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Armenia's Rights Activists Slam Government Action As Imitation

Demands Of PACE Resolution Have Not Been Fulfilled

YEREVAN -- A number of human rights organizations issued a statement Tuesday criticizing the Armenian authorities for making an imitation of the fulfillment of the demands laid out in a Council of Europe resolution on the political crisis in Armenia.

They in particular said that no independent inquiry has yet been conducted into the circumstances of the March 1 events and the developments that had led up to them and no one has been brought to responsibility for at least ten deaths and hundreds of injured people. They also said that the matter was entrusted to a commission formed by the coalitional forces in the parliament that "does not enjoying public trust" and "has many times proved its anti-democratic nature."

The human rights activists say that despite few decisions to change measures of restriction in relation to some, most of those arrested for political reasons still remain in custody. They also discard as cosmetic the amendments made in the law on freedom of assembly, as a result of which, they claim, the constitutional rights of Armenian citizens to a peaceful assembly still remain restricted.

Artur Sakunts, head of the Vanadzor-based regional branch of the Armenian Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, fears a possible 'political deal' between the Venice Commission, which gave a positive conclusion to the amendments made by the Armenian legislature in the law on assemblies, and the authorities of Armenia.

"I consider it to be a deal with Armenia's authorities. That is, political factors here prevailed over democratic principles," Sakunts asserted.

The human rights campaigner does not exclude that the Council of

Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) may give Armenia more time to fulfill its demands.

"But an inadequate approach in such a situation would show that the Council of Europe is not consistent with its principles," Sakunts added.

Meanwhile, Armenian Helsinki Association head Mikael Danielian, who met with visiting PACE Monitoring Commission member Georges Colombier on Tuesday along with heads of another three nongovernmental organizations, told RFE/RL that all speakers at the discussion voiced an opinion that the demands of the PACE resolution have not been fulfilled by the Armenian authorities.

"I expressed my opinion that if Europe wants Armenia to move towards democracy, pressure must be exerted on Armenia's authorities and some sanctions must be applied," Danielian said.

Representatives of the other NGOs declined to answer questions citing the confidential nature of the discussion.

While in Armenia, Colombier also met with families of arrested politicians.

Marine Harutiunian, the wife of politician Grigor Voskerchian, told RFE/RL that they had presented the current situation to the co-rapporteur and what she described as the 'illegal course of legal proceedings'.

"We received a strange answer — You want us to apply sanctions against Armenia? But do you understand that by pushing [Armenia] out of the Council of Europe you will not get your husbands released? And I put a question to them — and what would happen if you don't impose sanctions? Will there be 'March 1' again? Will you be responsible for that then?"

Swedish Parliament Refuses To Recognize The Armenian Genocide

SWEDEN -- On June 12, 2008, the Swedish Parliament, with the votes 245 to 37 (1 abstain, 66 absent), rejected a call for recognition of the 1915 genocide in the Ottoman Empire. On June 11, a long debate took place in the Swedish Parliament in regard to the Foreign Committee report on Human Rights, including five motions calling upon the Swedish Government and Parliament to officially recognize the 1915 genocide. In its answer (2007/2008:UU9), a majority consisting of the ruling alliance parties together with the Social Democrats (opposition party) proposed rejecting the motions, whereby the Green (Miljöpartiet) and the Left (Vänsterpartiet) parties announced their reservations, forcing the Parliament to have a debate in the main chamber before the proposal was voted

on. The argumentation for why a recognition should be rejected was based on four main assumptions:

-no particular consideration regarding the Armenian situation has ever been in form of an UN Resolution, either in 1985 or any other occasion.

-The Committee understands that what engulfed the Armenians, Assyrian/Syrians and Chaldeans during the reign of the Ottoman Empire would, according to the 1948 Convention, probably be regarded as genocide, if it had been in power at the time.

-There is still a disagreement among the experts regarding the different course of events of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The same applies to the underlying causes and

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Opposition Defiant After Ban Popular Movement Presses Ahead With Rally Plans

YEREVAN -- Armenia's opposition led by former president Levon Ter-Petrosian has reiterated its plans to stage a rally later this week despite the refusal of Yerevan's authorities to authorize it.

Levon Zurabian, a leading member of Ter-Petrosian's Popular Movement, said on Wednesday that the rally will take place on Friday in the area adjacent to Matenadaran, the ancient manuscripts depository in downtown Yerevan.

Earlier the opposition had planned its June 20 rally in nearby Liberty Square, the scene of the opposition's nonstop post-election protests broken up by security forces in a predawn action on March 1. The municipality, however, had not allowed the rally to be staged in the square citing another planned event for the venue as the reason for rejecting the bid. Nor did the city officials grant the opposition an opportunity to gather near Matenadaran, as an alternative suggesting they gather in a small square near the capital's largest football arena just off the city center. The opposition, however, rejected that offer out of hand.

"Our rally will take place," Zurabian said at a press conference. "It is authorized under Article 20 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 29 of Armenia's Constitution."

An administrative court in Yerevan upheld the municipality's decision in its ruling on Tuesday in a move perceived by the opposition as another evidence that courts in Armenia lack independence.

Since the March 1 deadly street clashes in Yerevan the municipal authorities have rejected just about every rally permission request filed by the Ter-Petrosian camp basing on controversial amendments to the law on rallies allowing the authorities to ban opposition protests practically at will.

"Remaining committed to laws and a legal manner of action, as well as interested in a normal holding of this political arrangement, we suggest that the authorities appoint municipality and police representatives who will be in contact with the leaders of the Movement and will ensure a normal course of the rally," the opposition movement said in a statement.

The planned rally will come three days before the start of the session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg where the organization is expected to discuss Yerevan's compliance with its resolution on the political situation in Armenia.

European Court Judges In Favor Of Closed Armenian TV

STRASBOURG -- A Strasbourg-based court has found the Armenian authorities at fault for repeatedly refusing to issue a broadcasting license to a television station, A1 Plus, that was controversially taken off the air in 2002 and has not been allowed to resume its work ever since.

In a press release issued by its Registrar on Tuesday, the European Court of Human Rights said it had held unanimously that there had been a violation of Article 10 (freedom of

expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the Armenian authorities' refusal to grant the applicants' requests for broadcasting licenses.

The Court also awarded the applicant company, Meltex Ltd, 20,000 euros in respect of non-pecuniary damage and 10,000 euros for costs and expenses.

The case concerned the appli-

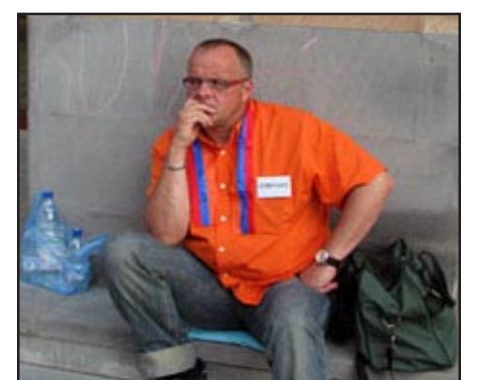
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Belgian Goes on Hunger Strike in Armenian Capital

YEREVAN -- A citizen of Belgium went on an open-ended hunger strike in Yerevan after his Armenian wife alerted him to 'the presence of political prisoners' in the country.

Luc Vandevale, a 51-year-old builder currently based in Armenia, told RFE/RL he meant his hunger strike in the Armenian capital's central Northern Avenue as a demand for the release of political prisoners in Armenia.

"It is not acceptable to have political prisoners in a democratic country. It means it is not a democracy," Vandevale said to RFE/RL in French. "Armenia that represents the Council of Europe must release political prisoners."



Belgian hunger striker Luc Vandevale

The Belgian said he could not plan for how long he would continue his action, but added that it depended

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