
IN SETBACK FOR PASHINIAN, ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT AGAIN FAILS TO PASS ELECTION BILL

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The Armenian parliament has again failed to muster enough votes to approve changes to the Electoral Code drafted by acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian's government ahead of snap general elections expected in December.

The proposed amendments were brought to the National Assembly's floor for a second time on October 29, a week after a first attempt to pass the bill failed.

The draft legislation was essentially blocked by former Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party (HHK), which has the largest faction in parliament.

The development is a setback for Pashinian, a former opposition lawmaker who was swept into office in May after spearheading weeks of protests that prompted his predecessor, Serzh Sarkisian, to resign.

As approved by the government on October 16, the legislation would change the existing legal mechanism for distributing seats in the National Assembly, which critics believe favored the HHK in the last parliamentary elections held in April 2017.

Under Armenia's constitution, any amendment to the Electoral Code must be backed by at least 63 members of the 105-member parliament.

Only 62 lawmakers backed the bill in the October 29 vote, with two voting against it. On October 22, it was backed by 56 deputies.

Pashinian has accused the parliament majority of "sabotaging" the work of his cabinet.

The HHK rejects the accusation, accusing the government of ignoring a number of alternative proposals that were jointly made by the four political forces represented in the National Assembly.

HHK lawmaker Armen Ashotian on October 29 called the government's second attempt at getting the draft legislation passed "a travesty of democracy."

"Changing an electoral law just 40 days before an election is simply absurd," he also told RFE/RL.

Gianni Buquicchio, the president of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, said on October 19

that the draft amendments "pursue legitimate aims and seem mostly positive."

He said that the commission had some "reservations" about the proposed changes, but that "these reservations are less relevant if there is consensus among political forces about the change."

The National Assembly will be dissolved later this week if, in accordance with an apparent agreement between political factions, deputies again fail to elect a new prime minister.

Pashinian announced on October 16 that he was resigning from the post in order to dissolve parliament and force early elections.

Under the Armenian Constitution, snap elections can be called only if the prime minister resigns and the parliament fails to replace him or her with someone else within two weeks.

New elections then shall be held no earlier than within 30 days and no later than within 45 days -- approximately the first half of December, in this case.

Pashinian has pushed for snap elections following his bloc's landslide victory last month in the mayoral race in the capital, Yerevan, in a bid to unseat his political opponents, who have maintained a majority in parliament.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/29570598.html>

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