OUTSIDE INTERVENTION TO THE ELECTION OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCH OF ISTANBUL CONTINUES

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The election of a trustee (Ar. *değabah*) in charge of carrying out the patriarch election process was held on 15 March by the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, with Vicar General (Acting Patriarch) of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul Archbishop Aram Ateshian and spiritual leader of the Armenian community in Germany Archbishop Karekin Bekchian as the contenders for the position. Ultimately, while Karekin Bekchian was elected as the trustee, shortly after, the below short statement was released by the Office of the Governor of Istanbul:

> *Given the reports in the written and visual media, it is understood that the procedure of patriarchal election is intended to be de facto started by electing a değabah* [trustee] *on 15 March 2017.*
>
> *Considering the unfavorable developments that took place during the meeting on 16 February 2017 at the Patriarchate, it is determined that starting the election process is legally impossible given the facts that this process might cause disturbance and divisions in the* [Armenian] *community, that there is already an incumbent vicar and that your community knows the basic proceedings and practices concerning the patriarchal election.*

Recriminations within the Armenian community following the trustee election and the statement from the Office of the Governor of Istanbul prove that the patriarch election process creates disturbances within the Armenian community and that the election process was rushed and held without consultations with the state of the Republic of Turkey. The statement by the Office of the Governor reveals that the State does not recognize the trustee election and that Vicar General Ateshian is officially still in office. As a matter of fact, although the opponents of Ateshian alleged that he must resign following the trustee election, Vicar General Ateshian issued a statement stating that he would not step down from his post as the Vicar General of the Patriarchate. Meanwhile, in the coming days, Vicar General Ateshian and his colleagues are expected to obtain an appointment from the Office of the Governor of Istanbul and discuss the trustee and patriarch election issues.

Bekchians candidacy and election, on the other hand, reveals what is being imposed upon the Armenian community in Turkey. From the beginning of the patriarch election process,

Vicar General Ateshian has been continuously subjected to a smear campaign and ostracized by the remaining candidates. A candidate even withdrew from the trustee election and called for the votes to go to Bekchian for the sole purpose of obstructing Ateshians election as trustee. It is put forth by this externally supported ideological smear and ostracism campaign that the trustee and patriarch election processes, which were initiated without consulting relevant authorities and, therefore, have no legal basis, have been conducted in an unjust manner.

Bekchians election as trustee is also an unfortunate development. Bekchian, who has been carrying out his church duties in Germany, is known for his support for anti-Turkey activities organized by Germany (which embrace Armenian allegations) and backed by the German Protestant church. Efforts to entrust this person with the responsibility to represent citizens of Armenian heritage of the Republic of Turkey as trustee is, no doubt, a move that will not yield any benefits to the Armenian community in Turkey. It is also clear that Bekchians election will have no contributions to the already tense Turkish-German relations.

**Photo: Agos*

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