

# Massis Weekly

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## Armenians Mourn The Day In Silent Remembrance Sarkisian Sworn In Amid Tight Security

Serzh Sarkisian was sworn in as Armenia's president on Wednesday amid unusually tight security measures taken by the authorities.

The inauguration took place at a special session of the Armenian parliament held in the national Opera house in Yerevan. It was followed by a military parade in the adjacent Liberty Square, the scene of daily post-election demonstrations staged by Sarkisian's main challenger, former President Levon Ter-Petrosian.

Meanwhile, thousands of baton-wielding police blocked major streets leading to the square to keep opposition supporters from gathering there. Hundreds of protesters managed to rally elsewhere in the city center and demand a re-run of the February 19 presidential election controversially won by Sarkisian.

As the new president was taking the oath "to respect human and citizens' rights", numerous citizens had gathered near the Myasnikyan monument, near several foreign embassies and international organizations, near the Constitutional Court and the Central Election Commission building, demanding that he "really respect citizens' rights and respect the memory of the dead."

The silent remembrance quickly turned into an anti-government rally,



with mostly female participants chanting "Freedom!" and "Levon!"

While the new president was promising "to adopt corresponding changes in the law on assembly in line with international standards", police near the Myasnikyan monument were having quarrels with people to try to force them to vacate the area.

"Your actions are unlawful, go away, don't stand here for more than two minutes, lay the flowers and go away, it already becomes a rally, and

you don't have that right," one of the policemen was periodically shouting.

"Are you setting a term for mourning? I have the right to have time at least for a prayer," one woman was saying crossly.

"I was here on March 1," Seda, a gray-haired pensioner, told RFE/RL. "The people had only stones and sticks, but they still shot at us. I want Serzh and Kocharian to go and be put on trial.

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## U.S. Expects 'Dramatic Steps'

The United States expects Serzh Sarkisian to restore civil liberties and take other "dramatically positive steps" to resolve Armenia's grave political crisis, a senior U.S. official said on Wednesday.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza indicated that the Armenian government has so far failed to address U.S. concerns stemming from its crackdown on the opposition that followed the February 19 presidential election. He also said that Washington has revised its initial, largely positive, assessment of the government's conduct of the vote.

"More needs to happen to restore the confidence of the Armenian people that the country is moving in the right direction and that there is some momentum in the development of democracy," Bryza told RFE/RL in an interview. "First of all, healing has to take place," he said. "But beyond healing, dramatic steps are needed to restore a sense of confidence that the country is moving in the right direction."

Bryza said those steps should include a dialogue with the opposition, the release of opposition activists arrested for their political activities as well as a "full restoration" of freedom of speech and assembly. He warned that failure to take such steps would cause further damage to U.S.-Armenian ties and, in particular, call into question continued U.S. economic assistance to Armenia.

## Massachusetts Municipal Association Cuts Ties With "No Place For Hate" Program Over Stance On Armenian Genocide

Expressing strong disapproval over the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) unwillingness to unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide, the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) severed ties with the "No Place for Hate" (NPFH) program, a community-based program offered by the human rights group.

In a statement issued last week, the MMA Board of Directors expressed disappointment with the ADL's refusal to "clarify and strengthen" its earlier statements concerning the Armenian Genocide at the ADL's National Commission meeting in November 2007.

"The Board believes that unequivocal recognition of the Armenian Genocide is both a matter of basic justice to its victims, as well as essential to efforts to prevent future genocide," stated the MMA, a nonprofit, nonpartisan association that provides advocacy, training, publications, research and other services to Massachusetts cities and towns.

"The MMA feels strongly that it is imperative to speak with absolute clarity on the genocide and that due to the NPFH program's association with

the National ADL, the Association will no longer be a sponsor of the program," the organization explained.

"The Massachusetts Municipal Association has made a just and rightful decision," said Massachusetts State Representative Rachel Kaprielian (D-Watertown), a member of the Armenian Assembly's Board of Trustees who has been working on this issue. "As Armenians across the globe continue to fight for official recognition of the Genocide of 1915 committed at the hands of the Ottoman Empire—this is another step on the long path toward worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide."

"As a former member of this board, a former municipal official and current State Representative, I am deeply heartened by today's unanimous decision," Kaprielian continued.

Following repeated calls by members of the Armenian, Jewish and other communities in Massachusetts and elsewhere, the ADL one of the oldest and most influential Jewish organizations in the US, issued a statement in August 2007 in which they categorized the events of 1915-1918 as "tantamount to genocide."

## Armenian Rally Ban Unacceptable To European Watchdogs

Europe's two leading human rights watchdogs have expressed serious concern about the Armenian authorities' recently enacted legal amendments that effectively banned further anti-government rallies in the country.

The National Assembly hastily passed the controversial amendments to an Armenian law on street gatherings on March 17, four days before the end of a state of emergency. They were closely examined by experts from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) shortly afterwards.

"On the basis of a preliminary assessment, the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR Expert Panel on Freedom of Assembly do not consider the proposed amendments to be acceptable, to the extent that they restrict further the right of assembly in a significant fashion," they said in a joint statement released late Wednesday.

The two bodies had submitted a detailed analysis of the amendments to the leadership of the Armenian parliament late last week. Its findings were high on the agenda of an ensued visit to

Yerevan by members of a more influential Council of Europe body monitoring the fulfillment of Armenia's membership commitments to the Strasbourg-based organization. Diplomats making up the so-called Ago Group pressed Armenian leaders to accept the Venice Commission's and ODIHR's recommendations in addition to engaging in dialogue with the opposition and releasing political prisoners.

In a letter sent to the National Assembly on March 28, the Venice Commission and the ODIHR said this provision is "excessive" and must be amended in a way that would allow Armenian courts to quash police or NSS bans.

The European watchdogs said this provision "greatly increases the potential for arbitrary restrictions" and enables security forces to disperse "an assembly where the authorities themselves have used excessive force resulting in the loss of life." "In addition, it must be emphasized that violence by a minority of participants should not automatically result in the dispersal of the entire event, and the Police and National Security Service must always distinguish between violent and non-violent participants," they said.