
ARMENIAN OPPOSITION LEADER PASHINIAN NOMINATED AS PM CANDIDATE

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Armenian protest leader Nikol Pashinian has been officially nominated by his Yelk alliance as the party's candidate for prime minister a day before a vote in parliament on a new head of government after street protests forced the resignation of Serzh Sarkisian.

Pashinian, who had already secured the support of all opposition factions, was nominated unanimously by Yelk on April 30, lawmaker Ararat Mirzoyan told RFE/RL.

The nomination of the 42-year-old comes a day after several thousand people rallied to demand that the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) transfer power to Pashinian by electing him to the prime minister's post on May 1.

Pashinian addressed the April 29 gathering, telling protesters that he thinks it is "very likely that at least some members of the HHK faction" would vote for a "people's candidate" for prime minister.

He called on supporters to pause their actions of civil disobedience and to stop calling and sending emails to HHK lawmakers. However, he urged them to return to the square in the evening of April 30.

I want to look straight in the eyes of all of you, with all the confidence to declare that yes, I am ready to assume the office of the prime minister of the Republic of Armenia and to serve the people of Armenia, Pashinian told the rally.

After meeting with HHK faction leader Vahram Baghdasarian on April 29, Pashinian told reporters that there was no mood among members of the Republican Party to "thwart" the parliamentary vote.

"There is a mood that a prime minister should be elected on May 1," he said, without elaborating.

Pashinian, the only candidate to step forward for the post, had instructed his supporters on April 29 to continue blocking traffic and staging "peaceful and nonviolent" acts of civil disobedience "even though the political situation has changed and there has been certain progress."

'Extremely Important Rally'

He also told them to gather in Yerevan's central Republic Square for "the most powerful [rally] yet."

Baghdasarian told reporters that the HHK would not hinder the election of Pashinian if the other factions in parliament support his candidacy.

Meanwhile, the former ruling coalition party that has seven seats in parliament, Dashnaktsutyun, announced that it was formally supporting Pashinian's candidacy in the May 1 parliamentary vote.

Dashnaktsutyuns decision came after the HHK, which has 58 seats in the 105-seat parliament, decided on April 28 that it would not nominate its own candidate.

The second largest parliamentary faction, the Tsarukian Alliance, has also pledged to support Pashinian. The Tsarukian Alliance controls 31 seats in parliament.

Pashinian's Yelk alliance has nine seats.

That means Pashinian needs support from at least six members of the HHK to be elected.

No HHK Candidate

A spokesman for the HKK said the party decided not to nominate its own candidate in order "to avoid confrontation and destabilization of the country."

HHK spokesman Eduard Sharmazanov said Republican lawmakers plan to consider all other candidates, then vote as a bloc.

Pashinian has led weeks of street demonstrations in Armenia that resulted in the resignation of Serzh Sarkisian from the prime ministers post.

He hopes that a massive show of support on the streets during the next two days will convince HHK lawmakers to vote him to power.

Pashinian said he met early on April 29 with President Armen Sarkisian for talks about Armenias "domestic political situation, the latest developments, and possible solutions."

U.S. 'Closely' Monitoring Situation

The U.S. State Department weighed in on Armenias political standoff late on April 28, saying it continues to "closely" monitor the situation.

"As a friend of Armenia, we urge all parties to engage in good faith negotiations on the formation of a new government in accordance with the constitution, and to reach a resolution that reflects the interests of all Armenians," it said in a statement.

HHK holds 58 seats in the 105-seat parliament, and without its support Pashinian is unlikely to be elected.

However, the second biggest party in parliament, the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), hinted it might support him.

"My team and I will vote for a people's candidate, whether it's Nikol Pashinian or anyone else nominated by the people," party leader Gagik Tsarukian told Kentron TV.

'No Geopolitical Reversals'

The current crisis was triggered by Serzh Sarkisian's shift earlier this month to the newly powerful post of prime minister after a decade as president -- a move critics charged was a blatant bid to cling to power when he reached the limit of two straight presidential terms.

Pashinian on April 27 promised no "geopolitical reversals" in front of thousands of supporters in Gyumri, the country's second-largest city and host to a large Russian military base.

Russia -- Armenia's main ally and trading partner -- has said it will not intervene in the standoff.

However, President Vladimir Putin on April 26 talked on the telephone with Karapetian, a former Gazprom manager, calling for a quick solution to the Armenian crisis -- one that would reflect the outcome of last years parliamentary elections won by Sarkisian's HHK, the Kremlin said.

Pashinian, in his speeches to the local crowds on April 28 repeatedly called on local governments, municipalities, elected representatives in local assemblies, and mayors to publicly announce their joining what he called the "Popular Movement," in an apparent effort to consolidate his public support base.

He also said he was ready to meet with all the ruling party's lawmakers "simultaneously."

I want to confirm that we are ready for negotiations, and we are interested in resolving these problems as soon as possible," he said.

On April 29, Pashinian vowed to enhance relations with Moscow, saying Armenia and Russia "will benefit from this process" if he becomes prime minister.

But he added, "We will also step up our relations in all the directions, and will expand relations with the EU, the U.S., China, Iran, and Georgia. There is every prerequisite for this," he said.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/armenian-opposition-leader-pashinian-calls-for-protests-to-continue/29198782.html>

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