
ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT ELECTS EX-PM SARKISSIAN AS COUNTRY'S PRESIDENT

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02.03.2018

Reuters (02 March 2018)

Armenias parliament chose Armen Sarkissian as the countrys new president on Friday in a vote that is meant to herald the start of a power shift to the countrys prime minister and parliament.

Sarkissian, 64, a former prime minister who once served as the countrys ambassador to Britain, was elected to serve a seven-year term.

Ninety lawmakers voted to elect him, ten opposed his election, and one abstained.

Sarkissian succeeds Serzh Sarksyan, who opposition leaders say could now become prime minister.

Armenia, a South Caucasus country of around three million people, is in line with some other former Soviet republics and countries in eastern Europe in moving away from direct democracy, according to analysts.

Outgoing Sarksyan became president in 2008 and nominated former prime minister Sarkissian to succeed him in January.

Under the terms of a constitution approved in 2015 in a referendum that effectively abolished direct presidential elections, parliament can elect a president with a three-quarters majority.

The presidency is now meant to become largely ceremonial under the amended constitution and power to shift to the prime minister and parliament.

Opposition leaders accuse Sarksyan of planning to move into the post of prime minister to continue ruling Armenia.

Sarksyan denies having any such intention.

But many members of the ruling party say Sarksyan would be the best candidate for prime minister given his experience, especially in negotiations over neighboring Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Clashes over control of Nagorno-Karabakh, which lies inside Azerbaijan but is controlled by ethnic Armenians, have intensified in the past three years and there was a flare-up in violence there in April 2016.

Armenia seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991, but remains dependent on Russia for aid and

investment. Many Armenians accuse the government of corruption and mishandling the economy.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-president/armenian-parliament-elects-ex-pm-sarkissian-as-countrys-president-idUSKCN1GE0WQ?il=0>

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