
ARMENIA 'STILL BLOCKING' NEW HEAD OF CSTO

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25.02.2019

Azatutyun (22 February 2019)

Armenia is reportedly continuing to object to the appointment of a new secretary general of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) nominated by Belarus.

The CSTOs previous, Armenian head, Yuri Khachaturov, was sacked in November after being charged by Armenian authorities over a 2008 crackdown on opposition protesters in Yerevan. Khachaturovs three-year tenure was due to end in 2020.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinians government demanded that another Armenian official be named to run the organization until that time. The demand was rejected by other CSTO member states and Belarus in particular.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko nominated one of his top security officials, Stanislav Zas, for the vacant post. Zass candidacy was reportedly backed by Russia and all other members of the defense alliance except Armenia.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry last week urged Yerevan to drop its objections. The post of secretary general of an international military-political organization is not a hotel room that can be booked, said a ministry spokesman.

The Russian newspaper Kommersant reported on Friday that Moscow has come to terms with the fact that the CSTO will not have a new secretary general until 2020. We expect the appointment next year, it quoted a Russian diplomatic source as saying. There is no collapse and stupor within the organization, it is working according to plan.

A spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed that the blocs member states have still not reached a consensus on the issue. The official, Dmitry Peskov, stressed that the Kremlin is not frustrated with that.

And there is no operational vacuum in the leadership of the CSTO because it has an acting secretary general [Russias Valery Semerikov] who will be performing his duties until the situation with the new secretary general is cleared up, Peskov told reporters in Moscow.

Pashinians press secretary, Vladimir Karapetian, likewise said that negotiations on the choice of CSTO secretary general are continuing. There is still no agreement as yet, he told RFE/RLs Armenian service.

The dispute appears to have seriously strained Armenias relations with Belarus. In November, Pashinian condemned Lukashenko for questioning Yerevans role in the CSTO at a meeting with a senior diplomat from Azerbaijan, Armenias arch-foe not affiliated with the bloc.

Lukashenko claimed afterwards to have apologized to Pashinian. Still, he insisted that Yerevan should agree to the appointment of a Belarusian secretary general.

The problem was created by [Pashinian,] not us, Lukashenko said, adding that the Armenian prime minister should have consulted with fellow CSTO leaders before bringing criminal charges against Khachaturov for political reasons.

Zas travelled to the capitals of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and met with the presidents of those countries late last year to secure their backing for his candidacy. The Belarusian official has repeatedly expressed a desire to visit Yerevan as well.

Asked whether Pashinian is ready to receive Zas, Karapetian said: We dont have such an issue on our agenda right now.

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Kaynak/Source: