# LEVON TER-PETROSSIAN'S SPEECH AT THE MAY 29, 2009 RALLY

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Dear compatriots,
Today I will try to refrain from going into a systematized analysis of domestic and foreign policy issues as I will limit myself to some observations only, which are deduced from the current situation. It is accounted for by the fact that we are, in fact, wrapping up our election campaign, and there only remains to emphasize a few additional points. In my opinion, it is necessary, first and foremost, because there are as yet some gaps to be filled and questions to be clarified for our citizens; and it will also provide a proper guidance for the Election Day. These questions might seem selective, but let me assure you, they are interconnected by a logical link between the election and the general tendencies for the development of the country.

No matter how hard we try, it is nevertheless impossible to refrain from addressing foreign policy issues, because the upcoming election of the Mayor of Yerevan will be of vital importance from the point of view of international relations. The main development expected in Armenia's foreign policy is the pending meeting between Serge Sarkissian and Ilham Aliyev scheduled to take place on June 7 in St. Petersburg, which according to information leaked from diplomatic circles could be of crucial significance for the settlement of the Karabagh conflict. In this sense, Vladimir Kazimirov's May 13 statement is particularly noteworthy, as it says that since the parties to the Karabagh conflict are not ready for peace, the time has come for peace coercion. Thus, this means that a Dayton-type settlement, which was coerced during the Bosnian conflict, is on the table. Kazimirov, though a retired diplomat, is no stranger to the Russian policy in the Caucasus. He continues to be a most sought-after expert on Karabagh in that country. Therefore, it is no accident, that he made the above-mentioned statement before the upcoming meeting in St. Petersburg. It is beyond doubt, that should Russia and America come to an agreement on Karabagh, a coerced settlement or a possibility of a Dayton-type solution can become a reality. In that case Armenia will have to pay the price for the reckless rejection of quite advantageous proposals made to us in the past and for the ousting of Karabagh from the negotiation process. As for the possibility of a principal agreement on the Karabagh issue settlement between Russia and the US, it could take place during President Obama's visit to Moscow in July. The super-powers like the US and Russia, with their list of issues of common interest, would not single out the Karabagh problem as one in which they will fail to find common ground.  This means that the pressure on Armenia, as far as the Karabagh issue settlement

is concerned, will soon increase exponentially, and thus the vital need for a national unity to withstand it will become more tangible. The key to this unity, this consolidation, as I already mentioned during our last public rally is in the hands of Serge Sarkissian, while the means to achieve it is to set free all the political prisoners and to hold legitimate and fair election of the Mayor of Yerevan.

Recently during private conversations our Western colleagues would reproach us, saying that we halt Serge Sarkissian from settling vital national issues, -the Armenian-Turkish relations and the Karabagh conflict. They would also remind us that we always voiced our support in favor of the quick solution of these issues, while now, it seems, that we are going against our own principles. True, we have always supported the idea of a quick Armenian-Turkish rapprochement and the settlement of the Karabagh conflict, because we know it for a fact that without doing it Armenia has but a slim chance for economic development, for overcoming international isolation and for becoming a normal, safe and prosperous state. But we have never intended to do that at any cost, namely by betraying the Genocide cause and by ignoring Karabagh's right to self-determination. Therefore, no matter how much pressure is put on us, we will never allow the establishment of the joint commission of Armenian and Turkish historians, nor shall we give our agreement to any solution, in which Karabagh's right to self-determination is trampled on. We have repeatedly stated and we are doing that again today, that despite serious domestic contradictions, despite brutal violence used against us, we are ready to help the Armenian authorities both as far as Armenian-Turkish relations and the Karabagh conflict resolution are concerned. We are ready to help with whatever steps they take, if they are not in discord with our national interests. The reproaches made by Western diplomats could have been to an extent justified, have they not, alongside with their strong interest in the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement and the Karabagh settlement, failed to remember the most vital issue Armenia is facing today,-the restoration of constitutional order and establishment of democracy, and have they not tolerated violence spread in our country, the fact of political prisoners and the dire situation with human rights violations. Failing to do that, these diplomats become oblivious of their own history,-dozens of revolutions in Europe and sacrifices made by its peoples for the sake of democracy and freedom. They also forget the long years of the bloody civil war in the United States of America, fought to put an end to slavery, which for me is the brightest page in American history.

No national issue is more vital than people's right to a normal, safe and dignified life in their own country. Therefore, to prove that there is an unselfish and genuine interest behind its desire to better the Armenian-Turkish relations and to settle the Karabagh conflict, the West, first and foremost, needs to prove that it is sincerely interested in establishment of all-around democracy in Armenia without turning a blind eye to the rigged elections, trampled human rights, existence of political prisoners, total corruption and various other vicious phenomena of the kind. Or else, there could be an impression, that by putting such an incessant effort into the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement and the Karabagh conflict settlement, it is not helping the Armenian people that the West is after, as

it wishes to present, but it rather pursues its own interest, or just tries to get rid of the headaches these unresolved issues are currently causing.

Amazingly, as far as Turkey and Nagorno Karabagh issues are concerned, the agenda of national institutions in Diaspora coincides with that of the Western governments. The only difference is that while these governments demand concessions from Armenia, Diaspora's demand is just the opposite,-no compromises at all. It is also amazing, that the West and Diaspora have the same attitude, or, rather, the same absence of attitude, when it comes to the situation with democracy in Armenia. Just like the West, Diaspora seems not to care about the violent force the Armenian authorities used against their own people, the rigged elections and the existence of political prisoners, country-wide corruption and robbery. Their sole concern is that the Armenian regime meets their two above-mentioned expectations. The West is an outsider, and it can afford not to care. But it is deplorable, when Diaspora does the same.

In this regard, the joint statement made after March 1 tragic events by several Diaspora organizations,-the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian National Committee-Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ANC-ARF), the Armenian Diocese and Prelacy is noteworthy, as it blindly believed in the official version and interpretation of the events, as it condemned the opposition and as it voiced an unconditional support to the illegitimate, "newly-elected" authorities. This infamous document reminds me of another, no less disgraceful statement made in the fall of 1988 by Armenian political parties in Diaspora in condemnation of the activities of the Karabagh Committee and in support of the Communist authorities of Armenia in their fight against the Nation-Wide Movement.

Diaspora judges a leader of Armenia by one criterion only. Should he pursue the recognition of the Genocide, curse the Turks up and downhill, and fly at them,-he would be a national hero, and were he not to do that, -it would be high treason.  And nobody cares what consequences this cursing and this flying at will have for the destiny of the country and its people. The same national elders of Diaspora who unconditionally supported Serge Sarkissian a year ago are imprecating him today unable to see their own fault. They absolutely fail to realize that by having assisted the illegitimate authorities to settle in, and, therefore, by weakening our statehood, they paved way for Serge Sarkissian to make concessions in the field of foreign policy. Thus, they are as much responsible for the abortion of the Genocide recognition process and the imminent threat of dangerous developments for Karabagh as Serge Sarkissian himself. Not until have the Diaspora organizations realized that the nourishing source for the identity of the Armenian people is Armenian statehood, not until have they made it a priority to bring to life the ideas of democracy and fundamental liberties, they will continue to jeopardize both the future of Armenia and the realization of our nation-wide endeavors. There are, of course, healthy forces whose mind-set is completely different from that of the so-called national institutions. But they, with a few courageous exceptions, being pressured by the uniformity of the public opinion are afraid to voice their objections. This means that

the reform of traditional national institutions in Diaspora is as much a topic of the day as the change in the state structures of Armenia proper. Therefore, the crisis of the mind-set and of the mode of action is nation-wide as it does not limit itself to the borders of Armenia.

And now let's turn to Armenia's domestic issues, the upcoming election of the mayor, in particular. There is a word around that Prosperous Armenia (Bargavach Hayastan) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the Dashnak party) play a game of pretending to be an opposition, while in reality, being disillusioned with Serge Sarkissian and convinced that he will lose his post soon, they are preparing the return of Robert Kocharian. I have no doubt, of course, that Kocharian has not come to terms with the status of a young retiree, and, both within Armenian political circles, and in Russia, Europe, and as rumor has it, in Iran and Syria also, he is looking for support to come back to power. Yet I am also sure that the Prosperous Armenia and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation realize that Robert Kocharian is a back-number no more reckoned with, and that he will never be able to return to politics after the Oct. 27 outrage and especially after the March 1 mass murder. They would hardly wish to associate themselves with someone who opened fire against his own people and someone, who is totally discredited, jeopardizing their reputation and authority, as well as their political future.

In the long run, it is common knowledge that Kocharian is the root-source of the man-made disasters besetting Armenia. He is the founder of the Cleptocracy responsible for the country-wide robbery; he is the one who uprooted fundamental liberties, the god-father behind the criminalization of the state. He is the one responsible for the failure of the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, and the architect of the jeopardized future for Nagorno Karabagh.  Serge Sarkissian has simply been one of Kocharian's accomplices and associates, although the most influential one, only to become a helpless successor of his predecessor's evil-doing. After settling into the president's office Sarkissian has missed the chance of disassociating himself from Kocharian's criminal regime, thus recklessly sharing all the faults and wrong-doings of his predecessor. As a result, since the first day in office he has been subject to public censure. Having mentioned all that, I do not rule out that it is Serge Sarkissian himself who puts the rumor of Kocharian's return into circulation to scare people with a horrible prospect of Kocharian's coming back to power, should he be removed from it.

The Prosperous Armenia party if it sincerely wants to serve the people and to change something in this country should follow the ARF's example and immediately leave the ruling coalition. Otherwise, nobody will believe in the sincerity of its motives and everybody will realize that in reality this organization is assisting the Republican party in monopolizing its power and perpetuating the cleptocratic regime. Moreover, should the Prosperous Armenia not take this step of leaving the ruling coalition, it will share full responsibility with Serge Sarkissian for his anti-national policy, and will soon cease to exist as a political party. The ARF, being an experienced party and history-conscious as far its reputation is concerned, though late, but eventually abandoned the sinking ship. Had they done that during the presidential election, the present regime would not have

disgracefully betrayed the Genocide recognition cause, nor would the Karabagh conflict resolution process have been in such a miserable state. As you see, I do not speak about the third member of the ruling coalition, - the Rule of Law party (Orinatz Yerkir), because this party, as people say, is a hopeless case. The Rule of Law will never leave the fertile pastures of the regime and, if need be, it will even choose to become a member of Turkish or Azerbaijani coalition only to prolong its pitiful existence in the corridors of power.

No matter how hard we try to avoid speaking about Robert Kocharian, even after leaving the office he continues to live up to his infamous reputation and reminds us about his personal existence by taking mean actions. The most blatant example of these actions was the trial against Haykakan Zhamanak daily. How miserable, pitiful and primitive can one be to do such a disgraceful thing? In civilized countries no former or acting president, prime-minister or even a minister would bring a reporter or a newspaper to trial. There is a possibility to refute or deny any information, insult or slander used against him, as he has much more access to TV air and to newspapers with a much broader circulation. Since Kocharian does not do that, it means that he is not sure that the public at large will believe him, and for this reason he tries to silence the reporter by bringing him to trial. Until today no former or acting president, except for Lukashenko, would bring a reporter to trial. There were thousands of insults and slander against me both in the past and present, but it would have never crossed my mind to bring a reporter or a newspaper to trial. By this dishonest act Robert Kocharian not only exposed himself as a pitiful character, but he also discredited the whole institute of presidency. If it seems to him that he has honor and dignity that need to be saved in the court, the very fact that he took this step completely destroyed that honor and that dignity.

Many think that the upcoming mayoral election is a do-or-die struggle, while others consider it to be the last chance of the opposition or the Armenian National Congress. I do not share these views. This election is neither do-or-die struggle nor the last chance for us. It is just a means to at least partially better our country's dire situation, and our society must take advantage of that. This election is not between parties or personalities, this is the election between political/ state systems, -the forces constituting the Cleptocracy and the Armenian National Congress. Should the former be elected the people will prolong the gloomy days of slavery. Should the Congress win the election there will be an opportunity to improve the situation in the country and to radically change the moral atmosphere, to obtain freedom, legal justice and protection.

Paraphrasing a proverb well-known from history, one can come up with the following: the people need a small victorious election to restore self-confidence and to take their destiny in their own hands. One can also say that this election is, first and foremost, a question of dignity for our people. For how long can one tolerate the rule of the ignorant, the criminal and the irresponsible, being mocked and ignored by the rest of the world?

Irrespective of the election results, the opposition represented by the Armenian National Congress has nothing to lose. It will keep its leading role, become stronger and expand. It will be our people

who will lose. And if the election of the Mayor is really the last chance, then it is last not for the opposition but for Serge Sarkissian, because his political future is determined by it. Should he show statesmanship, he will have a chance both to raise his rating and to improve the situation in the country. Should he make a wrong choice, it will be another blow to the Armenian statehood and he will lose the last remnants of his almost non-existent reputation. During my speech at the May 15 public rally I noted that Sarkissian has two ways to come out of this predicament. Should he rig the election again, there will only remain one path to take, - to resign immediately and leave Armenia. The people and the opposition will have no choice but to make Sarkissian's resignation the only watchword of our political struggle.

Thus nothing is finished with this election; on the contrary, everything is just beginning. In any case, if not today, then tomorrow under the pressure of the problems solving which is beyond his ability, Serge Sarkissian will have to go. And, by the way, the West is not going to save him, because after giving away Karabagh and giving up the Genocide, it will not need him anymore.

So if the election is rigged get ready to see Serge Sarkissian off immediately. Enough is enough. Stop suppressing the will of the people. Stop treating people as wordless animals or slaves. And, lastly, stop abusing the patience of the people. Everything has its limits. And let nobody doubt that the people will win.