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PASHINYAN'S EMPHASIS ON DEMOCRACY

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Following Armenia's consecutive defeats in Karabakh under the leadership of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, opposition to the Pashinyan administration has intensified both within Armenia and among the Diaspora. These opponents not only openly express their discontent with Pashinyans government but also repeatedly emphasize the need to take action to change the administration through undemocratic means.

Aware of the opposition against him, Pashinyan focused particularly on the issue of democracy in his speech at the European Parliament on Tuesday, 17 October. In summary, Pashinyan stated that democracy is undergoing a difficult period both in Armenia and across the world, but that Armenia had managed to maintain its sovereignty thanks to democracy. He claimed that the Collective Security Treaty Organization had abandoned Armenia, but that the Armenian people had defended democracy and did not allow provocations to succeed. Stating that for the first time in the history of the Republic of Armenia, elections became a means of overcoming an internal crisis, Pashinyan argued that the inaction of Armenias allies and the public calls by his opponents to overthrow the democratic government are providing an opportunity for those who seek to destroy Armenias democracy.[1]

Pashinyans speech at the European Parliament resonated widely in both Armenias and the Diasporas press. Some commentators, who argue that Pashinyan is responsible for Armenias defeats, claimed that his continued hold on power despite these defeats is incompatible with democracy and asserted that his speech contradicted his actions.[2]

The term democracy, derived from the Greek words demos (people) and kratos (power), essentially expresses the power of the people and is a form of government based on the will of the people.[3] Therefore, Pashinyans continuation in power through elections despite the defeats Armenia has faced is not a sign of the lack of democracy, but rather an indication that he remains a legitimate leader who is still supported and trusted by the people. One of the clearest examples of this is the 2021 elections held after the 2020 Karabakh War, which ended in Armenias defeat, in which Pashinyans government won more than half of the votes.[4]

In a 2023 survey conducted by the International Republican Institute, Armenians were asked who they trusted the most among political figures, which resulted in Pashinyan

coming first with 13% of the votes.[5] The fact that Pashinyan topped the trust poll with a 13%, which may seem low at first glance, shows that the issue is not Pashinyan remaining in power, but rather the absence of a second figure whom the Armenian public finds trustworthy.

It is natural for individuals to withdraw their support, refrain from voting, criticize, or even campaign against leaders they previously supported when the leaders in question fail. However, accusing elected leaders they view as unsuccessful of being dictators, above all, calls into question the credibility of those making such accusations. Despite internal and external opposition, Nikol Pashinyan continues to be Armenia's elected leader with a majority of votes. Nevertheless, the intense criticism of his style of governance, even if excessive, indicates that Armenia is still far from its claim of being a beacon of democracy.

**Picture: United States Studies Center* - *https://www.ussc.edu.au/the-debate-papers-is-american-democracy-in-peril*

[1] Հայաստանը Պարզապես Կաթվածահար Կլիներ, Կկորցներ Իր Անկախությունն Ու Ինքնիշխանությունը, Եթե Չլիներ Ժողովրդավար. ՀՀ Վարչապետ, Armtimes, October 17, 2023, https://armtimes.com/hy/article/271619.

[2] Harut Sassounian, Pashinyan boasts about Armenias fake democracy at European Parliament, The Armenian Weekly, October 24, 2023, https://armenianweekly.com/2023/10/24/pashinyan-boasts-about-armenias-fake-democracy-at-european-parliament/#:~:text=Pashinyan%20listens%20to%20no%20one,if%20it%20were%20not%20democratic.%E2%80%9D

[3] Democracy, Counsil of Europe, October 30, 2023, https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy.

[4] Նիկոլ Փաշինյանն առաջարկեց՝ «գողացվածը վերադարձնել», «վերջ տալ հայհոյախոսությանը», Azatutyun, June 21, 2021, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31319112.html.

[5] Joshua Kucera, Even After Multiple Defeats, Pashinian Remains Armenia's Teflon Prime Minister, Radio Free Europe, October 23, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-pashinian-karabakh-teflon/32650597.html.

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