FORMER ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER V. OSKANIAN IS INCRIMINATED

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Vartan Oskanian who served as Armenian Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2008 and at present is the Chairman of the opposition party Prosperous Armenia, as a result of the voting in the Armenian Parliament for the lifting of his immunity for misappropriation, with sixty-four votes against six votes in the assembly out of a total of 131 members, has thus been delivered to judiciary. Oskanian has strongly rejected the allegation that he misappropriated the donation of 1.400.000 dollars made by the American philanthropist Jon Huntsman Jr. to the civilitas foundation (meaning responsibility of the citizen to the community in Latin) which he had established in 2008 and that he used 180.000 dollars of this amount for his personal expenses. He has emphasized that this issue is known by both the foundation and the American benefactor, that he did not receive any complaints from them and as such the allegation and accusation is entirely political.

Comments made in the Armenian press suggest that Oskanian and his partys rejection to enter into a coalition despite the Ruling Partys calls, as well as the concern for becoming a serious rival to President Sarkisian in the presidential elections to be held in February, might have led to the legal process which started against him. In a recent statement referring to the Georgian elections, Oskanian has alleged that he has been accused because he has tried to implement in Armenia the democratic example in Georgia where the legislative and executive organs and the presidency are in the hands of different parties.

Oskanian, who came to Armenia as an American citizen and who was subsequently appointed as foreign minister after giving up his American citizenship, has displayed a pragmatic approach during his term as minister, giving priority to Armenia opening up to the West and the world, in particular the US and Europe, and to establishing rooted institutions. In this context, in his approach to Turkey, he has used a language which did not make concessions from the one-sided Armenian allegations, yet meticulously refrained to appear a militant.

A long-term contribution of Oskanian to Armenian foreign policy has been to bring Armenia, which had alienated itself from the outside world during the USSR period, closer to the US and the Armenian diaspora in the West and implementing the diasporas financial and moral assistance for the new Armenian administration which until then was relatively introvert and timid. The Civilitas Foundation which he established after withdrawing from the Ministry has, in his own words, brought money to Armenia and has

provided jobs and food. The political aspect of the case filed against him without doubt closely concerns the remittances of the diaspora, mostly channeled through the US. The US Embassy in Yerevan expressing serious concern through an official statement has also opened the field to comments for inserting a Moscow-Washington dimension to the issue.

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