CONCERNS OVER THE PATRIARCH ELECTION – III

AVİM

AVİM had previously published two commentaries on the election process of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul.[1] In these commentaries, to summarize, question marks were raised about the termination of General Vicar (Acting Patriarch) Archbishop Aram Ateshians position and the transfer of the powers of his office to Trustee (Ar. *Değabah*, the official tasked with organizing the patriarch election) Archbishop Karekin Bekchian, the former spiritual leader of the Armenian community in Germany.

Within this process, the Agos newspaper has consistently criticized Ateshian, and has attempted to delegitimize him. The same newspaper has consistently praised Bekchian, and has overlooked his behavior that might pose a problem. The Agos newspaper underwent a change in its editorial policy ever since the murder of its founder and editor Hrant Dink, and began to publish news and commentaries more and more in the manner of the Armenian diaspora known for its anti-Turkey stance. Concerning the patriarch election, the Agos newspaper and the Diaspora news sources are exhibiting a similar conduct: both sides are attempting to push Ateshian to background while pushing Bekchian to the foreground as much as possible.

This time, the Agos newspaper has taken a step further by seeing in itself the prerogative to dispense advice on the subject of which candidate will able to join the patriarch election. The editor of the Armenian section of the Agos newspaper and columnist Pakrat Estukyan, who was given an award by President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan for creating awareness about the Armenian genocide,[2] told the following in a statement he gave to the News.am news portal based in Armenia: I dont think Ateshian may be nominated. I will be very much surprised if that takes place.[3] He also added that the names of the Patriarch candidates were not yet known, and that therefore it was difficult to say who would compete in the election.

What must be mentioned here is that, while he was attempting to arbitrarily create public opinion about who would be able to take part in the patriarch election, he has contradicted with what Bekchian (the candidate the Agos newspaper he is a part of is attempting to highlight) has said about the patriarch election process. In a statement made about a month earlier, Bekchian had indicated that five people would take part in the election and he had even named who the candidates are (which included Ateshian).

Even though the Agos newspaper is attempting steer the patriarch election towards the

lines of its own ideology, the views it puts forth is not shared by all sections of the Armenian community of Turkey. For example, Luys Magazin, unlike Agos, exhibits a more balanced approach, and attempts to give voice to all sections of the Armenian community.

Luys Magazin has additionally shared with its readers the disrespect exhibited towards Diramayr Mari Mutafyan, the mother and the legal guardian of the former Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul Mesrop II Mutafyan who has been retired to his serious illness. Relaying the news that Diramayr Mari Mutafyan has been asked to vacate her room in the guesthouse of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul with the justification that there are guests arriving from abroad, Luys requested this disrespect to be put to an end.[4] In one of the sections of the interview regarding her son she gave to the proprietor of the Luys magazine Aram Kuran, Ms. Mutafyan told the following:[5]

> **Aram Kuran** – I take it that Archbishop Aram Ateshian was an important figure in your life during this period [during the course of Mesrop II Mutafyans illness] ...
>
> **Diramayr Mari Mutafyan** – Ever since the day the illness started, Archbishop Aram Ateshian served as a brother to my dear son, and as a son to me. He was always by our side. He had the guesthouse in the garden of the Patriarchate restored and put it to use of His Holiness the Patriarch and me. After using the guesthouse for 1.5 years, we switched to the hospital [Surp Pırgiç Armenian Hospital]. I stay at this place in the patriarchate for one day each week, because I have difficulty sitting on the chair in the hospital room. However, they saw even this as being too much! Now they have sent me the news that Diramayr must vacate this place. No such request would have even come if Ateshian was around...

It is not possible for the decision of the eviction of the Patriarchs mother from the Patriarchates guesthouse to be taken without the knowledge of Trustee Bekchian, because Bekchian currently serves not only as the trustee, but he has also assumed the powers vested in the patriarch with the decision of the Patriarchates Clerical General Assembly. As such, by ordering or at least approving the eviction of the Patriarchs mother who was using the Patriarchates guesthouse out pressing necessity, Bekchian (who likes to imply that he possesses the high qualities worthy of a patriarch) has revealed a not so faithful side of himself.

This issue has become a source of dispute between the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul under the control of Karekin Bekchian and the Luys magazine.[6] In summary, the Patriarchate has released a statement expressing that what has been published by Luys magazine does not reflect the truth.[7] In response, Luys magazine has argued that it does not favor anybodys side, that it has simply relayed Ms. Mutafyans words, and that there are attempts to interpret what has been written in the magazine without properly understanding its content. Meanwhile, while the Agos newspaper has expressed views that the Patriarchate under the control of Bekchian was the correct side of the dispute, Aram Ateshian has criticized the Patriarchates conduct.

These developments demonstrate that there are serious disputes within the Armenian community of Turkey regarding the patriarch election and related issues, and that the

views put forth by the Agos newspaper following in the line of the Armenian diaspora represent only one section of the Armenian community.

It is AVİMs hope that the election of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul will take place within a civic mindset, and in a fair and constructive context devoid of polemics and slander.

Photo: Agos

[1] AVİM, Concerns Over The Patriarch Election, *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Commentary No. 2017 / 53, July 7, 2017, accessed August 21, 2017, http://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/CONCERNS-OVER-THE-PATRIARCH-ELECTION ; AVİM, Concerns Over The Patriarch Election II*Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM),* Commentary No. 2017 / 56, August 8, 2017, accessed August 21, 2017, http://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/CONCERNS-OVER-THE-PATRIARCH-ELECTION-II

[2] Hazel Çağan Elbir, Sarkisyan Awarded Agos Columnist, *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Commentary No. 2017 / 43, May 30, 2017, accessed August 21, 2017, http://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/SARKISYAN-AWARDED-AGOS-COLUMNIST ; Hazel Çağan Elbir, Sarkisyandan Agos Yazarına Ödül - 2, *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Commentary No. 2017 / 49, June 7, 2017, accessed August 21, 2017, http://avim.org.tr/tr/Yorum/SARKISYAN-DAN-AGOS-GAZETESI-YAZARINA-ODUL-2

[3] Agos editor: I rule out Ateşyans nomination, *News.am*, 16 Ağustos 2017, erişim tarihi 18 Ağustos 2017, https://news.am/eng/news/405036.html

[4] Diramayr Mari Mutafyana Büyük Ayıp! *Luys Magazin*, Yıl: 5, Sayı: 100, 12 Ağustos 2017, p. 5.

[5] Aram Kuran, Diramayr Mari Mutafyan: Bir anne olarak üzüldüm ve üzülüyorum, *Luys Magazin*, röportaj, Yıl: 5, Sayı: 100, 12 Ağustos 2017, p. 19-20.

[6] Miran Manukyan, Diramayr polemiği büyüdü, *Agos*, 18 Ağustos 2017, erişim tarihi 18 Ağustos 2017, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19201/diramayr-polemigi-buyudu

[7] Tekzip Yazısı, *Türkiye Ermenileri Patrikliği*, 11 Ağustos 2017, erişim tarihi 18 Ağustos 2017, http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site/tekzip-yazisi/

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