

= Vazgen Sargsyan =

Vazgen Sargsyan ( Armenian : ?????? ??????? , pronounced [ vʰzʰʰn sʰʰkʰsʰjʰn ] ; 5 March 1959 ? 27 October 1999 ) was an Armenian military commander and politician . He was the first Defence Minister of Armenia from 1991 to 1992 and then from 1995 to 1999 . He served as Armenia 's Prime Minister from 11 June 1999 until his assassination on 27 October of that year . He rose to prominence during the mass movement for the unification of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh with Armenia in the late 1980s and led Armenian volunteer groups during the early clashes with Azerbaijani forces . Appointed Defence Minister by President Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan soon after Armenia 's independence from the Soviet Union in late 1991 , Sargsyan became the most prominent commander of Armenian forces during the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh War . In different positions , he regulated the military operations in the war area until 1994 , when a ceasefire was reached ending the war with the de facto unification of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic with Armenia .

In the post @-@ war years , Sargsyan tightened his grip on the Armed Forces , establishing himself as a virtual strongman . After strongly supporting Ter @-@ Petrosyan to retain power , he forced the president out of office in 1998 due to his support for concessions in the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh settlement negotiations , and helped Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan to be elected president . With their relations deteriorated , Sargsyan merged the influential war veterans group Yerkrpah into the Republican Party and joined forces with Armenia 's ex @-@ communist leader Karen Demirchyan . In the May 1999 elections , their reform @-@ minded alliance secured a comfortable majority in the National Assembly . Sargsyan became Prime Minister , emerging as the de facto decision @-@ maker in Armenia with effective control of the military and the legislature .

Sargsyan , along with Demirchyan and several others , was assassinated in the Armenian parliament shooting of 27 October 1999 . The perpetrators were sentenced to life in prison . However , the distrust toward the trial process gave birth to a number of conspiracy theories . Some experts and politicians argue that their assassination was masterminded by Kocharyan and National Security Minister Serzh Sargsyan . Others have suspected the possible involvement of foreign powers in the shooting .

Despite his mixed legacy , Sargsyan is now widely recognized as a national hero across the political spectrum and by the public . Given the honorific Sparapet , he made significant contributions to the establishment of Armenia as independent state and ensuring its security as the founder of the Armenian Army . He has also been criticized by human rights organizations for being undemocratic , especially for his role in elections . Sargsyan was awarded the highest titles of Armenia and Nagorno @-@ Karabakh ? National Hero of Armenia and Hero of Artsakh .

= = Early life and career = =

Vazgen Sargsyan was born in Ararat village , Soviet Armenia , near the Turkish border , on 5 March 1959 , to Greta and Zaven Sargsyan . After finishing secondary school in his village , he attended the Yerevan Institute of Physical Culture from 1976 @-@ 79 . He worked as a physical education teacher at the secondary school in Ararat from 1979 to 1983 . Therefore , he was exempt from conscription in the Soviet army . From 1983 to 1986 , he was the Young Communist League ( Komsomol ) leader at the Ararat Cement Factory .

An amateur writer , Sargsyan developed a literary and active social life . He wrote his first novel in 1980 , and became a member of the Writers Union of Armenia in 1985 . From 1986 to 1989 , he headed the publicity department of the Garun ( « ?????? » , " Spring " ) literary monthly in Yerevan . In 1986 , his first book , Bread Temptation ( « ????? ????????????? » ) , was published , for which he was awarded by the Armenian Komsomol . A number of his works were published in journals , however , his literary career did not last long and ended in the late 1980s .

= = Nagorno @-@ Karabakh conflict = =

= = = Early stages and independence of Armenia = = =

The relative democratization of the Soviet regime under Mikhail Gorbachev 's glasnost and perestroika policies since the mid @-@ 1980s gave rise to nationalism in the republics of the Soviet Union . In Armenia , the Karabakh movement gained widespread public support . Armenians demanded the Soviet authorities unify the mostly Armenian @-@ populated Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Autonomous Oblast ( NKAO ) of Azerbaijan with Armenia . In February 1988 , the NKAO regional legislature requested the transfer of the region from the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan SSR to Armenian SSR , but it was rejected by the Politburo . Tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis further escalated with the pogrom in Sumgait . With both groups arming themselves , clashes became frequent , especially in the disputed Nagorno @-@ Karabakh and the border areas of the two Soviet republics . In 1989 and 1990 , Sargsyan took the command of Armenian volunteer groups fighting near Yeraskh , on the Armenian @-@ Azerbaijani ( Nakhchivan ) border , not far from his hometown .

By January 1990 , he became part of the leadership of the Pan @-@ Armenian National Movement . Sargsyan was elected to the Armenian parliament ( the Supreme Council ) in the May 1990 election . He served as the head of the Supreme Council Commission on Defense and Internal Affairs until December 1991 . With his initiative , the Special Regiment was established in September 1990 . Composed of 26 platoons and a total of 2 @,@ 300 men , it was the first formal Armenian military unit independent from Moscow . It became the main base of the Armenian army in the following years .

By 1991 , most Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis from Armenia were forced to move to their respective countries , as remaining in their homes became nearly impossible . Although Armenia had proclaimed its independence from the Soviet Union on 23 August 1990 , it was not until on 21 September 1991 , a month after the failed August Coup in Moscow , when the overwhelming majority of Armenians voted for the independence in a nationwide referendum . Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan , the leader of the Karabakh Committee and the head of the Supreme Council since 1990 , was elected president of Armenia in October .

= = = Active military involvement = = =

Due to the fact that Sargsyan was popular among Armenian volunteer units and army officers , he was appointed the first Defense Minister of independent Armenia by President Ter @-@ Petrosyan in December 1991 . On 28 January 1992 , the Armenian government passed the historical decree " On the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia , " which formally created the Armed Forces of Armenia . With the rise of hostilities in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , in March 1992 , Sargsyan announced that Armenia needed a 30 @,@ 000 @-@ strong army for maintaining security . On 9 May 1992 , the Armenian forces recorded their first major military success in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh with the capture of Shusha . Another significant victory for the Armenian forces was recorded weeks later with the capture of Lachin , which connects Armenia proper with Nagorno @-@ Karabakh .

In summer 1992 , the situation turned critical for the Armenian forces following the launch of Operation Goranboy , during which Azerbaijan took control of northern half of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . On 15 August 1992 , Sargsyan called on Armenian men to gather and form a volunteer unit to fight against the advancing Azerbaijani forces in the northern parts of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . In a televised speech he stated :

If 10 ? 15 men from every district of Armenia come together , we can form a battalion of 500 . This battalion must fight in the most dangerous areas , where the chance of survival is 50 ? 50 . Together we will go fight in the most difficult parts and we will win . Because , in reality , nothing has changed , the enemy is the same enemy , which was escaping and we are the same . It 's just that we have lost the faith in our power . Now we need another attack and we must do it with the old guys to stimulate others in the army . If the day after tomorrow we will be able to establish a battalion of 500 volunteers , then we will fight and we will win . "

The battalion Sargsyan called for , named " Artsiv mahapartner " ( « ????? ????????????? » , " Eagles Sentenced to Death " ) , was formed on 30 August 1992 . Under the command of Major @-@ General Astvatsatur Petrosyan , it defeated the Azerbaijani forces near the Gandzasar monastery and Chldran village in Martakert Province , on 31 August and 1 September 1992 , respectively . According to the Armenian Defense Ministry , the battalion 's activity stopped the advancement of the Azerbaijani forces and turned the course of the war in favor of the Armenian side in the part of the region .

= = = Armenian military victory = = =

Between October 1992 and March 1993 , Sargsyan served as the Presidential Adviser on Defence Affairs and the Presidential Envoy to Border Regions of Armenia . Subsequently , he was appointed the State Minister on Defence , Security and Internal Affairs . In these positions , Sargsyan had a major role in the advance of the Armenian army . With other key commanders , he regulated the operations to the Armenian forces in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . He was particularly active in unifying the various semi @-@ independent detachments active in the war zone . Political chaos in Azerbaijan and the demoralization of the Azerbaijani army resulted in the Armenian forces taking control over the territories outside of the original Soviet @-@ drawn borders of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . In 1993 , Sargsyan founded and led Yerkrpah , a union of 5 @,@ 000 war veterans , that had a great influence in Armenia 's domestic politics in the post @-@ war years and became the main base for Vazgen Sargsyan to rise in power .

In early April 1993 , the Armenian forces captured Kelbajar , a city outside the originally contested areas , causing international attention to the conflict . Turkey closed its border with Armenia , while the United Nations passed a resolution condemning the act . In the summer of 1993 , Armenian forces gained more territories and , by August controlled Fizuli , Jebrail , and Zangelan . By early 1994 , both countries were devastated by the war . On 5 May , the Bishkek Protocol was signed by the heads of the parliaments of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , Armenia and Azerbaijan . The Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic , backed by Armenia , established de facto control of these lands . Nagorno @-@ Karabakh ( also known as Artsakh to Armenians ) remains internationally unrecognized and a de jure part of Azerbaijan . However , it is in de facto unified with Armenia .

= = Minister of Defence and president change = =

Sargsyan was appointed Minister of Defence by Ter @-@ Petrosyan on 26 July 1995 , during the restructuring of government ministries . He remained in that position for almost four years . The Armenian army was highly regarded by experts with Armenia being described as the only former Soviet state that " managed to build a combat @-@ capable army from scratch " and was " comparable in efficiency to the Soviet Army . " According to Thomas de Waal , the army was " the most powerful institution " in Armenia under him . Sargsyan is credited with substantially professionalizing the Armenian army .

Sargsyan showed strong confidence in the army and stated in 1997 that its strength has doubled in the past two years . In the same year , in response to Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev 's statements that Azerbaijan was " ready to solve the Karabakh problem by force , " Sargsyan replied , " Let him do it . We are ready . " Sargsyan 's term as Minister of Defence was marked by cooperation with Russia and Greece . Sargsyan had " close connections " with the Russian military elite , especially Defense Minister Pavel Grachev . According to the Jamestown Foundation , he pursued a military diplomacy with Greece , Cyprus , Syria , Iran and Bulgaria for a pro @-@ Russian alliance .

= = = A ' power minister ' : 1995 ? 96 elections = = =

Sargsyan became a key figure in post @-@ war Armenia due to the fact that he was indisputably supported by the army , the only well @-@ established institution in Armenia . He was described as

an éminence grise of the Armenian politics , deciding many personnel appointments and dismissals . In the aftermath of the war , which was accompanied by a harsh economic crisis in Armenia , President Ter @-@ Petrosyan became unpopular . His authoritarian rule , the banning of the major opposition party Armenian Revolutionary Federation in 1994 and the arrest of its leaders , made him highly dependent on the " power structures , " which included the Ministries of Defence ( headed by Sargsyan ) , Interior ( Vano Siradeghyan ) and National Security ( Serzh Sargsyan ) . In July 1995 , Vazgen Sargsyan helped Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's Pan @-@ Armenian National Movement ( PANM ) win the parliamentary election and pass the constitutional referendum that gave the president more powers in appointing and dismissing key judicial and legislative officials . They were marred with major electoral violations .

Sargsyan 's impact on Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's presidency became more evident during the 1996 presidential election and the subsequent developments . A few days before the election , Sargsyan stated his support for Ter @-@ Petrosyan , stating that Armenia " will enter the 21st century victoriously and stable with Ter @-@ Petrosyan [ as president ] . " According to the Caucasian Regional Studies , Sargsyan " turned off the voters " from Ter @-@ Petrosyan and caused " irritation and antipathy " in 28 @. @ 6 % of the people according to a poll . The election , held on 22 September , was largely criticized by observation and monitoring organizations , that found " serious violations of the election law . " Official results , which recorded Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's victory in the first round with just above 50 % of the total vote in his favor , were denounced by opposition candidate Vazgen Manukyan who had officially received 41 % of the vote . Manukyan began demonstrations claiming electoral fraud by Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's supporters . The protests culminated n 25 September , when Manukyan led thousands of his supporters to the parliament building on Baghramyan Avenue , where the Electoral Commission was located at the time . Later during the day , the protesters broke the fence surrounding the parliament and entered the building . They beat up the parliament speaker Babken Ararktsyan and vice @-@ speaker Ara Sahakyan . In response , Vazgen Sargsyan stated that " even if they [ the opposition ] win 100 percent of the votes , neither the Army nor the National Security and Interior Ministry would recognize such political leaders . " He was later criticized by human rights organizations for this statement . State security forces , tanks and troops were deployed in Yerevan to restore order and to enforce the ban on rallies and demonstrations on 26 September . Sargsyan and National Security Minister Serzh Sargsyan announced that their respective agencies had prevented an attempted coup d'état .

= = = Leadership split : Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation = = =

In 1997 , the OSCE Minsk Group , co @-@ chaired by Russia , the United States and France , pressured Armenia and Azerbaijan to agree on the final status of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . In September , Ter @-@ Petrosyan stated his support of the " step @-@ by @-@ step " proposal , which included the return of the territories outside the NKAO borders . Ter @-@ Petrosyan argued the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan and , therefore , the opening of the border with Turkey was the only way to significantly improve Armenia 's economy . After the plan was publicized , he came up against strong opposition . The issue was " important to the Armenians because of historical and psychological factors . After having been losing territories for centuries , the Armenians are reluctant to ' lose ' Karabakh now that they have won a war against Azerbaijan . " According to political scientist Vicken Cheterian , " By calling for major concessions on Karabakh , Ter @-@ Petrosyan was antagonizing the last forces that supported his rule , the army and the Karabakh elite , at a time when his popularity within the Armenian society was at its lowest . "

The Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic leadership , the Armenian intelligentsia and the diaspora , the opposition also expressed their opposition to the president ? ' s support for the proposed settlement plan . Vazgen Sargsyan , who quickly denounced the proposal , became the de facto leader of the opposing group within the government . He was joined by the two Karabakh Armenians in the government : Prime Minister Kocharyan and Interior and National Security Minister Serzh Sargsyan . These three politicians were referred to as " hardliners " in the Western media for their perceived nationalistic stance . They argued that " Armenia should try to improve its economic

performance , " while Ter @-@ Petrosyan insisted that Armenia " could only achieve marginal improvements insufficient to address the fear of relative decline and economic exclusion . " The Kocharyan cabinet , where Vazgen Sargsyan was a leading figure , called for a " package " deal , " involving a single framework accord on all contentious issues . " On 21 October 1997 , ten members of the Republic bloc in the parliament left the faction and shifted their support to Vazgen Sargsyan . Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's bloc in the parliament was left with a majority of two seats . Despite the great public and political opposition , the Pan @-@ Armenian National Movement voted in favor of Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's foreign policy .

During the National Security Council meeting on 7 ? 8 January 1998 it became clear that Ter @-@ Petrosyan did not have enough support to continue his reign as president . On 23 January 1998 , during the peak of the crisis , Vazgen Sargsyan declared his unconditional support to Robert Kocharyan , and blamed the Pan @-@ Armenian National Movement for trying to destabilize Armenia . Sargsyan also guaranteed that the Armenian army " will not intervene in the political struggle . "

Ter @-@ Petrosyan announced his resignation on 3 February 1998 . According to Michael P. Croissant , it was Vazgen Sargsyan who " played ultimately the principal role in inducing the president 's resignation . " In his resignation statement , Ter @-@ Petrosyan referred to Vazgen Sargsyan , Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan as " the well known body of power . " He cited the threat of destabilization of the country as the reason of his resignation . Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation was followed by the resignation of National Assembly speaker Babken Ararktsyan , his two deputies , Mayor of Yerevan Vano Siradeghyan , Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Arzoumanian and others . A significant change occurred in the National Assembly . Dozens of members of the parliamentary faction called the Republican Bloc ( mostly made up of Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's Pan @-@ Armenian National Movement ) joined Vazgen Sargsyan 's Yerkrpah bloc , making it the largest parliamentary bloc , with 69 members compared to only 56 for the Republic .

After Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation , Prime Minister Kocharyan became acting president . On 5 February 1998 , Sargsyan denied the claims of a coup d 'état and said that Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation was " rather sad but natural . " Sargsyan claimed that the president 's move surprised him and that he had " been seeking common grounds with the president for the past three months . " He added , " the only step I achieved on the Karabakh issue was the suggestion that the situation be frozen . " Almost a year after Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation , Vazgen Sargsyan stated at the Republican Party convention that he " respects and appreciates " Ter @-@ Petrosyan and described him as a " wise and a moral man and politician . " Sargsyan insisted that the question of " political responsibility " was the main reason behind his resignation .

= = = 1998 election : Kocharyan as president = = =

Sargsyan ( along with Interior Minister Serzh Sargsyan ) openly supported Kocharyan and used his influence for his election in March . He called Kocharyan a " man of unity of word and action " and stated that his experience in Karabakh and Armenia " shows that he is capable of solving economic problems also . " Kocharyan 's main opponent was Karen Demirchyan , the leader of Soviet Armenia from 1974 to 1988 . Sargsyan praised Kocharyan for being part of the " struggle of the Armenian people " and criticized Demirchyan for not being part of it .

No candidate gained more than half of the votes in the first round , while in the second round of the election , held on 30 March , Kocharyan won 58 @. @ 9 % of the vote . The British Helsinki Human Rights Group suggests that " ordinary Armenians turned to Robert Kocharian as someone untainted by mafia connections and the intrigues of Yerevan politics . " The OSCE observation mission described the first round as " deeply flawed , " while their final report stated that the mission found " serious flaws " and that the election did not meet the OSCE standards . Although Demirchyan didn 't officially dispute the election results , he never accepted them and did not congratulate Kocharyan . After the election , however , Sargsyan suggested Kocharyan appoint Demirchyan Prime Minister to decrease the tensions in the political scene .

Even after becoming president , Kocharyan did not have any significant institutional support ( e.g. a

party , control of the army , a source of money ) and remained " in a fundamental sense an outsider in Yerevan . " Kocharyan had a more tough position on the Karabakh settlement issue than Ter @-@ Petrosyan . He also urged the international community to recognize the Armenian Genocide , something on which his predecessor did not place importance . In response , Turkey and Azerbaijan tightened their cooperation in isolating Armenia from regional projects . Kocharyan did not put pressure on the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh leadership to concede territory to Azerbaijan . He was supported by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation , which was allowed to actively operate after Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation a month before the election .

= = Rise in power = =

= = = Politicization of Yerkrpah = = =

By 1998 Vazgen Sargsyan became " the power behind the throne " as the Yerkrpah faction ? made up of war veterans loyal to him ? was the single largest faction in the Armenian parliament following Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's resignation in February 1998 . Yerkrpah was merged with the Republican Party of Armenia ? a minor party with ideology similar to that of Yerkrpah ? in summer 1998 , taking the party 's name and its legal status . Though Sargsyan was not the chairman of the Republican Party , he was considered its unofficial leader .

The relations between Sargsyan and Kocharyan deteriorated after the presidential election with Sargsyan " casting around for partners unconnected with or downright opposed to the president . " Within several months three assassinations of top officials took place that spread rumors in Armenia that relations between Sargsyan and Kocharyan were " not normal . " In August 1998 Armenia 's Prosecutor @-@ General Henrikh Khachatryan , a close friend of Kocharyan , was murdered in his office " in murky circumstances . " In December 1998 Deputy Minister of Defence Vahram Khorkhoruni murdered " for equally mysterious motives . " While in February 1999 Deputy Minister of Interior Artsrun Margaryan was murdered . Vazgen Sargsyan and National Security and Interior Minister Serzh Sargsyan , Kocharyan 's close ally , were " also perceived to be at odds . "

= = = Alliance with Demirchyan = = =

It was initially announced that the Republican Party would go to the parliamentary election alone and would seek " qualitative majority " in the parliament , and that their goal was the fairness of the electoral process . Surprisingly for many , on 30 March 1999 , Vazgen Sargsyan and the runner @-@ up of the 1998 presidential election and Armenia 's ex @-@ communist leader Karen Demirchyan issued a joint announcement that they were forming an alliance between the People 's Party of Armenia and the Republican Party . It came to be known as the Unity bloc ( « ??????????? » ?????? ) , often referred to as Miasnutyun . Vazgen Sargsyan claimed the bloc was a " genuine " alliance and that the two parties had come together to lead Armenia " from a turning point to progress . " When asked about the reasons why he joined Demirchyan , Sargsyan said that , " there is no other way out . " According to the U.S. Helsinki Commission , Sargsyan " obviously concluded it was better to have the popular Demirchyan as an ally than an opponent , " and that " in forming Unity bloc , Sargsyan and Demirchyan overcame whatever ideological differences they may have had , and said they had joined forces to overcome the difficult problems facing Armenia while promoting tolerance in the country ? ' s political life . " In analyst Richard Giragosian 's words , the bloc was " an odd mix , " however he admitted that it " effectively marginalized the electoral threat " of other parties . Sociologist Levon Baghdasaryan described it as " unification of the new and old nomenklaturas . " The British Helsinki Human Rights Group wrote of the Unity bloc that it " aimed to appeal to the electorate by being all things to all men . " The ODIHR suggested that the " alliance was not only created for electoral purposes , but that a strategic political agreement had been reached while overcoming ideological differences . "

= = = 1999 parliamentary election = = =

During the campaign , Sargsyan pledged that he would spare no effort to make sure the elections were free and fair . Sargsyan and Demirchyan put the emphasis of their campaign on the economy and the improvement of the life of ordinary Armenians . Talking about Yerkrpah ? now politically transformed into the Republican Party ? Sargsyan said he was confident " that the people that gained victory on the battlefield will also gain victory in economy . " He expressed his optimism saying that they were sure that they " will jointly change something and find the right course . " The Unity bloc " called broadly for a democratic society , rule of law , economic reforms and a market economy , with the state also creating conditions for the normal functioning of state enterprises and ensuring decent living standards for all . " Throughout the campaign , the Unity bloc was widely considered the favorite of the election . Opposition newspaper Hayots ashkhar suggested that most other political parties in Armenia were gravitating towards the opposite pole , around Kocharyan , National Security & Interior Minister Serzh Sargsyan , and the leadership of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic .

The parliamentary election took place on 30 May 1999 , just two months after Sargsyan 's and Demirchyan 's announcement about their decision to form an alliance . The Unity bloc won over 41 @. @ 5 % of the popular vote , and took 62 of the 131 seats in the National Assembly . The alliance established an effective majority with cooperating with a group of 25 independent and officially non @-@ affiliated members of the parliament , sympathetic to the Sargsyan @-@ Demirchyan coalition . The electoral process " generally showed an improvement over the [ previous ] flawed elections , but ODIHR said they were " not an adequate basis for comparison . " ODIHR 's final report described the election as " a step towards compliance with OSCE Commitments " and claimed that , along with improvements to the electoral framework and the political environment , serious issues remained . The Council of Europe also suggested " considerable improvement " from the past elections . The National Democratic Institute report was more critical , saying it " failed to meet international standards " and that it proved to be the continuation of the flawed 1995 parliamentary elections , differing only in " the methods and types of manipulation . "

= = Prime Ministry = =

At the Republican Party convention in January 1999 . Sargsyan stated his desire in remaining in the position of Minister of Defence . After the election speculations arouse about Sargsyan wanting to combine the positions of Defence Minister and Prime Minister , however , this was impossible according to the Armenian constitution . On 11 June 1999 he became Prime Minister of Armenia , while Unity bloc co @-@ chairman Karen Demirchyan was elected speaker of the National Assembly .

Many experts suggest that Sargsyan as Prime Minister was the most powerful politician in Armenia , while others suggest that he had become Armenia 's strongest politician long before that . According to Mark Grigorian , his " activities had began to overshadow " Kocharyan . Despite Kocharyan 's formal welcome of their alliance , the president was " effectively weakened " and " was being sidelined " . Some political analysts suggested that the Sargsyan @-@ Demirchyan alliance " ultimately would bring about the resignation of Kocharyan . " Vazgen Manukyan stated that Kocharyan " would end up like the " Queen of England . " Despite no longer being the Minister of Defence , Vazgen Sargsyan remained the de facto leader of the army , as a close ally , Vagharshak Harutiunyan , replaced him .

According to Styopa Safaryan , an analyst and former member of the Armenian parliament , despite his mixed legacy , under Vazgen Sargsyan Armenia became increasingly independent .

= = = Economic policy = = =

At the time of Sargsyan 's Prime Ministry , Armenia had not yet recovered from the economic effects of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the energy crisis in Armenia during the Nagorno

@-@ Karabakh War . One of the major issues Sargsyan faces was the emigration from Armenian that started at the period of the decline of the Soviet regime . The World Socialist Web Site held international creditors responsible for Armenia 's economic hardships as they did not " leave much room for manoeuvres for the Armenian government to shape its policies more strongly according to the economic and social needs of the majority of the population . " The 1998 Russian financial crisis worsened the situation , and showed a decline in human development .

In his first address to the parliament as Prime Minister on 18 June , Sargsyan described Armenia 's economic situation as " ? grave . " The budget revenues were almost 20 % lower than the government had planned , because of the low level of tax collection and the high level of corruption in the Armenian economy . Although Sargsyan criticized the post @-@ Soviet privatization by the Ter @-@ Petrosyan government , he admitted Armenia had no alternative , and that his government had an enormous amount of work to do . In his speech on 28 July , Sargsyan described the economic situation in Armenia as " extremely difficult , but not hopeless . " According to him , the first half of 1999 saw \$ 61 million less in the budged revenues than planned by the Darbinyan government . He said that tax evasion played a role in the budget deficit .

Despite being criticized by the opposition , especially the National Democratic Union , the Unity bloc voted in favor ( 96 of the 131 MPs ) of the austerity measures of the Sargsyan cabinet on 28 August , allowing Armenia to take loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ( IMF ) . The World Bank alone had loaned almost \$ 0 @. @ 5 billion to Armenia since 1992 to finance the budget deficits . The Sargsyan cabinet wanted to diversify \$ 32 million in the budget funds in order to be able to repay the internal debts . For this purpose , the excise tax was raised on cigarettes by 200 % and on gasoline by 45 % , seriously hitting the middle class . Sargsyan described these as " painful but right steps " for getting the necessary amount of money from the foreign lenders . He pledged a " tougher crackdown on the shadow economy and more efficient governance . " National Assembly Speaker Karen Demirchyan called for a greater role of the state in the economy to ensure stability , while President Kocharyan was mostly uninvolved in these developments .

= = = Notable events = = =

During his Prime Ministry , Sargsyan helped to organize three major events . On 28 August 1999 , the first Pan @-@ Armenian Games began in Yerevan . Over 1 @, @ 400 Armenian athletes from 23 countries participated in the games . The closing ceremony took place in the Yerevan Sports and Concerts Complex on September 5 , with President Robert Kocharyan and Vazgen Sargsyan in attendance . Just after the Games , which involved thousands of diaspora Armenian youth , the preparations for the eighth anniversary of Armenia 's independence began .

On 21 September , the anniversary of the day in 1991 when Armenians voted in favor of leaving the Soviet Union in a referendum , a military parade was held in Yerevan 's Republic Square . Vazgen Sargsyan " was visibly the most excited of the government leaders standing on a specially built pedestal . " In a short briefing after the parade , Sargsyan enthusiastically stated that he had " touched almost every piece of hardware you 've just seen " and continued that he " just wanted to show it " to the Armenian people .

During the next two days , on 22 and 23 September 1999 , the first Armenia @-@ Diaspora Conference was held in Yerevan . The conference brought together the Armenian political elite and many diaspora organizations , political parties , religious leaders , writers and over 1 @, @ 200 representatives of Armenian communities from 53 countries , an unprecedented number . Vazgen Sargsyan opened the second day of the conference with his speech @-@ report about the economic and social situation in Armenia . The conference was closed by Sargsyan .

= = Assassination = =

= = = Shooting and funeral = = =



On 27 October 1999 , at around 5 : 15 p.m. , five men ? Nairi Hunanyan , his brother Karen , their uncle Vram and two others ? armed with Kalashnikov rifles hidden under long coats , broke into the National Assembly building in Yerevan , while the government was holding a question @-@ and @-@ answer session . They shot dead Vazgen Sargsyan , National Assembly Speaker Karen Demirchyan , Deputy National Assembly Speakers Yuri Bakhshyan and Ruben Miroyan , Minister of Urgent Affairs Leonard Petrosyan , and Parliament Members Henrik Abrahamyan , Armenak Armenakyan and Mikayel Kotanyan . The gunmen injured at least 30 people in the parliament . The group claimed they were carrying out a coup d'état . They described their act as " patriotic " and " needed for the nation to regain its senses . " They said they wanted to " punish the authorities for what they do to the nation " and described the government as profiteers " drinking the blood of the people . " They claimed Armenia was in a " catastrophic situation " and that " corrupt officials " were not doing anything to provide the way out . Vazgen Sargsyan was the main target of the group and the other deaths were said to be unintended . According to reporters who witnessed the shooting , the men went up to Sargsyan and said , " Enough of drinking our blood , " to which Sargsyan calmly responded , " Everything is being done for you and the future of your children . " Vazgen Sargsyan was hit several times . Anna Israelyan , an eyewitness journalist , stated that " the first shots were fired directly at Vazgen Sargsyan at a distance of one to two meters " and , in her words , " it was impossible that he would have survived . " Sargsyan 's body was taken out of the parliament building on the evening of October 27 .

With policemen , army troops , armed with APCs surrounding the building . President Kocharyan gave a speech on TV , announcing that the situation was under control . The gunmen released the hostages after overnight negotiations with President Kocharyan and gave themselves up on the morning of October 28 , after a standoff that lasted 17 ? 18 hours .

On 28 October , President Kocharyan declared a three @-@ day mourning period . The state funeral ceremony for the victims of the parliament shooting took place from 30 October to 31 October 1999 . The bodies of the victims , including Vazgen Sargsyan , were placed inside the Yerevan Opera Theater . A number of high @-@ ranking officials from some 30 countries , including Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze , attended the funeral . Karekin II , the Catholicos of All Armenians and Aram I , the Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia gave prayers .

= = = Investigation and conspiracy theories = = =

The five men were charged with terrorism aimed at undermining authority on 29 October . The investigation was led by Gagik Jhangiryan , the Chief Military Prosecutor of Armenia , who claimed his team was looking for the masterminds of the shooting even after the trial had begun . According to Jhangiryan , the investigating team considered more than a dozen theories . By January 2000 , Jhangiryan 's investigators considered the connection of Kocharyan and his circle to the parliament shooting . Several figures close to Kocharyan were arrested , including Aleksan Harutiunyan , the Deputy Presidential Adviser , and Harutun Harutiunyan , the Deputy Director of the Public Television of Armenia but , by the summer of that year , they were released . Eventually , Jhangiryan failed to find evidence linking Kocharyan to the shooting . The trial began in February 2001 and eventually , the five main perpetrators of the shooting ( Nairi Hunanyan , his younger brother Karen Hunanyan , their uncle Vram Galstyan , Derenik Ejanyan and Eduard Grigoryan ) were sentenced to life in prison on December 2 , 2003 .

Possible motives behind the attack gave birth to a number of conspiracy theories . Stepan Demirchyan , Karen Demirchyan 's son , stated in 2009 that " nothing was done by the authorities to prevent that crime and , conversely , everything was done to cover up the crime . " In March 2013 , Vazgen Sargsyan 's younger brother Aram stated he had many questions for both governments of Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan . He claimed the judicial process of 27 October had " deepened the public distrust in the authorities ... [ as ] many questions remain unanswered today " . According to him , the full disclosure of the shooting is " vital " for Armenia . Sargsyan , at the conclusion , insisted that he " never accused this or the former authorities of being responsible for

27 October . I have accused them in not fully disclosing the 27 October event . " In an April 2013 interview , Karen Demirchyan 's widow , Rita , suggested the shooting was ordered from outside Armenia and was not an attempt at a coup , but rather an assassination .

Although the investigation did not find any considerable evidence linking Kocharyan to the Hunanyan group , many Armenian politicians and analysts believe that President Robert Kocharyan and National Security Minister Serzh Sargsyan were behind the assassination of Vazgen Sargsyan and other leading politicians . Albert Bazeyan stated in 2002 that " We have come to the conclusion that the crime was aimed at making Robert Kocharian 's power unlimited and uncontrolled . By physically eliminating Karen Demirchyan and Vazgen Sargsyan , its organizers wanted to create prerequisites for Kocharyan 's victory in the future presidential elections . " Ter @-@ Petrosyan accused Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan and their " criminal @-@ oligarchic " system of being the real perpetrators of the parliament shooting . Nairi Hunanyan , the leader of the armed group , was a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation ( ARF , Dashnaktsutyun ) . According to the ARF , Hunanyan was expelled from the party in 1992 for misconduct and had not been in any association with the ARF since then . Some speculations have been made about the involvement of the ARF in the shootings . In 2000 , Ashot Manucharyan stated he was worried that " a number of Dashnaktsutyun party leaders are acting in the interest of the American foreign policy . "

= = = Allegations of foreign involvement = = =

Some analysts have suggested that foreign powers , including Russia , may have been behind the shooting . They pointed out the fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan were close in signing some kind of an agreement at the OSCE 1999 Istanbul summit over Karabakh , something not in Russia 's interest .

Russian secret service defector Alexander Litvinenko accused the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation of having organised the Armenian parliament shooting , ostensibly to derail the peace process , which would have resolved the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh conflict , but he offered no evidence to support the accusation . Russian and Armenian officials denied this claims .

The French @-@ based Armenian political refugee and former Apostolic priest Artsruni Avetisyan ( also known by his religious name Ter Girgor ) gave an interview to Armenian media network A1plus , in which he claimed the Russian secret services were behind the October 27 , 1999 , shooting . He also claimed the shooting was perpetrated by Lieutenant General Vahan Shirkhanyan , the Deputy Minister of Defense from 1992 to 1999 , and the National Security Minister Serzh Sargsyan . He insisted the shooting was assisted by the Russian secret services in order to bring the " Neo @-@ Bolshevik criminal clan " of Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan into power .

Others suggested that it was in the best interest of the West to remove Sargsyan and Demirchyan from the political scene , as they had close ties to Russia . Ashot Manucharyan , one of the leading members of the Karabakh Committee , the former Minister of Internal Affairs and Ter @-@ Petrosyan 's National Security Adviser and his close ally until 1993 , stated in October 2000 that Armenian officials were warned by a foreign country about the shootings . He also declared that " Western special services " were involved in the 27 October events . In Manucharyan 's words , " the special services of the U.S. and France are acting to destroy Armenia and , in this context , they are much likely to be involved in the realization of the terrorist acts in Armenia . " Manucharyan claimed the shooting was planned by Kocharyan in order to get rid of his two major rivals ( Sargsyan and Demirchyan ) , who were against the Goble plan , involving territorial concessions to Azerbaijan .

= = = Aftermath = = =

Just after the shooting , the Interior and National Security Ministers Suren Abrahamyan and Serzh Sargsyan resigned as a result of pressure from the Defence Ministry , led by Sargsyan 's ally , Vagharshak Harutiunyan at the time . From early June to late October 1999 , the political system in Armenia was based on the Demirchyan @-@ Sargsyan tandem , which controlled the military , the

legislative and the executive branches . The assassinations disrupted the political balance in the country and the political arena of Armenia was left in disarray for months . The " de facto dual command " of Sargsyan and Demirchyan transferred to President Robert Kocharyan . James R. Hughes claims that the so @-@ called " Karabakh clan " ( i.e. Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan ) was " kept in check " by Vazgen Sargsyan and his " military @-@ security apparatus , " while after the parliament shooting it came out to be the sole influential group able to successfully take over the political scene in Armenia . Since the leaders of the Unity bloc were assassinated , the two parties in the alliance ( the Republican Party of Armenia and the People 's Party of Armenia ) gradually lost edges of collaboration and , by late 2000 , the Unity bloc collapsed . Yerkrapah , the Republican Party , and the People 's Party effectively lost their influence by 2001 .

= = Personal life and brothers = =

Sargsyan never married . According to Razmik Martirosyan , a friend and the Minister of Social Security from 1999 to 2003 , Sargsyan promised in December 1987 that he would marry sometime before March 8 of the next year . The Karabakh movement started in February 1988 and Martirosyan claimed that the popular movement " did what it did . " In a 1997 interview , Sargsyan revealed that his favorite historical military figure was Charles de Gaulle . When asked about what kind of Armenia he would like to see in five years , he said " an independent , self @-@ sufficient country with strong culture , school and army . "

Sargsyan had two younger brothers , Aram and Armen . Aram was appointed Prime Minister by President Kocharyan on 3 November 1999 , a week after Vazgen Sargsyan 's death , largely as a " political gesture . " He admitted that Armenia has " no concept of state security " and that fact led to the assassination of his brother . Aram Sargsyan served in the position of the Prime Minister for only six months . He was dismissed by Kocharyan on 2 May 2000 , due to " inability to work " with Sargsyan 's cabinet . In his television statement , Kocharyan claimed that he relieved Aram Sargsyan to end the " disarray " in the Armenian leadership . Kocharyan blamed him for being involved in " political games . "

Aram Sargsyan founded the Republic ( Hanrapetutyun ) party in April 2001 , along with several influential Yerkrapah members , such as the former Mayor of Yerevan Albert Bazeyan and former Defence Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan . Its co @-@ founder Bazeyan stated that the party is the " bearer of the political heritage of Vazgen Sargsian and will try to realize the programs aborted by the October 27 crime and its consequences . " The party backed up Stepan Demirchyan against Kocharyan in 2003 and Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan against Serzh Sargsyan in the 2008 presidential elections . In a 2013 interview , Aram Sargsyan talked about the past 14 years after his brother 's death :

Vazgen Sargsyan 's other brother , Armen , supported Serzh Sargsyan in the 2013 presidential election . On 5 March 2013 , Aram Sargsyan was asked about his brother 's political stance , to which he responded , " I would very much like to ask Vazgen that question . I don 't know what he would have answered . I don 't know Vazgen 's answers to very few questions . Unfortunately , our friends and relatives are not always the way we want them to be . I am not the first one , neither am I the last one ; the history of the world is full of such examples starting from the Bible . "

= = Legacy and tribute = =

Vazgen Sargsyan was awarded the Hero of Artsakh title , the highest award of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic , in 1998 . On 27 December 1999 , two months after the parliament shooting , Sargsyan was posthumously given the National Hero of Armenia title . He widely is recognized as the founder of the Armenian army .

A presidential decree issued on 28 December 1999 , named the Yerevan military academy Vazgen Sargsyan Military Institute in his honor . The Republican Stadium in Yerevan was named after Vazgen Sargsyan by the same decree . Numerous streets in Armenia and Karabakh , including one in Yerevan 's Kentron ( Central ) district and in Stepanakert , and a park in Kapan are named after

Sargsyan . Statues were erected in his honor in Yerevan ( 2007 ) , Ararat ( 2009 ) , Vanadzor Shusha and other locations . In 2000 , 27 October was declared a day of remembrance by the Armenian government . In 2002 , the Armenian Defence Ministry created the Medal of Vazgen Sargsyan , which is awarded for " meritorious services towards military education and improvements in service life . "

Every year , on 5 March ( his birthday ) and 27 October ( the day of his assassination ) , Sargsyan is commemorated in Armenia and Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . His comrades from the Yerkrpah Volunteer Union , high state officials and many others visit the Yerablur cemetery , where Sargsyan is buried next to many Armenian military figures .

Vazgen Sargsyan 's museum was opened in his hometown of Ararat on 5 March 2001 by the decision made by the Armenian government . Notable attendees of the opening ceremony of the museum included Premier Minister Andranik Margaryan , National Assembly Speaker Armen Khachatryan , Defence Minister Serzh Sargsyan , and other high @-@ ranking military and diplomatic representatives , such as the former Russian Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev , who revealed in his speech at the ceremony that Sargsyan was once his student .

Sargsyan is often referred to as Sparapet , a military rank that has existed since the ancient Kingdom of Armenia . The phrase " ????????? ????? " Sparapet Hayots ( literally meaning " Commander of the Armenians " ) is engraved on Sargsyan 's memorial in Yerablur cemetery . The song " Sparapet " by Alla Levonyan is dedicated to his memory .

= = = Public image and recognition = = =

In Armenia , Nagorno @-@ Karabakh and , to a lesser extent , in the Armenian diaspora , Vazgen Sargsyan is recognized as a national hero . Several survey conducted by Gallup , Inc . , International Republican Institute , and the Armenian Sociological Association from 2006 to 2008 , revealed that Vazgen Sargsyan topped the list of national heroes in public perception , with 15 % -20 % of the respondents giving his name . He left behind the two prominent early 20th century military commanders Andranik and Garegin Nzhdeh . Sargsyan is widely considered a charismatic leader . He was generally perceived as a man of " tremendous power and charisma , " known for his " brutality , temper , and nonchalant attitude toward the law . "

His contributions have been acknowledged by his colleagues and comrades . In 1997 , President Ter @-@ Petrosyan stated that Sargsyan is someone who deserves the title of National Hero of Armenia . He added that " if all members of our government worked as conscientiously and selflessly as Vazgen Sargsyan , we would live in a perfect state . " Armenia 's second president Robert Kocharyan said in his speech during Sargsyan 's funeral , " history will provide its assessment of Vazgen Sargsyan as a politician who stood at the birth of the Armenian state . His role in the creation of the national army is beyond appraisal . By his life and commitment , Vazgen Sargsyan has made an immense contribution to the establishment of a powerful country . " In 2007 , giving a speech on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Armenian Armed Forces , the Defence Minister Serzh Sargsyan ( and the incumbent president ) noted that he " was a valiant soldier dedicated to the cause of our statehood , and who revered the strength of Armenia and the strength of the Armenian soldier , and who had a staunch belief in our future success . "

Manvel Grigoryan , leader of the Yerkrpah Volunteer Union , recognized Sargsyan 's contributions , stating that Sargsyan " was a strong individual and his greatness was felt not only during the war , but during the nation @-@ building years after the war . " According to Grigoryan " his presence was enough for the foreign leaders to become vigilant . " Dr. Ara Sanjian , the director of the Armenian Studies at the Haigazian University , wrote shortly after Sargsyan 's assassination :

In the West , Sargsyan was generally described as a strong nationalist . The British journalist Jonathan Steele wrote of Sargsyan as " a fierce nationalist who always preferred action and force to words and diplomacy . " Encyclopædia Britannica describes Sargsyan as an " Armenian nationalist who devoted much of his life to the Armenian fight with Azerbaijan for control of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh enclave . " Political scientist Razmik Panossian expressed the opinion that he was " the last significant nationalist politician whose commitment to Karabakh and Armenia was not doubted

by anyone . "

Sargsyan was criticized for being undemocratic , particularly for using his influence in pre @-@ determining the election results . The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe suggested in 1999 that his " record does not inspire confidence in his commitment to democracy . " The 2008 book Religious Freedom in the World described him as " thuggish " and held him responsible for the 1995 assaults on religious minorities in Armenia ( especially those that discourage military service ) , carried out , allegedly , by Yerkrpah . Thomas de Waal describes Sargsyan as a " feudal baron , " and claims that Yerkrpah controlled " large areas of the economy . "