SARGSYAN'S LA VISIT SPLITS TASHNAGS

Posted on August 20, 2011 by Keghart

ԱՇԱՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ՈՒՂԻՂՈՒԿԱՑՄԱՆ

Category: Opinions

Emil Danielyan, azatutyun.am,19 August 2011

In a rare manifestation of discord within its ranks, the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) criticized on Friday its largest branch in the United States for deciding to boycott an upcoming event in Los Angeles to be attended by President Serzh Sarkisian.

Emil Danielyan, azatutyun.am,19 August 2011

In a rare manifestation of discord within its ranks, the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) criticized on Friday its largest branch in the United States for deciding to boycott an upcoming event in Los Angeles to be attended by President Serzh Sarkisian.

Sarkisian is expected to visit the U.S. in late September to address the UN General Assembly in New York and meet with representatives of the influential Armenian-American community. He will attend an official banquet organized by the Armenian Consulate in Los Angeles and dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Armenia's independence.
Dashnaktsutyun's organization in the western U.S. announced late on Thursday that its representatives will not take part in the celebration, in protest against Sarkisian's track record in office. It said his presence there will "cast a shadow on the idea of independence and denigrate the struggle of our people for the restoration of justice."

In an unusually strongly worded statement issued late on Thursday, the pan-Armenian party's chapter described the Armenian president as a "discredited" individual who "tramples democracy and democratic values underfoot" in order to ensure "the reproduction of the criminal regime."

The statement went on to accuse the Sarkisian government, of which Dashnaktsutyun was a part until April 2009, of committing "blatant human rights violations," controlling the judiciary and sponsoring "oligarchs that continue to relentlessly plunder our people" in Armenia. It also condemned the government's conciliatory policies towards Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Dashnaktsutyun's supreme decision-making body based in Yerevan, the Bureau, made clear the next day that it disapproves of the boycott.

"Obviously, there are numerous unsolved problems accumulated in the Republic of Armenia," Giro Manoyan, the Bureau's foreign and pan-Armenian affairs spokesman, said in written comments to media. "But the 20-year anniversary testifies to our common victory and achievements."

"We have no right to be guided by personalized relationships and emotional steps in this kind of events," Manoyan said. "Instead, we must use this occasion to express our unity and consolidation with such events, while remaining faithful to our principles."

Manoyan did not clarify whether the Bureau agrees with the harsh assessment of Sarkisian made by one of the party's most important Diaspora branches. Dashnaktsutyun leaders in Armenia have been more cautious in criticizing the current authorities in Yerevan.

The verbal attacks from the Armenian-American political structure are more in tune with characterizations of Sarkisian regularly made by the Armenian National Congress (HAK), a more radical opposition force at odds with Dashnaktsutyun. They are the clearest indication yet that some Dashnaktsutyun structures and individual members disagree with the party leadership's cautious stance.

Opening a Dashnaktsutyun congress in Yerevan in late June, Hrant Markarian, the de facto head of the Bureau, called for a "systemic regime change" in Armenia but avoided personal attacks on Sarkisian. He made clear that Dashnaktsutyun will not seek to topple the president with sustained street demonstrations and other radical actions.

A declaration adopted by the congress likewise stopped short of demanding Sarkisian's resignation.

Dashnaktsutyun quit Armenia's governing coalition in 2009 in protest against Sarkisian's controversial policy of rapprochement with Turkey, rather than his human rights or socioeconomic records.

The nationalist party had joined the coalition after recognizing Sarkisian's hotly disputed victory in the February 2008 presidential election and essentially endorsing the deadly suppression of post-election demonstrations organized by HAK leader Levon Ter-Petrosian. The crackdown was ordered by Sarkisian's predecessor Robert Kocharian, whom Dashnaktsutyun supported throughout is decade-long rule.

Ter-Petrosian and his associates accuse Dashnaktsutyun of continuing to maintain close ties with Sarkisian. The Dashnaktsutyun leadership dismisses these claims, saying that the HAK itself exposed its readiness to cut secret deals with the Armenian authorities when it embarked on a dialogue with them last month.