
ARMENIAN EX-PRESIDENT KOCHARIAN GOES ON TRIAL IN YEREVAN

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Former Armenian President Robert Kocharian, has gone on trial on charges of overthrowing the constitutional order during the final weeks of his decade-long rule that ended in April 2008.

RFE/RL correspondents report from the courtroom in Yerevan that the first session began on May 13 with the issue of Kocharian's pretrial restrictions, namely whether he should be released on bail or transferred to house arrest during the trial.

The court has not yet examined the charges in the case.

Kocharian is accused of illegally ordering security officers to use force against opposition supporters who were protesting against alleged fraud in the disputed February 2008 presidential election.

Eight protesters and two police officers were killed when security forces quelled the two days of protests that began on March 1, 2008. The crackdown came after Kocharian declared a three-week state of emergency.

The 64-year-old ex-president, who served from 1998 to 2008, has remained in pretrial detention since his arrest in December.

In comments sent from prison to the AFP news agency, Kocharian called the case against him "nothing less than lawlessness."

"The current Armenian political authorities have declared me guilty, and the judicial system now serves this political master," Kocharian said in remarks published by AFP on May 13.

Kocharian has said that the accusations are part of incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian's political "vendetta" against him.

Pashinian, a former opposition lawmaker, was swept to power last year after leading protests that ousted Kocharian's former ally and successor, Serzh Sarkisian.

Pashinian played a key role in the 2008 protests and spent nearly two years in prison because of it.

He has strongly defended the criminal case against Kocharian and denied orchestrating it.

The former head of state faces up to 15 years behind bars if convicted.

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