

Armenia

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| Response to Information Request: | Number: ARM98001.zla |
| Date: | 24 June 1998 |
| Subject: | Armenia: 1) Groups currently at risk in Armenia, 2) Armenia's present position on Nagorno-Karabakh |
| From: | INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC |
| Keywords: | Armenia / elections / ethnic groups / ethnic enclave / Nagorno-Karabakh / religious groups / right to a nationality / right to self-determination / vulnerable groups / territorial integrity |

Query:

Since the 30 March 1998 election:

1. Have the "groups at risk" in Armenia changed?
2. Is Armenia adopting a more defensive position regarding Karabakh?

Response:

Former Armenian President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan stepped down in early 1998 after accusations of being too soft towards Azerbaijan over control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Robert Kocharian, the former leader of the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, won the presidential election held 30 March 1998, with 59.48 per cent of the vote. Kocharian's closest opponent, a former communist party leader, captured 40.52 per cent of the vote. The new president called for the right to self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh, and pledges to support its independence. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 10 Apr. 1998; Dow Jones International News 3 Apr. 1998; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 3 Apr. 1998).

A parliamentary election has not been held; however, Khosrov Arutyunyan, Speaker of Parliament, stated that early elections may be held because of the change in president. During pre-election rallies, many opposition presidential candidates called for parliamentary elections. The parliament has never been popular in Armenia and many wonder if President Kocharian can trust such a group, particularly one that does not share his aspirations (*Russian Press Digest* 7 Apr. 1998).

According to the area expert consultant to the RIC, the usual ethnic and religious "groups at risk" remain the same. Turks and Muslim Kurds (rather than Yazidi Kurds) remain at risk. There has been some change in political groups which may be at risk. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks), whose leadership was subject to mistreatment under the former government, no longer appears to be at risk since they supported Robert Kocharian in his presidential bid. On the other hand, members of the Armenian Pannational Party (the party of Mr. Ter-Petrosyan) may now be at risk, as well as any group that opposes Mr. Kocharian's policies. There were reports of arrests of a political nature after the election (RIC Area Expert 26 May 1998).

The RIC area expert stated that President Kocharian is taking a harder line than the previous regime toward Azerbaijan on the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The question of Armenian citizenship for Karabakh Armenians has been raised, as has the

issue of citizenship for other Armenians in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, especially the strip between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. This is an issue which has potentially explosive consequences, stated the RIC Consultant. President Kocharian was born in Nagorno-Karabakh and according to "normally accepted" citizenship law he is a citizen of Azerbaijan. The Armenian Constitution explicitly forbids non-native born Armenians from the presidency, yet, Kocharian is now the president (RIC Area Expert 30 Apr. 1998).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Deutsche Presse-Agentur. 10 April 1998. "New Armenian President Names Prime Minister." (Westlaw)

Dow Jones International News. 3 April 1998. "Armenia's New President May Take Tough Approach." (Westlaw)

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 3 April 1998. "Kocharyan Declared Winner of Election." (Westlaw)

RIC Area Expert. 30 April 1998. Email sent to the RIC.

26 May 1998. Email sent to the RIC.

Russian Press Digest. 7 April 1998. Boris Mkrтчan. "Parliament of Armenia May be Dissolved." (Westlaw)

Attachments:

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