachatryan, a

board member. "That is obvious from his rallies. That factor had a serious impact on our vote."

According to Zharangutyun spokesman Hovsep Khurshudian, the hostile coverage of Ter-Petrosian's campaign by Armenia's leading TV stations loyal to the government was also a factor behind the move.

Hovannisian twice met with Ter-Petrosian late last year and is understood to have participated in the latter's negotiations last week with another major opposition contender, Artur Baghdasarian.

"During the negotiations [with Ter-Petrosian] we received answers to many questions," Khachatryan told reporters. "I wouldn't say that all issues between us have been solved as we have some ideological differences." He said Hovannisian and the eight other members of the Zharangutyun plan to meet Ter-Petrosian soon to "ascertain" his position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and other challenges facing Armenia.

Turkish Activists Demand Justice At Dink Murder Trial

ISTANBUL -- Turkish intellectuals and politicians called for a fair and transparent ruling Monday in Istanbul as the third hearing began in a case against three alleged killers of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

"This stain must be cleaned so that a Turkey where opinions are no longer judged and those who express them are no longer condemned can exist," said a statement read to journalists near the Besiktas court.

The statement was signed by politicians from various leanings, as well as well-known intellectuals who called for "complete transparency" in a case that is being closely followed by the European Union, which Turkey is looking to join.

On January 19, 2006, 52-year-old Dink was shot outside the office of the weekly publication he ran — the Turkish-Armenian Agos — by a 17-year-old

boy with close links to Turkish nationalists.

A group calling themselves "The Friends of Hrant Dink" read a statement to a separate crowd of several hundred people in Besiktas. They demanded that justices "do their job correctly and follow this through to the end." The courthouse was surrounded by police as those standing trial arrived in armed police vans.

Monday's hearing took place behind doors due to the fact alleged murderer Ogun Samast is a minor. Samast has confessed to the murder and could face up to 42 years in prison. His co-charged, Yasin Hayal and Erhan Tuncel, allegedly ordered the attack on Dink and could face life in prison. Sentences ranging from 7.5 to 35 years have already been handed out to 16 others accused in the case.

Levon Ter-Petrosian's Surprise Visit To Moscow

MOSCOW, YEREVAN -- Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian and his entourage on Tuesday declined to divulge any details of his surprise Monday visit to Moscow during which he reportedly met Russian President Vladimir Putin's likely successor.

The one-day trip came just over one week before Armenia's presidential election, raising questions about the Kremlin's continued support for the current authorities in Yerevan.

The Russian newspaper "Argumenty i Fakty" reported that Ter-Petrosian had a brief conversation with Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's first deputy prime ministry widely expected to succeed Putin in an election scheduled for next month. The paper said Ter-Petrosian "explained his position on key issues" during these and other "political consultations" in the Russian capital.

It quoted a Ter-Petrosian spokesman in Moscow, Smbat Karakhanian, as saying that the Armenian presiden-

tial candidate's talks were "very productive and important." No further details were reported.

Contacted by RFE/RL, an aide to Medvedev, Vladimir Andrianov, refused to refute or confirm the "Argumenty i Fakty" report. Ter-Petrosian aides in Yerevan also declined a comment.

RFE/RL learned that while in Moscow Ter-Petrosian was interviewed by Russian state television. A prominent Russian TV commentator who spoke to the ex-president could not say when the interview will be aired.

"The authorities are alarmed by street protests staged by the [Armenian] opposition every day," the Russian daily "Moskovsky Komsomolets" quoted an unnamed Armenian government official as saying during Zubkov's trip. "They are attended by more and more people. The visit by your prime minister will demonstrate to the electorate on whose side Russia is."

Constitutional Court Rejected Ter-Petrosian's Demand

The Constitutional Court on Monday rejected former President Levon Ter-Petrosian's demand to postpone Armenia's presidential election by two weeks because of state television's perceived biased coverage of his election campaign.

Under the Armenian Electoral Code, a presidential election can be put off if one of the candidates is deemed to be facing "insurmountable obstacles" during the campaign. If those obstacles are not eliminated by authorities within two weeks, the vote must be cancelled and held anew 40 days later.

In its appeal to the country's highest judicial body, the Ter-Petrosian campaign claimed that the election coverage by the state-controlled Armenian Public Television, which has been highly critical of the ex-president, constitutes such an obstacle. Ter-Petrosian's representatives spent more than an hour trying to substantiate the claim before the panel of nine judges headed by Gagik Harutunian.

In its verdict the Constitutional Court ruled that the alleged obstacles are not serious enough to be considered insurmountable.

Congressman Tom Lantos Passes Away

WASHINGTON, DC -- Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA), a champion of human rights and the only Holocaust survivor to ever serve in the U.S. Congress passed away on Monday at the age of 80.

First elected in 1980, Lantos served as Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and sat on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. In addition to Chairing the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Lantos co-founded and co-chaired the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, which helped raise awareness of critical issues around the world and became a catalyst for bringing Members of Congress together. After announcing that he had been diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus, Lantos said that he would not seek reelection after concluding his 14th term in Congress.

As Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Lantos supported adoption of H. Res. 106, which affirms the historical truth of the Armenian Genocide. This resolution passed



Congressman Tom Lantos

the House Foreign Affairs Committee by a vote of 27 to 21. Lantos also supported an identical measure during the 109th Congress having reversed his previous opposition to a similar resolution in 2000.

In addition to his support of H.Res. 106, Lantos also spoke out against the genocide taking place in Darfur. In April of 2006, Lantos was arrested at the Sudanese Embassy while protesting against the genocide in Darfur along with Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA), John Olver (D-MA), Jim Moran (D-VA), and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX).