AN ARCHBISHOP OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH HAND IN HAND WITH A MURDERER - BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PROTESTS IN YEREVAN

Hazel ÇAĞAN ELBİR

Analyst

Analysis No : 2024 / 7

23.05.2024

This is the English translation of Turkish language article that was originally published by AVİM on 15 May 2024. The article was translated by İrem Akın.

Since last week, Armenia has been the scene of protests by groups opposed to the efforts of border demarcation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The protests are led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan of Armenia. Archbishop Galstanyan is a Canadian citizen born in Gyumri and formerly served as the Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Canada. He is also known for his participation in Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutyun (ARF-D) rallies to remove Pashinyan from office and to prevent the normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia in 2022.[1] One of the Archbishop's supporters is Hampig Sassounian, a known murderer in Türkiye and a terrorist of the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG).

It is now widely recognized that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is pursuing a different policy than the traditional Armenian politicians of the past. His recent efforts to establish a dialogue with Türkiye and Azerbaijan have drawn harsh reactions from opposition groups. Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan of the Armenian Apostolic Church has assumed the task of leading these groups. Archbishop Galstanyan is a true "leader" in the eyes of the writer of *The California Courier*, Harout Sassounian.[2] Sassounian's opinion of Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan is well known.

On Tuesday, it was Archbishop Galstanyan who led the demonstrators participating in the anti-government protests in Yerevan. According to Harout Sassounian, the Archbishop is "a cleric whose only weapons are truth and morality."[3] The fact that this cleric, who is said to preach "peace," "love," and "non-violence," posed for candid poses with Hampig Sassounian[4], the terrorist who ruthlessly murdered Kemal Arıkan, who was the Consul

General of Türkiye in Los Angeles, on 28 January 1982, and presented him as a hero, is a point that Armenians who truly stand peace should not overlook. Hampig Sassounian, the JCAG terrorist, who has been actively involved in the ongoing protests for some time, has been detained this time during the demonstrations in Yerevan.[5]

Let us briefly remember the aforementioned terrorist:

Hampig Sassounian was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole and, from 2006 until the decision to release him, he went through release hearings. In 2006, 2010, 2013 and 2015, his petition for release was denied. In 2017, the terrorist was granted parole, which was denied by the US state of California Governor Jerry Brown. In 2018, the request for release was revived, but denied again. In 2019, a release order was issued, which was rejected on 25 May 2020, this time by the next Governor of California, Gavin Newsom. However, on 24 February 2021, a court verdict overturned Governor Newsom's reversal. On 10 March 2021, Governor Newsom's office notified the Armenian National Committee of America-Western Region (ANCA-WR) that the Governor had decided to accept Sassounian's conditional parole.[6] Subsequently, Nora Hovsepian, President of ANCA-WR, expressed their gratitude to Governor Newsom and his staff for the humane decision to grant Sassounian his parole.

This murderer is a terrorist who, from the early years of his conviction, received admiring letters from Armenian children between the ages of 8 and 15 who were members of the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF). This blood-curdling development is still ongoing for similar terrorists. Let us recall that in 2024, children attended the unveiling of the monument to the Nemesis terrorist Soghomon Tehlirian in Marseille.

In 1996, Armenian newspapers in the US published a series of articles titled "Letters to Hampig". Messages to Sassounian from Armenian children in the US were published in *The Armenian Weekly* newspaper. In the letters, in which children wrote about their admiration for Sassounian, it is seen that all the children stated that they were AYF members. The AYF, acting as a bridge between Sassounian and AYF member children, shared Sassounian's appeal to the public. In his appeal, Sassounian stated that he was innocent and thanked those who provided financial and psychological support. The crucial part of the appeal came at the end. Sassounian's message to the children of the AYF members was that all the sacrifices they would make in defense of the Armenian claims would be worth the effort and that they should continue their struggle. In this message, it is clear that Sassounian was portraying terrorism as something sacred and appealing to young people.

Sassounian, the murderer, seems to have lost his "hero" status after being arrested in Armenia today. As for Archbishop Galstanyan, who -the writer of *The California Courier* claims- gives "peaceful sermons", proves what kind of peace he is in favor of by appearing alongside and praising a bloody murderer.[7]

*Picture: *https://www.instagram.com/p/C6Y5jYEqz2_/*

[1] Armenia, clergy-led protests in Yerevan call for Pashinyans resignation, *Osservatorio*, 14 May 2024, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Armenia/Armenia-clergy-led-protests-in-Yerevan-call-for-Pashinyan-s-resignation-231398.

[2] Harout Sassounian, Archbishop Bagrat is Leading the Effort To Oust Pashinyan and Save Armenia, *The California Courier*, 13 May 2024, https://www.thecaliforniacourier.com/archbishop-bagrat-is-leading-the-effort-to-oust-pashinyan-and-save-armenia/.

[3] Harout Sassounian, Archbishop Bagrat is Leading the Effort To Oust Pashinyan and Save Armenia, *The California Courier*.

[4] 301arm, https://www.instagram.com/301arm/reel/C6D7jTaqm2S/.

[5] Assassin of Turkish Diplomat Detained in Yerevan, *News.az*, 14 May 2024, https://news.az/news/-assassin-of-turkish-diplomat-detained-in-yerevan--video-.

[6] Hazel Çağan Elbir, The Decision to Release Sassounian, avim.org.en, *AVİM*, 12 March 2021, https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/THE-DECISION-TO-RELEASE-SASSOUNIAN

[7] Two Armenians who have dedicated their lives to the Armenian cause meet once again when Hampig Sassounian joined the protesters in Tavush. Sassounian urges everyone to join the movement against the surrender of any land to Azerbaijan, https://www.instagram.com/p/C6Y5jYEqz2_/.

About the Author :

Hazel Çağan-Elbir is an analyst in AVİM. Çağan-Elbir continues her studies in Political Economy doctorate program at Atılım University.

To cite this article: ELBİR, Hazel ÇAĞAN. 2026. "AN ARCHBISHOP OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH HAND IN HAND WITH A MURDERER - BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PROTESTS IN YEREVAN." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Analysis No.2024 / 7. May 23. Accessed November 23, 2026. https://www.avim.org.tr/public/index.php/en/Analiz/AN-ARCHBISHOP-OF-THE-ARMENIAN-APOSTOLIC-

CHURCH-HAND-IN-HAND-WITH-A-MURDERER-BEHIND-THE-SCENES-OF-THE-PROTESTS-IN-YEREVAN

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
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

© 2009-2025 Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) All Rights Reserved