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RELIGION IS MEDDLING WITH STATE AFFAIRS IN ARMENIA

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The decision to return four villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan within the framework of the border agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been creating protests. The protests are led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, the spiritual leader of the Tavush region. It is known that Garegin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, also supported the protest movement. On May 28, during the celebrations of the Founding of the First Republic in Armenia, Garegin II and accompanying clergy were blocked by the police for a while from entering the Sardarapat Monument. The Echmiadzin, as well as other religious institutions, reacted to the incident. Additionally, the Armenian Patriarchate of Türkiye issued a statement on the matter.

The statement conveyed that the actions of the Armenian security forces towards the Catholicos of All Armenians on 28 May 2024 raised eyebrows and that all representatives of the Church should act in solidarity. While churches supporting each other is understandable, it is clear and surprising that religion is interfering in the affairs of a state like Armenia, which prides itself on its democratic stance in the South Caucasus. Intermingling the affairs of the state and religion is in contradiction with the principles of a secular and democratic state.

There is also a notable omission in the statement. Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, the spiritual leader of the Tavush region, seems to have put aside his religious title to run for prime minister. During a protest he organized quite recently, photos were taken of him being very friendly with a JCAG terrorist (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide) who murdered the Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles, Kemal Arıkan. The Armenian Patriarchate of Türkiye did not give an expected response to a priest praising a terrorist as a hero. A cleric standing arm in arm with a terrorist goes against the concept of "religion" and the concept of "state". This photo brings to mind Armenia's image between 1973 and 1984, when it was associated with terrorism. We previously wrote an article regarding this subject[1].

There is another striking point in the statement. The explanation "Regardless of any political position, it is not in the interest of the Armenian state to violate the values embraced by the civilized world[2]. is noteworthy. This sentence can include the Patriarchate in Istanbul within the boundaries of politics. Therefore, it is believed that the

Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul should be careful when making similar references, knowing that it is the spiritual leader of the Armenian population living in Türkiye. All in all, it is inappropriate for an institution within the borders of Türkiye to comment on developments in Armenia's domestic politics.

Ultimately, these developments in Armenia are occurring with the aim of jeopardizing the peace and stability that is being established in the South Caucasus. In this environment, religious functionaries meddling with Armenian politics and the unabashedly friendly statements made by clergymen to terrorists are also striking and disturbing cases. It is important to keep in mind that all the peoples of the region would be adversely affected by any possible turmoil in the region.

*Image: *https://www.ermenihaber.am/tr/news/2022/01/25/Türkiye-Ermenileri-Patriği-Sahak-Maşalyan/224065*

[1] Hazel Çağan Elbir, An Archbishop Of The Armenian Apostolic Church Hand In Hand With A Murderer - Behind The Scenes Of The Protests In Yerevan, *AVİM*, 23 May 2024, https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/AN-ARCHBISHOP-OF-THE-ARMENIAN-APOSTOLIC-CHURCH-HAND-IN-HAND-WITH-A-MURDERER-BEHIND-THE-SCENES-OF-THE-PROTESTS-IN-YEREVAN

[2] AGOS, Patrikhaneden Ermenistanda Yaşanan Gelişmelerle İlgili Açıklama, *AGOS*, 31 May 2024, https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/30405/patrikhane-den-ermenistan-da-yasanan-gelismelerle-ilgili-aciklama.

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