

Armenia

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Date:	31 August 1999
Subject:	Armenia: The Armenian National Movement and 'Husos Paros'
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Armenia / Armenian National Movement / Armenian Pan-National Movement / Union of Yerkrpahs / Petrosian / Siradeghyan

Query:

1) Does the Armenian National Movement target members of 'Husos Paros'?

Response:

Background

The Armenian National Movement, also known as the Armenian Pan-National Movement, was founded in 1989. Following its inception, the ANM led Armenia to full independence and secured a place in government as the ruling party headed by Levon Ter-Petrosian from 1990 to 1998. According to the 1999 Armenian Parliamentary Elections Website, the party's platform promotes an independent democratic state, a liberal economy, and the preservation of national, spiritual and cultural values.

During the 1990's, the ANM witnessed serious internal problems and splits. Eduard Yegoryan, an influential leader of the reformist wing of the party, formed a *Hairenik* (Fatherland) faction together with twelve ANM deputies in September 1997. Later that same year, the Union of Yerkrpahs, who had initially been an inseparable partner of the ANM, withdrew its alliance with the party to form their own political faction. (Alexanian, 1998)

In 1998, President Petrosian resigned from office (apparently after pressure from hard-line military leaders), and Vano Siradeghyan took his place as the leader of the Armenian National Movement. (Political Handbook, 1998)

Controversy and Criminal Activities

Despite the ANM's pro-democratic platform, there has been serious controversy surrounding some of its top leaders as well as the activities of groups associated with the party. Even the fairness of the first post-independence elections has been questioned because the government (led by Petrosian) suspended an opposition party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, from participating. (Political Handbook, 1998)

One of the most serious allegations facing the party recently is that party leader, Vano Siradeghyan, was involved in the planning and carrying out of a number of ordered murders of Members of Parliament and other top government officials. Siradeghyan has been charged with 10 offenses including arson, murder, attempted murder and conspiracy. (BBC, 1999)

Members of the Union of Yerkrpahs, an armed veterans' militia and former ally of the ANM, have been implicated in several human rights violations as well. About 40 paramilitary troops (some claiming to be Yerkrpah) forcibly disbanded a group of demonstrators protesting the electoral commission's decision not to register a number of opposition parties and candidates for the upcoming elections; some opposition members were beaten and arrested by the militia troops. (HRW, 1998)

In addition, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Yerkrpah organization staged a series of attacks against members of several non-apostolic religious groups:

Services were broken up by paramilitary troops wielding pipes and guns, pastors and adherents were beaten and kidnapped, and offices were ransacked and equipment stolen. Twenty adherents were held for several days or weeks at a military police facility before being released. When asked why they were being held, the commandant told the detainees that it was because of their religious beliefs.

Despite the government's pledge to apprehend the perpetrators of these attacks, and despite several eyewitness accounts, the authorities have made no arrests in these cases. (HRW, 1998)

Conclusion

Numerous accounts suggest that leaders of the Armenian National Movement have been involved in questionable activities in the past. However, today, the ANM has only a small constituency, receiving less than 2% of the vote in the last parliamentary election, and very little power. (Armenian Parliamentary Elections, 1998)

The Union of Yerkrpah, on the other hand, has been gaining political clout in recent years. Members have reportedly been involved in a number of human rights abuses as well, usually targeting active members of opposition parties and Christian religious sects other than the Armenian Orthodox Church (DRL, 1998).

No information could be found on the cultural group, 'Husos Paros', despite extensive research using the Internet, Westlaw and Lexis-Nexis, and consultation with experts from the State Department and INS.

It is important to note though, that the Ministry of Justice, and the government as a whole, has shown little interest in prosecuting groups or individuals violating human rights. According to the State Department's Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (DRL), "In 1997, members of a local Yerkrpah group broke into a human rights library and removed its contents. No action was taken against the persons responsible, and while this particular incident was only a minor one, the episode does underscore the freedom of these local militias to act outside the law." (DRL, 1998)

In addition, there have been several reports claiming that the Yerkrpah are affiliated with government security agencies, including the Ministry of Defense. (DRL, 1998) Therefore, if an individual or group were targeted by the Union, they would probably have few options for retribution or protection from the government.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC and on the World Wide Web.

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