

ARMENIEN (85)

94

SNARK NEWS AGENCY

May 6, 1998

FORMER PRESIDENT'S DECREE ON DASHNAKTSUTIUN'S ACTIVITY SUSPENDING ACKNOWLEDGED INVALID

YEREVAN, MAY 6. (SNARK). The President of Armenia Robert Kocharian signed a decree on the recognition of the decree of the former Armenian President concerning the suspend of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutiun's activity as invalid.

It is noteworthy that the Dashnaktsutiun's activity was suspended under the decree of the President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian because of its charter's incompatibility to the law On public-political organizations of Armenia. -0- SA

NATIONAL MINORITIES DISCUSS LANGUAGE PROBLEM IN ARMENIA YEREVAN, MAY 7. (SNARK). At the May 7 round-table discussion on

issues related to the language policy in Armenia and to the national minorities, professor Bella Esajanian said, that there is no language problem in Armenia. The round-table organizers are the Center on conflict settlement in Armenia and the Armenian Union of Nationalities, which have been studying the conflict's possibilities in the republic on legislative and executive levels, including conflicts caused by unilingual policy. Esajanian thinks, that one of the ways to solve the crisis is the bilingual education, and the second language is not necessarily to be Russian.

The participants of the meeting - the representatives of all national minorities, Russian embassy in Armenia, guests, discussed the situation in Armenia after the adoption of the Law on language on April 17, 1993. The results of the meeting will be summarized and published as a special edition. -0-SA

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1. Kocharian Lifts Ban on ARF, Overrules Decree

YEREVAN (RFE/RL/Noyan Tapan)—The re-legalization process of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was formally brought to an end as President Robert Kocharian Wednesday overruled a decision by his predecessor, banning the political party's activities in late 1994. A decree signed by Kocharian said the suspension of the ARF's activities was not legal and is no longer valid.

The ARF was banned on December 28, 1994 by then President Levon Ter-Petrosyan on the grounds that it had harbored a clandestine terrorist group and its structure contradicted Armenian law. The ban was reaffirmed in the summer of 1995 when 31 members and supporters of the ARF were arrested on charges of plotting a coup. The ensued two trials, condemned by the opposition and human

rights groups as politically motivated, found no link between the party and alleged terrorists and plotters, however.

Wednesday's decree offered a justification different from that of the ministry of justice, that re-registered the ARF last February. The ministry ruled that the party had brought its structure and statutes into conformity with Armenia's law on political parties, which prohibits foreign membership. It thus effectively reaffirmed that the ARF's previous activities did not contradict the law.

The ARF, which has its branches in various parts of the world with large Armenian communities, in late 1996 gave its Armenia organization a high degree of autonomy from its central bureau currently based in Greece.

Observers say both the ban on and re-legalization of the ARF had political goals. The ARF was allowed to resume its activities shortly after Ter-Petrosyan, its arch-foe, resigned in early February under pressure from the cabinet of then Prime Minister Kocharian. It has since stood behind Kocharian, backing his presidential bid last March.

In an interview with RFE/RL Wednesday, ARF Executive Council of Armenia representative Vahan Hovanessian welcomed Kocharian's decision and called it legally invulnerable. He said the move corresponds with Armenia's "state interests" and is also "morally" important. He said the ARF has yet to decide whether to demand material compensation from the authorities for its confiscated property.

Hovanessian was recently appointed Kocharian's adviser for political issues and public relations.

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7. Trial of 31 Defendant Released

YEREVAN (Noyan Tapan)—Aramais Nigarian, a defendant in the Trial of the 31, was found guilty, Tuesday, of resisting police and illegal possession of weapons and ammunition, by the Judicial Board on Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court. The court withdrew charges of treason that had been previously brought against him.

Nigarian was a member of the Arabo battalion, which fought in Karabakh, and had been sentenced to a year and eleven months in prison. But as he had already served the full term in jail, the court ordered his release.

Nigarian was arrested on May 8, 1996. His case was separated from the general "Trial of the 31" because the Court had begun hearings on the general case two months prior to his arrest.

When handing down its verdict on Nigarian's case, the court ruled on two other defendants in the "Trial of 31." Levon Sargsian was found guilty of illegal possession of weapons and ammunition and given a suspended prison sentence of one year. Sussannah Margarian, one of only two women among the 31, was found guilty of complicity in illegal weapons possession and was given a suspended sentence of six months. The court dropped treason charges previously brought against Sargsian.

The court separated the case against Margarian from the "Trial of 31" because of her failure to appear at hearings. The case against Sargsian was separated from the general one because of his deteriorating state of health while in prison.

Thus, only four people convicted in the Trial of 31—Tigran Vazgenovich Avetisian, Gagik Karapetian, Arsen Yeritsian and Artur Ghazariandering—remain in prison. They were found guilty of murdering two policemen. Authorities, however, are re-examining those cases.

