CONCERNS OVER THE PATRIARCH ELECTION – II

AVİM

On 7 July, AVİM had published an article raising question marks about the course of the election process of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul.[1] This article brought attention to the problems raised by the termination of General Vicar (Acting Patriarch) Archbishop Aram Ateshians position by the Spiritual General Assembly of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul and the transfer of the powers of his office to the Trustee (Ar. *Değabah*) Archbishop Karekin Bekchian. The following points were brought attention to in the article:

> During the process preceding the election a new patriarch, if Aram Ateshians continued occupation of the position of General Vicar will be a cause for misunderstandings, would the power grab started with the decision of the Clerical General Assembly also not be a cause for misunderstandings?
>
> Given recent developments, is it possible to distinguish between Bekchian and Ateshian, whom Bekchian accuses of abusing his position as the General Vicar?
>
> Bekchian, who has been granted extraordinary powers, is trusted with preparing the ground for the election a new patriarch while also being a candidate for the position. Can this be accepted as fair and impartial (Bekçiyans name has been circulated as a candidate for some time and he has issued no statement regarding this)?
>
> How can the silence and even the approval expressed by Agos newspaper on this current situation, who has until now consistently criticized Ateshian and praised Bekchian, be explained?
>
> Finally, will official approval be granted for the election of a new patriarch under such suspicious circumstances?

In the month following this article, the below developments validating AVİMs reservations about the patriarch election process have occurred:

1) In an interview he gave regarding the patriarch election (planned to be held in the near future) and the related process, Trustee Bekchian stated that there will be five candidates in the election and that he will be one of them.[2] At the same time, Bekchian indicated that the election can be held no earlier than December 2017 due to the procedures that have finished in relation to the election.

2) The Patriarchates Clerical General Assembly convened under the chairmanship of Trustee Bekchian on 26 July, and all signing authority related to the Patriarchate was transferred to Trustee Bekchian.[3] In this way, it has been alleged that General Vicar Ateshians authority to conduct any official business in the name of Patriarchate has been terminated.[4]

3) Even before the decision taken on 26 July, Trustee Bekchian had put forth the claim that he is the sole representative of the Patriarchate and had begun to act in accordance with this claim. For example, he sent a congratulatory letter to the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the occasion of the first anniversary of the 15 July Democracy and National Unity Day. In the letter, Bekchian alleged that he was not speaking only for himself, but also on behalf of the Office of the Patriarch, members of the Clerical General Assembly, clerics of the Patriarchate, and the Armenian community of Turkey.[5]

In essence, Bekchian is alleging that he has stripped all of Ateshians powers via the Clerical General Assembly, and that from now on he is the sole representative of the Patriarchate.

It seems that Karekin Bekchian is attempting to enact a fait accompli in the patriarch election process by utilizing his position as the trustee and having himself elected as the patriarch. On the one hand, he is the official tasked with carrying out the election, and on the other hand, he is a patriarch candidate. Bekchian had objected to Aram Ateshian being in similar position, and had him removed from office through the decision of the Clerical General Assembly. However, when the turn comes to him, Bekchian alleges that the present situation presents no problems. Despite his claims, Bekchians conduct raises questions about the upcoming election. Would possible to say, in the current circumstances that the upcoming election will be carried in a fair manner?

The Agos newspaper, which has until now consistently criticized Ateshian and praised Bekchian, has not expressed any discomfort regarding Bekchians conduct during the current developments. How is this stance of the Agos newspaper to be explained?

As far as what has been written in the press, no official approval has been received about Ateshians removal from office and the transfer of all his powers to Bekchian. Will the patriarch election process be able to proceed in a healthy manner in the absence of such an official approval?

As has been indicated in its previous article, AVİM will continue to follow the developments regarding the patriarch election.

**Photo: Agos*

[1] AVİM, Concerns Over The Patriarch Election, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*,

Commentary No. 2017 / 53, July 7, 2017, accessed August 8, 2017, http://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/CONCERNS-OVER-THE-PATRIARCH-ELECTION

[2] Şahnur Kazancı, Değabah Başepiskopos Karekin Bekçiyan: Patrik adayıyım Seçimler Aralık 2017den önce yetişmez. *Luys Magazin*, July 15, 2017, 14.

[3] ԵԿԵՂԵՑԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԳՈՒՄԱՐ ԺՈՂՈՎԸ ՏԵՂԱՊԱՀ ՍՐԲԱԶԱՆ ՀՕՐ ՍՏՈՐԱԳՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԼԻԱԶՕՐՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ ՀԱՍՏԱՏԵՑ, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*, announcement, July 26, 2017, accessed August 7, 2017, http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/hy/%D5%A5%D5%AF%D5%A5%D5%B2%D5%A5%D6%81%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B4%D5%A1%D5%A3%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4%D5%A1%D6%80-%D5%AA%D5%B8%D5%B2%D5%B8%D5%BE%D5%A8-%D5%BF%D5%A5%D5%B2%D5%A1%D5%BA%D5%A1/

[4] Ateşyanın imza yetkisi elinden alındı, *Agos*, July 27, 2017, accessed August 7, 2017, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19017/atesyanin-imza-yetkisi-elinden-alindi

[5] Patriklik Kaymakamı Başepiskopos Karekin Bekçiyanın Sayın Cumhurbaşkanına Mektubu, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*, July 17, 2017, accessed August 7, 2017, http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/patriklik-kaymakami-basepiskopos-karekin-bekciyanin-sayin-cumhurbaskanina-mektubu/

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