
Kocharian gears up for Iran visit.

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President Robert Kocharian will fly to Tehran Wednesday on a two-day visit which officials in Yerevan hope will cement Armenia's close economic and political ties with Iran.

Kocharian is scheduled to hold his first face-to-face talks with Iran's controversial President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and meet other senior Iranian officials. A statement by his press office did not list the Islamic Republic's powerful supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, among them.

The statement said a number of unspecified "bilateral agreements" will be signed during the trip. Kocharian's spokesman Victor Soghomonian could not give their details, telling RFE/RL only that the Armenian leader will discuss a "broad range of issues" in Tehran.

The presence in the Kocharian-led Armenian delegation of Energy Minister Movsisian, who visited Iran as recently as in late May, suggests that growing Armenian-Iranian cooperation in the energy sector will be high on the agenda. Movsisian and Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakosian were already in Tehran on Tuesday, making last-minute preparations for Kocharian's arrival.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Movsisian met with Iran's Oil Minister Vaziri Hamaneh and Energy Minister Parviz Fattah to discuss multimillion-dollar Armenian-Iranian energy projects, notably the ongoing construction of a pipeline which is due to start pumping Iranian natural gas to Armenia next year.

"The Tehran Times" daily reported on June 13 that Yerevan and Tehran will soon sign an agreement to build a third high-voltage transmission line that will connect the power grids of the two neighboring countries. The paper said the \$80 million project will be financed by a state-run Iranian bank.

The Iranian government has already provided a separate \$35 million loan to finance the ongoing construction of Russia's state-run gas monopoly, Gazprom, announced earlier this week plans to buy the Armenian section of the pipeline which was supposed to ease Armenia's strong dependence on Russian energy resources. The issue may also be discussed during Kocharian's visit.
