
ARMENIAN MINISTER ACCUSES DASHNAKS OF HINDERING REFORMS, REJECTS RESIGNATION CALLS

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A key figure in Armenias 2018 Velvet Revolution who serves as a minister in the current cabinet has accused an opposition party that was represented in the previous government of hindering reforms.

Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Arayik Harutiunian made the accusation after the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) began to call for his resignation over a controversial educational reform.

Dashnaktsutyun is showing some undisciplined behavior, Harutiunian claimed following a government session on Thursday.

Talking to media, the minister, who also sits on the board of the ruling Civic Contract party of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian, went on to accuse the leadership of Dashnaktsutyun, who he said are linked to the former authorities, of creating artificial problems for the Pashinian government.

Dashnaktsutyun, or the ARF, which was founded in 1890, has operated in Diaspora Armenian communities. It entered Armenias politics after the end of Soviet rule in the South Caucasus republic in 1991. The party advocating democratic socialism and espousing traditional views and values has been a particularly vocal champion of the Armenian Cause, campaigning for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Dashnaktsutyun was part of several governments in Armenia. In particular, it was a junior coalition partner of former President Serzh Sarkisians Republican Party of Armenia in 2016-2018. It quit the coalition amid popular anti-government protests that led to Sarkisians resignation in April 2018 and was even briefly involved in the new government formed by Pashinian. The party failed to enter the new National Assembly in snap elections in December 2018.

Minister Harutiunian today appealed to Dashnaks leaders outside Armenia to take care of their party, because the undisciplined behavior displayed by [Armenias] Dashnaktsutyun does not give credit to one of our oldest political parties.

He also urged Dashnaktsutyun to look back at its failures and analyze why it was rejected by the society. It should have changed its leaders, because they continue to fail the ARF. The actions that are taking place now have only a negative impact, the minister added.

Harutiunian explained that while during my visits abroad I see adequate Dashnak partners willing to engage in constructive work, I do not see it here [in Armenia].

In the previous government Dashnaktsutyun, in particular, controlled the Ministry of Education. Harutiunian believes that the party now tries to scandalize current educational reforms because it failed multiple times in this area.

Dashnaktsutyuns youth wing began to demand Harutiunians resignation after the ministry came up with a legislative initiative to make the teaching of the Armenian language, literature and history optional in universities.

The party also criticized the ministry for funding a street performance in Yerevan by a group of young artists that was branded by many on social media as propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientation and Satanism.

ARF Youth Union members staged a protest in front of the government building in Yerevan on Thursday to repeat their call for Harutiunians resignation. They proceeded to the ministry building where a sit-in was organized.

Harutiunian, however, seemed undaunted by the protests. I am ready to resign only when I feel I am not doing enough. This is not the case, the minister said.

Meanwhile, ARF member Gegham Manukian dismissed accusations voiced by the minister. He, in turn, accused Harutiunian of trying to drive a wedge between Dashnaktsutyun members in Armenia and abroad.

I would simply advise that Arayik Harutiunian refrain from even thinking about that or else he will end up in a very bad place. If they [authorities] make an effort to learn what is happening, they will see that at least in the past three days ARF youth unions in different parts of the world – in the West Coast of the United States, Sweden, Jerusalem, the Netherlands, Lebanon – have voiced their support to the ARF Youth Union of Armenia, which has organized today's protest, Manukian said.

As Minister Harutiunian and Dashnaktsutyun trade accusations today, Armenias Investigation Committee released a statement with explanations regarding the invitation of senior Dashnak member Artsvik Minasian for interrogation.

It said Minasian, who served as Armenias environment minister in the previous government, was questioned as a witness as part of an investigation into alleged embezzlement and forgery at an aviation meteorological center in 2017. Investigators stressed, however, that according to the evidence in the case, Minasian has nothing to do with the crimes that are being investigated.

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