

Armenia: beginning of dialogue between opposition and government

On 18 and 26 July, talks were held between the government and the main opposition force, the Armenian National Congress (ANC), whose leader is the former President Levon Ter-Petrossian (held office between 1991 and 1998). The 'ruling camp's' decision to initiate the dialogue was forced by the country's ongoing internal crisis (economic problems, large-scale immigration) and the social discontent which has been rising for months; the latest sign of the latter was the recent series of demonstrations organised by the ANC, which assembled tens of thousands of participants.

It became possible to start the talks after the ruling coalition met the ANC's demands; these concerned the release of political prisoners, permission to demonstrate on the symbolic Freedom Square in Yerevan, and an investigation into the brutal breakup in March 2008 of demonstrations against the falsification – as the opposition claims – of the presidential election. The negotiations will concern the holding of early presidential and parliamentary elections. Details of the talks will be announced at a demonstration on 2 August. These concessions by the ruling coalition seem to be attempts to improve its image and weaken their rivals' political importance. The ANC's criticisms concerned the rule of law and civil liberties; by meeting these demands, the 'ruling camp' has deprived the ANC of its arguments and taken over their democratic rhetoric. The resumption of the dialogue shows that the government is aware of losing public support and the growing importance of the ANC. <zrok>