

# Massis Weekly

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## Authorities Fail To Thwart Opposition Gathering Near Matenadaran

Thousands Of Popular Movement Supporters Call For The Release Of Political Prisoners

YEREVAN -- Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian again rallied thousands of supporters in Yerevan on Friday in what was the first gathering of the opposition since the bloody break-up of its post-election protests.

The rally was staged in an area near Matenadaran, an ancient manuscripts depository located in downtown Yerevan. Earlier, police in riot gear had attempted to seal off the area not to allow opposition supporters access to the venue where their rally had not been authorized by Yerevan authorities.

Opposition demonstrators started to chant Levon! Levon! in response to police demands to clear the area.

Earlier, police officials had warned that the opposition would not be allowed to gather in an unauthorized venue.

The municipality had refused to authorize the opposition's rally either in central Liberty Square or in an area adjacent to Matenadaran. Instead, the city authorities had suggested the opposition should gather near the capital's largest football arena just off the city center. The opposition, however, rejected that offer as unreasonable.

As a result of negotiations between opposition representatives, including Levon Ter-Petrosian's top aide Levon Zurabian, and deputy chief of police Aleksandr Afian, the latter gave the go-ahead for opposition supporters to move up to the area and start



Popular Movement supporters in front of the Matenadaran

their rally.

The rally came three days before the start of the summer session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) in Strasbourg where the organization is expected to discuss Yerevan's compliance with its mid-April resolution on the political situation in Armenia.

"This is our first all-republican rally after March 1 and I ask you to pay respect to the memory of the March 1 victims with a minute's silence," Ter-Petrosian said beginning his address to the army of his supporters.

"The gangster state, the Tartar-Mongol criminal regime opened fire on

people. They will answer for this sooner or later," he said. "With your permission, I take the responsibility for bestowing the title of Armenia's national hero to the March 1 victims, including the killed policemen."

"This rally proves that people do not accept the results of the election and Serzh Sargsyan's legitimacy. There would be more than the current 200,000 people had the municipality permitted the rally. Dozens of marches and rallies had taken place before, however there was never any disturbance," Ter-Petrosian said.

"I have only one task at this moment – it is the release of political prisoners," continued Ter-Petrosian, referring to one of the key demands of the resolution.

Ter-Petrosian said the opposition would continue its struggle, and promised if all political prisoners are freed he would make an appeal to Europe asking not to impose sanctions against Armenia. He added that he is ready to negotiate with the government if these negotiations result in new elections.

## U.S. Presses Armenia To Return To Democratic Path

YEREVAN -- A senior U.S. official in charge of promoting democracy around the world ended on Wednesday a two-day visit to Armenia during which he pressed its government to restore civil liberties and "promptly" release opposition members arrested following last February's disputed presidential election.

"We hope Armenia gets back on a democratic path and stays on that path," David Kramer, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, said after talks with Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian and other senior Armenian officials.

"We recognize that there will be ups and downs in the future as well,"

## Senate Foreign Relations Committee Delays Vote On Ambassador Nominee To Armenia

WASHINGTON, DC -- The Senate Foreign Relations Committee postponed a vote on the nomination of Marie L. Yovanovitch to serve as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Armenia.

At the onset of Tuesday's business meeting, Chairman Joseph Biden (D-DE) announced that Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) requested that consideration be held over so that she has more time to review the written responses received yesterday from Ambassador Yovanovitch. While making this announcement Chairman Biden stated that he felt that Ambassador Yovanovitch was "eminently qualified."

Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), who chaired her nomination committee hearing last week, stated that he was "very impressed" with all the nominees and expressed his hope that Armenia have an Ambassador as soon as possible. Ranking Member Richard Lugar (R-IN) also expressed the importance of sending an Ambassador to Armenia.

Also, last week, Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) posed a series of questions for Ambassador Yovanovitch during the Senate confirmation hearing. He provided the Ambassador with several historical documents, including cables from U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Ambassador Abram Elkus, U.S. Consul Jesse Jackson, U.S. Consul Leslie Davis, as well as Article II of the UN Genocide Convention and President George Bush's 2004 April 24<sup>th</sup> Statement.

With Congress scheduled for recess next week, the next business meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is anticipated after the July 4<sup>th</sup> Recess.

## Letter To The Council Of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

The following is the text of the letter that was sent to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on behalf of the participants of the protest rally that took place on Sunday, June, 22, 2008 in Hollywood, California

Honorable Lluís MariaDe Puig, President of the PACE

On behalf of the participants of the rally we welcome the decision to conduct a debate under urgent procedures on the implementation of Assembly Resolution 1609 (2008) by Armenia and hope that your steadfastness and resoluteness will finally convince the authorities in Armenia that this time they will be held fully accountable for their actions or inaction and that there will be consequences for their failure to implement all the provisions of the resolution.

We believe that PACE has an obligation in helping the Armenian people resolve the current crisis, especially since there exists a direct correlation between the preliminary assessment of the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Parliamentary Assembly, and the brazen behavior of the authorities in Armenia in the aftermath of the elections, when emboldened and empowered by the fact that many countries were basing their positive assessment on that report; intensified their clampdown on the opposition, arrested scores of activists and leaders who still remain imprisoned and ultimately created the explosive atmosphere that led to the bloody events of March 1<sup>st</sup>.

With Resolution 1609, Council of Europe has provided a roadmap toward the resolution of the current crisis in Armenia. Until now however, the authorities in Armenia have done nothing to comply with the demands outlined in Res. 1609. On the contrary, they have continued to arrest people with false pretenses and sentence people to long term imprisonment with bogus charges.

Considering the above, we once again urge you to steadfastly and resolutely pursue the implementation of all the provisions of Resolution 1609 and most importantly demand from the current authorities in Armenia the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

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