WHY IS THE TRADITIONAL PROCESS REGARDING THE PATRIARCH ELECTION BEING OPPOSED?

AVİM

Ever since the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Mesrob II Mutafyan fell ill in 2008 and became incapable of serving, the new patriarch election has remained on the agenda as an unresolved problem. In this regard, the appointment of Archbishop Karekin Bekchian (the former spiritual leader of the Armenians in Germany) as the Trustee (Ar. *Değabah*) tasked with organizing the patriarch election process and the forming of an Enterprising Committee from amongst the leading members of the Turkish Armenian community has been an important development that accelerated the patriarch election process.

On the other hand, as reported in the media, discomfort has been expressed through various channels towards Archbishop Bekchian (due to his past and present behavior) and towards some members of the Enterprising Committee, and disapproval has been expressed towards the said people occupying their present positions. According to the news in the media, officials have informed the President of the Yedikule Surp Pırgiç Armenian Hospital Foundation and the Platform of Cooperation Among Foundations (VADİP) Bedros Şirinoğlu, who is considered to be a prominent member of the Armenian community, that Archbishop Bekchian is not recognized as the Trustee and that it would be helpful if a different formula is used for proceeding onto the patriarch election. On October 24, former General Vicar (Acting Patriarch) Archbishop Aram Ateshian, the Head of the Patriarchates Clerical Council Bishop Sahak Mashalyan, President of the Enterprising Committee Sarkis Külegeç, and Bedros Şirinoğlu met with Istanbul Governor Vasip Şahin, and discussed the patriarch election and the governments sensitivities on this issue.[1] Shortly after this meeting, the President of the Enterprising Committee and three other members of the committee announced their resignation from their duties.[2]

The Agos newspaper, which has highlighted Archbishop Bekchian on every occasion and has disregarded his flaws ever since the patriarch election process began to take a more concrete form, continues its ideological and unconstructive (Armenian diaspora-driven) publication policy on the patriarch election. It seems that the Agos newspaper is targeting Turkish officials and authorities, attempting to create the impression that the Turkish government is interfering in the patriarch election. The Agos newspaper and groups with similar opinions are advocating that there is no need to consult with the Government on the patriarch election, and that the Government should only be informed. However, the rest of the Armenian community are of the opinion that, in accordance with traditions, the patriarch election should be conducted by consulting to and congruence with the

Government, which has been the way the patriarch election has been previously conducted.

Just like every other institution of the Republic of Turkey, it is normal for the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate to be expected to work in conformity with the laws and authorities of Turkey. Furthermore, there is no regulation that sets for provisions for the election process of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul. Up until this day, patriarchs have been elected according to the Patriarchates traditions and by consulting with the Government. Moreover, Archbishop Bekchian, in his capacity as the Trustee, stated in his declaration on 27 October that the Government is attending to the subject of the patriarch election and that it has stated that there is nothing to be concerned about. In the said declaration, Archbishop Bekchian has also confirmed that the patriarch election is a process that is pushed forward by consulting with the Turkish government.[3] For this reason, it is both unreasonable and unfair to attempt to create a public perception that the Government has ill intentions towards the election.

Some media organizations that have taken the role of being the voice of the fanatical and Turcophobic Armenian diaspora continue their insistence on highlighting Archbishop Bekchian. This is a strange attitude, since, according to the news from the media for example, despite having stating that he has cut all his ties with Germany, Archbishop Bekchian is still going regularly to Germany and making contacts there. Most recently, in October 24, he had again gone to Germany when the meeting with the Governor of Istanbul had taken place, stating that he had made some contacts there due to his duties.[4] Germanys record regarding the 1915 events and the related Turkish-Armenian controversy is well-known. In the past, Germany has attempted to maliciously utilize the Turkish-Armenian conflict for its own interests even at the presidential level. In this regard, the following questions should be asked: Is it not disconcerting that Archbishop Bekchian, despite having the title Trustee, is still traveling to his previous post Germany and continuing his relations there? What kind of contacts is Archbishop Bekchian making in Germany?

**Photograph: Agos (The Enterprising Committee and Archbishop Karekin Bekchian)*

[1] Duyuru, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*, accessed 26 October 2017, http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/duyuru-3/

[2] Müteşebbis Heyet'te istifalar, *Agos*, accessed 26 October 2017, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19585/mutesebbis-heyet-te-istifalar

[3] Bildiri, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*, accessed 27 October 2017, http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/bildiri/

[4] Bildiri, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*

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