
According To Serge Sargsian Armenia Gives Priority To Poverty Reduction And Only Then To Human Rights Protection

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YEREVAN, APRIL 10, NOYAN TAPAN. The Financial Times newspaper (Great Britain) on April 9 published an interview with the Armenian prime minister Serge Sargsian (the interview took place in Brussels, apparently on April 4). The newly appointed prime minister stated that the Armenian government considers as its priority the economic growth and improvement of people's social conditions, and only after that - to human rights improvement. According to him, the Armenian government is resolute to hold the parliamentary elections on May 12 in line with democratic requirements, as "this corresponds to our interests."

Serge Sargsian added that Armenia prefers to work with superpowers rather than to exploit contradictions between them. For this reason, Armenia maintains friendly relations with Russia, it is against creation of an American military base in the Caucasus and at the same time cooperates closely with NATO.

Below is the translation of the article "Armenia to Give Growth in Economy Priority over Rights".

"Armenia will put economic development ahead of human rights improvements, its new prime minister said in an interview with the Financial Times.

Serge Sargsyan, the defence minister who was promoted on Wednesday after the death of Andranik Margaryan from a heart attack last month, said jobs were more important than rights. Despite double-digit economic growth in the past few years, a third of the 3m-strong population of the landlocked Caucasian republic lives below the poverty line.

"It is hard to talk about democratic and human rights when you need to solve the social and economic needs of the population," the prime minister said during a trip to Brussels. "We would not like to be a state stuck in our transition."

He said the huge Armenian diaspora - estimated at up to three times the native population - should get more involved in the country. Only 1 per cent of investment came from them, he said, and he was looking at ways they could be encouraged.

However, Mr Sargsyan said the government in Yerevan would keep pledges made to international bodies after criticism of its rights record and he was hopeful that the May 12 parliamentary elections would be the first to be pronounced free and fair by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European security watchdog.

"We have made commitments to different programmes and we think compliance is in our interest. We want to become part of the European family."

Mr Sargsyan, who helped organise militias that seized the enclave

of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan in a three-year war following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, said his top priority was to conclude a peace treaty with its Muslim neighbour.

The oil-rich state has been rearming recently but Mr Sargysan said that was sabre-rattling. Turkey closed its border with Armenia during the war and the premier said he would strive to restore relations and sign a peace deal.

Armenia could grow far faster if rapprochement was reached with its bigger neighbours, he said.

Yet Armenia remains in control of Nagorno-Karabakh and hundreds of thousands of people are still displaced. Turkey - which has been offered talks without conditions - has shown no willingness to compromise.

Mr Sargysan said that, despite ties to influential exiles in the US, Yerevan would remain friendly to Moscow and would not support a US base in the volatile Caucasus. In a swipe at neighbouring Georgia, whose "rose revolution" against Russian domination has endeared it to the west, he said he did not see it as a model to emulate.

"One can either exploit their differences between superpowers or work with them. We prefer to work with them. There are many conflicts in our region."

Mr Sargysan said Armenia would one day like to join the European Union but had no desire to join the Nato defence alliance, although it was working closely with it."
