
ARMENIAN GUNMAN SEEKS MAYOR'S OFFICE, DESPITE DISCOURAGEMENT

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RFE/RL By Ruzanna Stepanian August 24, 2016

A jailed Armenian activist who helped seize a Yerevan police station last month wants to run for mayor in his hometown, but hard-line opposition representatives are discouraging him from doing so.

Arayik Khandoyan, a member of the armed group Sasna Tsrer (Daredevils of Sassoun) that occupied the police station for two weeks last month in a deadly standoff with police, wants to be elected head of the Tsaghkahovit community in Armenias western Aragatsotn Province in an election scheduled for September 18.

His proxy submitted an application to the Central Electoral Commission shortly before the deadline expired on August 19.

Khandoyan is a 45-year-old veteran of the 1992-94 Nagorno-Karabakh war with Azerbaijan and is also known as Lone Wolf. He currently faces charges of hostage-taking and illegal arms possession. But Armenias law allows citizens in pretrial detention to run for election as long as they are not convicted of a crime.

If registered as a candidate, Khandoyan will run against the incumbent mayor of the village, who is a member of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

But the Founding Parliament, a hard-line opposition movement to which Khandoyan and other Sasna Tsrer members are loyal, is urging activists not to participate in elections under the current government, saying they should instead push for political change through street protests.

Founding Parliament senior representative Alek Yenigomshian has called on Khandoyan to withdraw from the race.

In an interview with RFE/RLs Armenian Service, Yenigomshian, who himself faces charges of aiding the armed occupiers and was recently freed pending trial, said that the Founding Parliament believes the political situation cannot be changed through elections under the current regime.

Yenigomshian said Khandoyan decided to run for mayor without consulting the group. He said the group's jailed leader, Zhirayr Sefilian, and other members also would discourage Khandoyan from running.

The period for the withdrawal of candidacies is not over yet," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, members of Khandoyans extended family in Tsaghkahovit said local authorities are

laying obstacles to his election bid. His brothers wife said a government loyalist obstructed her involvement in the local election commission.

Kaynak/Source: