

Armenian Lawmaker Denounces Threats

Author: [Armen Karapetyan](#)

Parties trade jibes after parliamentarian alleges head of state has a gambling problem.

An opposition politician in Armenia has been assigned police guards after facing ferocious criticism from ruling party members because she asked the president whether he indulged in gambling.

Zaruhi Postanjan, a member of the Heritage Party, used the October 2 summit of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to ask President Serzh Sargsyan whether it was true he had lost 70 million euro in bets at a casino in Europe.

Sargsyan flatly denied this, saying he had not visited any casino in Europe and did not have that kind of money. "I do not gamble in casinos," he said.

Members of the president's Republican Party, which dominates parliament, were furious, and Postanjan was sacked from the Armenian delegation to PACE and replaced by a politician from the Rule of Law party..

The speaker of Armenia's parliament, Hovik Abrahamyan, issued a statement condemning Postanjan's remarks.

"The guaranteed right to free expression of one's political beliefs is one of the cornerstones of democracy," he said. "However, the expression of political beliefs is not an absolute right. Article 66 of the Armenian constitution states that the right of a deputy to free expression is limited by the inadmissibility of defamation or slander."

Other members of the Republican Party also severely criticised her, both in public statements and on their Facebook pages.

Khachik Asryan, deputy minister for sports and youth affairs, and a member of the party's ruling council, comparing Postanjan to **Ramil Safarov**, an Azerbaijani officer who murdered an Armenian at a NATO meeting in Budapest in 2004.

"Zaruhi Postanjan should be burned alive on a bonfire, but not like Joan of Arc – like Ramil Safarov," Asryan said in an interview for the www.yerkir.am news site.

The next day, Asryan qualified his remarks, saying he had meant the politician should be burned in effigy. No disciplinary action was taken against him, but his comments infuriated Postanjan and her allies.

"Armenia's laws forbid defaming or threatening people," Postanjan told IWPR. "These laws also set out the punishment for such things. However, we can see that the police and the prosecutors in Armenia are taking absolutely no action when I am defamed and criticised by representatives of the current government. It reminds me of the inquisition in the Middle Ages, when people were burned to death for their faith."

Postanjan's Heritage party has not filed a legal complaints against the alleged incitement, but demanded that the government "halt its political persecution and abuse, and punish all officials who have threatened her".

Subsequently, in mid-October, two police officers were assigned to guard Postanjan.

In an interview for IWPR, Galust Sahakyan, deputy head of the Republican Party, said, "You see – the government does worry about the opposition member's safety. Now no one can raise a finger against Zaruhi Postanjan."

Sahakyan declined to comment on the threats and criticism made towards her, saying only that "we are human, too, and we could hardly fail to respond to Postanjan's defamation of the president".

That was not good enough for Artur Sakunts, head of the Vanadzor office of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, a human rights organisation. He told IWPR that Armenia was now a country "where government representatives can openly issue threats and go unpunished".

"These events show once again that Armenia not only has an authoritarian regime – you don't even have the right to ask questions that are displease the person at the head of this regime – it also has laws that don't work," Sakunts said. "Someone can threaten to burn a person to death and still go unpunished. If the

police acknowledge that a threat exists and send officers to provide security for Postanjyan, then why don't they follow the threat to its roots?"

Armen Karapetyan is a freelance journalist in Armenia.

Location: [Armenia](#)

Topic: [Accountability](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenian-lawmaker-denounces-threats>