
ARMENIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT HEAD'S HOME SEARCHED

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27.01.2020

Azatutyun (24 January 2020)

Investigators searched the Yerevan apartment of Hrayr Tovmasian, the chairman of Armenias Constitutional Court, on Friday one month after indicting him on charges which he rejects as politically motivated.

They did not confiscate any documents kept there, according to Tovmasian and his lawyers.

Tovmasian was charged with two counts of abuse of power. Prosecutor-General Artur Davtian said late last month that he unlawfully privatized an office in Yerevan and forced state notaries to rent other premises de facto belonging to him when he served as Armenias justice minister from 2010-2014.

Tovmasian strongly denies the accusations, saying that they are part of the Armenian governments intensifying efforts to force him to resign.

The chief justice claimed that officers of the Special Investigative Service (SIS) raided his home for the same reason. The current authorities are seeking to quickly get rid of me as chairman of the Constitutional Court, and that is being done in a very crude and open manner, he told journalists after the search.

Tovmasian stressed that he has no intention to step down and remains undaunted by the possibility of his arrest. Its my cross which I have to bear, he said.

His lawyers claimed, meanwhile, that the search was conducted illegally because the SIS investigators failed to give their client a copy of the search warrant issued by a Yerevan court. The SIS was quick to deny that.

The law-enforcement agency has brought the same charges against Norayr Panosian, a former Justice Ministry official related to Tovmasian. He too denies them.

Panosian was arrested in late September. Armenias Court of Appeals freed him in early November, questioning the credibility of the charges. The SIS altered them before arresting Panosian again on January 9.

The Armenian government and investigators maintain that there are no political motives behind the high-profile case.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian implicitly demanded in August the resignation of Tovmasian and other Constitutional Court judges who were installed before he came to power in the 2018 Velvet Revolution. He accused them of maintaining links with Armenias former leadership and impeding reforms which he says are aimed at creating a truly independent judiciary.

Pashinians critics say that he is on the contrary seeking to gain control over all Armenian courts.

Tovmasian was indicted on December 27 one day after President Armen Sarkissian signed into law a controversial government bill giving seven of the nine Constitutional Court judgesfinancial incentives to resign before the end of their mandate. None of those judges has accepted the proposed early retirement so far.

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30395258.html>

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