ARMENIA 2013 (1)

Ömer Engin LÜTEM

The developments that could take place in 2013 in Armenia, which has serious problems with its neighbors in the Southern Caucasus and when looking from this aspect, entails the most important obstacle to the creation of conditions for security and cooperation in the region, are tried to be summarized below. The presidential election to be held on 18 February 2013 without doubt forms the most important event of domestic policy. Some developments taking place in the last couple of months show that President Sarkisian will easily win this election. The former President (1998-2008) Robert Kocharian, who could have been a serious opponent of Sarkisian, for reasons such as being regarded as the main person responsible for the death of about ten individuals by law enforcement officers during protest demonstrations that took place right after the 2008 elections; moreover, allowing for the oligarchic system which still dominates the country today to be installed or at least not to be prevented and furthermore, not playing a certain role in domestic politics after withdrawing from presidency, has not been able to stand as an opponent. Public opinion polls have shown that if Kocharian runs as candidate, he will only be able to receive about 10% of the votes. Armenias first President (1991-1998) Levon Ter Petrosian, who played the leading role as President in the occupation of Karabakh and the surrounding Azeri territories, had supported a peace plan of the Minsk Group, but was forced to resign in 1998 when it was understood that this plan would not be adopted by the National Assembly. After remaining distant from politics for almost ten years, he participated in the presidential election in 2008 only to receive about 20% of the votes and Sarkisian, obtaining 52%, had easily won the election. Following the election, Ter Petrosian formed the Armenian National Congress Party, comprised of some small parties coming together, which became the main opposition in the country. However, despite Armenias economic condition being hampered, this party has failed to make its presence felt and has only been able to receive 7.8% of the votes during the parliamentary election held last year in May. When becoming clear that it would also not be able to receive the necessary support from the other opposition parties, Ter Petrosian has announced that he will not participate in the presidential election. His party has also not nominated another candidate until now. Under normal conditions, it could be considered that Ter Petrosians political career has come to an end. Before the 2008 parliamentary elections, a new party called Prosperous Armenia had been formed. Its leader was former world champion in arm wrestling and the newly enriched Tsarukyan who was considered to be an oligarchic. It was said that this party was in fact formed by Robert Kocharyan, who was on the verge of withdrawing from presidency back then, in order to intervene in domestic politics when

necessary and to be able to be elected as President again in the future. In the 2008 elections, this party gained 24 deputies by receiving 14.7% of the votes and entered the Government Coalition. On the other hand, it gained 37 seats by increasing its votes by approximately a fold (30.1%) in the 2012 parliamentary election, but this time it failed to enter the Government coalition. No explanation was made on this issue. It was said that Tsarukyan asked for prime ministry to be given to his party, but when this was not possible the party renounced its decision to enter the government. Since the Armenian Republican Party, led by President Sarkisian, has the majority in the Assembly, the non-participation of Prosperous Armenia did not create a problem and the government was formed without difficulties. In the recent months, it was frequently mentioned that Tsarukyan would run as candidate for presidency. Going to Brussels and meeting with EU officials there was regarded as having a connection to this candidacy. Since it had professional relations with Russia, it was not expected for opposition to be received from this country either. In short, it was understood that if Tsarukyan received the support of some opposition parties, with the Armenian National Congress being at the forefront, it would stand as a serious opponent to Sarkisian. But, after a meeting held with President Sarkisian last month, Tsarukyan declaring that he would not run as candidate and that his party would not support another candidate came as a surprise. Some news published in the Armenian press stressed that Sarkisian had threatened Tsarukyan. Since individuals acquiring wealth in a short time usually make use of illegal means, these news items were rather convincing. There are still about fifteen candidates for the presidential election to be held in Armenia. However, as mentioned above, since those who could be serious rivals have been eliminated, it is expected for President Sarkisian to easily win the election on 18 February. What kind of problems await President Sarkisian and the new government he will form will be addressed tomorrow.

About the Author :

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AVRASYA İNCELEMELERİ MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr

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E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
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