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ARF 33RD WORLD CONGRESS COULD NOT PROMISE FOR 'YOUNG SPIRIT' AND 'FRESH IDEAS'

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On 16th January Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsoutyun (ARF) gathered the 33rd World Congress in 128th year of its existence. According to Asbarez 100 delegations and guests from 30 countries participated in this assembly[1]. The illegal nature of this Congress was related to the place it has taken place. 33rd Congress of Dashnaktsoutyun (ARF) convened in Khankendi, the central city of the occupied Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan Republic.

In this plenary session, a new Bureau, the highest governing body of the organization and its chairman was elected. Hagop Der-Khachadourian replaced Dashnaktsutyuns longtime top leader, Hrant Markarian as a new chairman[2].

In the inaguration speech of the World Congress the leader of the so-called Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) Bako Sahakian expressed his enjoyment about the saliance of the event firstly by stressing on the venue it has been held. He mentioned that ARF held some activites and meetings in Nagorno Karabakh previously, nevertheless according to Sahakian the meaning of hosting the key political event of the ARF like World Congress seemed incomparable with others. The leader of so-called NKR praised ARF for its contribution to Armenia and NKR by emphasizing its role as a linkage between Homeland and Diaspora[3].

Furthermore, the role of the party as a protector of the national identity of Armenians all around the world and its inspiration for patriotic up-bringing of younger generation[4] were especially stressed by Sahakian. He also expressed greetings to ARF for its input to the settlement of Nagorno Karabakh problem, reinforcement of the NKR statehood and the international recognition of NKR. Sahakian proudly accentuated that ARF has been playing a key role not only in the liberation struggle of NK, but also in its existence for almost three decades[5].

Later on the Bureau Chairman of ARF Hrant Markarian took the stand and indicated his point of view about recent geopolitical challenges that Armenia and so-called NKR should confront within the framework of national aspirations. He also reiterated the words of Sahakian about the resolute role of ARF in the fate of so-called republic.

On 24th January the ARF World Congress published an announcement about so-called NKR. The announcement has urged the current government in Armenia to sign military-

political agreement with the so-called republic[6]. In the announcement the readiness of ARF to continue its commitments to the leadership of so-called NKR on the efforts to develop and enhance the countrys socio-economic situation, its security and territorial integrity[7] was indicated. Moreover, the importance of the complete participation of NKR authorities in the mediation processes of Nagorno Karabakh conflict was emphasized. As the last point, the continuation of Armenias guarantor status in the independence and security of so-called republic on the international stage was pointed out in the announcement of ARF World Congress[8].

On the other hand, Markarian touched upon the Velvet Revolution in 2018 where Sarkisyans government was toppled down by the popular uprising led by the current Prime Minister of Armenia, Pashinyan. The Chairman emphasized his joy of the triumph of peoples will, ousting the corrupt leaders, he mentioned about the challenges that Pashinyans government may face[9]. First of all, he indicated that overcoming poverty and advancing social justice in Armenia should be considered as a major duty of the new government. Moreover, he stressed on inexperience of Pashinyans government by uttering that without having competence in formulating necessary mechanism of governance they may not be able to eradicate the problems of Armenian people. Therefore, Markarian stated that ARF is concerned of high risk of amalgamation of the executive and legislative branches and strengthening of one-person rule[10] in the government that is lack of experience, and have bad governance and poor cadres[11].

In the last part of his speech Markarian stated the challenges that ARF has faced in recent times, including the separation of their ways with Pashinyan, and took all criticism to himself. He indicated the inevitability of the change and proclaimed that he is not going to put his candidacy as a Bureau Chairman in the elections.

ARF presents itself as an Armenian nationalist socialist political party, founded in Tbilisi, Tsarist Russia in 1890. At its outburst the wider goal of ARF was proclaimed as creating a "free, independent and unified" Armenia, nevertheless its historical background covers a bloody past. Armed movements in Ottoman Empire since the early 1890s, bloody massacres in Baku, Azerbaijan during 31 March - 2 April 1918 are remembered as some samples of Dasnaks savagery.

Though time has changed the narrative of Dashnaks, the hatred constructed on Turks has stayed. The aggressive stance of Armenian governments towards Turkey and Azerbaijan after declaring independence of Republic of Armenia in 1991 in terms of Nagorno Karabakh conflict and 1915 events have been especially fuelled and supported by ARF. Therefore, close relations of ARF with Sargsyans government that Markarian so enthusiastically criticized in the recent Congress were well known. Within the long-term political cooperation ARF had approved designation of Sargsyan as Prime Minister in April, 2018.

This party could not acquire the minimum 5% threshold that was required for parliamentary representation in December, 2018 elections in Armenia. Though it could not retain stable relations with Pashinyans government, considering that ministers appointed from ARF to Pashinyans cabinet were fired due to the continuing secret collaboration with

Sargsyan, the Prime Minister later in the election campaign held in November, 2018 declared his readiness to cooperate with ARF. Pashinyan expressed his hope that ARF will gain a young spirit and come up with fresh ideas[12] after the World Congress. Nevertheless, the statements voiced in the World Congress of ARF proved that change in the leadership does not argue to bring serious revisions in the mindset of ARF party nor its followers.

The choice of the venue of the World Congress the city of Khankendi, within the occupied territories of Azerbaijan Republic, speaks for itself. Dashnaks of 21st century do not hesitate to ignite new flames on the ongoing conflict. The statements of Markarian and the later published announcement about Nagorno Karabakh, the internationally recognized region of Azerbaijan Republic, disclosed that new generation of Dashnaks are in lack of young spirit and fresh ideas. Indeed, the advices pointed out for Pashinyans government about supporting the general framework of Armenian interests in the international society can be evaluated as a warning by ARF. Though, this party is a minor one in Armenia nowadays, ARFs mindset and influence has stood on the core of Armenian decades-long policies. Therefore, change in ARF in particular and in Armenia in general may not come only with the names of political authorities, but it can be achieved through the revision of the mindset that they obstinately insist on to preserve.

[1] Haig KAYSERIAN. "The ARF World Congress: An Opportunity to Self Reflect." *Asbarez*. January 04, 2019. http://asbarez.com/177058/the-arf-world-congress-an-opportunity-to-self-reflect/?fbclid=IwAR2SCn22-1XyHtj4-FEmycL1NlhX2rMKy0Cem5AavI4Zly4F5Zk7fO3XZEg.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] "ARF World Congress Issues Statement on Artsakh." *Asbarez*, January 24, 2019. http://asbarez.com/177359/arf-world-congress-issues-statement-on-artsakh/?fbclid=IwAR129lVb3fZ32z8F_VoJ95pQq90pOvnyew3Ev7eOamsoorLYqGh36FU0UsU.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Haig KAYSERIAN. "The ARF World Congress: An Opportunity to Self Reflect." *Asbarez*. January 04, 2019. http://asbarez.com/177058/the-arf-world-congress-an-opportunity-to-self-reflect/?fbclid=IwAR2SCn22-1XyHtj4-FEmycL1NlhX2rMKy0Cem5AavI4Zly4F5Zk7fO3XZEg.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Speech Delivered by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan While Introducing the Government Program to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia - Statements and Messages of the Prime Minister of RA - Updates - The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. January 21, 2019. http://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2019/01/21/Speech/.

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