

# ECHMIADZIN UNDER ASSAULT

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***For a reasonably comprehensive view, readers are suggested to read editor-columnist Edmond Azadian's article in conjunction with Maitre Barkev Davidian's [Գարեգին Կդերապետին Պաշտպանները](#), Mr. Vosgan Mekhitarian's [Ողջմտութեան Բացակայութիւնը](#), historian Gevorg Yazichyan's [Ոսնահարելով Պարկեշտութեան Բոլոր Սահմանները](#) which precede the below writing and also Keghart.com's editorial [Catholicos Karekin II Stands Accused](#).***-  
Ed.

**Edmond Y. Azadian, [Mirror-Spectator](#) Senior Editorial Columnist, 19 July 2018**

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President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent victory in neighboring Turkey has ramifications far beyond that country's borders. Following his victory, Erdogan flew to Baku immediately to fan the Pan-Turkic dreams from the Caucasus to Central Asia. That move was echoed and complemented by Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, who repeated the call for the unity of Turkic peoples. Ironically, Nazarbayev is supposed to be Armenia's strategic ally through its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union.

All these developments resulted in increased troop concentration in Nakhichevan, where the Turkish general staff plans to execute seven consecutive military exercises in the near future.

This situation is further aggravated by the intensifying suspicions of Moscow about the political intentions of the new government in Armenia. A Russian delegation has already visited Azerbaijan and bashed Armenia for its position in the Karabakh issue. The political tension is already in the air, reminiscent of the days in the 1990s when President Levon Ter-Petrosian's government advocated a shift in its policy from Moscow to Ankara and Russia responded in kind by sending arms and strategic support to Azerbaijan, which almost occupied two-thirds of Karabakh, until the Armenian side came to its senses, switched back its policy, recovered that territory last and signed the ceasefire agreement on May 12, 1994.

One wonders who is paying attention in Armenia to this egregious situation when demonstrators are out in the streets calling for a new Catholicos in the new Armenia. Their numbers and their calls could be easily ignored had it not been the government's equivocal position vis-à-vis these disturbances.

A disgruntled priest, Fr. Koryun Arakelyan, who was disciplined by His Holiness, has joined a group of demonstrators who first gathered at the courtyard of St. Anna Church in downtown Yerevan, then moved their show to Echmiadzin and they invaded the compound, hurling slurs and demanding the resignation of His Holiness Karekin II. Some social sites have also joined the chorus, by manufacturing outrageous stories about the Catholicos. That kind of dirt in the newspapers and online has degraded journalism generally in Armenia, where libel laws are still a mockery.

On July 17, the Catholicos of the Armenian Church defrocked Arakelyan for "improper conduct," the Church said.

The movement against the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II came to a boiling point when he recently took a trip to a monastery in the Vayk region. He visited Gundevank, where a group of people surrounded His Holiness's car and forced him to walk. As he walked, they began insulting him by hurling obscene slogans and asking him to resign. They also distributed a video of the demonstration, with their demand for the Catholicos to negotiate with them the terms of his abdication right then and there in that wilderness. Later on, commenting about that encounter, the Catholicos would not talk to his flock. The scene could only bring revulsion to any sane person. Their slogans and their general conduct could only be described as the behavior of thugs. Nothing else.

On his way back to Echmiadzin, His Holiness was stopped and surrounded by his supporters at Khor Virab, where he gave his blessings to them and forgiveness to the demonstrators, saying they are "still our children."

In all this turmoil, the police failed to act. They were only bystanders. Later on, viewing the video, the prime minister agreed that the police did not behave the way they were expected to, but then he issued statements which were not worthy of a statesman. He said that the situation had not gotten

out of hand. If it ever comes to that, the government will act, he said.

"Nevertheless," in his opinion, "the matter has not still become public and there is no need for expressing the government's stance," he said.

His most revealing statement was that he is "not an expert in this area and therefore could be mistaken."

When the Catholicos' life is in jeopardy, he sure is mistaken, and more mistaken are the misguided individuals who continue to conflate the position of the Catholicos of All Armenians with the local issue of General Manuel Grigoryan and his family. Grigoryan's son, Karen Grigoryan, was the mayor of the city of Echmiadzin and protestors ousted him from that position recently.

One priest, Fr. Asoghik, in Echmiadzin said that if the government does not protect the Catholicos, the clergy will.

The positions of the Catholicos and the patriarchs are for life. A case in point is that of Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan in Istanbul, who is in a vegetative state and yet the people are not allowed to elect a new patriarch.

The election of the Catholicos is the only case when the diaspora and Armenia come together in the National Ecclesiastic Convocation to elect the Catholicos. Therefore, he is technically the religious head of ten million Armenians. These demonstrators were chanting that the entire Armenian nation "dislikes you. You have to resign."

One wonders who has appointed these people to represent "the entire Armenian nation."

This movement is designed by the perpetrators to drive a wedge between three million Armenians living in the homeland and the seven million living in the diaspora.

Prime Minister Pashinyan's benign position reflects this attitude toward the old regime despite his pledge that there will be no vendettas. He still associates the Catholicos with the crimes of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan's clan, without giving him the benefit of the doubt and realizing that the Catholicos has no temporal power and no choice but to cooperate with the administration in charge. Pashinyan has not verbalized this view but the demonstrators have.

Most of the Dioceses and Primates around the world have expressed their concerns and they have lent their support to the Catholicos.

This movement is not only directed against the Catholicos personally, but it is directed at Holy Echmiadzin to undermine its authority and to destabilize the church because the Armenian Church is one of the strongest institutions contributing to the unity of the Armenian people.

Since the beginning of this protest movement, many speculations pointed to alien sects and foreign agencies, which the protestors denied, until proof was provided recently by a ruffian called Karen

Petrosyan, a vocal protestor who released a video claiming that his institute, called Compass, receives funding from Open Society to do charity work. It seems that one of those "charitable deeds" is to undermine the Armenian Church. Open Society is funded by the Soros Foundation, which commissions agents to destroy the fabric of societies, to undermine their cultural values, under the guise of promoting democracy while destabilizing regimes and collapsing them through popular uprisings, like in Georgia, or through violent overthrows of the government, like Ukraine.

The confession is there for anyone to review.

Karen Petrosyan's case has further developments which complicate the issue and implicate other forces. He was recently appointed as a director of a government educational institute in Gyumri. A journalist asked him whether the position was offered to him as a reward for heading the movement against the Catholicos. He has denied the allegation and has said that the appointment was because he is a "professional." It remains to be seen what profession he has other than serving as a foreign agent.

The situation is tense in and around Echmiadzin. The Holy See has survived many administrative and theological crises. This case is definitely politically motivated campaign.

The Holy See, for now, remains under assault.

