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**OSCE PA HUMAN RIGHTS CHAIR URGES RESTRAINT, DIALOGUE IN ARMENIA**

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On the eighth consecutive day of protests in Yerevan and other cities in Armenia, Ignacio Sanchez Amor (MP, Spain), Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's human rights committee, today called on all sides to engage in constructive dialogue.

"I welcome the civic engagement of people turning out to exercise their right to freedom of expression through peaceful protest," said Sanchez Amor, the Chair of the OSCE PA's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions.

"This right must be respected by the authorities, and I take note of reports of instances of excessive use of force. At the same time, I remind that the right to peaceful protest does not enable demonstrators to force their way into buildings and disrupt proceedings. I call on all sides to exercise due restraint to ensure that all Armenians can peacefully express their opinions, and call for a prompt return to constructive dialogue. In this context, Freedom of the Press is of paramount importance and journalists should be protected against any form of violence."

Sanchez Amor served as Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission to the April 2017 parliamentary elections in Armenia.

The anti-government protests in Armenia began on April 13 after Armenia's ruling Republican Party nominated former president Serzh Sargsyan for the prime ministers post. Serzh Sargsyan resigned as president on April 9 and was elected as prime minister during a special session of parliament on April 17 by a vote of 77 to 17.

According to Armenia's amended its constitution, approved in a national referendum in 2015, Armenia has switched the government from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary system making the presidency largely ceremonial and strengthening the office of the prime minister.

The protests are led by Nikol Pashinyan, the head of the opposition Yelk parliamentary faction, who declared April 17 the beginning of popular, non-violent "velvet revolution" urging demonstrators to keep besieging ministries, the prosecutor's office, the central bank and other governmental buildings

More than 200 people have been detained by police today after protests resumed in Yerevan against the election of former president Serzh Sargsyan as prime minister.

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